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Ref:

Psychological Report Re: Death of the four Folbigg children

Prepared by Ms Rozalinda Garbutt, as requested by Det. S/C Bernie Ryan on 11 October 1999.

My Qualifications

My full name is Rozalinda Narelle Garbutt. I am a Police Psychologist with the N.S.W. Police Service. I am a member of the Australian Psychological Society and a member of the Forensic College of Psychologists. I have worked as a Police Psychologist since 1995. In 1997 – 1998 I completed a Masters in Investigative Psychology at Liverpool University, UK. As part of my studies I completed research on Psychological Autopsies and assisted counsel in relation to an equivocal death in a homicide trial. My major research was into intrafamilial homicide and on my return to Australia have assisted on some intrafamilial homicide investigations. My current work with the N.S.W. Police Service involves trauma counselling as well as providing psychological assistance to ongoing investigations. I am also a lecturer on the Forensic Psychology Masters course at University of Western Sydney and conduct workshops on behalf of the Forensic College of Psychologists.

Summary of My Conclusions

My opinion is dependent upon the elimination of natural causes to explain the death of the four Folbigg children. If natural causes are eliminated then in my opinion Kathleen Folbigg became angry and frustrated with her children's crying and need for constant attention to a point where it overwhelmed her and she lost control and consciously ended the lives of each child.

Material Considered

- Thirty one page statement by Mr Craig Folbigg including three sketch plans – not to scale.
- Copy of diary entry dated 19.2.89 written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg
- Copy of “May Gibbs” 1992 diary containing handwritten entries by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg
- Copy of ten A4 pages of handwritten memoirs by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Copy of six A4 page letter written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Copy of personal diary written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg between the 4/6/96 and 5/6/97.
- Copy of personal diary written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg between 6/6/97 and 10/4/98.
- Copy of two A4 page handwritten letter by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg to Mr Craig Folbigg.
- Copy of diary entries dated Jan. 1 1999, Sunday 3/1/99 and 19/6/99 written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Copy of A4 pages 2 and 3 from a letter written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg to Mr Craig Folbigg.
- Copy of eleven A5 page letter written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Copy of diary entry dated July 1999 written by Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Copy of 3 A4 page letter written by Mr Craig Folbigg to his dead son Caleb Folbigg.
- Copy of 2 A4 page letter written by Mr Craig Folbigg re: his dead son, Patrick Folbigg.
- Copy of suicide letter written by Mr Craig Folbigg.
- Copy of 3 page handwritten document by Mr Craig Folbigg re: the deaths of his children.
- Copy of 2 A4 page typed letter by Mr Craig Folbigg.
- Copy of 6 page handwritten document by Mr Craig Folbigg to his wife.
- Copies of video tapes numbers six and seven of Electronic Interview between Detective Ryan and Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Copy of transcript of Electronic Interview between Detective Ryan and Mrs Kathleen Folbigg.
- Brief of Investigation and background history written by Detective S/C Bernie Ryan, Singleton Police.
- Research, articles and information on Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy.

Background Information

Over a period of 10 years, Kathleen Megan Folbigg, married to Craig Gibson Folbigg, gave birth to four children, all of whom died between 20 days to 19 months of their birth.

The first child, Caleb Gibson Folbigg was born on the 1/2/89 and died aged 20 days. At approximately 2:50am 20/2/89, Kathleen went to check on Caleb, in his bassinette in the sunroom of their house. Craig Folbigg was wakened by screams from his wife, Kathleen. An ambulance was called, but Caleb had stopped breathing and could not be revived. Post mortem placed the cause of death as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Patrick Allen David Folbigg was born on the 3/6/90 and died aged 8 months. At approximately 3:30am 18/10/90, Kathleen went to check on Patrick. Craig Folbigg was wakened by screams from his wife, Kathleen. An ambulance was called, but Patrick had laboured breathing and was kept alive by Craig conducting CPR. The hospital treated Patrick for a hypoxic episode which is caused by an obstruction to the airway. A complication from the episode, resulted in Patrick experiencing epilepsy and blindness. Patrick was returned home and on the 13/2/91 10:00am, Kathleen Folbigg rang Craig Folbigg at his place of employment, stating "its happened again" this time resulting in Patrick's death. The cause of death was explained as an obstruction of the airway caused by an Epileptic Fit. The post mortem was carried out by the Mater Hospital and is currently being reviewed.

Sarah Kathleen Folbigg was born on the 14/10/92 and died aged 11 months. At approximately 1:30am 30/9/93, Kathleen went to check on Sarah. Craig Folbigg was again wakened by screams from his wife, Kathleen. An ambulance was called, but Sarah had stopped breathing and could not be revived. Post mortem placed the cause of death as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Laura Elizabeth Folbigg was born on the 7/8/97 and died aged 19 months. At approximately 12:05pm 1/3/99, Kathleen telephoned Emergency (000) stating that Laura was not breathing. An ambulance arrived and tried to revive Laura, but she had stopped breathing and could not be revived. Post mortem placed the cause of death as undetermined following investigation.

All four children were found 'warm to touch' by the Ambulance Officers, which indicated that the children were found by Kathleen within a short time of their deaths.

Antecedents

Accidental death through Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or natural causes is believable for one child within a family, concerning for two and suspicious when three or four children die. Currently, post mortem medical staff and police are reviewing the possibilities of accidental death through medical and criminal investigations.

When reviewing a case involving the deaths of four children which cannot be explained by natural causes it is a viable option to consider "Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy". The information and details received from this case, though, do not indicate a typical pattern of behaviours and affects which is displayed by 'Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy'. The reasons for these inconsistencies will be discussed from a Psychological perspective.

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy

Adults who through self-inflicted injuries, bogus medical documents or symptoms attempt to gain hospitalisation and treatment are known as having a condition called Munchausen Syndrome. Munchausen Syndrome is a recognised psychiatric disorder. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders (DSMIII-R) describe it as the "intentional production of physical symptoms". In the latest edition of this diagnostic manual (DSMIV) the disorder is included within "Factitious disorders".

The feigning of or deliberate production of physical or psychological signs or symptoms in another person who is under the individual's care is referred to as "Factitious Disorder by Proxy". This condition was determined to have insufficient information for it to be classified as an official category according to the DSM IV. This condition "Factitious Disorder by Proxy" is more commonly known as "Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy".

The term "Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy" (MSBP) was coined in a 1976 report describing four children who were so severely abused that they were dwarfed. Perpetrators (usually parents or parent substitutes) usually induce illness or falsely report illnesses in their victims (usually children).

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in the past has been mistakenly allocated as the cause of death for children who have been killed due to Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. Much of the research which has been conducted into sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) has arisen after one family had five children who had all died of unexplained circumstances. The deaths turned out to be caused by the children's mother who suffered from Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy.

In relation to this case, Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy would be a conclusion many would presume on initial review. Kathleen and Craig Folbigg over a matter of ten years had four children under the age of 19 months die of unexplained circumstances. Three of the children's deaths have been certified as SIDS and one of the deaths caused by the obstruction of his airway due to an epileptic fit. Kathleen Folbigg on all occasions discovered the children had ceased to breath. In relation to Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy it would be presumed that Kathleen as the perpetrator caused the physical effects in her children in an attempt to receive attention or sympathy as an emotional gain. It is therefore important to analyse the current case in the light of the possible existence of Factitious Disorder by Proxy (Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy).

The criteria according to The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders (DSMIV) for Factitious Disorder by Proxy is as follows:

A: Intentional production or feigning of physical or psychological signs or symptoms in another person who is under the individual's care

In reference to the deaths of the Folbigg children even though the physical symptoms may have been unexplained surrounding the death there was no prolonged illnesses evident in the children.

B: The motivation for the perpetrator's behaviour is to assume the sick role by proxy.

Kathleen makes little attempt to generate sympathy from the police or family members she has contact with. Kathleen detaches herself from the incidents rather than encouraging ongoing support. For example from the time that the ambulance arrives she physically distances herself in another room and resists attention. Kathleen discourages the SIDS support groups assistance and is hesitant to accept monitoring from doctors including attending the Westmead Hospital. Devices which are given to the Folbigg's to monitor the breathing of their children are removed by Kathleen due to the disturbance they create and she resists any additional attention in relation to her children. Kathleen mentioned to very few people even the fact that she has had children, friends were even unaware that they had existed. Kathleen has shown no previous symptoms of Munchausen Syndrome herself, which was identified by Artinngstall (1995) as a precursor to Munchausen Syndrome by proxy.

This criteria is of opposite extreme for Kathleen Folbigg who persistently detaches herself from the deaths/sicknesses of her children and actively discourages any attention given to her due to the children.

C: External incentives for the behaviour (such as economic gain) are absent.

The behaviour of actively pursuing sympathy or attention in relation to the children is absent therefore no external incentives exist.

D: The behaviour is not better accounted for by another mental disorder.

There are no known indications or medical history that identify Kathleen Folbigg suffering from any other disorder.

According to the factitious disorder by proxy criteria, Kathleen fails to display any of the behaviours which would meet any of the criteria which eliminates the possibility of her diagnosis under this specific criteria.

After reviewing the information provided on Kathleen Folbigg, she does not fit the typical profile of a person with Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. Kathleen was more annoyed at the extra attention on the children and was more inclined to reject the advice from the doctors than encourage ongoing interference. Kathleen seemed more likely to "play down" the children's symptoms rather than continually fabricating or over emphasising them.

Kathleen's own opinion of Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy

Kathleen Folbigg discounts the option of Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy herself which was recorded on the listening device on 23 July 1999 at 10:12 pm. Kathleen mentions that "they think she has Munchausen, getting pregnant for the attention, having children for the attention and killing them for the attention." Kathleen believes the police are aiming their investigation in this direction. She discounts Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy by saying that any attention she received she found it to be uncomfortable and expressed she does not like talking about it.

According to the research, the diagnostic criteria and even in her own opinion it appears that Kathleen Folbigg was not suffering from Munchausen syndrome by proxy at the time of her four children's deaths.

Factitious disorder by proxy (MSBP) is therefore not a valid explanation for the deaths of the four Folbigg children.

Homicide Implications

It is necessary when examining an equivocal death, particularly four in one family, to explore all possible explanations as to the mode of death. Natural, Accidental and Homicide. The particulars of the case rule out accidental death, medical experts will debate SIDS and natural explanations which leaves the validity of homicide as the remaining option to examine. Previously we have eliminated psychiatric illness, in the form of Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy as a reasoning for homicide which necessitates the examination of deliberate homicide.

A quote by Dr Linda Norton, Forensic Pathologist highlights the need to examine the explanation of homicide.

“ There are some who say one infant death is SIDS, two leaves a big question mark and with three you yell murder”

Deliberate homicide will be examined from a psychological perspective by discussing the findings and understandings of intrafamilial homicide and the killing of children. Kathleen's behaviour and thoughts which are evident in her diary entries and ERISP interview will also be examined in respect to deliberate homicide.

Diary entries

Kathleen Folbigg regularly wrote in a diary expressing her thoughts and feelings on that day in relation to her mood, daily activities and her thoughts about her children, her husband and her friends. Reviewing these diary entries which date from 19-2- 89 to July 1999 there are thoughts and behaviours evident in Kathleen's diaries which are valuable in assessing the case in reference to homicide.

Loss of control

Within these diary entries Kathleen made a number of references to herself "losing control" with her previous children and being worried of that happening again.

18-6-96

" When I think I'm going to loose control like last time I'll just hand the baby over to someone else. Not feel so totally alone"

8-9-96

" And I have enough friends now not to loose it like before"

30-10-96

" I worry that my next child will suffer my psychological mood swings like the others did"

6-7-97

" Hopefully preparing myself will mean the end of my dark moods, or at least the ability to see it coming and say to him or someone hey, help I'm getting overwhelmed here, help me out. That will be the key to this babies survival. It surely will.

14-12-96

" But have decided if I get any feelings of jealousy or anger too much I will leave Craig and baby rather than answer being as before. Silly but will be the only way I will cope. I think support and not being afraid to ask for it will be a major plus. Also I have and will change my attitude and try earnestly not to let anything stress me to the max. I will do things to pamper myself regularly and just deal with things. If I have a clingy baby then so be it. A cat napper so be it. That will be when I will ask help and sleep whenever I can. To keep myself in a decent mood. I know now that battling wills and sleep deprivation were the causes last time."

1-1-97

" I am going to call for help this time and not attempt to do everything myself anymore – I know that that was the main reason for all my stress and stress made me do terrible things."

16-5-97

" I really needed him (Craig) to wake that morning (re: Sarah's death) and take over from me. This time I have already decided if I ever feel that way again I'm going to wake him up."

29-10-97

"Totally she (Laura) doesn't push my button anywhere near the extent she (Sarah) did. Which is good for her is all I can say."

8-11-97

"We will never again do anything that doesn't involve her.. funny how now she's here we can't seem to imagine a life without her dominating every move. Must try to release my stress some how. I'm starting to take it out on her. Bad move. Bad things and thoughts happen when that happens. It will never happen again."

28-1-98

"I've done it. I lost it with her. I yelled at her so angrily that it scared her, she hasn't stopped crying. Got so bad I nearly purposely dropped her on the floor and left her. I restrained enough to put her on the floor and walk away.....I feel like the worst mother on this earth. Scared that she'll leave me now. Like Sarah did. I knew I was short-tempered and cruel sometimes to her and she left. With a bit of help. I don't want that to ever happen again. I actually seem to have a bond with Laura it can't happen again. I'm ashamed of myself I can't tell Craig about it because he will worry about leaving her with me. Only seems to happen if I'm too tired, her moaning, bored, wingy sound drives me up the wall."

Kathleen in these extracts appears to blame the children's deaths on her psychological mood swings (dark moods) and the ultimate loss of control she experienced with them. Kathleen indicates she became overwhelmed with her children and in the future she plans to utilise tactics of asking others for help rather than losing control. The indications from these extracts is that Kathleen became overwhelmed and lost control while caring for the children. Kathleen attributes the loss of control to a number of different causes such as: frustration, anger, jealousy, sleep deprivation and continued need of her attention by the children.

Guilt

Kathleen also made a number of diary entries which made reference to her own guilt regarding the deaths of her children. These entries indicate she felt her actions made her "at fault" and "deserving" of punishment.

21-7-96

"God I hope so or else these tablets will cause brain damage. Probably would be just desserts for me considering! But not fair for Craig at all. I would feel like a failure and wouldn't cope at all. Can't be dwelling on what ifs. I truly deserve anything life throws at me so my philosophy is whatever happens, happens and it's the way it shall be."

11-9-96

"I'm not pregnant yet. Feel as though its my fault, think its deserved after everything that has happened. I suppose I deserve never to have kids again."

14-10-96

"Nature, fate and the man upstairs have decided I don't get a fourth chance and rightly so I suppose. I would like to make all my mistakes and terrible thinking be corrected and mean something though. Plus I'm ready to continue my family time now. Obviously I'm my father's daughter. But I think losing my temper stage and being frustrated with everything has passed. I now just let things happen and go with the flow. An attitude I should of had with all my children if given the chance I will have it with the next one."

6-8-96

"It is a sign, don't bother with having a child, would be just desserts for me it is exactly what I deserve for my indiscretions of life."

These extracts seem to indicate Kathleen's guilt about the death of her children and her not deserving another child. She is blaming the deaths of her children on her frustration and temper and therefore understands why she may not 'be worthy' of having other children. Kathleen makes reference to seeing herself as her father's daughter. Kathleen's father killed her mother, is this in the vein that she sees herself as her father's daughter or was she frustrated with the children as her father was in his marriage.

Responsibility

Another theme in the diary entries relate to Kathleen assuming responsibility and the part she played in the deaths of her children.

26-8-96

"Went to Clairvoyant last week so did Craig. I always believed there is more going on than just human nature. I seem content now because I know that even though I am responsible. It's alright. She (Sarah) accepts & is happy their."

17-2-97

"One day it will leave (the new baby). The others did, but this ones not going in the same fashion. This time I'm prepared and know what signals to watch out for in myself. Changes in mood etc. Help I will get if need be."

25-10-97

"Laura has definite feminine features, they are chalk and cheese. And truthfully just as well. Wouldn't have handled another one like Sarah.. She saved her life by being different."

9-11-97

"Craig was pretty drunk Friday nite. In his drunken stupor he admitted that his not really happy. There's a problem with his security level with me and he has a morbid

fear about Laura, he well I know theres nothing wrong with her. Nothing out of the ordinary anyway. Because it was me not them."

31-12-97

"She's (Laura) a fairly good natured baby – thank goodness, it has saved her from the fate of her siblings! I think she was warned."

The above extracts suggest Kathleen views herself as having been responsible for the deaths of her children and holding the ultimate control over their continuing lives. For Laura, her life continued due to her physical appearance and her temperament being different to Sarah. In these diary entries it seems to suggest that the lives of the Folbigg children relied upon Kathleen's decision of their survival which was dependant on their physical appearance and temperament. It is also implied that it is the children's responsibility to keep themselves alive by being good natured and attractive. Kathleen implies full responsibility for the deaths of the children and claims ultimate control as her actions caused their deaths which is contrary to if the loss of the children was through natural death.

Summary of Diary Entries

The writings of Kathleen Folbigg raise some questions in relation to the deaths of her four children. Much of the research conducted into the killing of children (filicides) reveals a similar pattern to what is presented by Kathleen in her diaries. d'Orban (1979) in a study of 89 women who had killed their children found " these assaults always occurred in a state of exasperation and loss of temper and there were no instances of planned, deliberate cruelty (p.565). Much other research conducted into filicide was consistent with this finding (Somander and Rammer, 1991; Ewing, 1997; Alder and Polk, 1996; Kunz and Bahr, 1996 and Frude, 1991).

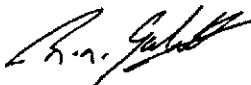
Kathleen's writings follow three sequential themes which present a cycle of responsibility for their deaths. Kathleen writes consistently about the children's actions causing her to feel 'stressed' and overwhelmed which in turn creates her to lose control and have 'bad thoughts' which leads to 'bad things' happening. Kathleen, then, acknowledges her own feelings of guilt and being at fault for the 'bad things' that happened and due to this rationalises that she does not deserve to have any more children. During this rationalisation Kathleen accepts responsibility for her children's deaths but moves to a position of understanding her actions as being the result of the behaviour or appearance of her children.

Conclusion

The death of the Folbigg children is equivocal in nature. The determination of their deaths as natural, caused by SIDS is brought into question due to the multiple number of deaths in one family. The question of a natural death is a debate open to medical experts. If natural causes is under question this then leaves accidental or homicide as the remaining modes of death. Accidental as mentioned previously is eliminated due to the nature of the deaths and the age of the deceased, therefore, homicide needed to be examined. Within this report homicide was examined as a possible mode of death from a psychological perspective.

Homicide can occur due to the offender suffering from a psychiatric illness. In relation to this case with the deaths of four children in one family, 'Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy' is a disorder commonly identified to explain the actions of the offender. The viability of this disorder can be discounted within this case due to Kathleen's own behaviour, acts and admissions which do not meet the description of symptoms and criteria.

From viewing the diaries, transcripts and facts surrounding the deaths deliberate homicide is a more plausible explanation for the deaths of the four children. Most significantly, Kathleen takes responsibility for the deaths of her children not because she could not stop the deaths (through natural causes) but due to her 'losing control' she consciously ended her children's lives. From all the information reviewed within this report, the deaths of the four Folbigg children seem to be more logically explained by deliberate homicide.



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