

CRIME: Six York officers, OPP working Stouffville beheadings

Police worried cat killer will turn 'violent on people'

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An intense search is underway for the person(s) responsible for leaving six dismembered cat heads on curbsides in Stouffville several weeks ago.

'We want to catch this person, there's something seriously wrong.'

And while police continue to go door-to-door — including another blitz tomorrow — to find the culprit, a psychology professor and a PhD student of mental health weigh in on potential reasons behind the horrific act that has caused widespread disgust around the region and in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

York Regional Police has dedicated six officers to investigate the reams of information being called in locally and from as far away as British Columbia.

Investigators are also sending feline remains to the University of Guelph to be analysed, to find out

if the body parts had been cut up or simply left there by predators.

Det.-Const. Scott Hunter, a lead investigator, said he is intent on processing all information provided to the force's dedicated case phone line.

"We're working with outside agencies and there's a lot of information coming into our lines," he said. "One caller made us aware of a case in B.C., we're expecting something soon from police in Maple Ridge."

In that case, 24 dismembered cats have been found within a two-kilometre radius over the past two years in a residential neighbourhood in Maple Ridge, including on cat owners' lawns where the animals had been cut in half with a saw or a knife, according to the Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows News.

As to the question of who would perform such inhumane acts against another living creature and methodically placing bloodless heads on curbsides within a one-kilometre radius of Tenth Line and Main Street, Det.-Const. Hunter said investigators are intent on getting the individual off the streets.

ON THE COVER:

Pat Vandervoort holds Sasha, one of her three cats, at her Tenth Line home Thursday. She lives in the neighbourhood in which six cats were beheaded this year.

"Our concern is if this abuser becomes violent toward people," he added. "We want to catch this person, there's something seriously wrong. We've been working with the behavioural service unit from the OPP."

Although it's dangerous to speculate too much about this individual, he said it is likely the person is a young adult or adolescent male, a solitary individual who gets a thrill out of performing these acts and others' reaction, said Steve Wormith, a professor from the University of Saskatchewan, who specializes in forensic and correctional psychology.

When asked about a number of serial killers who began torturing animals in their youth, most recently Luka Magnotta, he said evidence does not show that those

who harm animals at a young age necessarily escalate their behaviour or move onto humans.

"These are certainly isolated and very dramatic cases, however, the evidence is very unclear or indecisive whether there's a casual relationship or escalating into something more serious," he said. "This kind of activity is not terribly uncommon ... it's clearly unusual and unacceptable behaviour, however, if the individual is not caught, it doesn't mean a few years later there will be horrific harm done to humans perpetrated by this person."

Furthermore, Dr. Wormith added, this person's actions could be a release of frustration or anger and also offered the possibility the incidents could be a result of peer pressure.

Despite agreeing with Dr. Wormith in regards to "mixed evidence" when it came to the "violence graduation hypothesis", Rochelle Stevenson, who is completing her PhD thesis on intimate partner violence and animal cruelty, said the incidents have raised "big red flags" for her.

"It doesn't seem to be the behaviour of someone ashamed of what they are doing," she said. "This could be a case of someone trying to gain a sense of their own power."

Another theory is that the person may be suffering abuse and acting out to minimize their own feeling of victimization.

'It doesn't seem to be the behaviour of someone ashamed of what they are doing.'

Ms Stevenson added that the overt and public nature of the display is worrying and could show a broader pattern of disregard and disinterest in the feeling of others.

"Another theory is this is part of a stimulation-seeking behaviour that centres on the need to hurt ... human beings in some way," she said.

Anyone with information relating to the case, is asked to contact the dedicated police line on 905-898-1221, ext. 2693.

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