



H69 The Dark Side of Mothering: A Case of Infanticide

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

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the importance of a multidisciplinary approach with forensic pathologists, gynecologists, and anatomopathologists in order to clarify cases of doubtful abortions.

Filicide is the murder of a child by a parent, while neonaticide specifies the killing of a child on the day of birth. Although infanticide is often used to refer to as child homicide, the term has forensic implications and applies mainly to the killing of a child under the age of 12 months by a mother who has not fully recovered from the effects of pregnancy and lactation and suffers some degree of mental disturbance. Although maternal infanticide is a rare event, a high proportion of cases occur in the context of postpartum mental illness. This case report demonstrates that maternal mental illness is not always the cause of infanticide. Often the causes of infanticide can be financially motivated.

Reported is a case of a girl who went to the hospital with her lifeless fetus and placenta still in the uterus. The complete and spontaneous birth occurred on the same day at the hospital. The analysis of health records determined that in previous months the woman went several times to the hospital for abdominal secondary pain due to traffic accidents. Both the forensic pathologist and the gynecologist performed a forensic examination. During the consultation, the girl explained she had been involved in a car accident and, as a consequence of the impact, she gave birth. External examination of the woman didn't reveal traumatic injuries such as bruising, hematoma, bruises, abrasions, or lacerations. Speculum examination of the cervix revealed two lesions at the level of the anterior lip of uterine cervix, which were bleeding despite their cleaning with gauze. These injuries were attributable to fetal expulsion through the pinching of the cervix with surgical forceps. An ultrasound pointed out the absence of uterine disease or intracavitary pouring. Furthermore, an autopsy of the fetus was performed. External examination revealed that the fetus of 28 weeks had no malformations. The umbilical cord was inserted regularly and there were no abnormalities concerning it or the placenta. The examination of internal organs showed the presence of edematous lungs with subpleural and subepicardial petechiae. The histological examination revealed the occasional presence of squamous cells and amniotic fluid as gasping breathing, in the lungs. Therefore, pathologists confirmed that the fetus attempted to breath for few minutes. The maturity of the lungs in premature fetuses does not allow, in the absence of assisted ventilation, independent, physiological respiratory acts. Therefore, at the moment of fetal expulsion, it attempted respiratory efforts, which were demonstrated by the presence of subconjunctival petechiae and hemorrhage from the sclera, which resulted in acute respiratory failure and subsequent cardiorespiratory arrest. Fetal death was caused by a surgical abortion; the histological demonstration of respiratory attempts accomplished by the fetus after its expulsion asserts that this was a case of infanticide. The analysis of the clinical history and



Pathology/Biology - 2017

the psychiatric interview of the woman showed the absence of mental illness. The scientific investigations and the statements revealed the truth: the pregnancy had been used to stage an accident to collect the insurance on the death of the small fetus. Multidisciplinary and timely analysis in cases of doubtful abortions can determine the truth about the manner in which the event happened. The strict collaboration between the forensic pathologist, gynecologist, and pathologist played a key role. The postmortem diagnosis about the absence of fetal malformations and uterine pathologies, with a histological demonstration of gasping during ejection, confirm the vitality of the fetus and corroborate the suspects' statements.

Forensic Science, Pregnancy, Infanticide