

## E97 The Role of Social Networks in the Crime of Stalking: A Case of Murder

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the role of social networks in investigating the crime of stalking.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing the importance of applying the method of “Social-Mobile Autopsy” to prevent the crime of stalking before the stalker adopts violent behavior.

Social networks are digital platforms developed to allow communication between people who could be a great distance apart. These programs are known to also offer personal data sharing. From this point of view, social networks have become easy tools for acquiring private information via videos, geographic location, and fast methods of contacting other people. In this context, social networks may also be dangerous when are used improperly to achieve personal persecutions. The term “stalking” denotes a disturbing, threatening, unpleasant, repetitive, and/or intrusive behavior directed toward a specific person.<sup>1</sup> The victim is often linked by previous romantic relationships with the stalker, who does not accept the separation and begins an activity of controlling the victim with obsessive methods. Sometimes, the victim can be a person not known directly to the stalker but contacted through other methods, such as virtual dating sites.

A case is presented of double homicide by firearm that took place in a restaurant in a southern Italian town. The victims were a man and a woman who worked in the restaurant. Initially, the investigators had difficulty reconstructing the motive of the murder and the reason why the killer had chosen to kill only the two subjects among all the people present in the room. A crime scene investigation and an autopsy were carried out. Later, investigators listened to family members, who assumed an economic motive. Subsequently, the mobile phones of the victims and the killer and their respective personal computers were seized. The investigators focused the investigations on the social profiles of the three individuals using the Social-Mobile Autopsy method by analyzing messages, chats, public and private posts, photographs, and videos.<sup>2</sup> These investigations were carried out to understand the relationship between the victims with the killer and the motive for the murder.

The investigation revealed that the killer had used two firearms at the same time (a rifle and a gun). The woman had been struck first with both weapons for a total of 23 shots. Subsequently, the killer pursued the man on the street outside the room by hitting him only with the gun for a total of seven shots.

The analysis of the victims’ mobile phones revealed the exchange of messages between the two individuals and the existence of a hidden romantic relationship. However, the analysis of personal telephones did not highlight messages with the killer. Only the investigation of the victims’ social profiles revealed an intense stalking activity by the killer against the woman. The man sent numerous obsessive messages, photos of the victim, inserted numerous likes and comments in posts, and made video call attempts, often using fake accounts or other friends’ profiles. The murderer’s profile revealed repeated searches by typing his name several times in the search engine and publication of several posts related to the woman. The messages and photos suggested the woman’s previous relationship with the killer, who did not accept the end of their relationship.

Social networks have a fundamental role to get in touch and acquire information on the private lives of other people. In recent years, the so-called “stalker” has found in digital media the ideal tool to acquire personal information about the victim or to carry out the pursuit and oppression of the victim, specifically by sending hundreds of text messages, e-mails, and calls forwarded often using fake accounts. In the case described, the investigation carried out using the Social-Mobile Autopsy method allowed the discovery of a real crime implemented through social networks, such as stalking, and therefore allowed clarification of the motive for the murder. This case demonstrates the importance of using the Social-Mobile Autopsy method in investigating cases of suspected stalking in order to take preventive measures to ensure the safety of the victim before the stalker adopts violent behavior. Finally, this type of investigation is suggested in all cases of homicide/suicide in which the motive appears doubtful or cannot be reconstructed through circumstantial data or testimonies.

### Reference(s):

1. Brady P.Q., Nobles M.R. The dark figure of stalking: Examining law enforcement response. *J Interpers Violence*. 2017 Oct;32(20):3149-3173.
2. Aquila I., Sacco M.A., Gratteri S., Sirianni M., De Fazio P., Ricci P. The social-mobile autopsy: The evolution of psychological autopsy with new technologies in forensic investigations on suicide. *Leg Med (Tokyo)*. 2018 May;32:79-82.

### Forensic Sciences, Stalking, Social Networks