State of Texas v. Andrea Yates

Name

Institution Affiliation

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**Mental Disorder and Symptoms Considered by the Court**

Postpartum psychosis also called postnatal onset bipolar disorder, or puerperal psychosis is a severe psychiatric illness. The condition affects one in 500-1000 women that have an infant (NCT, 2017). Although there are claims that the rapid changes in pregnancy hormones at birth trigger the disease, the understanding of the causal elements is not clear. Still, genetic factors play a significant role for some people (NCT, 2017). Postpartum psychosis is a terrifying illness, both for the woman suffering from it and her relatives. Health professionals classify the condition as a psychiatric emergency since it can worsen quickly and requires early treatment (NCT, 2017). Since the woman might not know she has the illness, friends/family may need help from a health provider.

There were several symptoms considered by the court in the Andrea Yate's case. To start with, during her marriage, she continuously displayed a preoccupation with infant well-being, fluxes in mood, and mood lability (CNN Library, 2017). The moods ranged from over concern to frank delusions, and they manifested as suicide attempts associated with other situations in Andrea's life. These circumstances included the death of her father, displaced living conditions, her husband's strange behavior, home schooling of her children, and her increasing obsession with religious philosophy, her family's depressive illness history, and the pressure to bear more children (CNN Library, 2017). The defense argued that Andrea's mental condition resulted to her believing that she was justified for murdering her children.

**Relationship between Actions and Behavior that Led to Defendant Mental Evaluation**

There was an introduction of a mental health testimony in the second trial. The records demonstrated that Andrea was grievously mentally ill when she committed the crimes. Her

husband and five children were a great stress to her. Before the incident, she approached a mental facility and requested for her hospitalization.

After Andrea's arrest, she narrated to mental health specialists and law enforcement that she felt that she was an inadequate mother and that murdering her children would save them from the malevolence of living with her. Andrea stated that her children would live in heaven, as they were innocent (CNN Library, 2017).

In the first trial, it was determined that Andrea was incapable of trial implying that she lacked the capacity to comprehend the charges and the proceedings. Therefore, she could not help her attorneys in her defense. Andrea was hospitalized and instructed to take medication to proceed with the trial. However, the courtroom observers noticed that she was unfeeling and unemotional after medication (CNN Library, 2017). The prosecution proposed that she did not feel sorrow for the loss of her children.

Not only did Andrea seem human in the second trial, but also her defense team presented more witnesses to assist in proving that she was a frail, loving mother that delusionally believed that death was the best thing for her children.

**Evaluation of the outcome.** In the second trial, Andrea's defense team offered a plea of insanity. After a 12-hour deliberation, the jury decided that her mental condition was so grave at the time of the crime that whereas she knew that her actions were unlawful; her delusional thinking implied she was doing the right thing for her children (CNN Library, 2017). Consequently, Andrea was not found guilty and was referred indeterminately to a psychiatric facility for treatment instead of prison.

Incidentally, the expert psychiatric testimony, the witness statements, and evidence in both trials were nearly the same, but the verdicts were very different. A revered Forensic

Psychiatrist Dr. Park Dietz presented the evidence in focus that gave Andrea a second trial. Some of Dietz's initial testimony incorporated allusion to an episode of Law & Order that he claimed had aired in the days before the killings presenting a mother that had drowned her children and received the insanity verdict (CNN Library, 2017). Dietz believed that this led to Andrea's mental state and her crimes.

However, it was later found that the episode shown by Dietz as evidence was never aired and as a result, must not be included and considered by the jury. In the second trial, Dietz testified for the prosecution except he abandoned his improper allusions, maintaining his perspective that regardless of Andrea's history of mental illness and postpartum psychosis, her decision in waiting to be alone at home and dialing emergency after murdering her children implied that she was not aware of her wrongful actions (CNN Library, 2017). As a result, Dietz claimed that Andreas should be criminally accountable for her actions.

Nevertheless, the jury chose not to follow Dietz. They believed that due to her psychosis, Andrea thought she was safeguarding her children by murdering them resulting in a verdict of not guilty of capital murder because of insanity.

***Critique of the Court's Decision.*** The decision reached by the court was justified particularly considering the situation. The killing of children, especially by their mother, is a dreadful crime. Most of the jurors that had to endure these distressing trials had their children, with some having ages similar to the children that were murdered. This creates an emotional impression that is hard to ignore. Andrea Yates had a mental condition, and her situation is one that emphasizes the misinterpretations and to some extent, absolute refutation, of the gravity that some mental illnesses have and the manner in which they can influence the behavior of a person.

An individual that is diagnosed with psychosis lacks the capacity to view their surrounding world in the same manner that a rational person does. Consequently, although Andrea's actions were repulsive, they cannot be considered and contrasted with the deeds of a mother that has killed her children with no mental illness. The period in between Andrea's trials and similar cases highlighted the problem of mental illness and postpartum psychosis to public domain. This established the basis for a comprehension that accepted the occurrence of such incidences.

The most important aspect of Andrea's case revolves around having an enhanced understanding of postpartum psychosis and severity of the condition. Still, this comprehension has its limitations. Andrea remains in a psychiatric facility where she spends her days with the knowledge that she murdered her children while ill and delusional.

References

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