



I38 Parricide by Pre-Teens: Case Review and Study

*Sandra Hah, MD**, Los Angeles County, University Southern California, 2010 Zonal Avenue, Outpatient Department, 1st Floor, 1P-2, Los Angeles, CA 90033

After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with several cases of parricide by pre-teens and be better acquainted with the core issues that are present in the legal, ethical, and psychiatric dilemmas surrounding these cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a platform to discuss the challenges that child parricide cases present to the legal system, as well as highlighting the complex ethical issues that result when the courts must consider punishment versus rehabilitation. This presentation will also serve as a forum in which to discuss several salient psychological and forensic psychiatric issues that arise in child parricide cases.

Parricide is an extremely rare occurrence and parricide committed by pre-teens (children ages twelve and younger) is practically unheard of. On average, there are between two hundred to three hundred parricides a year which represents approximately two percent of all homicides. Only a few of these parricides are committed by minors and of these cases, there may only be a handful of parricides by a pre-teen. The vast majority of parricide cases involve sons murdering their fathers with a firearm. The smallest subgroup of parricide is daughters who commit matricide. There are several etiological theories on parricide by minors. Several studies show that minors who commit parricide are often victims of abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional) or violence, and that they murder as a way to end the abuse. Yet, another theory outlines a shame-rage cycle in the pre-teen that occurs as a result of a contentious relationship with the parent who is the victim of the parricide. There is a smaller subset of children who commit parricide as the result of a severe mental disturbance, and yet an even smaller subset of children who commit parricide for seemingly inconsequential reasons. This presentation will serve as an outline to highlight these theories, and illustrate that there may not necessarily be any pattern or predictability to parricide.

This presentation will also offer insight into the complex issues that must be addressed in the evaluation of the preteen from a forensic psychiatry perspective, as well as the trial proceedings. Several court proceedings and case law files will be reviewed as examples of the specific legal dilemmas that will be discussed. These include; various defense strategies such as battered child syndrome (BCS), how to ensure a fair trial to a child, and how to determine whether the child knew the difference between right and wrong at the commission of the parricide. Ethical dilemmas reflect the strong emotionality of child parricide cases, and include the debate about the fairness of rehabilitating versus punishing children, and whether it is ethical to hold a developing child responsible for a crime for which they may not fully understand the consequences and outcomes. Forensic psychiatric issues focus on examining whether there are any patterns of behavior or psychiatric illness in children who commit parricide. Additionally this presentation will address whether there are any reliable risk factors that can be identified and used to predict this kind of dangerous behavior in a child.

Child Parricide, Forensic Psychiatry, Legal Defenses