

UK: Paris Mayo jailed for murder of a baby she delivered alone, aged 15

Julie Hyland
7 July 2023

Paris Mayo was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment last week after being found guilty of murdering her baby son shortly after she delivered him alone at home when she was just 15 years old.

The case has taken almost four years to get to court. In his sentencing remarks, Mr Justice Graham noted the impact of the “significant” delay, especially for a 15-year-old. “This matter has been hanging over your head for 20 percent of your life”, he said. But he went on to stipulate he made no criticism of the Crown Prosecution Service for the delay, which was due to gathering “medical evidence.”

The verdict and the sentence are unprecedented. Especially given that Justice Graham acknowledged that Mayo was “alone and unsupported” when she “went through the process of giving birth without the assistance of a midwife, a doctor, a friend or a relative. I find as a fact that you were frightened and traumatised by those events. I have no doubt that the birthing process was not just painful, but overwhelming for you.”

Nonetheless, Mayo was sentenced as an adult for something that occurred when she was still a child and clearly in a disturbed mental state.

The court heard that Mayo, now 19, was just 15 years and four months old when she delivered a baby boy, Stanley, in 2019, in the sitting room of her father’s home in Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire. Neither Paris’ parents, nor her brother, knew of her pregnancy or anything about the delivery—despite being upstairs in the same house—until the next day.

The prosecution charged that Mayo wilfully concealed her pregnancy, having determined that she would kill the child. On birth, it charged she had stamped on his head and stuffed his mouth with cotton wool, so he suffocated. She then put the baby in a black bin bag outside the door, messaged her older brother asking him to put it in the bin, and went to bed.

The remains were found by her mother Coralie the next morning, who was disturbed by blood around the bag. Audio of the harrowing call made by Coralie to the emergency services was played to the court. Sobbing at times

uncontrollably, she told the 999 operator “My 15-year-old daughter just gave birth last night. I didn’t know.” Speaking to her daughter, she was heard crying hysterically “you know you could have told me.”

Against the charge that she had wilfully concealed her pregnancy, Mayo told the court, “I had convinced myself so much that I wasn’t. I guess I was scared, I didn’t want it to be true.’ She did not want her parents to be “ashamed” of her, she said.

In a saddening account, Mayo described having a difficult childhood, and a troubled relationship with her father who was “emotionally cruel” and made her feel “worthless”. Feeling very insecure in herself, she became sexually active aged 13, because she thought it would make people like her.

It was only when labour began, Mayo said, that she accepted she must be pregnant.

Childbirth experts testified that it was “extraordinary” Mayo did not shout or scream during labour, especially given her confusion and severe pain.

The court heard Mayo’s father was terminally ill. Though her parents were separated, the family had moved back into the home to support the father who was receiving dialysis with the help of Coralie upstairs, while Mayo delivered silently in the living room. Mayo later said that she had not wanted to “bother” her mother, who had “enough on her plate.”

Mayo’s father died ten days later.

Several medical experts testified that Mayo had “created a false memory.” Dr John Sandford explained, “As a 15-year-old girl giving birth, she went into a state of shock, of panic and distress, with very high anxiety and emotional trauma. Such events could lead to a disturbance of the balance of her mind.”

Justice Graham concurred that if Mayo “had planned in advance to kill your child and conceal the evidence of that crime, there were obvious steps you could have taken”, including moving out to her aunt’s house “where you were unlikely to be disturbed.”

He also recorded, “On the question of pre-meditation, I

reject the prosecution's suggestion that the previous six or seven months had been devoted to avoiding detection of your pregnancy or concealment of the forthcoming birth or that this was an offence with significant preplanning."

How, after hearing such a tragic account, did the court respond with such a brutal sentence?

The jury concluded by majority verdict that Mayo deliberately killed her child. Every legal avenue of accounting for the fact that Mayo was clearly in a terrible situation and a disturbed state of mind was then closed off.

A charge of infanticide, rather than murder, is available and provides women with a partial defence of the murder or manslaughter of a biological child aged under one year, in acknowledgement of the frequently appalling circumstances.

Dr Emma Milne, Associate Professor in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice at Durham university, told the *Guardian* that "women accused of killing a new-born are incredibly vulnerable and experience pregnancy as a moment of crisis." For almost half a century, no woman had been imprisoned following a conviction of infanticide, with many receiving psychiatric support.

This precedent, she explained, "is being swept aside" by a "hardening from the Crown Prosecution Service" towards such cases, with Mayo joining three other women sentenced for murder after trying to plead infanticide in the last five years.

While the jurors in Mayo's case were invited to consider infanticide, the prosecution pushed for a murder charge and spent years gathering the testimony it required to convict her.

Justice Graham specifically identified the testimony of Dr Harding as "somewhat unsatisfactory." In what should have been a damning comment, he said it was apparent that Harding "formed a clear and unshakeable view of your culpability from the time of his very first meeting with you. He had told the police that you ought to be prosecuted, a surprising opinion for an expert called to give evidence on a defendant's mental state to express and one which he agreed in his oral evidence ought not to have appeared in his report.

"I also regard it as unfortunate that Dr Harding did not know, or at least as unable to call to mind, the standard of proof that would have to be applied by the court considering his opinion. In my view, he demonstrated in his oral evidence an inflexibility of thinking that seemed to me unhelpful in as complex and difficult a case as this one."

Having gone into labour, it was argued, Mayo should have called for help. The fact that she had not was proof enough she intended to murder her child. The terrible manner of Stanley's death—involving blunt force trauma and suffocation—meant there could be no mitigating

circumstances.

In his highly contradictory summation, Justice Graham accepted "the prosecution's submissions that, on any view, you knew you were pregnant and about to give birth an hour or so before you did so", and so the defence of denial could not be upheld. "... by the evening of the 23 March, you knew what was happening to your body and in those last minutes, you decided that you had to get rid of this baby. To that extent, this was a pre-meditated killing", even though "this pre-meditation was not long-standing."

He concluded with a statement that tacitly argued against a prison sentence:

"Despite listening to all the evidence over the last six weeks, I have detected nothing to suggest you would be a danger to children or to anyone else, (with the possible exception of another child of your own if you were to fall pregnant again in similar circumstances, which is a remote possibility given the sentence I am about to impose)."

There has been little discussion, let alone outcry, against the verdict. This is part of the reactionary trend in bourgeois politics that has seen the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States last year, effectively denying millions of American women any right to an abortion.

In June, 44-year-old mother of three Carla Foster was jailed for 28 months for inducing an abortion after the legal limit. As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, "Moves to imprison these individuals reflect an attitude of hardened indifference and callous cruelty in the legal system and the ruling class, akin to the Victorian elite who implemented the original 1860s [Offences Against the Person] law. Feeling the capitalist system they defend exposed, judges and politicians are less and less able to acknowledge the damning social causes and necessarily fundamental social solutions to personal tragedies, shifting the blame by branding individuals."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact