



D55 Gunshot Suicides in the Island of Crete

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The primary goal of this study is to present the characteristics of gunshot suicides in the region of Crete between January 1999 and December 2006.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by raising awareness and evoking interest to the serious health and community burden represented by gunshot suicides.

Data was collected from the records of the Department of Forensic Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Crete. Furthermore, data was cross-checked with the records kept in the Police Departments as well as the Public Prosecutor orders per case in each prefecture. Any discrepancy was discussed with the Head of the Department of Forensic Sciences.

Crete lays in the Mediterranean Sea, is geographically isolated from the Greek mainland and constitutes the southernmost part of Greece with approximately 600,000 inhabitants. The island of Crete has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Nowadays, it is no secret that in the notoriously trigger-happy island most Cretans, by tradition, own guns. Road signs are easy targets and you will see many of them that resemble swiss cheese after some shooting practice.

Gunshot suicides were reviewed in the island of Crete for a eight year period (1999-2006) with respect to age, sex, type of firearm, anatomical location of the entrance wound, alcohol use, location of the event, and the presence of a suicide note. In the present study, which is the first relative study for a part of the Greek population, comparison was made with available data from a nationwide study of suicide (data period 1980-1995) and from the Epirus region, South-West Greece (data period 1998-2002). There were a total of 323 suicides during the period 1999-2006 in Crete. 19.5% of all suicide cases (n=63) used firearms, the third most frequent used method in the island, while the second favored method nationwide and in Epirus region. In contrast, firearm related suicides were the most common mode of suicide in the United States with a percentage of 60.9, between 1990 and 1995 years. When compared with European countries, firearm usage makes up 21.2% of the suicides in Finland, 24.7% in France, 10.4% in Germany, 18.3% in Austria, and 28.9% in Norway. Firearm suicides were more common in males and their frequency decreased as age increased, though is the less common means for women (n=1). In the majority of cases the suicide victims used shotguns (hunting rifles) and the shooting distance was contact or near contact. Most of the entrance wounds were located in the head and chest region. The number of gunshot suicide victims leaving a suicide note in this study is consistent with the observation that the majority of all suicide victims fail to leave such a note. With respect to the location of the event, the majority of gunshot suicide victims preferred to commit suicide in familiar surroundings, particularly the home or adjoining property. These findings are in accordance with other countries.

In Greece according to the national law 2168/1993 firearm acquisition requires the purchaser to obtain a firearm acquisition license. In order to obtain such a license, the applicant must be 18 years or older, have not been convicted of a crime in the last five years, to have a medical certificate of good mental health (provided from a psychiatrist, neurologist, or pathologist in a state hospital), and wait approximately a month before purchase. According to the Greek authorities there are more than million- and-a-half illegal guns in the country and they estimate that some 600,000 are in the island of Crete, the largest center of the arms trade in Greece. It is well known that availability of means to commit suicide has a major impact on actual suicides in any region; nevertheless Cretans seem to have a discreet gun culture. Despite the convenience to possess a firearm-legally or not-, gunshot suicides makes up in Crete a less common used mode compared with available data from a nationwide study of suicide and from the Epirus region, South-West Greece.

Suicide, Gunshot, Crete