



G1 A Peculiar Case of a Perineal Injury Miming Sexual Abuse in a Child Run Over by a SUV

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become aware of the occurrence of non-intentional traumatic anogenital injuries in children run over by motor vehicles. These accidents can sometimes conceal the findings of sexual abuses.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by underlying the necessity of making investigations and carefully putting forward opinions, in a multidisciplinary perspective, led by the strict application of the forensic medical methodology.

A case is described of a suspected pediatric sexual abuse case, involving a nine-year-old female. The girl, while running out of her stepfather's shop, was run over by a slow-moving SUV. The stepfather had a criminal record for prior sexual abuse.

When the ambulance arrived, the little girl was found locked in the shop restroom. The girl's mother did not want the doctor to enter. After repeated requests, the doctor entered the restroom where he saw the girl standing with bloodstained panties and trousers. Additional bloodstains were observed in the toilet bowl. Deeply upset and in a state of amnesia, the girl first refused to be seen by the doctor. She relented due to repeated requests and was taken to the first aid hospital in Terni. Multiple excoriations on upper and lower limbs were found by the medical staff who also confirmed the presence of the bloodstains in the panties.

A gynecologist was contacted who, because of the girl's reluctance, decided to continue the exploration under general anesthesia. He described a second-degree perineal laceration between the labial back commissure and the anal sphincter of 2.5cm long which was soon sutured. According to the gynecologist, this injury could be due either to a sexual abuse or post-traumatic injury from the road accident.

The doctors at the hospital reported the fact to the judiciary which, because of the girl's stepfather's criminal records, started a file of documents in the event of a sexual abuse (Art. 609 bis; art. 609 ter, Italian PC). The judiciary entrusted inquiries to the Carabinieri and to the department of forensic medicine in Terni.

The inquiries, at first, strongly indicated sexual abuse and showed that the road accident occurred unexpectedly, while the child was trying to elude her stepfather; however, when questioned by the medical examiner, new witness evidence had been admitted together with an examination of the SUV. Only after these further inquiries did he exclude any hypothesis of violence and declared that the perineal injury was due to the car accident.

In literature, perineal and anogenital injuries are described as the consequence of a car.¹⁻⁶ As a matter of fact, these injuries can resemble the ones caused by sexual abuses.

The finding of an anogenital injury in a child can become a diagnostic dilemma in distinguishing a sexual abuse from a non-intentional injury, and medical examiners should always ponder both possibilities, especially if the history is vague or appears unlikely.

A multidisciplinary approach, led by an experienced medical examiner, is fundamental in such cases in order to avoid misdiagnoses. The latter could have devastating results for the children and their families.

References:

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Perineal Injury, Sexual Abuse, Road Accident