

The death row inmate: the transformative story from pathology to person

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Abstract

One of the most effective ways to mitigate a capital murder sentence is to tell the life story of the client in such a way that judge and/or jury are emotionally moved, seeing him/her less as a diseased sickness on society, but more as a dejected human struggling to survive with underdeveloped or non-existing coping skills. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss ethical and culturally competent ways to gather and document client information using certain skill sets, assessments, and techniques which ultimately assist in sentence mitigation. A well-educated, well-trained, ethical mitigation specialist will literally and figurative hand over lifesaving information to the defense team. After weeks or months of meeting with the client and unpacking every bio-psycho-social-spiritual-Eco environment adverse event they experienced, the hard work then begins. The specialist then spends weeks writing the findings analysis and implication of analysis for defense council. This bio-psycho-social-spiritual-eco-enviro history must be so well-written that council can vividly picture themselves experiencing the abuse, the domestic violence, the community violence, the abject poverty, that utter depravity in which the client survived. A "painting" so well-written that the only thing left for defense council is to share the story and indicate that the adverse childhood trauma is directly linked to the adult criminal behaviors, which points to mitigating circumstances. A well-written and well-told story is an effective sentence mitigation strategy and is paramount to securing a lesser sentence.

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Biography

Dr. Swindell's research on death row inmates, adverse childhood events (ACES) and adverse lifetime events (ALTES), Swindell, (2019) and neuroscience is groundbreaking. She was recently invited as a guest speaker at the US Administrative Office of the Courts to share her research findings on the effects of community and family violence, ACES and ALTES on brain development and architecture. She independently contracts as a Mitigation Specialist and SME in family and community violence/dysfunction,

attachment, child emotional, physical, mental, and sexual abuse, and addictions as related to brain development. Dr. Swindell, a professor of Social Work at Mississippi State University-Meridian, recently made history as the first teaching PhD in Social Work and MSW to be awarded both tenure and the rank of full professor. Dr. Swindell completed her Ph.D. (2001) and MSW (1992) in Social Work from the University of Alabama-in the traditional, brick and mortar environment.