

Relationship of sharp force injuries to motivation

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Abstract

Forensic pathologists are often expected to provide an opinion on the intention of the assailant in sharp force fatalities. A retrospective study was carried out on reports of post-mortems of victims of sharp force trauma over five years. The position and type of injuries were recorded and related to the known motivation for murder. Victims of different motives of killing had an almost similar injury pattern. There is no significant association of the pathology of sharp force injuries with the motive of killing.

Keywords

Sharp force trauma, homicide, motive for killing, number of injuries, medico-legal opinion

Introduction

Sharp force injuries contribute to a significant proportion of violent murders worldwide and are the most predominant method of homicide in Europe.^{1,2} In the United States homicides are frequently committed with guns because they are readily available.^{3–8} However, the use of sharp force is still not uncommon. Twenty-two per cent of the homicidal deaths in the western province of Sri Lanka are due to sharp force trauma.⁹ Forensic pathologists are often expected to provide an opinion about many important factors in sharp force fatalities in addition to the cause of death. Some of these include the manner of death, type of the weapon, the awareness of the victim, type, number and anatomical distribution of injuries, the shape, size, length, and depth of injuries and the extent of internal injuries are important in the reconstruction of the crime and crucial for the formation of such opinions.

Accurate and objective forensic opinion based on scientific evidence is essential for justice. Miscarriage of justice and wrongful convictions are increasingly reported in the field of forensic medicine due to controversial medical evidence presented at trials. Balanced and reasonable expert opinions from the forensic pathologist can lead to justice for both the prosecution and the defence in a criminal trial.

A revisit to the findings and decisive factors in a homicidal sharp force murder and correlation of these

with the historical motive for the killing is crucial to ensure an impartial medico-legal opinion and justice in these cases.

Objective

The aim of the study was to look into the characteristics of homicidal sharp force injuries and their relationship to the known motive of killing and understand how a medico-legal opinion may be influenced by them.

Study design

A retrospective descriptive study was made based on reports of post-mortems performed on the victims of murder by sharp force trauma during the past five years. Historical evidence on the motive of killing was obtained from the records made by the medical officers based on statements by the police and the other informants. The information was gathered on a pro forma basis. The data were analysed using a software package for statistical analysis.

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