



D59 Case Report of an Unusual Gunshot Suicide Inside a Grave

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The primary goal of this study is to present the case of a 66-year-old man who was found dead inside a grave with two gunshot wounds to the head. The results of the scene investigation, the ammunition used, and the autopsy and toxicological findings are described.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by presenting a case of an unusual location of a suicide event as there is no mention of gunshot suicide in a grave in the English-language literature. The majority of gunshot suicide victims prefer to commit suicide in familiar settings with privacy, particularly in the house or adjoining property.

Data was collected from the records of the Department of Forensic Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Crete.

In September 2003, a 66-year-old man, recently retired, visited his village, approximately 42km from the city of Chania, as he would do normally. He had a telephone conversation with his children and a second one with his wife, who was on vacation outside the country. The next day none of the family had seen him. He was reported missing by his son as he recently had suffered a cerebral stroke and a huge search started immediately. The next day, police investigators found his body inside a grave that has been recently purchased by the victim. While entering the village cemetery everything looked normal and the grave slabs were in position except one that seemed slightly moved. Investigators then decided to move the grave's slab and have a closer look inside. The 66-year-old man was found sitting on a cement parapet; his left shoulder was lying on the inner side while having a 9-mm Luger pistol still in his right hand. The scene investigation showed no evidence of a struggle. In the interior, investigators found: (1) three fired cartridges (the two in the victim's feet), (2) two live cartridges in the chamber, (3) one live cartridge in the clip and another one out, (4) fourteen live cartridges in a paper bag, (5) a knife 28cm in length, (6) a hand lens and a battery, (7) two pairs of glasses, (8) a rubber cement tin and four silicone tubes, and (9) a metal device used for the silicone. The deceased had apparently used the silicone to seal the grave's slabs from inside before committing suicide. A multiple page suicide note was found in a knapsack in the victim's car trunk, parked outside his home, while a second one was found inside the grave.

Autopsy examination revealed two typical contact gunshot entrance wounds in the head. The first entrance wound was located in the right temple and the exit wound in the left parietal. The course of the bullet was right to left. The second entrance wound was located in the middle line of palate inside the mouth with upper jaw and mandible smashed. The course of the bullet was upward. One deformed bullet was found smashed in the fractured left zygomatic bone parts and beneath the skin. Gunpowder residues were detected in the right hand in the subsequent chemical detection in Crime Lab. Toxicological analysis showed a 0 g/l blood alcohol and it was also negative for other drugs.

Multiple contact suicidal gunshot wounds to the head have been not at all unusual in the every day medicolegal practice. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that scene investigation, including the position of the body and gun, the pattern of blood splatter, past history of the victim, questioning of the members of the household, and the existence of a suicide note, is evident of suicidal intent or not in the medicolegal investigation.

Gunshot Wound, Suicide, Crete