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A man who brutally murdered his grandchildren and wife in rural NSW told his daughter it's "because I love you" as he tried to kill her with an axe. The woman may not receive another explanation for the killings that destroyed her family, but her 70-year-old father will spend the rest of his life in jail.

He had pleaded guilty in July to the three murders and to one count of inflicting grievous bodily harm with intent to murder his daughter, who is a police officer.

The man, who cannot be named for legal reasons, was given two life sentences for the "grim" murders of his grandchildren - a seven-year-old boy and five-year-old girl.

In handing down the sentences in Sydney today, Justice Lucy McCallum described his actions as "wicked in the extreme".

The man also received at least 15 years for the murder of his wife and at least 12 years for his daughter's attempted murder.

Due to his age, the judge did not bother outlining a release date.

Dressed in prison greens and with closely cropped white hair, he sat with his head bowed throughout proceedings.

He refused to meet the gaze of his daughter, who has disowned him and sat sobbing in the front row of the public gallery.

The woman had left her children with her parents overnight at their Cowra home, in NSW's central west, as she went to work a night shift on June 29 last year.

She returned to the home the following day to find her 52-year-old mother clubbed over the head with a hammer shaft, stabbed in the neck and attacked with a lump hammer.

She followed her father to her children's bedrooms where she discovered the bodies of her son, killed with the same hammers, and her daughter, who had been drowned in a bath.

Her father then swung an axe at her head, leaving her with a fractured skull requiring titanium plates and ongoing psychological issues.

During the struggle she asked why he was doing this.

"I am doing this because I love you ... We are all better off this way. This is the way it has to be," he replied.

The man later admitted to the "mercy killing" of his wife - using a hammer shaft he described proudly and called Fred - but said "the other two are murder".

He told police he also drowned the family's dog because there would be no one left to look after it.

Justice McCallum rejected the man's claim his wife's death was a mercy killing and said extensive psychological examinations had revealed no mental health issues that could explain

his actions.

"He intended to kill them and planned their murders with grim attention.

"He killed the children knowing that he had already killed the one person who might have come to their defence that night."

She said he had abused his position of trust by coaxing his grandchildren out of their beds, adding his granddaughter "must have experienced a level of terror no child should know".

"The offender's culpability is not mitigated by mental illness or any other circumstance which provides a reason for his conduct," she said.

"The only reason stated by the offender for killing (his grandchildren) is the baseless and arrogant assertion that his daughter would not have been able to care for them on her own.

"His acts were wicked in the extreme."

In a statement released through police media, the mother said she was satisfied with the sentence and now hoped to go on and live a life her "babies" would be proud of.

"I now plan to move forward with my life in a manner that, to the best of my ability, will be one that my mother and my babies would have been proud of."