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CAN A JUDICIAL MEDICAL OFFICER (JMO) BE SATISFIED WITH THE WORK HE PERFORMS PERTAINING TO HOMICIDES?

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Judicial medical officers are called upon to perform judicial post mortem examinations on cases of suspected homicide. At times the alleged assailant/s is/are also examined by the JMO. Visiting the scene, collection of trace materials, obtaining photographs, identification of the body, obtaining a relevant history and finally performing the judicial autopsy are a few straight forward medico-legal duties of a JMO. The JMO's prime responsibility usually ends at giving expert evidence in a court of law pertaining to the homicide. JMOs also tend to gather information regarding the proximate cause for the perpetrator's violent behaviour and other contributory factors for the incidence. This history taking is often very superficial and the JMOs usually prefer to rely upon the story brought up by the police. With the following illustrations, the authors wish to discuss the mere causes for homicides disclosed by the relatives during the investigations. Yet, the authors also emphasize the importance of having a deeper understanding of the multiple causes and risk factors for homicidal acts in general.

Case 1: A 65 year old retired teacher was found dead in her bathroom. The police opined that she might have fallen accidentally or as a result of a natural illness. The postmortem examination though commenced as an accidental or natural death, demonstrated injuries around the neck, proving the homicidal nature of the event.

Case 2: A heavy alcoholic who was also a cannabis addict was murdered by a manual labourer working in a nearby quarry.

Case 3: A middle-aged male suffering from morbid jealousy and paranoid personality disorder killed his de-facto partner.

The cause of death and other medico-legal issues were able to be sorted out by conducting a post mortem examination in above three cases. Yet, the authors feel that there is a lacuna of understanding as to the investigation of the social, psychological and emotional aspects of the assailants and family members who are involved with homicides. This emphasizes the need for "psychological autopsy" and a deeper understanding of criminal psychology for prevention of such incidences in future, in addition to the established criminal justice system in the country.

Keywords: *homicides, violence, psychological autopsy, personal development, JMO*