

### **H74 Peculiar Suicidal Behavior: A Case of Multiple Fatal, Sharp, and Penetrating Wounds in the Neck**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of a peculiar manner of suicide involving sharp penetrating wounds in the neck.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing an unusual type of suicide that often raises doubts about the differential diagnosis between suicide and homicide.

In this case, a 57-year-old male was found dead by his wife, lying in a large pool of blood in their apartment bathroom. Secondary droplets and blood spatter were found in the entire room, indicating the rupture of arterial high-pressure vessels. The body showed two patterns of injuries on both sides of the neck for a total of six sharp and penetrating instrument wounds, four on the right side and two on the left side. The prosecutor conducted a full autopsy to determine the cause of death and to gain information in order to establish suicide or to start an investigation for murder. External examination of the body was negative for any type of injury, apart from the two injury patterns on the neck — no bruising or signs of struggle and no self-defense wounds on the hands and arms to indicate that the subject tried to stop an aggressor holding a weapon. A plastic surgical clamp was found around the neck, compressing the soft tissues (not the airways), probably posed in order to highlight the blood vessels. Internal examination of the organs was negative for signs of pathology or internal injuries due to blunt trauma. The wounds on the neck were closely examined, both externally and internally. The wounds had the typical features of a weapon with a penetrating and sharp capability, with wide margins and clear signs of vitality. The weapon produced stab wounds that penetrated the neck skin and the soft tissues below, damaging the carotid and jugular vessels on the right side, while on the left side, only the carotid vessel was damaged. A full toxicological exam of the bodily fluids was conducted and was negative for all substances researched (both legal and illegal). The cause of death was determined to be exsanguination due to self-inflicted stabbing injuries; no signs of violence or struggle were detected except for the fatal injuries at the neck.

In this case, the interpretation of such a large number of wounds in vital areas is explained by the phenomenon of “test” or “incitation” wounds, meaning that the subject attempting to commit suicide makes some first attempts to harm himself to find the courage to deal the fatal blow(s). Cases like this are quite uncommon and can be considered borderline between suicide and homicide, since normally a suicide is committed by a single suicidal gesture (as falling from a height or hanging). Injury patterns and interpretation of injuries in suicidal deaths are important components of forensic examinations. The goal of this report is to analyze the different wound patterns present in this case, explaining how the investigation process has led the experts to the final diagnosis of natural death.

Reporting this type of case is of great value for the scientific community, proving how different patterns of suicidal behavior may challenge the expertise of the forensic investigator.

#### **Suicide, Sharp Penetrating Wounds, Incitation Wounds**