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Children are not possessions, says BSWC

British Second Wives Club identifies a worrying trend where mothers view children as “property” to which they have rights, and which they refuse to “share” with their ex-husbands.

“Say goodbye then”, was Theresa Riggi's chilling reply when her husband told her he was seeking custody – right before she put down the phone and stabbed the children to death. In a similar American case Rebecca Koehler attempted to kill her children after ongoing refusals to let them visit their father. According to the way both women were portrayed in the media, both “loved their children too much” to let their fathers see them. To members of BSWC, these cases have a chilling familiarity.

Many BSWC members are partners of men whose ex-wives complicate or deny access to their children. Sometimes mothers make access contingent on fathers sending the stepmother away. Frequently access is used as a threat – a mother threatens to move, saying the father will never see his children again – unless he accedes to certain demands. Fathers are held hostage by this emotional blackmail; stepmothers often watch in anguish the emotional hurt that these “loving” mothers cause to their own children.

One member remembers her stepson using Skype “to keep in touch with us when he wasn't here. His Mum... went mad because it was “her time”. It was fine for him to be in his room on his computer whilst she thought he was just playing games; as soon as she found out that he was chatting to his Dad it got stopped.” Another member experienced her step-children's mother telling their Dad he would not see his children unless she was sent away or was “supervised”. A step-grandparent was asked to remove the step-grandchildren's photographs from her photograph album by their mother, “as she believes that the kids are *not* part of my family and never will be”.

Riggi electronically tagged her children when they visited their father and gave them mobile phones on which they were to phone her if he said anything they did not like. Koehler used MySpace and Facebook to taunt her ex about “not trying” to see his children and having to “try harder”. These women see their children as a “possession”, which like spoiled children, they refuse to share with another. In their desire to hurt an ex-partner who has dared to move on, they will do anything including hurting – and in these tragic cases, killing – the children.

One BSWC member comments:

“Children need to see both parents. They need to realise that both places are home.... some women find it so hard to realise... that their children are not extensions of themselves, but individuals in their own right who deserve a chance to develop... Ultimately it seems to me that a lot of these women are focussing on winning the battle (annoying their ex, annoying their ex's new partner; punishment) rather than focussing on the right point - winning the war (a healthy, happy, confident well adjusted child)”.

The British Second Wives Club offers support to women whose partners have been married before. For more information go to www.thebritishsecondwivesclub.co.uk/