



I28 The Charleston Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Shooter: Debating the Psychiatric Experts' Competency to Stand Trial Reports

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will gain experience in approaching complex competency to stand trial cases by participating in a debate and discussion of the evaluation reports by psychiatric experts in a mass murder trial. Attendees will investigate a racially motivated perpetrator and gain an understanding of arguments for and against adjudicative competence. Additionally, relevant literature and case law involving competency to stand trial will also be incorporated into the discussion.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by investigating a racially motivated perpetrator and will further understanding of arguments for and against adjudicative competence.

Psychiatric experts provide critical information to the trier of fact in assessing competence to stand trial.¹ How do opposing experts examine the same information and reach different conclusions regarding psychiatric diagnoses and opinions about competency? In this complex case, how an autism spectrum disorder may impact competency to stand trial is explored. There is developing case law and literature addressing individuals with autism spectrum disorders who perpetrate violence and engage in criminal behavior.² Diagnostic differences between severe personality disorders and primary psychotic disorders are explored in relation to their potential impact on competence. Young adults with social difficulties that could be suggestive of prodromal psychotic symptoms may be particularly difficult to evaluate with regard to the extent their symptoms interfere with the ability to work with an attorney on a defense strategy. Questions remain regarding how much ability constitutes sufficient present ability to consult with an attorney.

This presentation will describe the church shooting that occurred at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, and provide context for Mr. Roof's history, psychological functioning, and psychiatric symptoms. The three competency reports authored by two psychiatric experts and the psychological evaluation conducted on Mr. Roof will be reviewed and their findings will be debated. Additionally, Mr. Roof's desire to represent himself in trial and how this impacted the opinions regarding his competency to stand trial will be explored. Finally, relevant literature and case law involving competency to stand trial will also be incorporated into the discussion.

Reference(s):

1. Lerner M.D., Haque O.S., Northrup E.C., et al. Emerging Perspectives on Adolescents and Young Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders, Violence, and Criminal Law. *J Am Acad Psych Law* 40:177-90, 2012.
2. American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law. Practice guideline: Forensic psychiatric evaluation of competency to stand trial. *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 35:S3-72, 2007.

Competency to Stand Trial, Racially Motivated Crime, Court Experts