

## Case Report

### Suicidal Death due to Stabbing: A Case of Rare Occurrence

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#### Abstract

Stabbing is one of the commonest means of homicide. Everyone prefers a painless death and stabbing is not a preferred means of suicide, especially for a female. In this paper, a case of an 18 years old girl who was found dead in a pool of blood on a bed inside a locked room under suspicious circumstances with multiple stab injuries to the abdomen is presented. A thorough post-mortem examination plays a crucial role in assisting the investigating agency to arrive at the possible manner of death. In such a case with multiple abdominal stab injuries, only after a meticulous autopsy, it was labelled as a case of suicide. Self-stabbing is comparatively uncommon and there is a male predominance over female and amongst the female self-inflicted stabbing cases, the one with multiple stab injuries is even rarer, and this paper is presented considering extreme rarity of such a case.

**Key Words:** Suicide, Suicidal stab injury, Self-inflicted, Wound

#### Introduction:

Suicide means "sui caedere"- to kill oneself (Latin). As per the data provided by the national crime records bureau, the so called "Soft method of committing suicide" such as hanging (37%) and poisoning (29.5%) are the most commonly adopted means of committing suicide in India.

"Hard methods" like self-cutting, self-stabbing, are very rare, being employed in only 0.4% of suicides and having a male predominance. [1, 2] Stabbings have been common throughout human history and one of the most frequent ways of committing homicide is by inflicting injuries with a sharp cutting or stabbing weapon [3]

A commonly used weapon such as a knife is cheap and easy to acquire. However, everyone prefers a painless death and suicide by stabbing is not common. [4]

In the early stages of death investigation, the opinion of a forensic expert may be crucial in initiating or aborting a homicide investigation. Stab injury is usually homicidal and very rarely suicidal.

Proper history, meticulous crime scene investigation and carefully performed autopsy are vital in ascertaining the manner of death in such cases. This paper describes a rare case of female suicide with multiple fatal stab injuries which was labelled as suicide only after a meticulous post-mortem examination.

#### Case History:

On 11th Oct. 2013 at 2:05 pm, post-mortem examination was conducted on the dead body of an 18-yr old girl at our centre. As per police, the girl stayed in her aunt's place which was located near her parent's house. On the previous evening of the fateful day, she did not come back to her aunt's house and the aunt did not try to contact her parents as she was assuming that the girl was with her parents.

The parents usually did not stay in their house as they mostly stayed at a shop located about 1km away from the house. However, she was found dead in a suspicious manner on a bed inside a room which was locked from inside in her parent's house at about 10:30 am of the fateful day. Neither the parents nor the aunt were aware of what was happening in her personal life viz., any strain in love affairs or history of depression, etc.

#### Crime Scene Examination:

The dead body was lying supine on the bed, and there was a pool of blood just below and along the sides of the body. A blood stained kitchen knife was found in the vicinity.

The clothing was soaked with blood including the blue "T" shirt, which she was wearing and the abdomen was exposed with

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multiple stab injuries. The initial impression was suggestive of homicide.

However, all the things in vicinity were properly arranged in the room and there were no signs of struggle. Moreover, the door was found locked from inside and there were no grossly visible foot prints or any trail of blood, ruling out the entry of any outsider into the room. [Fig. 1]

### **Autopsy Findings:**

All the clothes were soaked with blood but they were intact, having no cuts or tears.

Both the hands were partially clinched. Rigor Mortis was present all over the body and post-mortem staining was present over back and fixed. The eyes were congested and the body appeared pale. Dried blood stains were observed on the abdomen and the right palm.

On external examination, there were three injuries on the mid-part of the abdomen. The first injury was a wedge shaped stab wound almost obliquely placed and based laterally, situated just left to midline and 100cm above heel, 2cm x 0.3cm, cavity deep with clean cut margins and red in colour. The bevelling of the wound was present on supero-lateral aspect.

The second injury was a scratch abrasion on abdomen in the midline, situated 98cm above heel measuring 0.5cm in length, red in colour. The third injury was a stab wound on umbilicus 97cm above heel, having “<” shaped measuring 1.6cm x 0.2cm, cavity deep with clean cut margins and red in colour. [Fig 2]

There were no defence injuries on the hands or forearms. On internal examination, the abdominal cavity contained blood mixed with clots (about 2 litres). There were cut injuries of skin, muscles, fasciae, peritoneum and small intestines at two places corresponding to external injuries. The mesentery and its vessels were also cut and contused. [Fig 3, 4]

The opinion as to the cause of death was given as haemorrhage and shock resulting from stab injuries to the abdomen produced by sharp cutting pointed weapon. All the injuries were ante-mortem and fresh at the time of death and the death was suicidal in nature.

### **Discussion:**

In medico-legal investigation, when a victim sustains multiple stab wounds, the interpretation is difficult. Even though the cause of death is known, the nature of the injury needs to be established i.e. whether it is homicidal, suicidal or accidental. History or witness's account may be perplexed or even misleading.

So, a thorough analysis of the crime scene and a meticulous examination of

characteristics of the wound may help in determining the nature of the death.

### **Factors in Favour of Suicide:**

The wounds were over accessible area of the body i.e. abdomen. There were no rents/cuts on the clothes worn on the day of the incident. A person who commits suicide exposes his body by opening his clothes and then inflicts the wound, [5] and this was observed in the present case. Vertical stab wounds imply homicide, [6] whereas suicidal wounds are most frequently horizontal i.e. margins bevelled. [7]

The wounds were wedge shaped and bevelling of the margin of the 1<sup>st</sup> wound on the left supero-lateral aspect imply that the weapon used was probably a single edged pointed sharp cutting weapon like a knife, and the direction of entry of the blade was downward, backward and to the right which is in favour of self-infliction. The depth of a suicidal stab wound is variable and rarely single stroke is fatal. [5]

In this case, the depth of the wound reached only up to the small intestine and mesentery. The right hand of the victim was stained with dried blood; however, there were no defence injuries observed on the hands or forearms, which were indicative of homicide in a victim of assault by sharp edged weapon.

This finding is a fact which strongly supported the hypothesis of self-infliction. [8]

Another important characteristic of self-inflicted sharp force injuries is the presence of “hesitation cuts”. “Hesitation cuts” also known as “tentative cuts” are multiple superficial cuts present around the commencement of a main wound. These cuts indicate the divided state of the mind of the victim, as it is normal human instinct to preserve life. [9, 10] Suicidal stab wounds may show hesitation mark surrounding the final fatal wound. [11]

In the present case, the second wound which was a small scratch injury to the abdomen (as described in external findings of post-mortem examination) can be considered as a hesitation cut which is very much in favour of suicide.

### **Conclusion:**

In medico-legal practice, an autopsy surgeon has to give his opinion about the homicidal or suicidal nature of the wound. Homicide might be initially suspected in such a case of female death with multiple stab injuries.

It is very hard to believe from a layman's perspective that a girl could stab several times to commit suicide. This case is of rare occurrence as self-cutting or self-stabbing is employed in only 0.4% of suicides in India and there is a male predominance over female.

Amongst the female self-inflicted stabbing cases, the one with multiple stab injuries is even rarer. Such type of case was never presented in any literature, especially, in this part of the country.

A meticulous analysis of the features of the wound helps in establishing correctly the manner of death in such cases.

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**Fig. 1: Crime Scene**



**Fig. 2: External Injuries**



**Fig. 3: Internal Injuries**



**Fig. 4: Internal Injuries**

