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### E72 The Cruel Deaths by Suffocation of 71 Migrants Smuggled From Hungary to Austria: A Tragic Case Study

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**Learning Overview:** The goal of this presentation is to discuss forensic methods of identification and legal procedures, as well as humanitarian aspects of human smuggling.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by detailing the dangerous, cruel, and inhumane consequences of human smuggling, so common in different parts of the world.

In 2015, Europe became the scene of mass immigration, especially over the so called “Balkan Route” from Turkey to Greece, and from Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary to Austria and Germany. During this time, smugglers made huge fortunes transporting desperate refugees from the east to the west of Europe. The unscrupulous actions of such smuggling rings not only exploit the immigrants but puts lives in grave danger due to the lack of sufficient means of safe transportation from one location to another.

In August of 2015, a truck was discovered on the roadside of an Austrian motorway, containing the bodies of 71 immigrant men, women, and children who began the journey in Hungary. Only 30 minutes after the truck left its place of origin, the passengers were struggling to breathe due to the crowded conditions and lack of sufficient oxygen. Three hours later, all had died. The cause of death was determined to be suffocation.

Hungarian and Austrian authorities immediately began an investigation that resulted in the arrest of four smugglers. They determined the time of death to have taken place in Hungary where the journey first began. Austrian officials took on the task of identifying the victims, primarily using DNA analysis, while Hungarian law enforcement handled the legal proceedings resulting with the criminal conviction of the smugglers in June of 2018. Considering most immigrant deaths in Europe occur at sea while crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy and Malta, this large death toll occurring on land could have been avoided and was due to the extreme inhumane conditions, crowding 71 people in the back of a truck with no oxygen.

Despite the call of the prosecution for a life sentence, the four smugglers, one from Afghanistan and three from Bulgarian descent, were convicted and sentenced to only 25 years imprisonment in a court in Central Hungary, with no prospect of earlier release. Altogether, 14 people were involved in this smuggling ring, and the involvement ranged from planning and organization of vehicles for smuggling people to hiring drivers. The four main leaders who held key positions in the ring who were convicted for 25 years consisted of the ring leader, the deputy ring leader, the truck driver, and the driver of the car that followed the truck during this “journey to death.” The other ten people involved were also convicted and sentenced to somewhere between 3 to 12 years imprisonment, depending on their degree of the involvement in this unimaginable tragedy. The international character of this case, involving the two neighboring countries of Austria and Hungary, demonstrates on a small scale how all of Europe is affected by this crisis.

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#### Identification, Smuggling, Suffocation