

Mens rea case study samples

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Introduction

Every lawyer can prove that modern justice system is not perfect. There are such cases that can be tried for months and even years. When such a case appears, a judge might find it difficult to sentence a defendant. This case study is devoted to a thorough analysis of one of such cases – the case State of New Jersey vs. Sonney Pelham. The essay will be divided into several parts. The first part will contain a brief case description. The second part – mens rea – will be devoted to the issue of innocence of the defendant. The third part – actus reus- will be dedicated to the analysis of the objective side of the crime. The last part will be devoted to the analysis and discussion – I will argue that Sonney Pelham was guilty, and the judge passed correct sentence upon Sonney Pelham.

Late night of 1995 William Patrick together with Jocelyn Bobin were driving when their car was bumped from behind. It was Sonney Pelham. The accident was serious because both the driver and his passengers were heavily injured; moreover, Mr. Patrick was unconscious. He was taken to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital where he was treated for a long time. However, he was not getting better and on May, 30, 1996 he was pronounced dead. On the contrary, Mr. Pelham was blood tested for alcohol in his blood, and it appeared that he was alcohol intoxicated while driving. When Mr. Patrick died, Sonney Pelham was accused in the first degree murder. However, Mr. Pelham's barrister argued that the evidence presented by the prosecutor was not relevant. The State of New Jersey should have proved the relevance of the evidence.

Mens rea is the inner, subjective attitude to the crime. Mens rea consists of three parts. It is significant to know about all of them to evaluate Mr. Pelham's mens rea. Relevance of motive. First, it is necessary to understand whether Sonney Pelham was intended to kill Mr. Patrick. The answer is – no. The investigation showed that they did not know each other. Hence, Sonney Pelham did not have any reason for the crime. The second part of mens rea is intention. There are two kinds of intention: direct and oblique. When the direct intention is present, a person realizes that his or her acts can lead to a crime. On the contrary, oblique intention means that a person does not realize all the harmfulness of one's actions. In this case, knowing that Sonney Pelham was alcohol intoxicated, we see that oblique intention was present. Recklessness, the third component of mens rea, is present in this case, as well. Sonney Pelham was aware of consequences when driving drunk. However, he ignored the law and committed a crime. The last component of mens rea is criminal negligence. Obviously, driving being alcohol intoxicated is dangerous. Sonney Pelham neglected the danger of getting into a car accident.

Actus reus

Actus reus is the opposite to mens rea. The term is translated as “ guilty act”. Actus reus means that there should be an act that lead to committing a crime. There are two types of actus reus: act and omission. In the case State of New Jersey vs. Sonney Pelham criminal act is present. The point is that the car accident caused by Sonney Pelham led to serious health problems of Mr. Patrick. That, in turn, led to his death. This case is rather difficult because Mr. Patrick died several months after the accident. One of the main tasks of

prosecution was to prove actus reus in this case. The barrister of Mr. Pelham tried to prove that Sonney was not guilty in Mr. Patrick's death. The main argument was that it was Mr. Patrick, who decided to die and remove the ventilator tube. However, the law of New Jersey as well as the law of the United States of America states that he was allowed to remove the tube whenever he wanted. The point is that it were Mr. Pelham's actions that led to such health problems of Mr. Patrick.

When speaking about other elements of a crime, such as concurrence and causation. Concurrence is present in this case: actus reus and mens rea are simultaneous. Causation is presented in this case as well. Mr. Pelham caused the car accident where Mr. Patrick was heavily injured. His injuries caused different diseases (such as pneumonia and sepsis) which led to almost whole body dysfunction. This led to his paralysis and transferring him to another hospital where he breathed, ate through the tube. As a consequence, Mr. Patrick was not able to stand any longer and asked to remove the ventilator tube.

Discussion

The defense argued that Mr. Pelham was innocent because he did not cause the death. However, the point is that he did not cause the death directly. As I have already mentioned, the car accident caused by Sonney Pelham was the main factor in Mr. Patrick's death. In my opinion, the judge made a right decision. Besides, I should admit that driving drunk was the reason for the car accident. The prosecution proved that it was the car accident that led to William Patrick's death. In my opinion, although not all the components of mens rea are present in the case, Mr. Pelham was guilty.

Resources:

n. a. (2003) State vs. Pelham. Retrieved from [http://www. leagle.com/decision/20031906824A2d1082_11886](http://www.leagle.com/decision/20031906824A2d1082_11886)

n. a. (2011) Elements of crimes. International Criminal Court

n. a. (n. d.) Actus reus. Mens rea. Causation. Concurrence. Retrieved from <http://law.wustl.edu/sba/firstyearoutlines/criminallaw/hughes/Hughes-CrimLaw1-Sp07.pdf>