



Pathology/Biology Section - 2015

H73 The Forensic Science Investigations in Recent Cases of Victim's Cannibalism: Reality or Fiction? A Case of Matricide and Review of Literature

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to describe the impact of forensic science in cases of cannibalism.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the crucial role of a multidisciplinary approach in a case of matricide in order to demonstrate that cannibalism occurred.

Introduction: Cannibalism is one of the most contentious topics in anthropology and there are many historical reports of cannibalism.^{1,2} The figure of the cannibal as an icon of primitivism took form in the encounter between Europe and the Americas and became a defining feature of the colonial experience in the New World.³ In mythology, religion, and literature, there are many examples of cannibalism that have been passed down over the centuries which do not strike us as shocking as long as they remain fixed in a symbolic context. There is not just one, but many forms of cannibalism.⁴ Today cannibalism is very rare. In a review of the literature, there are no studies which reported cases of parricide and cannibalism. Many studies have analyzed reasons for parricide; some studies have revealed that the parricide may increase with the presence of mental disorders or for the absence of an adequate treatment in subjects with psychiatric disorders.^{5,6} The attackers are usually suffering from schizophrenia with symptoms of active psychosis at the time of the crime.⁷⁻¹³ Less well known are the reasons that bring a murderer to cannibalism of his victim. In particular, in this study, there was cannibalism in the case of matricide.

Case Report: A case of a young man suffering from schizophrenia who killed his mother is reported. The matricide occurred through the use of a single weapon with sharp serrated edges. The body of the victim was found in her apartment. The victim was on the bathroom floor with evident dismemberment of the body. In the kitchen, some small portions of human tissue were found in the pots on the stove, presumably to be eaten. Portions of these human remains were boiled, while other portions were roasted. The technique of bloodstain pattern analysis was employed to detect the presence of small air bubbles in the blood stains imprinted on bathroom tile as by repeated and violent blows against the surface above the victim while still alive. The portions of human tissue found in the kitchen belonged to the victim. Moreover, feces belonging to the murderer was found in the toilet. There were larvae on the stool. Genetic analysis of the larval content showed the presence of the genetic material of the victim. This confirmed that the portions of human tissue found in the kitchen had been eaten by the murderer and therefore it has been scientifically proven that cannibalism had occurred. An autopsy with histopathological and postmortem computed tomography investigations were performed. The analysis of bony evidence revealed the presence of a "Y"-shaped incision from a blade with a serrated edge. In this case report, the examination of the injuries inflicted on the bones of the head allowed a determination that the trauma occurred when the subject was still alive. The histopathological examination of cranial bone showed the presence of edema with intraosseous hematic effusion, while the investigation of other dismembered body parts did not show this histopathological data.

Conclusions: The forensic investigation allowed the determination of the cause and manner of death. In this case, as in the cases of parricide, a correlation with psychiatric disorders was noted, in particular with schizophrenia, in the choice of victim's cannibalism. Therefore, this rare case demonstrated how the multidisciplinary approach in the evaluation of the findings at the crime scene was crucial in obtaining a scientifically proven result.



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