



G74 Bitten by Snake Shot: Attempted Homicide and Successful Suicide With Multiple Gunshot Wounds

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The goal of this presentation is to illustrate an unusual case of an attempted homicide and successful suicide with a revolver and multiple snake shot cartridges.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating the need for close collaboration between the forensic pathologist and the firearm examiner when dealing with cases of unusual gunshot wounds.

Introduction: Suicide is one of the most important public health issues in the United States. Suicide represents the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States. Suicides comprise approximately 12% of the caseload of the Allegheny County Medical Examiner's Office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Suicide rates for this country have been relatively stable over the past decade averaging approximately ten per 100,000 populations. The most common method of suicide in the United States is the use of a firearm.

Homicide-followed-by-suicide (referred to as "homicide-suicide") incidents are rare events but can have a profound impact on families and communities. The National Violent Death Reporting System based on 2003-2005 data, revealed 408 homicide-suicide incidents in 17 participating states. Most incidents were committed with a firearm (88.2%) and perpetrated by males (91.4%), those over 19 years of age (97.6%), and those of white race (77.0%). Over 55% of male homicide-suicide perpetrators had prior intimate partner conflicts.

Materials and Methods: The case involved a 53-year-old Caucasian male and his wife with a long standing history of domestic violence. The couple began to argue when suddenly the decedent pulled out a revolver and shot his wife in the face several times. The wife ran downstairs, exited the house, and ran to the neighbor's house for help. She was transported to a local hospital, treated for three gunshot wounds to her face and then subsequently released weeks later.

The decedent was found in the upstairs bedroom in bed with a revolver lying on his left leg. Two wounds were noted to the left and right sides of his head.

Results: The external examination revealed a Caucasian male with two contact penetrating gunshot wounds to both sides of his head. Dense soot deposits were present on the skin and within the wound tracks. Faint muzzle abrasions with micro-stretch lacerations were identified surrounding the entrance wounds. Gunpowder residue was grossly visible on both the left and right hands. Radiographs of the head revealed two separate aggregates of pellets. Autopsy revealed a gunshot wound of entrance just lateral and slightly superior to the right orbit. The path of the pellets was leftward through the orbital rim, posterior, and inferior to the orbital globe and came to rest in the sphenoid sinus. The second entrance wound entered superior and anterior to the left ear. The path of the pellets was rightward through the frontal bone and frontal lobe of the brain where they were recovered.

The firearm used by the decedent was a revolver made in West Germany chambered in 22 long rifle. The ammunition in the revolver consisted of five spent rounds and one live cartridge of .22 caliber long rifle shotshells loaded with number (size) 12 shot.

Conclusions: Collaboration between the pathologist and firearms examiner concluded that the decedent shot himself near his right orbit first and then changed hands and shot the lethal round into the left frontal region of his head. This is supported by gunshot residue on both hands and autopsy evidence that the path of the pellets on the right side of the head did no major damage. A literature review revealed only two published papers pertaining to the use of snake shot or shot shells. This case report offers to further build upon the knowledge of terminal ballistics of handgun shot shells.

Snake Shot, Handgun, Suicide