

Murder – Suicide: Remorse or Stress

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Abstract

Murder–suicide is a severe form of interpersonal violence. It is an act in which an individual kills one or more other persons before, or at the same time as, killing oneself. The combination of murder and suicide can include: Driving a car with passengers off a bridge or intentional dashing; suicide bombing; Suicide after murder to escape punishment; Suicide after murder as a form of self-punishment; Joint suicide in the form of killing the other and oneself with consent; Murder before suicide with the intent of preventing future pain and suffering of others including family members and oneself, such as a parent killing their children before ending their own life; Murder followed by suicide by a mentally unstable person. We encountered a case in which a middle aged male administered poison to his wife and young daughter before committing suicide by hanging. History shows that the perpetrator, a businessman was under financial burden. He was unable to repay his loans and was under continuous threats and calls from his financiers. His inability to repay the money, threat to future of his family and humiliation directed him towards this extreme step. This paper emphasizes on aspects and outcomes of mental stress. **Acknowledgement:** Dept. of Forensic Medicine, KMC Mangalore

Key words: Murder-Suicide; Financial Stress; Mental Stress.

Introduction

According to Menninger, murder and suicide are interchangeable acts – suicide sometimes forestalling murder, and vice versa.¹ Severe repression of natural instincts due to early childhood abuse, may lead to the emergence of death instinct in a twisted form. In a research, perpetrators of murder-suicide were found to be different from perpetrators of homicide alone. Murderer-suicides were found to be highly depressed males, other murderers were not generally depressed.² From national and international data of murder–suicide perpetrators, the key predictors of murder–suicide are: a history of substance abuse, a break-up or pending break-up, a history of battering, financial stress, family problems and many more.

Few studies in United States, estimate between 1,000 to 1,500 murder-suicide deaths per year, with

the majority occurring between spouses or intimate partners with majority of perpetrators being male who will shoot the intimate partner before shooting himself. Depression, marital or/and financial problems, and other problems are general motivators.^{2,3,4}

In present paper, a case is reported wherein a middle aged male administered poison to his wife and young daughter before committing suicide by hanging. The perpetrator was unable to repay his loans and was under continuous threats. Which might have directed him towards this extreme step.

Case Report

- Dead body was of a 10 year old female child measuring 138 cms in length and weighing 26 kgs. Eyeballs were bulging, tongue protruded, face swollen, reddish tinged fluid oozing from mouth and nostrils. Face, upper limbs, front of thorax and abdomen showed greenish discoloration, marbling was present on both upper limbs, back and front of thorax and abdomen. No other external injuries were present on the body. Internally, brain was liquefied, lungs were congested, spleen and kidneys showed reddish brown discoloration, gastric contents were

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yellowish brown liquid with some abnormal odour.

- Dead body of a 32 year female, measuring 159 cms in length and weighing 65 kgs. Eyeballs were bulging, face disfigured, abdomen distended with gas, tongue protruded. Marbling was present at both shoulder, both upper limbs and right iliac fossa. Both upper limbs, back, chest and face shows greenish discoloration. Postmortem blisters were present on both upper limbs, back, face and side of trunk. Rectal prolapse was present. No other external injuries were present on the body. All internal organs showed reddish brown discoloration, brain was liquefied, gastric contents were yellowish brown liquid with some abnormal odour.
- Dead body of a 38 year male, measuring 173 cms in length and weighing 85 kgs. Face, lower limbs and external genitalia showed greenish discoloration. Skin slippage was present over both hips. Postmortem blisters were present on right thigh and left leg. Face was congested, tongue was protruded and bitten. Eyeballs were bulging.

Ligature Material

An orange colour cotton lungi tied in the form of running noose around the neck with knot at back of neck.

Ligature Mark

A deep grooved pressure abrasion, measuring 39x3.5 cm incompletely encircling the neck. No other external injuries were present on the body.

All internal organs showed reddish brown discoloration, brain was liquefied, gastric contents were yellowish brown liquid with some abnormal odour.

Routine viscera was preserved for chemical analysis which was positive for cyanide ions in all three cases. Cause of death was opined as cyanide poisoning in first 2 cases and hanging followed by cyanide consumption in 3rd case.

Discussion

Homicides followed by suicide often appear in headlines while normal suicides or homicides are rarely mentioned. This might misled the conclusion that people who are suicidal are more likely to also be

homicidal.

In 18th century Denmark, people wishing to commit suicide would sometimes commit murder in order to receive the death penalty with a belief that murder followed by repentance would allow them to end their life while avoiding damnation.¹ According to a study in wales, the decision to commit suicide is taken much before the homicide act and is rarely an outcome of remorse.⁵

The combination of murder and suicide can include: Driving a car with passengers off a bridge; suicide bombing; Murder before suicide with the intent of preventing future pain and suffering of others including family members and oneself, such as a parent killing their children before ending their own life. Whatsoever may be the combination it is beyond doubt that murder suicide is a severe form of interpersonal violence.^{1,6}

Reports shows that a 51 year old male in Florida (US) committed suicide after shooting his adult daughter, and 6 grandchildren one of whom was an infant.⁷ In another case, in Bradford (London) a 49 year old man committed suicide after killing his wife and 4 adult daughters.⁸ In yet another case a 45 year old male murdered his ex-lover and committed suicide in Padubidri, Karnataka.⁹ In our case, a middle aged male administered poison to his wife and young daughter before committing suicide by hanging. History shows that the perpetrator, a businessman was under financial burden. He was unable to repay his loans and was under continuous threats and calls from his financiers. His inability to repay the money, threat to future of his family and humiliation directed him towards this extreme step. The act was sudden, the perpetrator poisoned his family after confirming their death he poisoned himself, the act of hanging was probably committed to ensure death. The variation in timing is shown by little advance putrefaction in wife and daughters body as compared to the dead body of perpetrator.

This shows that the stress of financial burden or may be the humiliation for himself and his family or may be the sense of social insecurity for himself and his family provoked him to take this extreme step. Remorse is ruled out looking at the planning done for the final showdown. Thus, this paper emphasizes on an important aspect and outcome of mental stress.

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