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Disposal of the Body after Murder Committed by Juvenile Offender

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ABSTRACT

Disposal of the body by setting in concrete or sealing with bricks represents relatively rare form of corpse hiding after crime. We report a unique case of juvenile offender who killed his father and subsequently concealed the body. The victim had been reported missing by members of his family but the body was not found until 12 months later. Hidden in concrete body was well preserved allowing not only identification of the victim but also determination of the cause of death.

Key words: juvenile offender, disposal of the body, murder, stabbing

Introduction

Cases of corpse disposal (dumping) after committed homicide represent relatively rare form of hiding of the body, and it is often associated with »matters involving a missing person« at first¹⁻³. Offenders attempt to conceal their crime by dismemberment the victim's body, burning, dumping in water, feeding to animals and very rarely setting in concrete or immuring with bricks^{4,5}. Since each case is characterized by a distinct features it represents particular interest to the forensic experts⁶. Here, we describe an interesting case of dumping performed by juvenile offender who killed his father and subsequently concealed the body behind the house that was under construction.

Case Report

The body of 46-year-old man was discovered in the courtyard behind the house 12 months after his disappearance. Prior to corpse finding, his wife noticed the odor while she was cleaning the part of the yard. She thought that odor originates from dead animals, but she decided not to act alone, in addition she called police. When police came on the crime scene along with the forensic medicine specialist concrete block 1.98 × 0.73 m in diameter was dig, and body wrapped in nylons was discovered (Figure 1). The body was identified as her husband who was reported missing 12 months before. After additional investigations, the police confronted the son of

the victim with the suspicion that he had killed his father. Thereupon 17-years-old son confessed that he had committed murder, and dumped the body in the ditch behind the house. On the day when crime was committed, he was alone in the house with his father. During afternoon his father, who had history of alcohol abuse, came home from the work and physically attacked him. In quarrel the son spotted the pocketknife that was lying on the kitchen table, grabbed it and stabbed his father in the back several times. When the son saw his father was dead, from the basement he took two large nylons wrapped the body in it and tied it up with wire and electric cords. He dragged the body to the yard where he laid it in a 0.40 m deep ditch. To conceal the corpse he covered it with concrete. Psychological and psychiatric experts have agreed that boy was suffering from emotional maltreatment. He was molested child, and from the age of 4 his father was daily beating and punishing him with no obvious reason. The corpse was in a state of decomposition and partial saponification. Identification was possible by means of physical characteristics and dental status. On the external examination stab wounds were discovered to the posterior side of the body (Figure 2). The wounds were positioned from the upper border of the scapulae until lumbar region. Thirteen of them were recovered on the left side of the back, while seven were on the right side. The stab wounds were approximately 1.5 cm in length and were gaping approximately 0.5 cm.



Fig. 1. Wrapped body found in the ditch upon removal of concrete block.



Fig. 3. Pocketknife described as murder weapon found encased with the dumped body.



Fig. 2. Widely spread multiple stab wounds of the back.

Their direction varied from oblique to longitudinal and transversal. The internal examination revealed that injuries associated with stab wounds caused damage of the lungs and major blood vessels. The total length of the incision tracks was measured from approximately 8 to 10 cm. The cause of death was injury attributed to the severe hemorrhage due to multiple stab wounds. During autopsy, wrapped in the nylon next to the victim, pocketknife was found (Figure 3). It measured 23.50 cm in length, with a retractable blade of a 10.50 cm. The autopsy report concluded that pocketknife was consistent with the fatal stab wounds.

Discussion

The case we report represents outcome of domestic violence triggered by a physical and emotional child abuse. Juvenile offender, during an argument, killed his father. We report on unique case of dumping since in searching the literature we failed to find cases of body disposal performed by juvenile offenders. The victim, his father was conflicted person with history of heavy alcohol abuse. He was reported missing by his wife, but it raised no attention since his habit of leaving the family was known to police even before. In cases of body disposal offense was predominantly performed by strangulation or blunt force trauma. On the contrary, in our case stabbing was performed. It is known that stab wound can be made with minimal force so it appeared not to be a problem for

the boy. Once the blade has penetrated clothing and skin, little force was required to follow through and create a deep knife wound. The motive of murder in cases relevant to this issue was greed or domestic quarrel that is consistent with our case. The fact that bodies concealed in the concrete display a better state of preservation than those covered with wood or thrown into water is important for the solving the murder case⁴. The state of preservation allows not only identification of the victim but also determination of the cause of death even after a prolonged post-mortem interval⁷. Moreover, the tools used for committing the offense are usually encased together with the dumped body⁸. In our case the pocketknife described as a murder instrument was found along with the victim. In the literature cases of well-preserved bodies found in plastic bags after period of 3 and 10 years, as a result of saprogenic preservation are described^{9–11}. Although the air supply required for the multiplication of aerobic putrefies is impeded in the concrete, in our case the body was hidden in the courtyard therefore it was found in a state of partial decomposition and saponification^{12–15}. Due to prolonged decomposition discovering of the body was postponed. Twelve months after the murder the wife noticed odor while cleaning the yard, called the police and offense was recovered. The son confessed that he decided to hide the body to avoid troubles with the authorities. In addition, dumping was the most suitable way since house was under construction and lots of building materials was on his disposal. Moreover, he was trained how to mix concrete, because he was helping his father in building work.

In our case, the perpetrator confessed the crime that he committed a year before, while he was 17 years old. According to the Croatian Penal Code, the offender who is younger than 18 years is not fully competent to understand the consequences of his actions. Therefore, he was convicted of murder to two years imprisonment, according to the Penal Code for minors.

During enquiry, the psychiatric expertise determined that the defendant was mentally competent at the time of crime. Psychological testing showed that he was of average intelligence, and did not operate under the diminished responsibility. He had no criminal record before.

Conclusion

The case presented show the importance of detailed crime investigation, especially, if the presumed course of events is ambiguous. A close operation between police

and medical experts is essential to ensure fast and accurate elucidation of the case.

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