

Research paper on andrea yates schizophrenia and society

[Family](#), [Children](#)



On 20 June, 2001, Andrea Yates confessed to drowning her five children in their bathtub. The children were aged between six months and seven years. (Reamer, 2005, p 7). Yates immediately confessed to the killings and a long trial followed which drew international attention. Furthermore, the case of Andrea Yates continues to rouse debate today.

In her confession following the killings, Yates claimed that she had not been acting as a good mother to her children and that, as a result, her children were failing to develop sufficiently. She implied that she wished to receive punishment from the criminal justice system for her bad parenting (Erickson, 2008, p 80).

In court, Yates pleaded not guilty due to being insane at the time of the killings. Ten psychiatrists and two psychologists testified regarding Yates's mental state at the time of killing her children as well as her mental health history.

Yates had a long history of psychiatric illness, including several episodes of postpartum psychosis. Numerous hospitalizations resulted from suicide attempts, brought on by endeavouring to resist Satanic commands to kill her children (Riecher-Rössler, 2005, p 87).

Six months after the birth of her fifth child, Yates' family had termed her as a 'caged animal' as her mental health deteriorated. For some reason, her psychiatrist then discontinued her antipsychotic medication, which led to a "florid psychotic delusional state" (Riecher-Rössler, 2005, p 87). She thought that Satan was forcing her to kill her children, and if she did not they would be destined to the fires of hell (Riecher-Rössler, 2005, p 87).

Of the psychologists and psychiatrists present at the trial, five of the

professionals had treated Yates before June 20, 2001 and six of the professionals saw Yates on or shortly after 20 June for assessment and treatment of her mental illness. Of these, five of them testified that on June 20, 2001, Andrea Yates was incapable of knowing that killing her children was wrong, or that she believed her acts to be right. However, the state's central mental health expert in the case contested that although Andrea Yates was psychotic at the time of the killings, she knew that what she did was wrong. He theorised that, as she claimed her thoughts were coming from Satan, she must have known they were wrong. (Erickson, 2008, p 80). Following just three and a half hours of jury deliberation, Yates was found guilty of capital murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment (Riecher-Rössler, 2005, p 97). After a discrepancy was found in one of the witness statements, however, the verdict was repealed. In 2006 she was deemed not guilty of murder, due to insanity (Riecher-Rössler, 2005, p 98).

The question of whether Andrea Yates should have been convicted as guilty of murdering her five children still raises debate today. On the one hand, she knowingly and intentionally ended the lives of her children by drowning them in a bathtub. However, Yates was undoubtedly suffering from postpartum psychosis and, therefore, was not of sound mind.

Cases such as Andrea Yates' will continue to create controversy due to their complicated nature. However, as medicine and knowledge regarding mental health becomes more advanced, hopefully individuals at risk of harming their children will be identified earlier and awful incidents such as this will be prevented.

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