

## Chapter 15

# Conclusion

This study is an important initial step in conducting maternal filicide research from a law enforcement perspective. By combining empirical data from 213 maternal filicide offenders with considerations for law enforcement and prosecutors, the authors hope to assist the criminal justice community in these often complex and challenging investigations. This study highlights the various circumstances and important distinctions among mothers who kill their children and underscores the fact that while patterns exist among mothers, individual evaluation of cases is important (Lewis and Bunce 2003). In addition, this research calls attention to the influence of incorrect assumptions, some centuries old, regarding female violence and the mother/child relationship. These viewpoints continue to fuel the myth that maternal behavior is instinctively nurturing and self-sacrificing, thus setting up an expectation of a special explanation for why these acts occur. This has undoubtedly impacted our past and current legal responses to this kind of child homicide. By recognizing that mothers are not simply mad or bad, the multiple disciplines involved in filicide cases (i.e., law enforcement, prosecutors, mental health, parole boards, and corrections) can objectively consider the various factors that contribute to its occurrence and move toward a response based on research and facts.

While the most helpful research would be that which identifies mothers who are at risk for killing their child(ren), larger samples of a variety of filicidal women are necessary before a reliable set of predictive criteria for maternal filicide can be developed. In addition, it is vital that researchers conduct comparative analyses between populations of women who do not kill their children, but have similar mental disorders and/or environmental circumstances.