



D2 Suicide at the Work Place

Axelle Balgairies, Forensic Institute of Lille, France, Place Verdun, Lille, Nord Pas de Calais 59000, France; and Gilles Tournel, MD, Ann Becart-Robert, DDS, Valerie Hedouin, MD, and Didier Gosset, MD, PhD, Institut de Medecine Legale et de Medecine Sociale de Lille, Faculte de Medecine, 1, Place de Verdun, Lille, 59000, France*

The goal of this presentation is to focus on suicide at the workplace, to try to know any specificity about this kind of suicide, to understand the role of the job in the act of suicide, and to list if the suicide at the workplace was recognized as work injury.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating the impact of the job in this kind of suicide and raising awareness about this problem of suicide at the workplace, and the recognition of work injury and the role of the job.

Introduction: In 2000, The French national institute of statistic (INSEE) recorded 10,832 deaths caused by suicide; it was 2% of the total death cases in France. Suicide is the number one cause of death within the young French people.

The so called “job related” suicide is very often difficult to establish because of determining which causes are truly work related. Regarding this topic, very few data are available and the literature is most likely referring to “death at the workplace.” Besides, this kind of suicide can be identified as work injury. In this case, the victim’s family can expect to receive compensation from the Social Security. The goal of this study was to list all the “workplace suicide” cases that occurred in the northern part of France and also to collect and analyze the data.

Materials and methods: It was a retrospective study based on the archives of the Lille institute of forensic medicine and forensic unities, but also on personal archives of the coroner of Lille and Dunkerque. Twenty-two cases were recorded from Jan 1, 1997 to Mar 31, 2005. Autopsy and scene reports were used in addition to the data. The following criteria were selected: Sex, age, time of death, professional background, autopsy or not, toxic ingestion, psychiatrics antecedent or previous suicide attempts (mode of suicide, personal or professional circumstances), explanatory document and the eventual work injury reports.

Regarding the professional background, the professional category (wordlist of INSEE), the company activity (CITI 2 V3 wordlist), and the victim’s job description (CITP 88 wordlist) were used. All reported work incident within the period were requested from the Social Security.

Results: Twenty-two files were selected (19 in Lille, 3 in Dunkerque, 1 in Douai).

All victims were men. Most of the victims were aged 40 to 50; the youngest and the oldest individuals being 25 and 58 respectively. Most of these suicides do not occur during regular working hours (9:00am – 6:00pm). These suicides are most likely to happen early in the morning or very late in the night. From a performance stand point, low qualified employees represent more than 50% of the recorded cases of samples. On an activity type stand point, most of the victims worked in the service or manufacturing industry. Ten out of 12 autopsied victims were qualified as clear suicide cases.

There is unfortunately a lot of missing data: Among 10 clearly identified suicide cases, it appeared that seven had psychiatric issues antecedent and that seven never attempted to end their life. Regarding any toxic ingestion history, 13 cases did not show any data, three were confirmed and six were negative. Mechanism of death was also listed in the data base: hanging seemed to be the most commonly used way to commit suicide.

Suicide causes clearly related to the job environment were rarely positively mentioned. At the opposite, personal issues were easier to identify: seven cases out of a selection of 13 clearly stated the personal issues factor as the suicide root cause.

Discussion: Despite the very few data available, this study allowed for a reflection on the job related suicide topic in the northern part of France. The lack of data can be explained by a very decentralized forensic organization (until the year 2000) in this part of the country. Moreover, suicide at the workplace remains an epiphenomena and the forensic department is not always involved in these very cases.

Clearly established suicide cases were selected in this study; attempts were ignored because of the lack of reliability of the data base. The absence of valid and available information is due to the fact that the coroner focuses most of the time on the investigation part of the suicide case to the prejudice of the autopsy. Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude on some epidemiological characteristics: 30 to 40 year old men seem to be the most affected group. Overall, men appear to be the majority of the suicide cases with a victim’s age average of 44.6.

As mentioned above, most of this kind of suicide do not occur during the regular working hours and are most of the time related to the



General Section – 2007

service and manufacturing industries. In addition, like mentioned in prior studies and reports, low qualified workers are predominant in the number of the so called work related suicides.

Unfortunately, the worker seniority could not be selected when psychiatric antecedents were commonly listed. Personal issues were often identified. It was not possible to really identify the professional environment and the personal background as root causes of the suicide.

Finally, it was noted that, as mentioned in most prior studies, that the most common way of suicide was hanging. A job related factor was identified through this study in some suicide cases. That's why a "job related" document was added in the forensic report.

Suicide, Work Accidents, Workplace