

**MADNESS DESCENDED QUICKLY, VIOLENTLY**

# Experts can't explain why Blackman killed

VANCOUVER (CP) — The mental disorder that drove a seemingly likeable young Coquitlam man to murder six members of his family is still a mystery to modern psychiatry.

When the killings occurred, and again when Bruce Blackman was tried, the Canadian Mental Health Association received a "tremendous number" of calls from friends and relatives of mentally ill people worried they could be victims of violence.

"This indicated there are a lot of myths or misunderstandings that people are holding on to," said Terry Gordon, assistant associate director of the association's B.C. division.

Blackman wasn't a typical schizophrenic, say doctors. His madness descended quickly and violently.

Schizophrenia is an illness shrouded in myth and misunderstanding, they say, and is believed to be a range of mental illnesses grouped under one term.

Eight persons in 1,000, researchers say, develop it at some point.

Blackman, who earlier this month was found not guilty of the January deaths by reason of insanity, was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, one of four categories of schizophrenia.

Dr. Roy O'Shaughnessy, a psychiatrist who testified

for the defence at Blackman's trial, declined to discuss the case specifically, but agreed to talk about schizophrenia.

"It is not typical at all for a schizophrenic to become violent," he said.

O'Shaughnessy said the distinguishing characteristics of the illness are senseless statements, delusions, or paranoid beliefs. Schizophrenics also have grandiose thoughts, believe they have special powers, or that others are controlling their thoughts or behavior.

He said the illness can set in quickly or slowly.

When it sets in quickly it probably is a specific type of schizophrenia called schizophreniform, in which the person can reach a psychotic state in two days to two weeks.

"In other cases it can start very insidiously and be protracted over a long period of time."

The triggering of a schizophrenic episode probably is "multi-factorial," O'Shaughnessy said.

It is believed that persons who suffer from the illness probably have a biological predisposition to it, he said, but schizophrenic episodes can be brought on by the stress of personal conflicts or social problems.

"Part of the difficulty is that the person's ability to judge if he is functioning normally is impaired. Often, he knows something is wrong, but he's not sure if it's him or his environment.

"In many cases it (schizophrenia) can be contained and treated," he said. "The chances of recovery are good."

Dr. Chuni Roy of Vancouver, who does extensive work in forensic psychiatry, said that although advances have been made in the treatment of schizophrenia, it remains an obscure condition and more research is needed.

"It is one of the most serious forms of mental illness that causes an enormous amount of problems in the public health field," he said.

"It's not just the patient alone who suffers, but the relatives as well."

Roy said schizophrenia usually begins in early adulthood, but no single theory of its causes has gained complete acceptance within the scientific community.

One widely-held theory is that it is linked to vitamin deficiency and other metabolic disturbances.

Others subscribe to a sociological theory or disorder of communication, and some have dismissed the existence of schizophrenia as a myth.

Researchers also have proposed that schizophrenia is genetically inherited.

Despite the fact that the cause of the illness is unknown, Roy said, there have been significant advances in its treatment in the past 20 years.

Chemotherapy with various anti-psychotic agents is the accepted form of treatment for controlling the intensity of the condition, said Roy, although results vary, and there is no guarantee the condition won't recur.

At Blackman's B.C. Supreme Court trial, witnesses testified that although he had no previous history of mental illness, his mental state began to deteriorate about four months before the killings.

He had already been prescribed anti-psychosis drugs, but a psychiatrist testified the Blackman family would not consent to committing him to a mental institution.

On the rainy night of Jan. 17, the 22-year-old killed six members of his family — his parents Irene and Richard Joseph Blackman; his brother-in-law, John Davies; his sisters, Roberta Davies and Karen Rhodes and his brother, Richard Blackman.

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