



Pathology & Biology Section – 2005

G40 Adolescent Death: A 15-Year Retrospective Study

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After attending this presentation, attendees will know the most common causes and manners of death in the adolescent population; understand the typical victims, perpetrators, and trends in violent deaths; and be aware of the most common drugs of abuse in the adolescent age group.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing a thorough classification of adolescent deaths which could be useful in various ways to coroners, medical examiners, pathologists, and investigators when confronted with an adolescent death. Knowing common relationships of perpetrators to victims in violent deaths could help to find and convict the perpetrators. Also, understanding the typical victim and circumstances surrounding his or her death could help to prevent future violent adolescent deaths. A review of the toxicology in these cases could help delineate any trends in drugs of use and abuse in the adolescent age group, making it possible to prevent some accidental deaths through public health and safety measures. Finally, a review of natural deaths will demonstrate the most common natural disease processes, which could help in determining the causes of sudden, unexpected deaths in this population.

Adolescents, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as children ages 10-19, are a diverse group of people undergoing many changes in life as they develop, mature, and become adults. Still, pediatric forensic literature is dominated by reports, reviews, and studies of fetal, infant, and early childhood death. Previous studies have looked at specific aspects of adolescent death, but there remains a paucity of literature reporting the most common causes and manners of death along with other pertinent demographics of these victims.

The authors reviewed all cases of pediatric death referred to the Medical University of South Carolina Forensic Pathology section over the fifteen years between January 1989 and December 2003. In accordance with the WHO definition, only children 10-19 years of age were included. In all, 542 of 9540 total cases were studied. The authors examined the cause and manner of death along with the age, sex, and race of the victim. The toxicology results, perpetrator identification, death scenario and location, and victim traits were also analyzed. Homicides and suicides were due to gunshot wounds, blunt force trauma, sharp force injury, and asphyxia. Accidents were subdivided into environmental exposure, drug/inhalation toxicity, vehicle collision, and other. Natural deaths were classified by organ system. Adolescents comprise an eclectic mix of people vitally important to society, yet long-term comprehensive studies on the circumstances of their deaths are lacking in the literature. With a solid understanding of these circumstances it may be possible to predict, and hopefully prevent, future cases of adolescent death. The authors present their findings in this 15-year retrospective study to better aid forensic pathologists, death investigators, law enforcement, and epidemiologists.

Adolescent, Death, Forensic Medicine