

20 years sought for wife who chopped up 'abusive' husband

By JUN HONGO

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Prosecutors demanded a 20-year prison term for Kaori Mihashi on Thursday for murdering and dismembering her husband in December 2006 and disposing of the body parts around Tokyo.

The 33-year-old housewife stands accused of fatally striking her husband, Yusuke, with a wine bottle and cutting up his body using saws and kitchen knives.

Prosecutors alleged that Mihashi killed her husband in a fit of anger because she was unable to proceed with divorce talks the way she had hoped.

In their final statement to the Tokyo District Court, the prosecutors denounced Mihashi's "self-centered crime." They dismissed the defense argument — which was backed by tests conducted by court-appointed psychiatrists — that she was mentally incompetent when her husband was killed.

Prosecutors, however, admitted that Mihashi showed up at a Tokyo abuse shelter in June 2005, looking beat up and claiming her husband had been assaulting her.

Mihashi took the stand Thursday to plead not guilty. Her attorneys have argued that the killing was triggered by persistent domestic violence on the part of the victim and that Mihashi was suffering posttraumatic stress disorder at the time.

"I was helpless. I had nobody to turn to," Mihashi said in describing why she killed her husband.

Presiding Judge Masaya Kawamoto said the ruling would be handed down April 28.

The trial took an unexpected turn when two court-appointed psychiatrists suggested that Mihashi's upbringing, family background and the repeated

spousal abuse she endured had caused a mental disorder at the time of the killing. Under the Penal Code, a person cannot be held criminally responsible for an act committed in a state of insanity.

The psychiatrists said Mihashi had also been physically abused by her father when she was a child.

It also came out during the trial that her husband had nude photographs of Mihashi that he threatened to publicize if she left.

"It's presumable that she was in a state of insanity at the time of the killing," Kazumasa Kimura of Kokoro-no Clinic Shakujii, a Tokyo psychiatric center, told the court during one of the earlier sessions.

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Mihashi owned up to the charges during her first trial session in December, but her lawyers argued in their opening statement she was not liable for the killing because of her mental disorder caused by the repeated spousal abuse.

The prosecuting attorneys countered that Mihashi's attempts to hide the slaying, including replacing the condo's wallpaper after she cut up the body, indicate she was of sound mind at the time.

Following the final session, Yusuke Mihashi's parents released a statement saying they want the court to "unearth the truth" about his slaying. They added that they "cannot possibly understand" Mihashi's claims that he had abused her.

During Thursday's court session, a judge read aloud a message from the victim's mother that she wants Mihashi to "compensate for the crime through capital punishment."

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