



D78 Homicide vs. Suicide: Suicide by Cop Revisited

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the principles of suicide vs. homicide investigation and the application of an operational methodology to the investigative process to assist in the determination of the classification of manner of death.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by demonstrating the use of an operational methodology to guide and assist the standardization of the investigative process when investigating suicides, especially when the suicide involves subject-precipitated homicide.

Suicide by Cop (SbC) is a well-documented phenomenon in the forensic literature. Demographics as well as motivational considerations for SbC have been researched and detailed. But less clear is the operational methodology which investigators, including medical examiners and coroners, use to classify these incidents. Among investigators, there appears to be less reliance on standardized operational criteria for SbC and more reliance on outside, often emotional, influences such as family and social stigma, equivocal deaths and variability among medical examiners and coroner systems. As a result, these incidents may be misclassified, leading to questionable epidemiological data with regard to the problem of suicide nationwide. Homicides and suicides in the United States, and especially among members of the military, are of great concern to public health officials. Public health policy is based, in large part, on these statistics. Statistical error can result in misapplication of programming decisions with regard to reducing incidents of homicide and suicide, leading to much wasted time, effort and program dollars.

Operational criteria have been established in the literature: "*Operational Criteria for the Determination of Suicide*" (OCDS) was published in which criteria were set forth for determination of suicide;¹ "*Empirical Criteria for the Determination of Suicide Manner of Death (EDOS)*," was developed in which criteria were set forth for determination of suicide;² "*Police Shooting as a Method of Self-Harming: A Review of the Evidence for "Suicide by Cop" in England and Wales Between 1998 and 2001*," developed methodology for determination of SbC based on observable acts;³ and, "*Suicide by Cop: Police Shooting as a Method of Self-Harming*," worked out a set of indicators to help classify SbC.⁴

A case study will be presented in which a 64-year-old white male with a history of suicide threats and addiction to drugs and alcohol, called his daughter threatening suicide by shooting himself. Law enforcement was notified and the male was subsequently shot and killed by a responding sheriff's deputy after the male pointed a shotgun at him to shoot the deputy. The shooting was ruled a homicide. The case will be analyzed using standards presented in the operational criteria discussed in the literature to determine if the case should have been ruled more properly as a suicide. A recommendation will be made that medical examiner systems and coroner systems such as that in Ohio adopt an operational methodology for the determination of suicide and in particular SbC.

References:

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2. Jobes, D. A., Casey, J. O., Berman, A. L., and Wright, D. G., "Empirical Criteria for the Determination of Suicide Manner of Death," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, JFSCA, Vol. 36, No. 1, Jan. 1991, pp. 244-256.
3. Best, D., Quigley, A., and Bailey, A., "Police shooting as a method of self-harming: A review of the evidence for 'suicide by cop' in England and Wales between 1998 and 2001," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, Vol. 32, Issue 4, December 2004, pp. 349-361.
4. Lord, V.B. and Sloop, M.W., "Suicide by Cop: Police shooting as a method of self-harming," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 38, (2010), pp. 889-895.

Suicide, Suicide by Cop, Public Health Policy