

An Unusual Suicide Case: Suicide by Thrusting a Screwdriver Into the Head

Sıradışı Bir İntihar Olgusu: Kafaya Tornavida Saplayarak İntihar

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ABSTRACT Suicide, considered in society as an assault on human dignity, is the intentional ending by an individual of his or her life. Common methods of suicide include hanging, the use of guns, falls from height and the self-administering of psychoactive and toxic substances. In addition, to these, the use of explosives and sharp pointed instruments for stabbing purposes may also be encountered. On occasion, a combination of methods may be applied in a suicide. In this study, the case of a 64 years-old-male with a background of psychological illness who took his own life by thrusting a screwdriver into his head 14-15 times was presented in detail as an unusual suicide method. The case is submitted as only on initial inspection of the location and characteristics of the wounds, homicide might not be considered as the manner of death.

Key Words: Suicide, methods, wounds, penetrating, head

ÖZET İntihar, insanın özbenliğine yönelmiş bir saldırı olup, bireyin kendi yaşamına isteyerek son vermesidir. İntihar yöntemi olarak genellikle ası, ateşli silah, yüksekten atlama, psikoaktif ve toksik madde alma ve suda boğulma gibi yöntemler kullanılmakla birlikte patlayıcı madde kullanılması, kesici ve delici aletlerin vücudun değişik bölgelerine saplanması veya birden fazla intihar metodunun birlikte kullanılması gibi alışılmamış intihar yöntemleriyle de karşılaşılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, daha önceden psikiyatrik rahatsızlığı olduğu bilinen, kafasına 14-15 kez tornavida saplayarak intihar eden 64 yaşındaki erkek olgu özellikleriyle sunulmuş, alışılmamış intihar yöntemleri ile ilgili literatür gözden geçirilmiştir. Sadece yaraların lokalizasyonları ve özelliklerine bakarak orijinin cinayet olduğuna karar verilmemesi açısından olgu sunulmaya değer bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İntihar, yöntemler, penetre yara, kafa

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The most common suicide methods are hanging, the use of guns and falls from height in men and use of psychoactive and toxic substances and drowning in females.¹ However, there are certain unusual suicide methods, which include a combination of methods, the use of explosives and the use of sharp and penetrative instruments.²⁻⁸

Psychiatric co-morbidity is between 70-90% among suicide victims. The most common diagnosis is depression, with others such as schizophrenia and dementia at rates of 80% and 10% respectively. A quarter of those with psychological problems also suffer from alcoholism problems. The risk

of psychiatric patients committing suicide is greater than that for the general population and unusual suicide methods are more frequent in this group.^{1,3}

In this study, a 64-year-old man with a psychological disorder at the time who committed suicide by repeatedly thrusting a screwdriver into his head was presented. The case was worth presenting since the location and characteristics of his injuries on initial examination suggested that suicide was not likely to be the manner of death.

CASE REPORT

A 64 year-old male. Date of death: 24/01/04. Date of autopsy: 25/01/04. Place: Department of Forensic Medicine, Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Eskişehir, Türkiye. Protocol No: 2004/3.

SCENE INVESTIGATION

On investigation of the scene (24/01/04) there was no evidence that the door or windows were forced. The house was in a tidy state and nothing appeared to have been stolen. The deceased subject was found lying flat on his back with a screwdriver protruding from his head (Figure 1). There were bloodstains on the man's head and hands, and a sickle, a knife and pieces of wood were found near him.

His feet were touching one of the walls of the room, which bore a mark from the handle of a screwdriver (Figure 2). Hair and blood samples,

along with other items from the scene were sent to the police laboratory for crime. No indications of any other person involved were detected at the scene.

POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION

On examination of the deceased, bright red livor mortis was fixed on the rear part of the body. Rigor mortis was receding and decomposition in the lower abdomen had started.

On external examination, there were bloodstains on the left hand and a 1 cm oblique abrasion across the palm of the right hand. Numerous injuries (14 or 15) like cuts of varying size from 0.5 to 2 cm were noted in the region between the front part of the head and the vertex (Figure 3). Tissue bridges ran from side to side on the wounds. Only one of the wounds, at the left of the vertex, had



FIGURE 2: The mark of the screwdriver at the right hand.



FIGURE 1: The thrusting screwdriver into the head.



FIGURE 3: Injuries between the front part of the head and the vertex.

passed through the bone tissue and entered the head. The other wounds were limited to cutaneous and subcutaneous tissue. No other traumatic lesions were noted on the body.

On internal examination the area beneath the scalp was pale. Bleeding and contusion were observed under the wounds noted during the external examination of the head. An oval-shaped hole was observed at the left of the vertex. The edges of the wound were irregular. A dura defect was seen in the region of the hole in the bone tissue. Intracerebral bleeding in the lateral ventricle was observed. A needle check showed that the instrument which had entered the skull had progressed to the base of the brain, passing through the lateral ventricle. Intense subdural and subarachnoid bleeding was observed in the left parieto-temporal region.

The cause of death was ascertained to have been brain laceration and intracerebral bleeding resulting from a penetrating wound by a screwdriver to the head.

LEGAL INVESTIGATION

The step-brother of the deceased, M.B., stated on the date of the death, "My brother has been living alone since 1987, was married and divorced twice, and had no children other than one adopted child. This adopted child and one of his ex-wives live in another city. My brother preferred to stay at home and never went out. He always used to say I am tired of life, I don't want to live any longer and such like. He suffered delusions and used to clean the house saying, There are bad bugs and spiders. Throw them out so they can't eat me. We wanted to take him to a doctor but he would not allow this saying, You don't understand me. I went to visit him at around 10 o'clock, but he did not open the door, so I opened it with the spare key I had. When I entered the house, I saw my brother lying on his back with a screwdriver stuck in his head. I then called the police."

The opinion was that the wounds to the deceased's head had been inflicted by himself in order to remove the spiders and insects that he believed were there with a screwdriver.

DISCUSSION

Some unusual suicides were reported in the literature. In one such suicide, a person who had twice previously attempted suicide was found hanged and shot in the head. After the crime scene examination, assessment of the methods used and considering the previous attempts for suicide, manner of death was concluded as suicide. The victim had applied a second method in case the first method failed.³ In another case, the person committed suicide with a hand-made gun using wooden nails as bullets after an injection of insecticide.⁴ In two other cases, explosives were the method used, with the first subject committing suicide by detonating explosives placed in the mouth.⁵

Iten et al present a case in which the subject opened a vein in the foot with a scalpel after treating the area with local anesthetic, and reported that the trigger for the suicide could have been related to the fact that the subject was a terminal AIDS sufferer.⁶ In another unusual case, a subject pushed his back fast against a wall into a cavity in which he had placed and secured a knife.¹

Yasuhiro et al present an unusual suicide by self-stabbing who was a 42 years old man. He committed suicide with a dagger weighing 2.72 kg which was allowed to fall freely; the blade of the dagger fell from a height of 10 cm above the chest, penetrated the second left intercostal skin and pierced the upper lobe of the left lung.⁷ Munakata et al presented a suicide attempt of a man who was 46 years old; he had a cardiac stab injury resulting in cardiac tamponade, with using bodkin, a sharply pointed instrument for making holes.⁸

The most common source of injuries from sharp and penetrative instruments is homicide.¹ It is not easy to distinguish between homicide and suicide with sharp and penetrative instruments in some cases. Generally, when unusual methods are applied in suicide cases, it is difficult to establish the manner of death as either suicide, or homicide.

In the case presented, suicide was established as the manner of death after close examination of

the scene, post-mortem examination and the subsequent judicial investigation. The thrusting of a screwdriver into the head was evaluated as one of the most unusual suicide methods. The case was

considered worth presenting in that suicide would not be suspected at first sight but would be considered after assessing the location and characteristics of the wounds.

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