

The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez

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## **The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez**

In the documentary the *Trials of Gabriel Fernandez*, filmmaker Brian Knappenberger provides a comprehensive overview of the various factors related to child abuse. The show's six episodes explore how Gabriel was abused and tortured to death by his mother and her boyfriend due to the government system's failure to protect him (Knappenberger, 2020). The incident leads to turmoil across Los Angeles County, urging justice and responsibility for Gabriel's death. In addition, the six-episode documentary covers the necessary details of the trial (Knappenberger, 2020).

The mother, Pearl Fernandez, and her boyfriend, Isauro Aguirre, were found guilty of Gabriel Fernandez's death. Also, Brian investigates government systems that were responsible for protecting Gabriel. However, government officials did not act on reports of Gabriel's harassment, despite receiving multiple complaints. Amid the tragedy of Gabriel Fernandez, Brian explains how government policies should be examined in order to protect children. Also, several ethical issues were raised in this documentary, as well as the poor actions of the social workers. As part of the discussion of Gabriel Fernandez's case, violating the code of ethics forms the basis of not protecting vulnerable children. The series also analyzes social work theories and approaches. This paper describes my reflections from watching the documentaries and brings out different aspects related to the incident of child abuse.

Upon viewing the series *Trial of Gabriel Fernandez*, I believe that child services and county sheriff's departments failed to perform their duties effectively. Given the extensive evidence of Gabriel's abuse, it was surprising that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) did not remove Gabriel from his mother's house. Gabriel's aunt spoke with sheriffs twice and called social services three times to report the abuse, but they failed to take action. Moreover, the sheriff's department visited Gabriel's house, but they never asked to see

Gabriel. As a result, they chose to believe Pearl, who assured them that everything was all right, which was a lie. As a result, Gabriel died. The State has a clear duty to intervene and act in the child's best interest in order to protect this vulnerable population. Therefore, the State should be held legally accountable when they fail to take action.

I blame the system for what happened to Gabriel. Gabriel was taken in by another family member when he was born; after his mother left him at the hospital. Unfortunately, Pearl never wanted or loved Gabriel. Instead, she allowed her boyfriend to abuse the eight-year-old boy frequently. I can not understand how someone can harm a child; it is difficult to figure out why an abuser harms a child. As I explored, the life of Fernandez's mother revealed her psychological issues that could justify her behavior. Fernandez's mother underwent trauma at a young age by being gang-raped and exposed to drugs that may have contributed to her learning disabilities. Also, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Therefore, the DCFS could have taken appropriate legal action against the mother.

In addition, Pearl pleaded guilty to the crime in exchange for a life sentence in prison without parole. Watching her reaction was indescribable. As I watched Pearl reading the plea, she said, "I am sorry," off a piece of paper without remorse. That made me even angrier. Also, it was a complicated series to watch. It was hard to catch the concept that a mother could ever do that to a child and not feel guilt, which showed that she was mentally ill to a certain extent.

Gabriel Fernandez experienced emotional abuse through verbal abuse and threats. According to Fernandez's siblings, Aguirre would constantly make fun of Fernandez, and they also showed that Gabriel was bound and gagged in a cupboard on countless occasions. Also, Aguirre beat Gabriel daily and forced him to eat cat feces and cat litter. The abuse Fernandez suffered often centered around allegations of him being gay. Gabriel was forced to wear girl dresses while Aguirre teased him. Every kid should feel comfortable in their home.

This angry man Aguirre committed these awful actions because he blamed Gabriel for being gay. In other words, it was simply because Aguirre was not fond of Gabriel. Furthermore, Aguirre shared that he admits beating and torturing the boy but said his death was not intentional, although many people can argue that it was an intended murder by torture. Yet, Aguirre never expressed any emotion or looked regretful about the incident. Therefore, he knew precisely what he was doing. A few of his actions were insane, just pure evil. Aguirre was a deceptive manipulator who used his strength and love for Pearl to abuse Gabriel. It was not only his love or possessiveness of her that caused him to become a vicious murderer. It may have contributed to it, but ultimately he knew precisely what he was doing, which is why he was able to get away with it for so long.

Moreover, many people may say Aguirre was afraid or scared of Pearl, but I cannot entirely agree with that because, as an older man, he should have refrained from allowing Pearl to manipulate him to the point where he murdered her child. Despite the warning signs of a manipulative relationship, he remained by her side out of the guilt of leaving someone behind. His desire to please and comfort her acted as a drug, keeping Pearl on an eternal high. Finally, to escape from despair, he broke loose on Gabriel.

If I was Gabriel's therapist, the solution-based intervention would have been my first choice. However, Gabriel had been constantly beaten by his caretakers. Based on this, I would have considered putting Gabriel out of his mother's and boyfriend's care. Also, this would have stopped the extreme torture that later contributed to Gabriel's death. However, there are specific legal requirements to be considered.

Consequently, I would explore the available legal options to ensure Gabriel finds a suitable home away from the torture. For example, I would have given his grandfather

guardianship over him because Gabriel lived with him, and he seemed to like them. He wanted to continue living with his grandfather and had repeatedly asked to go there.

Additionally, I would have suggested prosecuting Gabriel's guardians for the damage they had caused him physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The other siblings also suffered psychologically, in which case prosecution would provide long-term safety assurance. Long-term solution-based interventions prevent further occurrences because they are long-term. Following the successful implementation of the solution-based intervention, I would also have recommended therapeutic care for his siblings.

Lastly, throughout the documentary, the author mentioned that the main reason Pearl had taken Gabriel from his grandparents was because of the welfare money she received from the government. I believe she was under financial problems that perhaps caused her high-stress levels. Therefore, stress levels may result in outbursts of anger that may have caused her to hurt the child. However, I would provide Pearl with enough resources; this kind of support has been shown to reduce stress and prevent child abuse. Because the system failed her therefore she needs support.

Moreover, his teacher called the social worker and stated that Gabriel's face and hands were bruised. In an investigation, Gabriel claimed to have been injured by a belt buckle. Gabriel later came to school with scratches, bruises, and a busted lip. That same teacher reported his appearance as swollen and bruised for several months. According to Gabriel, these resulted from his mother punching and shooting him with a BB gun. During investigations, Gabriel rescinded his statements because social workers failed to interview him without his mother present. From this information above, they should have removed him from the home to avoid further injury. I believe removing him from home would have been enough protection. Also, they could have

gotten his father involved. Another thing they failed to do was not speak to Gabriel by himself to hear the truth.

Throughout the documentary, I found myself crying due to the negligence of the social workers. I learned that the social workers were prosecuted due to their actions. However, I still wanted them to be prosecuted to a certain extent for failing to complete their duty and following their code of ethics. The mother got away with the murder of her son. She is more guilty and cunning, a tragic, sad story. I do not understand how the adults around him failed him when the signs of abuse were so noticeable to the naked eye. Are we so heartless and so indifferent? Nobody wanted to save this child, and I believe all these adults are somehow responsible for his death. Everybody was scared to do the correct thing while watching a child getting tortured.

## References

Brian Knappenberger (Director) (2020). *The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez*. [Television broadcast].  
Netflix.