



Criminal Liabilities and Insanity Defense in the Criminal Justice System

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Abstract

The insanity defense is a significant and challenging element of the criminal justice system, which permits defendants to claim that their serious mental illness made them unable to comprehend the nature or immorality of their conduct when they committed the felony. Here we discuss the progression of legal principles from ancient Roman law to the influential M'Naghten Rule, as well as the current standards, including, the Irresistible Impulse Test and Model Penal Code Test.

Keywords: Insanity Defense; M'Naghten Rule; Criminal Responsibility

Introduction

In the fields of criminal law and criminology, the primary focus is on gaining an understanding of the intentions and reasons that lead people to engage in illegal behavior. The inherent nature and formation of this intent and motive are frequently unquestioned, and a trial performed to determine the responsibility of an accused is typically reliant on legal evidence. A sense of responsibility has a major connection to our fundamental principles about human nature and reverence, as well as how we grapple with feelings of guilt, innocence, blame, and condemnation [1]. Seeking retribution against an individual who is not responsible for the crime is a violation of basic human rights and constitutional rights within the criminal justice system. In addition, it ensures the implementation of the legal procedure, particularly if the individual lacks the ability to present a defense in a court of law, thus invoking the principle of fairness [2]. However, it is crucial to understand that neurological and psychological limitations affect a defendant's ability to possess lucid and

unambiguous motives and intentions, a matter of contention.

Examining a criminal case involving a defendant with a documented history of mental illness presents numerous ambiguous aspects that necessitate the involvement of specialists in the respective discipline. Forensic psychiatric experts provide valuable analysis for understanding the circumstances surrounding criminal behavior and the actions of individuals with mental incapacities. This analysis can either strengthen the existing evidence or undermine its evidentiary value.

Insanity Defense

The insanity defense is a legal concept that, in certain situations, absolves individuals with mental illness from legal culpability for illegal actions. An essential competence in forensic psychiatry is the capacity to assess whether suspects satisfy a jurisdiction's criteria for a determination of not being criminally liable [3]. It is generally referred to as the Plea of Insanity. The term commonly used for this is

the insanity defense. The defendant asserts that during the commission of the alleged offense, they were confronted with a mental disorder that hindered their capacity to understand the essence of their acts or differentiate between what is morally correct and incorrect. It indicates that the behavior was not intentional; therefore, he is not legally accountable for the crime and cannot be prosecuted. The Latin maxim "Actus non facit reus nisi mens sit rea" states that an action does not make someone guilty unless their mentality is guilty. The principle asserts that an individual cannot be held responsible if their mental condition lacks culpability, as punishment requires the presence of a guilty mind.

Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that an individual's inability to conduct crimes eliminates them from punishment. This has been accepted by the legislation of the majority of almost every criminal justice system [4,5]. Even in India, Section 84 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) addresses the actions of individuals who are mentally unstable and explores the concept of using insanity as a defense [4]. This matter has sparked a significant discourse among medical, psychiatric, and legal experts worldwide.

Insanity Defense and its Different Legal Standards

The premise of the insanity defense can be traced back to ancient times. The earliest documented mention can be attributed to Roman law, which allowed for the exemption of those deemed "non compos mentis" (mentally incompetent) from legal responsibility. Various legal regimes have implemented different criteria for the insanity defense. The three primary standards include the M'Naghten Rule, the irresistible impulse test, and the Model Penal Code (MPC) test.

M'Naghten Rule

The M'Naghten Rule remains one of the most widely used standards. The most influential case in modern times is M'Naghten's Case (1843), in which Daniel M'Naghten was acquitted of the murder of Edward Drummond, the secretary of England's Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Peel, on account of his delusions of persecution. The M'Naghten Rule, as defined in this case, says, "Every man is presumed to be sane and to possess a sufficient degree of reason to be responsible for his crimes, until the contrary is proved to before the Jury to its satisfaction" [6]. This case gained substantial attention due to the defendant's unprecedented use of the insanity defense, making it highly renowned in the world of law. The investigation focuses on the defendant's understanding of the act's nature and their comprehension of its wrongfulness. The opponents contend that this regulation is excessively stringent and neglects to account for the complexity of mental disorders [7].

Irresistible Impulse Test

Irresistible impulse is a legal doctrine that absolves an individual from criminal liability if they possess the knowledge of right and wrong, but are compelled to engage in unlawful behavior owing to an uncontrollable compulsion resulting from a mental condition. In essence, a person may understand that their behaviors are wrong, but they are unable to modify their behavior to conform to what is considered ethically or socially acceptable due to a lack of willpower or volitional capacities [8].

Model Penal Code Test

The substantial ability test refers to the model penal code's insanity defense. The Model Penal Code was finalized in 1962. The Model Penal Code Test, formulated by the American Law Institute, integrates principles derived from the M'Naghten Rule and the Irresistible Impulse Test. The statement posits that if a defendant, as a result of a mental condition or defect, has a substantial deficiency in comprehending the unlawful nature of their actions or in conforming to legal standards at the time of those actions, they cannot be held responsible for their criminal conduct. Numerous states across the United States employ this examination, which is considered more comprehensive.

Conclusion

The insanity defense is an intricate and complicated matter that involves the intersection of law, psychology, and ethics. Although it plays a vital role in protecting those with serious mental illness, it also encounters substantial problems and criticism. Comprehending the historical background, legal criteria, and psychological evaluations associated with the insanity defense is crucial for effectively navigating this controversial field of forensic psychology. Further investigation and discussion are essential to tackle the disputes and guarantee that the insanity defense continues to be a just and efficient element of the criminal justice system.

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