



PROCEEDINGS



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J25 On Pathological Religiosity: Technical Reflection Points From an Expert Case Study

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Learning Overview: Through the analysis of four cases, this presentation aims to illustrate how the combination of dysfunctional religious beliefs and a culture of belonging, together with a premorbid personality, can influence an individual's conduct and assume relevance in the medicolegal field. Religions as a meaning system can affect the coping process, and the doctrines and religious beliefs within them can either exacerbate or reinforce psychopathological tendencies in emotionally vulnerable individuals.^{1,2} After attending this presentation, attendees will be more aware of the importance of careful analysis of religious and cultural dimensions, along with historical and existential aspects, in criminological assessments.

Impact Statement: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing the anthropological and psychological relevance of the effects of the intersection of disturbed religiosity and psychopathological antecedents on behavior. Paying attention to this element can be useful in the prevention of deviant and criminal behavior, as well as in the treatment, prognostic, and curative approaches to these dynamics.

Four expert cases were examined. The first case involves a couple with inadequately treated psychiatric disorders and a pathological religious dimension. This combination of factors led to serious dysfunctional dynamics in the relationship, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy and a reparative marriage. The daughter was diagnosed with severe autism spectrum disorder after a few years. During the separation, the technical relevance concerns the identification of the most suitable legal entity to take custody of the ill child, currently hospitalized in a health care facility.

The second case concerns a man, an entrepreneur and a Mason, who, approaching a church community, completely changes his lifestyle and gets married. However, he later develops a desire to become a priest. After the birth of his second daughter, he has a psychotic episode and undergoes involuntary mental health commitment. Subsequently, he separates from his wife, undertakes the declaration of matrimonial nullity, and begins training for the permanent diaconate. The technical relevance in this case is twofold, as it is necessary to assess both the subject's psychological condition with reference to the marriage nullity and his psycho-physical fitness for religious life. An affirmative judgment on the first point motivates a negative one on the second.

The third case involves a couple belonging to the Mormon Church. The beginning of the relationship coincides with his adherence to that religion, of which she has been a member since childhood. Sharing this cult with all its rigidities, methodologies, and psychological pressures helps keep the couple's relationship firm, concealing differences and incompatibilities. The estrangement and subsequent abandonment of the Mormon Church causes strong relational conflicts leading to the separation of the couple. This crisis also affects the children, who become the object of triangulation.

The fourth case deals with possible sexual abuse by a grandfather belonging to the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses against his minor granddaughter. The complex plot of this case of hypothetical intrafamilial abuse unfolds in a religious setting with a vindictive perspective and raises doubts about the granddaughter's ability to provide credible testimony due to her suggestibility.

The cases presented highlight the possibility that the religious dimension not only can turn in a phenomenon associated with individual or collective mental suffering, but the individual can also become inherently ill when deprived of authentic anthropological content.³ Because negative aspects of religion such as religious struggle, negative beliefs, miscommunication, and misunderstandings can be damaging to mental health, it's essential that those involved in spiritual education pay special attention in dysfunctional and problematic religious attitudes.⁴⁻⁸ Indeed, early recognition and appropriate management of such dynamics is crucial to fostering a healthy environment and spirituality.

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Behavioral Science; Forensic Science; Psychological Behavior