



E10 A Storm of Knives: Femicide and Attempted Suicide in an Ordinary Family

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will recognize the characteristics of a double crime scene dominated by multiple “white weapon” injuries. This case includes femicide and attempted suicide of a woman’s murderer husband.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by describing a multidisciplinary approach applied to crime scene investigations in a case of femicide and attempted suicide, following a love quarrel.

The term “femicide” defines an extreme act of violence against a woman perpetrated by a man that often occurs within a relationship or cohabitation. In this case, the weapon used was a kitchen knife. Knives are considered white weapons and are frequently used as sharp and/or sharp-point weapons; this kind of weapon produces typical wounds for their site and morphology. The characteristics and the extension of these wounds must be evaluated to differentiate homicidal from suicidal wounds.

On a cold winter night, two children, respectively eight and ten years old, frightened by the cries of their parents closed in the bedroom, went to the neighbor, who called the police. The police arrived in the house and found the master bedroom door closed from the inside. The policemen forced the door open and found the bodies of the two spouses, one over the other, on the floor. During the crime scene investigation, the forensic team found a knife block with two missing knives in the kitchen.

The lifeless body of the woman was inspected by the forensic pathologist: the wounds, all with clean and regular margins, were located on the face, neck, trunk, and upper limbs. Almost all the wounds were superficial: only two of them were broad and deep enough to cause death. The two injuries in the left hemithorax, at the autoptic examination, described two oblique intracorporeal traits parallel to each other. The first had the entrance wound located along the parasternal line between the second and third intercostal space, was directed from top to bottom and from right to left. This trait injured the left pectoralis major muscle, the underlying intercostal muscles, the pericardium, and the anterior and posterior walls of the right ventricle. The exit wound of the trait was on the back.

The second trait was located 8cm below and laterally to the first and involved the left ventricle of the heart. Below the woman’s body, her husband was surprisingly still alive despite the presence of a knife in the middle of his chest. The blade was the same model as those missing from the kitchen set. The man was taken to the nearest hospital, a chest Computed Tomography (CT) examination was performed with the *in situ* knife, then he underwent surgery. The hypothesized dynamics, based on the circumstantial evidence, were confirmed by the results of the autopsy performed on the woman and by data collected from the instrumental exams and body inspection conducted on the husband. Indeed, the presence of a deep wound with a knife in a highly vital area, such as the chest, in addition to the presence of multiple superficial stab wounds in self-attacking regions, such as wrists and elbow folds, with the parallel trend corresponding to test injury, suggested a suicide attempt by the man. The presence of wounds on the arms of the wife suggests a defense action; in literature, indeed, the defense wounds are common on the outer sides of the forearms, the backs of the hands, and the knuckles. The other typical knife defense wound is on the web between the base of the thumb and index finger when the blade is grabbed in an attempted pincer action, as in this case.

The presented case highlights and compares cutting wounds related to a homicidal event and a suicidal event, demonstrating how the two different diagnosis can be related by the circumstantial data; by the results of inspection; by the sites of the wounds, distinguishing between self-attacking areas or less; by the distribution and number of inflicted wounds; by the presence of defensive injuries (active and passive); or, conversely, by the presence of test wounds.

Femicide, Knife Crime, Attempted Suicide