

H59 The Chainsaw Massacre at the Beginning: An Unusual Suicide With a Jigsaw at the End

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to underline the importance of cooperation between the forensic pathologist, the policemen, and the engineering analysis; this is fundamental in order to collect all the evidence necessary to solve complex and atypical cases, such as the presented case. Without evidence, no truth is possible to be reconstructed, so no reliable judgement can be reached.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing that, despite the autopsy being an essential tool to provide scientific and forensic evidence, a correct interpretation of injuries, and of the mode of production (murder, suicide, accidental), the role of the forensic pathologist from the crime scene investigation is fundamental. The crime scene investigation carried out by a critical forensic mind and by an expert team is an essential instrument in the research and collection of evidence and samples.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) fact sheet of September 2, 2019 on suicidal rates, it has been estimated that about 800,000 people die from suicide each year, constituting the third-leading cause of death between 15–19 years.¹ The most frequent method of completed suicide in the general population is due to pesticide self-poisoning, accounting for around 20% of suicides, more typical of the rural areas. After this, hanging and gunshot injuries are the most common suicide methods.

Suicides completed through the use of saws seem to be exceptionally rare and are considered atypical events; indeed, they appear to be most frequently accidental and homicidal events. Among saws, electric ones are even rarer.

The presented case concerns a suicide completed with a jigsaw, a particular type of electric saw, and seems to be the only one reported in the scientific literature. A 36-year-old obese woman was found dead in her house near Rome, Italy. Police officers and forensic pathology were immediately alerted to investigate the crime scene. The young woman was found lifeless, lying on the sofa in the living room. A series of blood drops were also found on the floor through the path to the bathroom. A bloody orbital jigsaw was plugged in and was in the off mode on the sink. Police officers found out that the woman had bought the jigsaw just the day before she was found dead. Her medical history revealed she was affected by depressive disorder. Prior to the autopsy, postmortem radiological examination was carried out. On the anterior side of the neck, there was a large lacerated wound, which involved the lateral surfaces of the neck with a total length of about 28cm and a maximum width of about 5cm. This wound was widely separated, irregular, excoriated, bruised, and had blackish margins. Neck dissection (according to the Adam technique, modified by Pomara-Fineschi) revealed a lack of platysma muscle; injury of the superficial muscle bundles of the sternocleidomastoid muscles bilaterally, in the context of hemorrhagic infiltration; and hemorrhagic infiltration at the level of the origin of the omohyoid, sternohyoid, and sternothyroid-thyrohyoid muscles, bilaterally. Another focal area of hemorrhagic infiltration affected the right lobe of the thyroid. The thyroid cartilage had a large, full-thickness, transverse laceration. When opening the larynx and trachea, abundant blood was observed. The cause of death was attributed to hemorrhagic shock with blood aspiration. The alcohol blood test was positive and the toxicological test was negative for other common abused substances. The integration of all the information concluded the death was a suicide.

Due to the rarity of this injury, a review of the literature is also provided to compare the salient features between the scientific data and this case.

Reference(s):

1. World Health Organization. *Suicide*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>.

Jigsaw, Suicide, Multidisciplinary Approach