A84   Bodies Without Names, Names Without Bodies: Searching for Lost Lives in Lisbon, Portugal

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of how identification is being done in Europe, namely in Portugal, and the reality of unclaimed corpses and unidentified bodies in Lisbon, which is becoming a major international metropolis. Attendees will also be aware of how important the complicity of forensic anthropology and pathology is.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by imparting how identification is performed and how the existence of databases of missing persons and unclaimed bodies is a major value for the current global world. Forensic anthropology is playing an increasing role in identification.

Introduction: In Portugal, the number of people who cannot be identified at the time of death, John and Jane Does, has not been thoroughly studied. The same applies to unclaimed corpses, that is, the bodies that are kept in the mortuary refrigerators for more than a month. Although there is an empiric suspicion that these numbers are increasing, we cannot be certain unless this is demonstrated. Furthermore, this is a crucial issue with social implications. Thus, this reality needs to be monitored, among others, to discuss the need to create a national resource center for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed person cases. The measures that should be taken to fight this social problem require that the reality is known. Moreover, this will be a better tool to identify foreign citizens whose numbers are currently increasing.

Objectives: This study is the beginning of a larger project, which aims to estimate the annual number of unidentified persons and unclaimed bodies/remains. It seeks to recognize demographic and social characteristics associated with dying and remaining unidentified to determine if the rates vary over time and if causes of death can explain any of these numbers. This study also seeks to answer questions such as: How many bodies were found across Lisbon and never named? Furthermore, how are bodies identified? Anthropological cases are included.

Material and Methods: This study presents an observational, retrospective, and descriptive study of unidentified and unclaimed bodies/remains over a three-year (2015–2017) period in Lisbon, Portugal, at the South Branch of the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (DS-INMLCF). The data were obtained from the DS-INMLCF database and archive. Microsoft® Office Excel® was used for the statistical analysis.

The techniques used to perform this complex forensic challenge, which is the identification of bodies and remains, are provided.

Results: The number of cadavers or remains arriving at DS-INMLCF with no identity amounts to 113 (3.06%) of the 3,692 admitted cadavers. All were submitted to examination, but nine were excluded from the analysis since there was no identification purpose: six were not human and three had no forensic interest. Of the 104 analyzed cases, 85 (81.73%) reached positive identification, in a time period ranging from a few hours to 780 days, with forensic anthropology and genetics having a crucial role, as well as fingerprinting analysis. Identified cadavers' ages ranged from 16 to 90 years, with a median of 49 years, and about a quarter were foreigners. Regarding the causes of death, 54.81% were violent, most of them due to accidents.

The number of unclaimed corpses was 155 (4.21%) out of 3,679 (13 cases were excluded as the remains were unclaimable: two fetuses under 24 weeks of gestational age, two exhumations at cemeteries, and the nine cases previously referred). The number of such cases grew over the three years studied. Cadavers' ages ranged from 20 to 109 years, with a median of 67.5 years; 12.26% were foreigners and the majority (75.48%) were males. The unknown bodies accounted for 23 (14.84%). Concerning the causes of death, 50.97% were natural.

Conclusions: Unlike the number of unidentified corpses, that has remained constant over these three years, the number of unclaimed ones has been increasing. The high rate of unclaimed corpses (4.21%) may be explained by their advanced age and socioeconomic conditions and entails both social and financial problems.

Although this study covers a short time period, the percentage of unidentified corpses and the increasing number of unclaimed ones reinforces the need to create a national research center for missing persons and unidentified and unclaimed cadavers. This center could allow a proper communication channel for professionals involved and an easily accessible database for the general population that would facilitate the recognition and claim of these lost lives.

Identification, Unclaimed Bodies, Unidentified Bodies

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