



E10 Deaths in Silence: The Role of Prison Surveillance in Suicides

*Isabella Aquila, MD**, Viale Europa, località Germaneto, Policlinico Universitario, S Venuta-Medicina Legale, Catanzaro 88100, ITALY; *Silvia Boca**, Viale Europa, Catanzaro, ITALY; *Ciro Di Nunzio, MFS, PhD*, Magna Graecia University, Viale Europa, Germaneto, Legal Medicine, Catanzaro 88100, ITALY; *Salvatore Savastano*, Viale Europa, 88100 Germaneto, Catanzaro 88100, ITALY; *Francesca Pepe, MD*, Viale Europa, località Germaneto, Catanzaro 88100, ITALY; *Santo Gratteri, MD*, Viale Europa, Germaneto, Catanzaro 88100, ITALY; and *Pietrantonio Ricci**, Viale Europa-Località Germaneto, Catanzaro, ITALY

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to describe the impact of surveillance systems in prison in order to reduce the risk of suicide.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the importance of surveillance systems especially when the medical history of prisoners' psychiatric disorders or past self-harm are detected.

Introduction: In Italian prisons, inmates commit suicide at a rate 19 times greater than non-incarcerated people and they often do so in institutions where the living conditions are worse, such as in particularly dilapidated structures with few activities and a minimal presence of volunteers. In some cases, people who have committed suicide were suffering from disabling diseases and hospitalized in penitentiary clinical centers. The causes of death in prisons can occur for natural reasons, as a result of pre-existing illnesses, from violent acts related to self harm, or due to murder between inmates, usually as a result of fights in prison. In particular, there are a greater number of suicides. Psychiatric disorders increase the risk of suicides and they are usually higher among male than female prisons. Moreover, the most widely used method of suicide is represented by hanging, followed by choking, cutting veins, intoxication, and drug overdoses. In Calabria, Italy, deaths of those in detention are highly related to suicide. In Catanzaro, Italy, the percentage of deaths in custody due to self harm is in line with those overall. The frequency with which these crimes occur with people previously experiencing self harm is high. Suicides also increased among foreign prisoners. When there is a death in custody, the inspection is complicated. In particular, the narrow and small space in which it occurs may cause errors of judgment from the forensic pathologist.

Case Report: Calabria experiences many cases of suicide in prison. Reported is the case of a Tunisian boy, detained for theft, who in December 2013 was found dead in his cell. The corpse appeared suspended by the neck by a sheet tied to the cell bars. The victim was kneeling with his head tilted sideways. A forensic pathologist was appointed to clarify the manner of death and, in particular, the possible intervention of other factors which would have determined the death. The corpse appeared cyanotic with subungual and lip cyanosis. Hypostases were plentiful and red as in deaths by asphyxia. Evaluations on the suspension mechanism employed were performed. Measurements of the point where the sheet was bound and the knees of the corpse were taken and the cell was inspected. There were numerous cut scars over the boy's body from previous suicide attempts. The medical records of the prisoner was examined and also revealed numerous suicide attempts. The boy suffered from severe depression and his disorder was treated with antidepressant medications. Depositions from the that night's prison personnel were collected. The autopsy showed evidence of hanging and the hypothesis of suicide by hanging was confirmed. From this forensic case, it emerged that the detainee had not been carefully monitored by prison workers and medical personnel in spite of suicide attempts in the previous months and especially of his serious psychiatric disorder.

Conclusions: The suicide risk in prisons is very high. Surveillance systems to date have not reduced the number of deaths. Surveillance systems in prison should: increase medical checks; generate activities of social integration among prisoners through specific programs; and assess the risk of suicide for every prisoner by inserting a board-qualified psychosocial professional to evaluate the anamnesis and pathologies of detainees. It is hoped that all countries can implement adequate surveillance systems, especially when the medical history of prisoners, psychiatric disorders, or past self harm are detected, in order to respect human rights and avoid the silence in the community regarding deaths in prison.

Surveillance, Hanging, Prison