



Physical Anthropology Section - 2013

I32 The Psychological Autopsy as Method in Case of Suicide by Hanging

*Isabella Aquila, MD**, Policlinico Univ, S. Venuta-Medicina Legale, Viale Europa, Località Germaneto, Catanzaro, ITALY; *Arianna Serra, MD**, *Carol Pileggi, MD**, *Miriam Sirianni, MD*, *Silvia Boca, MD*, *Maria Chiarelli, MD*, *Pasquale De Fazio, PhD*, *MD*, *Ciro Di Nunzio, PhD*, *Santo Gratteri, MD*, and *Pietrantonio Ricci, PhD, MD*, Magna Graecia Univ, Viale Europa 88100 Catanzaro, ITALY

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the role of the psychological autopsy in a case of suicide.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing the relation between a suicide case and the choice of suicide with psychosocial, environmental, and cultural risk factors.

Introduction: Suicide is a public health problem; as a general rule it is underestimated. Prevalence of death due to suicide is greater than cancer, respiratory disorders, and other common diseases. Every year, more than 10/100,000 people commit suicide, with an alarming rise in suicides among children and women 18 to 30 years old; specifically, it is a major preventable cause of death among children. Every country has a constant trend. Specifically in Italy, there is a low risk of suicide, with the northern regions exhibiting values almost double compared to the south. It's influenced by psychosocial, environmental, and cultural risk factors. There are many risk factors: advanced age, male sex, widowhood, divorce, previous attempts or intentions of suicide, depression, schizophrenia, drugs, unemployment, social isolation, suicide among relatives, hallucinations, and delusions of persecution. Suicidal ideation is based on both cognitive substrates and personality disorders along with interactions with family as impaired parent-child relationships, emotional dissatisfaction, self-harming behavior, frustration, social marginalization experience, and inability to recognize other's complex emotional states. Even families dominated by violence and abuse can generate potential candidates for suicide. Also, there is a clear association with groups, as with psychiatric patients and persons with several mental and physical illness. In particular, adolescents with intellectual disabilities often diagnosed with comorbid psychiatric disorders are a vulnerable population who may be at risk for developing suicidal thoughts and behavior. Many different factors may influence personal decisions about the choice of suicide modality of death. There is a clear indication of restricted access to lethal means associated with a decline in suicide, especially for methods with a high fatality rate. Suicidal setting analysis is performed by forensic pathologists with "psychological autopsy." This survey includes demographics, lifestyles, personality traits, personal and psychological data of suicide's victims, and suicidal reasons. The psychological autopsy is one of the most valuable tools for research into the suicide's death.

The goals of this study are to evaluate the psychological autopsy to understand reasons and origin of suicide cases.

Case Report: This case has been tested, through the method of psychological autopsy, the case of a 17-year-old girl's death by suicide. At on-site investigations, the young girl was found hanged from a sheet attached to the railing of her apartment. The external examination of the victim revealed the presence of hanging marks: cyanosis of the face, conjunctival petechiae, soft skin neck injury, and hypostasis in both hands and feet. The examination of the victim demonstrated suicide by hanging. A psychological survey was performed on the family and friends of the victim. Measurements used were: face-to-face structured interviews, semi-structured interviews with family members of the suicide victim, or next of kin with informed consent obtained beforehand.

Results: The results showed the victim's parents were divorced. Further psychological investigations were suggestive of sexual abuse by a parent.

Conclusions: The study emphasizes the importance of psychological autopsy to detect the reasons for suicide. This survey is important especially to identify the risk of suicide victims in relation to: suicidal setting, family dynamics, previous psychiatric disorders of the victim, and any psychiatric disorders of the family. The identification of risks enhances prevention of this phenomenon.

Suicide, Psychological Autopsy, Interview