

Legal Insanity

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Legal Insanity Latest News

The Chhattisgarh High Court recently acquitted a man of double murder due to legal insanity, highlighting the importance of mental state in trials.

About Legal Insanity

- It is a term used to describe a **mental state** that is **severe enough to prevent a person** from **having legal capacity** and **excuses them from criminal responsibility**.
- It is a **recognised defence in criminal law**.
- It is based on the assumption that **at the time of the crime**, the **defendant** was **suffering from severe mental illness** and therefore, was **incapable of appreciating the nature of the crime** and **differentiating right from wrong** behavior, hence **making them not legally accountable for the crime**.
- The insanity defense is a **legal concept, not a clinical one (medical one)**. This means that **just suffering from a mental disorder is not sufficient** to prove insanity.

- To benefit from legal insanity, the **accused must establish**, often through psychiatric or psychological evaluations, that **they were not in control of their reasoning faculties** during the commission of the prohibited act.
- The accused must present a prima facie case, supported by reasonable materials, to establish their legal insanity.
- This **may involve presenting evidence of their conduct before, during, or immediately after the offence**, along **with relevant medical documentation**.
- The objective is to convince the court that, due to mental incapacity, the accused should be exempt from full criminal responsibility.
- There are **different types** of legal insanity, such as **emotional insanity**, which is when a person experiences a **violent excitement of emotions or passions that creates complete derangement of intellect**.
- Another type is **temporary insanity**, which **only exists at the time of a criminal act**.

Legal Insanity in Recent Judgments

- The **Supreme Court** in **Surendra Mishra vs. State of Jharkhand** (AIR 2011 SC 627) emphasised that **every person suffering from a mental disease is not automatically exempted from criminal liability**.
- The **accused bears the responsibility of proving legal insanity** and the onus can be discharged by demonstrating their conduct with reference to their medical condition.

What is Medical Insanity?

- It refers to a **state of mental illness or psychological disorder** that may require medical treatment.
- It is a **medical diagnosis** based on the individual's mental health condition.
- It primarily **addresses the individual's health and well-being, aiming to diagnose and treat** mental illnesses for the person's benefit.
- It does **not necessarily impact a person's ability to make decisions** in their daily life. A **person with a mental illness may still have decision-making capacity**.
- It **leads to medical treatment**, therapy, and other interventions aimed at managing and improving the individual's mental health.

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