



Pathology & Biology Section – 2008

G57 The Serial Killer of Elderly Women: Analysis of a Multi-Victim Homicide Investigation

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After attending this presentation, the participants will learn: (1) the practical issues involved in investigating and analyzing the actions of a serial murderer, and (2) the motives, methods of operation, victim selection, injuries and body disposal scenarios highlighted through case examples never presented before.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by showing a little-known but noteworthy case of a serial killer murder of an elderly woman occurring in Southern Italy ten years ago.

Ben Mohamed Ezzedine Sebai, is a convicted Italian serial killer. Originally from Kairouan (Tunisia), he immigrated illegally to Italy in 1990. In 1991 he was charged of attempted murder and rape and the police headquarters of Bolzano issued an expulsion order. He fled and took refuge in the province of Foggia (Southern Italy), where he worked as farm laborer. He begged for money and relied on voluntary organizations managed by religious institutions for food and shelter. Between 1994 and 1997, in the One victim in 1994, two victims in 1995, three in 1996, nine in 1997, but not all attributed to Sebai. Most of the victims were stabbed multiple times on the neck (min. 1, max. 20) with the exception of three cases in which the cause of death was manual strangulation. The assailant had sex with only one victim and sperm traces were recovered on the body. All the victims were found in their own apartments with no sign of break-in. However, the murders were connected to the theft of money and/or jewelry. The press alerted the public to the inability of the local police to seize the guilty party. In the meantime a criminal profiling was requested to aid the local police in refining their suspect list. The results showed that the murder pattern was completely inconsistent with the local criminal patterns, suggesting that the perpetrator could be an illegal immigrant sexually motivated or prior arrested for sex-related incidents. On the 15th of September, 1997, Sebai was arrested while attempting to catch a train after his last murder. Sebai was recognized by an 8-year-old child next-door neighbor of the victim while he was casting off his blood-stained clothing. He was convicted of four murders and given life sentence.

For the remaining homicides, other people were convicted; in most cases they were relatives of the victims spurred by economical reasons. In 2006, after nine years, Sebai admitted responsibility for the murders of four more elderly women, for which nine other people had already been convicted, among whom one had committed suicide in jail in 2005. The reasons of this posthumous confession are to be found in his willingness to clear these people of a groundless charge and hand over the crime weapon never found before. One year later, in 2007, he confessed to seven more murders, with all 15 deaths occurring between 1994 and 1997. After first interviews with Sebai, a story of difficulty during childhood involving his grandmother; apparently she allowed his uncles to abuse him. His father was violent too. He hit Sebai on his feet after hanging him face down. Sebai's techniques were quite simple; once he studied the elderly women's habits, he made sure that nobody was in and he intruded under the pretext of a sales- man of holy pictures then burst into the house. He deliberately chose the victims, having no prior personal connection with them at all. The neck was his favourite target because there the stab wounds can produce rapid death by exsanguination. With profuse bleeding, physical activity of the victim is also limited or lost rapidly preventing victims from screaming. He also confessed that at the end of each murder he used to ejaculate confirming the previous hypothesis of homicides sexually motivated. Sebai's criminal profiling is still going on and further developments of this case cannot be excluded.

Serial Killer, Multi-Victim Homicide Investigation, Criminal Profiling