

Title : "Self-embedding" of foreign bodies: Medico-legal significance

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Self-embedding is a form of self-injury where foreign objects are inserted underneath the skin. Though it has been reported in the scientific literature, it has not been reported in the forensic literature.

In 2010, a housemaid returned from working in Saudi Arabia with 24 nails and needles in her body. After arrival, she had not mentioned that she had been tortured by her employer.

In 2013, another Sri Lankan housemaid from the Middle East was admitted to hospital with needles in her body; she alleged that needles were inserted by her employer. X-rays showed 4 needles in her face and limbs, placed parallel to the skin surface. She confessed to self-embedding these needles in a way to escape from her employer. There are cases of self-inflicted injuries in people with Munchausen syndrome, where people simulate trauma or illness in order to draw attention.

In conclusion, the medico-legal significance of "self-embedding" of foreign objects is a new concept where the forensic physician has to exclude 'torture' by a third party before ascertaining the concept of self-harm. Multiple foreign objects, found parallel to the body surface, at accessible sites and accessible directions (to push foreign bodies between the thumb and the index finger) favours self-embedding.

Key words: self-embedding of needles, Munchausen syndrome, torture.