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| C:\Users\aep\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.MSO\92875CA7.tmp**How sleepwalking can**  **lead to killing** | | |
| |  | | --- | |  |   **A man in Manchester may have made legal history in the UK after being acquitted of murdering his father because he was sleepwalking at the time. He was found not guilty due to insanity and sent to a psychiatric hospital for an indefinite period of time.**   |  | | --- | | Jules Lowe  Jules Lowe was found not guilty on the basis of insane automatism |   Jules Lowe, 32, of Greater Manchester, told police he attacked his 82-year-old father Eddie while he was asleep and had no recollection of the incident in October 2003.  Dr Irshaad Ebrahim, director of the London Sleep Centre, was called in to establish whether what Mr Lowe claimed was true.  An expert witness for the prosecution, Dr Ebrahim and his team carried out a series of overnight sleep studies on Mr Lowe before his trial.  The tests - called a polysomnography - measure functions including brain waves, muscle activity and breathing activity.  **Close relationship**  Scientists also look at factors known to trigger sleepwalking episodes in people, such as alcohol and stress.  Dr Ebrahim told the BBC News website: "Mr Lowe had a history of sleepwalking and this was generally worse when he drank alcohol but he had never been violent before the night of this offence.  "However, his step-mother had just died and there were several other stressful factors occurring in his life - and he had a very violent sleepwalking incident in which his father was murdered.  "His father was very close to him and they had a close relationship."   |  |  | | --- | --- | | http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/shared/img/o.gif | http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/img/v3/start_quote_rb.gif**We think this is the first sleepwalking murder in the UK** http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/img/v3/end_quote_rb.gif  Dr Irshaad Ebrahim London Sleep Centre |   Dr Ebrahim said the tests showed Mr Lowe had indeed been sleepwalking at the time of the attack, in a state called automatism.  Automatism - defined legally as acting involuntarily - falls into two types. These are insane automatism, considered a "disease of the mind", and non-insane automatism, linked to external factors.  Mr Lowe's diagnosis of insane automatism meant he could not be held responsible for battering his father to death. He has been sent to a psychiatric hospital indefinitely.  But Mr Lowe's case is unlikely to be the first in a long line.  Dr Ebrahim said: "There have been about 68 cases worldwide of murder in sleepwalking and it's for that reason that this case has gathered so much interest.  **Hit with hammer**  "We think this is the first sleepwalking murder in the UK."  Dr Ebrahim said that although between 7% and 8% of children sleepwalk the proportion falls to less than 1% when people reach adulthood, most of whom are men.  Among sufferers "extreme forms of violence, of sleepwalking or automatism, are extremely rare, so we usually view them with a high index of suspicion", said Dr Ebrahim.  Nonetheless, cases with similarities to that of Mr Lowe have been seen in the UK before.   |  | | --- | | Image of a man sleeping  Men are more likely to sleepwalk than women |   In 1998 chef Dean Sokell was jailed for life after battering his wife Eleni to death in an attack at their home in Paignton, Devon which began while he was asleep.  The 27-year-old admitted murder on the basis that he had woken up to find he was hitting Eleni with a claw hammer - but then, while awake, carried on and finally stabbed her to silence the screams.  Another high-profile case was that of REM guitarist Peter Buck, who was acquitted of attacking BA staff on a transatlantic flight to London in 2002.  The court accepted he had no recollection of the incident because he was suffering from non-insane automatism at the time, brought on by combining alcohol and a sleeping pill at the start of the flight.  But last year in Los Angeles a man who claimed he was acting out a dream that an intruder was attacking him when he murdered his girlfriend was jailed for 26 years.  The court decided Stephen Reitz, 28, had been conscious when he threw a flowerpot at girlfriend Eva Marie Weinfurtner's head and then stabbed her.  Dr Ebrahim recommended that anyone with a history of violent incidents while sleepwalking see a sleep specialist for treatment. | |  |  |
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