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Case Report

Male Infanticide by Stab Wound- A Case Report

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Abstract

Infanticide is killing of an infant at any time from birth up to the age of 12 months. Historically, child killing has by no means always been a crime, and has been practiced as child sacrifice, a method of population control or as a social and economic necessity since the dawn of humanity. In India, female Infanticide is common but male infanticide is also practiced in certain cases. Here is a case report of a decomposed male infant with stab injury brought for postmortem examination at Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad. Since most often infants are killed by suffocation or poisoning and sometimes by abandonment. Aim of the case report is to high light the importance of careful and meticulous autopsy in decomposed body to give justice to innocent.

1. Introduction

Historically, child killing has by no means always been a crime, and has been practiced as child sacrifice, a method of population control or as a social and economic necessity since the dawn of humanity. The cultural and socioeconomic setting is still relevant today and reverberates through phenomena such as son-preference and sex-selective abortions, particularly in South Asian countries.¹

Infanticide is killing of an infant at any time from birth up to the age of 12 months. Neonaticidal mothers are often young, unmarried women with unwanted pregnancies who receive no prenatal care.² In a trial for infanticide, the prosecution is required to prove that the child was born alive, and that it died from criminal violence inflicted after birth.³ Due to certain social customs practiced in different societies of India female infanticide is very

common but male Infanticide is also practiced in case of illegitimate children born of widows or unmarried persons. With the wide spread of education and restrictive action by the government, it is relatively less prevalent but the low sex ratio of women in some states in India, particularly in the states of Haryana, west UP and Rajasthan are dangerous pointers conclusively establishing human interventions of killing of girl child at birth or equally worrisome practices of female foeticide. Sacrifice of a live child amongst the uneducated to protect one from evil are also reported. Certain studies also show that psychiatric illness as being responsible for a mother to kill her own children.⁴

2. Case History

An unknown dead body of a male infant was brought for post mortem examination at Forensic Medicine Department, B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad.

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As per the police papers and history, dead body was found in canal in a stage of decomposition and no cloth was present over dead body in wearing condition. On examination dead body was found in stage of decomposition emitting foul smell (Refer Fig. 1). Greenish discoloration was seen more over abdominal. Peeling of epidermis was present all over the body at places. Maggots of size 0.2cm-0.3cm were present all over the body at places. Facial features were not identifiable and skins over the face were missing exposing underlying bone. Scalp hair was easily pluckable. Scar of fallen umbilical cord was identifiable which indicate that it was a live born case. Skin around the neck, dorsum of both feet and around anal region were missing and its margins were pale and irregular appears to be produced by animal bite and insect. Skull sutures were separated and greyish liquefied brain matter was coming out from skull cavity.

Measurements of the dead body.

- (i) Total length – 55cm
- (ii) Weight – 1340 grams
- (iii) Chest circumference - 30 cm

Fig 1: Photograph showing decomposed male Infant.



On careful examination of dead body, one vertical stab wound of size 4cm x 1.5cm up to peritoneal cavity deep was present in front aspect of abdomen (Refer Fig. 2). Its upper end was 11 cm below tip of right shoulder and its lower end was 4

cm above right anterior superior iliac spine and 3.5 cm right to midline.

On dissection, it cuts skin, soft tissue, muscle, liver, loops of intestine and stomach. Blood mixed clot was present in peritoneal cavity. Margins of the wound were irregular probably due to gnawing effect caused by animal and insect bite. Red colour extravasation of blood is seen in the floor of margin and along the track of the wound (Refer Fig. 3 & 4).

Fig 2: Photograph showing stab wound over abdomen.



Fig 3: Photograph showing extravasation of blood along the track of wound.



No other antemortem injuries were present. The ossification centre appeared on lower end of femur, upper end of tibia but not in capitate bone.

Scar of fallen umbilical cord was identified and age of infant was given between 10 days to 2 month. Cause of death in this case was given as shock and hemorrhage as a result of stab injury over abdomen caused by sharp and penetrating object, antemortem in nature. Time since death was opined between 3-5 days before starting postmortem examination.

3. Discussion

In India, there is no distinction in law between infanticide and murder, such as exists in many Western countries. **The English Infanticide Act, 1938, Section 1, provides:** Where a woman by any willful act or omission causes the death of her child, the child being under the age of 12 months, but at the time of act or omission the balance of her mind was disturbed by reason of her not having fully recovered from the effect of giving birth to the child or by reason of effect of lactation consequent upon the birth of the child, then, notwithstanding that the circumstances were such that but for this act, the offence would have amounted to murder, she shall be guilty of felony of infanticide and may for such offence be dealt with and punished as if she had been guilty of the offence of manslaughter of the child. This Act tells us about the balance of mind which was disturbed at the time of committing the act.⁵

Law presumes that every newborn child found dead was born dead until the contrary is proved.⁶ Whether the crime is to be treated on the lines of manslaughter (as in England) or on the lines of murder (as in India), certain facts have to be established by a doctor such as whether the child was capable of survival after birth or the child was born alive and had a separate existence outside mother's body or whether the death was caused by willful act or omission.

Infanticide must be differentiated from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) which is the sudden death of any infant or young child which is unexpected by history and in whom a thorough necropsy fails to demonstrate an adequate cause of death.⁷ Infanticide may be misdiagnosed as SIDS due to lack of evidence. Meadow's dictum states that "One sudden infant death is a tragedy, two is suspicious and three is murder, until proved otherwise".⁸

4. Conclusion

Most often infants are killed by suffocation or poisoning sometime by abandonment but infanticide by means of stab injury is very rare. This case report highlights the vigilance of Forensic Medicine expert and importances of meticulous autopsy which help us in identifying the cause and manner of death in such decomposed body, where injury present in the dead body should be differentiate with postmortem artefact. It also emphasizes the crime of infanticide as a window into the social dynamics of the private and domestic space, where love, lust, incest, ignorance, poverty, and rape, sometimes resulted in many unwanted and illegitimate pregnancies. Micro-histories or even no history are there such as in our case, careful and thorough autopsy should be conducted so that proper justice is given to innocent.

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