



### **D68 Illegal Border Crossers in Arizona and California: A Comprehensive Study and Comparison of the Number of Deaths, the Causes, and the Related Factors and Patterns During the Last Decade**

*Barbara D. Salazar, MFS\*, National University, Forensic Sciences Program, 11255 N Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, CA 92037-1011; Ismail M. Sebetan, MD, PhD\*, National University, Forensic Sciences Program, 11255 N Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, CA 92037-1011; and Paul Stein, PhD\*, National University, Forensic Sciences Program, 11255 N Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, CA 92037-1011*

---

The goal of this presentation is to communicate a study that was conducted of the continuance of illegally crossing the border and the measurement of associated deaths from 2007 through 2012 compared to the previous six years. Two main locations were used in this research: San Diego County, California, and Pima County, Arizona. Statistics were generated by studying the total number of deaths in each location by month and year, breaking the information down by gender and age, and discerning the six major causes of death. Comparisons in all areas were made between San Diego and Pima Counties based on this research, as well as collectively and generally compared to similar statistics from 2000 to 2006.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing attendees with a better understanding of the details and the magnitude surrounding the deaths of illegal border crossers into the United States from Mexico. The numbers and the main causes of death will be investigated, as well as how these statistics compare to the information available from 2000 to 2006. Hopefully, this research will provide a platform for comparison and evaluation of the effectiveness of prior and current border-crossing initiatives, and will also provide a tool with which counties can better plan their budgets in regard to the costs of identifying those who die.

Ideally, this study would have included statistical information from all the other counties in these two states which border Mexico (Imperial County in California; Yuma, Santa Cruz, and Cochise Counties in Arizona), but due to variances in database systems, different sets of criteria used for recording information, and/or lack of information available, this study was unable to incorporate statistical data from those counties. During the time frame of this study, there were a total of 61 causes of death recorded on the data received from the Medical Examiner's offices of San Diego and Pima Counties for those who died while in the process of crossing the border. Many were the same basic cause of death; some were documented with more information or multiple causes were included. For purposes of this study, the six most common "causes of death" were focused on, including the three following categories: other, undetermined, and pending.

This research indicated that although border-crossing initiatives have been in place, modified and expanded upon over the years, the overall number of deaths have not decreased, but have become more numerous. Reasons for the increase of deaths in some locations can be directly correlated to the decreases in deaths in other locations. The causes of death have not changed significantly, but the increasing costs of autopsies have brought about changes in the way the postmortem examination costs are covered.

---

#### **Border Initiatives, Border-Crossing Deaths, Medical Examiner**