



E72 Autopsy Rate in Suicide by Poisoning Is Low in Denmark Compared to Finland

*Seija Ylijoki-Sørensen, MD, DDS, PhD**, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Kytösuontie 11, Helsinki 00300, FINLAND; *Jesper L. Boldsen, PhD, ADBOU*, Institute of Forensic Medicine, Lucernemarken 20, 5260 Odense S, DENMARK; *Lene W. Boel, PhD, Brendstrupgaardsvej 100, Aarhus N 8200, DENMARK*; *Henrik Bøggild, PhD, Public Health and Epidemiology Group, Niels Jernes Vej 14, 3-209, 9220 Aalborg, DENMARK*; *Kaisa Lalu, PhD, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Kytösuontie 11, 00300 Helsinki, FINLAND*; and *Antti Sajantila, MD, PhD, Department of Forensic Medicine, Kytösuontie 11, 00014 Helsinki, FINLAND*

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand that the limited use of forensic autopsy to confirm the cause of death in deaths classified as suicides indicates that mortality statistics of suicides may not be reliable in Denmark, specifically in cases in which the cause of death is registered as poisoning.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating that national differences in the legislation on cause and manner of death investigation are reflected in different national autopsy rates in suicides, although the cause of death is registered as, for example, poisoning.

The consequences for national mortality statistics caused by differences in the legislation on cause- and manner-of-death investigation on deaths classified as suicides in Denmark and Finland are not known in detail. The goal of this study was to analyze autopsy rates in deaths classified as suicides and to identify any differences in investigation practices in deaths in which the cause of death was registered as poisoning.

Data from the Finnish and Danish mortality registries were summarized for the years 2000, 2005, and 2010. Autopsy rates (total, forensic, and medical) and three age groups of the deceased were compared with regard to deaths classified as suicide and with focus on deaths registered as poisoning.

The total autopsy rate for suicides was 99.8% in Finland and 13.2% in Denmark. Almost all were conducted as forensic. In the age group ≥ 71 years, Danish suicides outnumbered Finnish suicides (410 versus 283). The total autopsy rate was low in this age group in Denmark (5.6%), whereas it was consistently high in Finland (99.6%). Among Danish deaths due to poisonings, the autopsy rate was 89.5% when these were classified as accidental poisoning, but only 20.7% for cases classified as intentional self-poisoning.

This study showed that the limited use of forensic autopsy to confirm the cause of death in deaths classified as suicides raises doubts about the accuracy of the Danish suicide mortality statistics. This finding is emphasized by those cases in which the cause of death was registered as intentional self-poisoning. The reasons for the alarmingly low interest in performing autopsies on elderly people who commit suicide remain unclear. A more plausible explanation is that the deceased person suffered from (serious) illness, which, in general, is more common for the older population, and therefore, suicide could be considered more acceptable. Overall, the high number of suicides among the elderly in Denmark is striking. Further investigation is needed to show whether the reported number is accurate or whether some deaths were incorrectly classified as suicides. It must be assumed that the Finnish mortality statistics for suicides are more reliable due to the high autopsy rate.

Autopsy Rate, Suicide, Forensic Autopsy