

SOUND TRACK ON A WRONG 'TRACK': A CASE OF RAILWAY ACCIDENT

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Abstract

Railway injuries are common in developing countries. They may be accidental or suicidal in nature. People are known to walk along the railway tracks, sometimes listening to music or as an adventure resulting in death. This is a case report of a railway accident which was mistaken for a homicide with political motives. A visit to scene of occurrence helped in correlating the injuries and concluding the manner of death.

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Introduction

Railway accidents are common in developing countries. Trains are known for their size, weight, and speed. While these characteristics are most often note-worthy pluses of the large transportation vehicles, when it comes to accidents the same list of descriptors will often be used as an account of notable detriments. Perhaps the most at-risk group of persons involved in train collisions is that of pedestrians. This is primarily because individuals stand little chance of survival against a train going full speed down the tracks. It is a common assumption that the pedestrians who were hit and killed or injured by a train were purposeful acts of suicide. However, this is not always the case. In fact, many such incidents are purely the result of an accident¹.

India carries one of the largest railway networks in the world and accidents from rail

operations may not be unexpected. The nature of railway injuries depends upon the position of the victim when struck². 108 victims have died in railway accidents in and around Mysore city in 2011, and 4852 victims died and 5696 victims suffered injuries in India in 2008-2009 due to railway accidents³.

Case report

The deceased was an engineering graduate, his body was found near a railway track inside Mysore city limits. His clothes had dirt and grease stains and were soaked in blood. He was a relative of a local politician and hence the local television media reported this as a case of homicide. We obtained a history from the relatives that he had a habit of walking in the railway track listening to music via earphone every morning. On post-mortem examination following findings was observed.

External examination

Following injuries were noted.

Laceration 6cm X 4 cm X bone depth present over right buttock. Impact abrasion 40cm X 15 cm present over right side of back (Fig 1).

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C shaped laceration 12cm X 4cm X bone depth present over forehead with exposed fractured fragments of frontal bone. Deformity of the left arm. Multiple grazed abrasions present all over the body.

Internal examination

Fracture of right 2nd to 10th ribs on posterior aspect. Fracture of upper end of left humerus. Transcapsular laceration of liver. Laceration of right kidney. 500 ml of blood in peritoneal cavity. Depressed comminuted fracture of frontal bone 8cm X 5 cm with multiple displaced fracture segments. Fissured fracture of anterior and middle cranial fossa measuring 12cm with displaced fracture fragments. Diffuse subdural and subarachnoid haemorrhage.

Discussion

In this case cause of death and identity were not an issue, but manner of death was which was portrayed by the media as homicide. To interpret the injuries and reconstruct the events we visited the scene of occurrence retrospectively and also procured the scene photographs from the police.

Body was found at a distance of 20 feet from the railway track. An ear phone was found lying besides the railway track. Blood stains were noted at the site where body was found. The impact abrasion present in the back was correlated by comparing with the height of the buffer in type of railway loco- motor which runs through the same route on a man of same height



Figure 1

Figure-1: Impact abrasion



Figure 2

Figure-2: Height of buffer

as that of deceased. It exactly correlated the site of impact (Fig 2).

The injuries over his forehead, underlying fractures and grazed abrasions over the body were secondary injuries caused following the primary impact when the person was thrown away.

The cause of death was given as haemorrhage and shock.

And with these observations and scientific evaluations the probable manner of death would have been an accident rather than homicide.

The manner of death in railway related fatalities can be accidental, suicidal or homicidal. When a person walks on the track, primary injuries are seen on the front or back due to contact with protruding parts of the engine⁴. A study done on railway fatalities in central India showed accidental railway fatality was the most common accounting to 91.3 % of railway fatalities, and 89.5 % were male. 70% of cases were from urban areas⁵.

Conclusion

Investigation must be done in a case of railway accident to rule out any foul play. Role of a Forensic Medicine expert is to interpret the injuries and deduce the circumstances under which these were caused.

Prevention of such mishaps in future can be done by making the public aware of railway rules and regulations like section 147 of Indian Railways act which deals with trespass and refusal to desist from trespass with a penalty of imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months or with fine which may extend to one

thousand rupees or with both⁶, and making railway crossings, over/under bridges compulsory for human movement. Use of earphones and music in pedestrians must be discouraged.

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