

CRIME

How postpartum psychosis can alter reality, experts explain amid Clancy trial



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The Patriot Ledger

Updated Aug. 7, 2026, 12:36 p.m. ET



Key Points

- Lindsay Clancy, a Duxbury mother, has pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity to charges of killing her three young children.
- Her defense argues she was suffering from postpartum psychosis, worsened by several prescribed psychiatric medications.
- The case has brought national attention to postpartum mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and psychosis.
- Experts say postpartum psychosis involves a break from reality, including hallucinations and delusions, which differs from other maternal mental health struggles.

The ongoing trial of [Lindsay Clancy](#), a Duxbury mother charged with killing [her three young children](#) in January 2023, has garnered national attention and ignited a conversation around postpartum mental health.

Clancy, a former labor and delivery nurse, has admitted to killing the children but pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder by reason of insanity in the strangulation deaths of 5-year-old Cora, 3-year-old Dawson, and 8-month-old Callan Clancy.

Clancy then harmed herself and jumped out of a second-story window at their home in Duxbury. She is now paraplegic and is [being held at Tewksbury Hospital](#).

Clancy's attorney Kevin Reddington has argued that at the time of the killings she was experiencing postpartum psychosis and [taking several psychiatric medications](#) that likely heightened, rather than helped, her symptoms.

"There is a misconception that motherhood is natural and a devaluation of the challenges mothers face," said [Helen Marlo, Dean of the School of Psychology and Professor of Clinical Psychology at Notre Dame De Namur University](#) in Belmont, California. "There is a stereotype that if you're struggling, you must not be maternal. It's a very hard time of reorganization."

She said the transition to motherhood is largely overlooked and comes with an enormous amount of responsibility and stress.



Lindsay Clancy murder trial Day 5: Photos from inside court

The fifth day of testimony was held on Monday, Aug. 3, 2026, in the trial of Lindsay Clancy, who is charged with the murder of her three children in 2023.

The case has raised questions about how postpartum psychosis develops, what it is and how it's different than other maternal mental health issues that can arise, such as depression and anxiety.

Lawsuit sheds light on months leading to Clancy killing her children

A Norfolk Superior Court civil lawsuit Clancy filed against some of her care providers outlines the months and days leading up to Clancy killing her children.

The lawsuit describes some anxiety after the birth of Cora, but “manic behavior” following Dawson’s birth. A psychiatrist offered to have her try an antidepressant, but she declined because she didn’t want it to affect her breastfeeding.

The hypomanic behavior grew after Callan’s birth in May 2022 and at 12 weeks postpartum, Clancy’s demeanor changed to anxiety and depression. Over the ensuing months, she sought psychiatric care, in-patient and out-patient, and was prescribed various medications, but her condition worsened.

Live coverage: [Clancy murder trial Day 9 Prosecution calls psychiatrists from McLean Hospital](#)

On Jan. 24, 2023, Clancy awoke with suicidal thoughts and severe depression, according to the lawsuit. She continued to experience hallucinations and, when her husband left to pick up take-out dinner, the voice told her “this is your last chance” and to kill her children and herself, the lawsuit said.

She said in the lawsuit that she “lost all control” and her “body started acting without any control.” She told her children, “Go to God, baby,” as she strangled them, the lawsuit said.

Expert who interviewed Clancy said she was bipolar with psychosis

The defense in her criminal trial has not yet started calling witnesses to testify about Clancy's mental health history, but it is detailed in the civil lawsuit.

According to the lawsuit, [Margaret Spinelli](#) a clinical professor of psychiat at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, conducted a comprehensive forensic psychiatric evaluation of Clancy on June 11, 2024, lasting five hours. She also spoke to Clancy's ex-husband, Patrick Clancy, and other family members.

Spinelli diagnosed Clancy with Bipolar Disorder I with psychosis and anxious distress, with postpartum onset. Spinelli concluded that Clancy had baseline bipolar disorder with minimal symptoms that then worsened after having her third child, and being prescribed an antidepressant caused psychosis. What Clancy described as “intrusive thoughts” were actually hallucinations.



13 Photos

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Lindsay Clancy murder trial day 7 of testimony: Photos from court

Multiple witnesses testified on Aug. 5, 2026, in the Lindsay Clancy murder trial including the former nanny during which Clancy broke down in sobs.

Many factors contribute to postpartum mood disorders

In an interview with The Patriot Ledger, Marlo said a history of mental health issues makes women more vulnerable when postpartum, but those without any history can also struggle.

Marlo said biological, cultural and social factors are often all at play when it comes to postpartum mood disorders, such as anxiety, depression or psychosis. The drastic hormonal changes can combine with things like sleep deprivation, a lack of adequate nutrition, and anxiety about going back to work, poverty or marital issues.

"All these factors can come together to create a complex thing that can destabilize a woman," Marlo said. "The majority of women struggle to some degree, and a subset of women struggle to a higher degree."

Marlo said limited access to care is a huge issue for new mothers, both due to availability and the taboo around women needing help at that time.

Key indicator of postpartum psychosis is a break from reality

While most people are familiar or know someone who has struggled with postpartum depression or anxiety, Marlo said psychosis is less common and understood. She said people experiencing psychosis have delusions and hallucinations, both visual and auditory, that they often keep private.

"People have this notion that if you're in psychosis, you aren't high functioning or functioning at all and you have to be showing odd behaviors," she said. "The more familiar tasks they already know how to do well, whether parenting or work, they can go through the motions, but how they are experiencing those actions are shaped by psychosis."

Marlo described psychosis as "a profound alteration of reality." She said sometimes mothers with depression or anxiety have negative or intrusive thoughts, but their sense of reality is intact.

Ty Milton, assistant professor of psychology and counseling and director of psychology at Mid-America Christian University in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, said the onset for postpartum psychosis is typically rapid and can occur within a few weeks of giving birth, up until a year after.

"One of the biggest defining features (of psychosis) is there's a break from reality that involves seeing or hearing things not present to us who aren't having it," he said.

He said those suffering can also have fixed false beliefs, such as that their baby is ill, odd behaviors and confusion.

"They usually can't recognize that anything is really wrong, which is also a part of psychosis versus anxiety or depression," he said.

Early and multi-faceted treatment is critical

Marlo said integrated care that involves communication between providers and a combination of medication and psychotherapy is the best approach for those struggling postpartum.

Marlo, who created a free Mentoring Mothers support group more than 15 years ago, said such care is much easier said done due to factors like pressures on clinicians and practical factors like childcare to attend therapy sessions.

"The standard of care is that the best outcomes for people occur when they're taking medications and have integrated treatment like psychotherapy" she said. "It should be managed closely and integrated with treatment versus doing one or the other."

Milton said virtual appointments have become far more common following the COVID-19 pandemic, but he thinks in-person assessments and appointments are critical for diagnosing mental illness and understanding the full picture of what someone is dealing with.

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