

Testimony wraps up in trial for courthouse attacks



Dr. David Dixon testifies about his psychological evaluation of Steven Kravetz during the fifth day of his trial in Chehalis.

By Brionna Friedrich
The Daily World

On the final day of testimony in the trial over last year's courthouse attacks, Steven Kravetz did not take the stand in his own defense. Instead, on Monday three psychologists discussed whether mental illness left him capable of criminal intent, and his mother testified again — this time in his defense.

Kravetz is accused of shooting a Grays Harbor County Sheriff's Deputy and stabbing a Superior Court judge who had rushed to the deputy's defense.

Closing arguments in the now week-long trial were scheduled for today.

Roberta Dougherty told the court her son grew up in California, and she and his father divorced when Kravetz was 7 or 8 years old. Even in grade school, he was solitary, she said. "He just kept with one friend, he didn't have a huge circle of friends."

In ninth grade, she started homeschooling him because of intense discomfort he had about gym class and dressing down in front of other boys. "I thought maybe he would grow out of that if we did homeschooling for a while," Dougherty said.

"Did he ever grow out of that," asked Kravetz's attorney, David Arcuri.

"No," she replied.

Instead, things got much worse. Around that time, she said Kravetz refused to take out the trash, which had been one of his chores, because of fears about germs. In response

to stress, she said he would take excessively long showers or wash his hands over and over.

“He could spend up to 20 minutes or more, over and over and over again, maybe within an hour,” Dougherty said of the handwashing.

After they began homeschooling, he never had friends his own age again, despite her encouragement, she testified. He never got a job outside their home, aside from odd jobs from her friends, never got a driver’s license or a car. They talked about college, until he read some of the privacy policies and became uncomfortable.

“Did there ever come a time as Steven’s mother that you thought, ‘I might need to get him some psychological help?’ ” Arcuri asked.

Yes, Dougherty said, in his late teens, but it wasn’t that simple.

“The insurance I had wouldn’t cover anything like that, and I was very strapped. It was very difficult for me to even pay bills,” she said.

By the time she was in a better position, after they moved to Washington, Kravetz was 18.

“After a person becomes 18 years old, it’s very difficult to get them to see a doctor unless they want to,” she said.

And apparently her son didn’t want to. He didn’t see a problem, she testified.

Her version of one night police came to their home in May 2005 differed from Kravetz’s. In a taped interview with Kravetz that was played earlier in the trial he said he just wanted to talk with a deputy, and they misunderstood his mother’s call for help as a reaction to a suicide threat by her son. Dougherty said there was no confusion.

“Did you indicate you were concerned he might be contemplating suicide?” Prosecutor Stew Menefee asked.

“Yes,” she said.

After that incident, where in the course of trying to get a urine sample, staff at Mark Reed Hospital used a catheter, Kravetz was highly traumatized and believed he had been a victim of a rape.

“His anxiety became very high, and he seemed to dwell on it all the time,” Dougherty said emphatically. “Every. Day. All the time.”

View on women

Menefee asked her about Kravetz's view of women, which has come up at several points during the trial, particularly around female authority figures he encountered.

"I would say he feels that women are like wives, and men are like husbands. He goes according to maybe Bible standards," Dougherty said.

"Did he feel women should be in roles of authority over men?" Menefee asked.

"In general maybe not," she said.

Forensic psychologist Dr. David Dixon testified Kravetz suffers from a delusional disorder, and he was so stressed by seeing Deputy Polly Davin approach him, he was overwhelmed by his delusions when he shot her and stabbed Judge David Edwards.

Kravetz was wanted on a bench warrant, and told detectives later he was afraid of being searched, which he viewed as a sexual assault.

If the warrant was served, Dixon said, "the way he would be interpreting it, there would be some sexual assault, he would be raped or even killed."

"How would you characterize that thought process," Arcuri asked.

"Very delusional," Dixon replied.

When Davin stopped him, "I think it put him right into the center of this delusional system," Dixon said.

"His ability to form intent to cause harm or intentionally do acts was impaired by this delusional disorder?" Arcuri asked.

"Yes," Dixon said.

Deputy Prosecutor Gerald Fuller argued that the delusions may have served as a motivation "for all the wrong reasons," but all the evidence showed Kravetz was able to react intelligently.

Defense case doesn't take long

In contrast to the four full days the state took to put on its case, Arcuri wrapped up his defense in a little more than an hour. The burden of proof is on prosecutors to show

Kravetz was able to understand and form intent to commit attempted murder in the second degree, assault and disarming a law enforcement officer.

Menefee called two rebuttal witnesses after Arcuri finished his case, both doctors who agreed Kravetz was capable of criminal intent, although they disagreed on his exact diagnosis.

Dr. Brett Trowbridge said Kravetz suffers from delusional (paranoid) disorder, but it didn't impair him on the day of the attacks.

"What I do is look at the conduct itself — and it may be very bizarre or crazy — but the question is, what is goal-directed or purposive?" Trowbridge said.

Given Kravetz's processing of the implications of being arrested, hiding from law enforcement and seeking a place he could call for a ride, "to me, all of that does seem pretty goal-directed," he said. "I think he was able to act intentionally."

He didn't equivocate as Arcuri pressed him on the nature of Kravetz's illness, although he did add, "I would say his ability to control himself was affected by his mental illness."

Dr. Marilyn Ronnei, a psychologist at Western State Hospital, evaluated Kravetz for his competency to stand trial last year, and again March 7 of this year to assess whether he had diminished capacity at the time of his alleged crimes.

"Intent is a mental state you can't measure directly. There's no lab test I could give that says he has a 12 on intent," she said as an example. "What we have to do is look at his behavior and infer his mental state."

"He still has these persecutory delusions even now. However, if you look at his behavior ... it's clear he was able to act with intent despite these delusions," Ronnei said.

"It isn't enough to have a mental illness, they have to impair your ability to form intent," she added. "He had no impairment to his capacity to form intent."

Which expert to believe will be a question for the jury starting today, after both sides make their closing arguments.