**The Guardian**

Husband stands by Tania Clarence as she is detained for killing their children

**Judge describes Clarence as being ‘severely depressed’ when she suffocated disabled daughter and twin sons**

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 Gary Clarence, center, leaves the Old Bailey where his partner Tania Clarence was sentenced for manslaughter by diminished responsibility. Photograph: Tim Ireland/AP

The distraught husband of a woman who killed their three severely disabled children in a fit of depression stood by his wife on Tuesday as a judge sentenced her to detention in a psychiatric hospital.

Tania Clarence, 43, admitted the manslaughter by diminished responsibility of Olivia, four, and three-year-old twins Max and Ben at the family’s home in New Malden, south-west London, in April.

Mr Justice Sweeney said she was severely depressed and overwhelmed by the challenge of caring for the children, who suffered from the muscle-weakening condition type 2 spinal muscular atrophy.

Her husband Gary, 45, supported his wife through the trial and in a statement afterwards said lessons needed to be learned from the case, in which his wife’s “dedication and love” turned to “despair and utter hopelessness”.

In a statement read by a family representative, he expressed the hope that “never again will a family endure the unbearable pressure that overwhelmed her”.

South Africa-born Clarence was at home on her own with the three children when she decided to end their lives – her husband, an investment banker, had taken their elder daughter Taya, now eight, to South Africa to visit family days earlier.

Clarence killed the children then tried to kill herself, leaving her husband a letter which said she was “so, so sorry”.

Sentencing her at the Old Bailey, Sweeney said it was “clear she loved her children” and had suffered a major depressive episode. “The prosecution accept that you loved all four of your children. Indeed, there is [a] substantial body of evidence that they were happy and well looked after and you were grief-stricken that Olivia, Max and Ben were destined to die early and before you,” he said. Quoting a psychiatrist, he added: “If you had not been suffering from mental illness at the time, you would not have killed your children.”

Clarence would not be released, he said, until she had recovered from her illness.

The actions of the local council were questioned as the judge said Clarence had been affected by witnessing medical interventions that she thought unnecessary. The effect of the actions of health professionals and social workers on her state of mind was an important factor, he said.

The court heard that Clarence wrote a letter to her husband on 20 April saying she had decided to kill the children on Good Friday, two days earlier. She said the plan to say goodbye had given her some inner peace. “I cannot face going down this path watching Liv and the boys continue to get weaker,” she wrote. “Most importantly, the interference in our lives (you know: GOSH [Great Ormond Street Hospital], NHS, Kingston/Moor Lane). I am tired of it all. No matter what we overcome, no matter what we do, it will never be enough.”

On the day of the children’s deaths Clarence had given the family’s nanny a day off. In the early hours of 22 April she smothered the twins using a nappy so they would not be able to smell her, the court heard – but then hesitated before killing Olivia.

After the twins’ deaths, she wrote her husband another letter, which read: “Gary, I need to tell you how difficult it is for me to take Liv’s life … If I could take my own life and leave her to wait for you I would … My only solace is the pain and future suffering I am saving her from. I am so sorry … The only thing giving me the motivation to continue is the belief that the boys are already playing up in heaven like they could never play here.”

In a statement for the family, solicitor **Richard Egan** said: “The Clarence family, and in particular Tania Clarence, dedicated their lives to the care and welfare of their three severely disabled children. Her love, commitment and tenacity in the face of the overwhelming responsibilities such care entailed was extraordinary. Ultimately, her story of dedication and love became a story of despair and utter hopelessness.”

He added: “Tania’s depression was certainly not assisted by the constant pressure placed on the family by some individuals within the medical profession and social services who could not agree with Tania and Gary’s stance of prioritising quality of life for their children and who were not readily willing to submit the children to operations and other interventions they felt were not appropriate in the circumstance.”

Kingston council has launched a serious case review after it emerged during the trial that a social worker who had been close to the family for more than a year, Suzie Holley, had been replaced by a younger, more inexperienced social worker six months before the killings.

Holley resigned soon afterwards. Friends said the mother had felt under constant pressure and had been “very derogatory about Kingston social services”, the court heard.

Jim Sturman QC, defending, criticised the actions of the “inexperienced social worker”. Prosecutor Zoe Johnson QC said Holley had been replaced in part because the social services department thought she “had got too close” to Clarence.

“With hindsight that perhaps was an ill-conceived decision by the social services department,” said Johnson.

A Kingston council spokesman said any findings from the review would be acted on.

“This is a terrible tragedy. The thoughts of everyone at the council are with the family and friends of the Clarences,” he said. “Throughout the lives of the children, we sought to work with partner agencies to ensure that the Clarence family were fully supported. This was provided through a range of services including therapies, care support into the home and direct payments to the family to assist with the costs of their nanny.

“The local safeguarding children board is currently undertaking a serious case review. The partnership will ensure that any learning from this review is incorporated into the work with children with disabilities and their families.”