

R v Kara Alexander Sentencing Remarks

Kingston Crown Court

Mr Justice Bennathan

11 April 2025

1. The heavy use of skunk or other hyper-strong strains of cannabis can plunge people into a mental health crises in which they may harm themselves or others. If any drug user does not know that, it is about time they did. At your trial, Kara Alexander, the three psychiatrists who gave evidence disagreed about a number of things, but on that they were unanimous. It will comfort nobody connected to this case, but if these events bring home that message to even a few people, some slight good may come from what is otherwise an unmitigated tragedy.
2. On 21 February of this year you, Ms Alexander, were found guilty of murdering your sons: Marley, aged 5, and Elijah, or Teddy to all who knew him, aged only 2. I now have to pass sentence on you. The only sentence the law permits for murder is life imprisonment but I have to set the minimum term you must serve before you can apply to be released on licence, which would only happen if the Parole Board were confident it was safe to do so. In deciding on that minimum term, I need to act on facts of which I am sure, and apply the guidelines of the Sentencing Council and the provisions passed by Parliament in schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020: that schedule specifies that the starting point for your minimum term must be 30 years, but that has to be adjusted to allow for aggravation and mitigation. The statutory surcharge applies in an amount to be notified to you.
3. The facts I find are as follows. On the evening of 15 December 2022 you had been smoking skunk. You had been doing so every night for weeks, probably much longer. At some stage both the boys were in their pyjamas, ready for bed, with Elijah also wearing his nappy. You drowned them both by your deliberate acts. I cannot reach any conclusion but that in your state at that time you intended to kill them as what else would someone intend who, unspeakably, held two little children under water for, in the words of the pathologist, Dr Carey, “*up to a minute or two*”. The bath was probably still run from their normal evening routine, and I do not think for a moment that your dreadful acts were premeditated. You then, sometime later, dried the boys, put them in clean pyjamas and laid them together, tucked in under duvets, on the same bunk bed. The next morning their father, worried by your unusual silence, came and found them: the stuff of nightmares.

4. I have today heard evidence about the impact of these crimes on four people, the boys' father, your mother, and your elder two children. Mr Thomas, the boys' father, is understandably both deeply grieving for the loss of his sons and full of anger towards you. Your mother and older son wrote of the loss of those lively cheerful little children and the emotional chaos and heartbreak caused by them losing both the children, and losing you. Your daughter spoke movingly and lucidly of the emotional devastation these crimes have inflicted on her life.
5. You are now 47 years old. You were 44 when the boys died. You have no previous convictions. Before the dreadful events of 15 December there was every sign you were a caring and affectionate mother to both children: a witness who saw them days before they died said, "*Both boys seemed really lovely and well behaved*". Their father said, of you, she "*never shouted or raised her voice at the boys, she never showed violence to the boys*". The evidence from the pathologists said both boys had some of the scratches or scrapes that children pick up from playing or tumbling over, but there was no sign or suggestion at all that they had been physically mistreated before the incident when they died.
6. Three psychiatrists gave evidence at your trial. I find:
 - (1) You were in a psychotic state when you killed your sons. I base that on the analysis of Dr Farnham, founded on your conduct before the killings, such as the atypical religious comments, your conduct afterwards, and the sheer enormity and abnormality of what you did to your own children.
 - (2) On the proper medical definition of your psychotic state, I accept and am sure of Professor Blackwood's diagnosis, that it was cannabis induced, even if there were other contributing causes such as a number of stressors you were under. That finding, of a psychosis correctly categorised as cannabis induced, is consistent with the jury's rejection of your defence of diminished responsibility.
 - (3) You had a previous psychotic episode in 2016. Cannabis probably played a part in that episode as well. In the aftermath of that episode there was an agreed diagnosis of a psychosis other than one adduced by cannabis. I cannot be sure that you were aware that cannabis could trigger another psychotic state: Dr Ratnam testified that you might have been, but that was based on her speculation of your having read the detail in a psychiatric report, where there is a single reference in general terms amongst many pages of numerous reports. I also note that in December 2022 you spoke regularly to two members of your social circle about your heavy cannabis use. They both knew you were looking after two small children, and at least one of them knew of your previous psychotic episode in 2016, yet neither of them warned you of any risk or sounded any note of caution at all.

7. There are two powerful, obvious, somewhat overlapping aggravating factors that must raise the minimum term given in the schedule: the vulnerability of the boys by their young age and the shocking abuse of the trust that any small child ought to be able to have in their mother or father.
8. There are three important pieces of mitigation. They are your previous good character, your psychotic state at the time of the killings, and the lasting effect on you of your own, murderous, acts.
9. First, you not only lack any previous convictions but before that terrible evening in December 2022 you had been a caring mother. That stands as a stark contrast to the history that more normally confronts the Courts when a child is killed, of persistent abuse and mistreatment.
10. Second, for reasons I have identified, I proceed on the basis that you were in a psychotic state at the time of the killings and you may not have been told that your previous psychotic state could be brought on again by cannabis. It is inconceivable you would have harmed either child had you been in your right mind. As a matter of public policy, the law at times treats self-induced intoxication as aggravation, and in homicides the law excludes the effect of such intoxication from founding the partial defence of diminished responsibility. The legal question I have had to address is whether, on the facts of your case, I can treat a psychotic state caused at least in part by the voluntary taking of drugs as mitigation. In my view I can, given:
 - (1) The listed aggravating factors in schedule 21 do not, in contrast to other guidelines, include the offence being committed under the influence of drink or drugs.
 - (2) The listed mitigating factors in the same schedule allow in terms for any mental disorder that falls outside the defence of diminished responsibility.
 - (3) The Sentencing Council guideline on Sentencing Defendants with Mental Disorders, particularly at paragraph 15, has the clearest implication that a state of self-induced intoxication, where the accused was not aware of the possible consequences, can be mitigation.
 - (4) In my view the necessary public interest in not letting offenders hide behind drink or drugs they chose to consume is satisfied, on the facts of this case, by the withdrawal of the partial defence of diminished responsibility.
11. In my view, applying once more the considerations in the Sentencing Council guideline, your culpability is very significantly reduced in that you were grossly disinhibited, and unable to make rational choices or exercise judgement.

12. Third, despite the fact it is all your doing, you will mourn Marley and Elijah for the rest of your life. From all I have read and seen of you, I have no doubt that every day when you awake you will remember and grieve for the little boys whose lives you snatched away.
13. Within the guidance I must follow, it is written that a detailed consideration of aggravating or mitigating factors may result in a minimum term of any length, whatever the starting point. I must also deduct from that minimum term the time you have already spent in custody, in your case some 843 days.
14. Balancing the very significant aggravation against the unusually weighty mitigation, the minimum term I impose is one of 24 years. With the deduction of the time you already served, that means the sentence I pass on both counts of murder is one of life imprisonment with a minimum term of 21 years and 252 days.