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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

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NEW BOOKS ON SUICIDOLOGY, FORENSIC SCIENCES AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide, First Edition, 2000 *Edited by* Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, Baffins Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 1UD, England ; ISBN 0-471-98367-5; Pages 755; Hardcover, Price not mentioned

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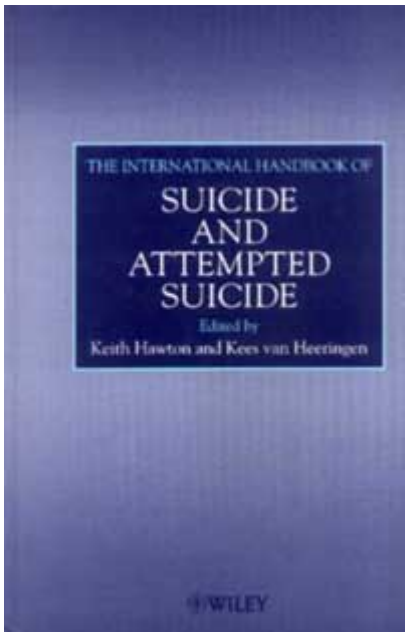

Suicide and parasuicide have attracted much attention lately, especially in the western world. This has resulted in a mass of research data on suicide. And it has poured in from such diverse fields as

sociology, psychology, genetics, human biology, forensic medicine and so on. This vast mass of data remains meaningless until and unless it is systematically organized and categorized in such a way that it can easily be assimilated by professionals devoted to the field of suicidology.

The book under review attempts to do just that. The editors are leaders in their field. Keith Hawton is a Professor of Psychiatry at Oxford University and is the Director of the Center for Suicide Research at Oxford University Department of Psychiatry. Kees van Heeringen is Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Gent, Chef de Clinique at the Department of Psychiatry of the University Hospital of Gent, and Director of the Unit for Suicide Research at the University of Gent, Belgium.

The Book has been divided in four sections, each dealing with a particular angle. Part I deals mainly with the causes of suicide. It begins with three chapters in which epidemiology of suicide is dealt with. Biology and psychology of suicidal behavior is dealt with in next two chapters. Other areas which are dealt with in this part are sociology and genetics of suicidal behavior.



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Part II is dedicated to the description of populations and circumstances in which suicidal behavior may occur. We read about suicidal behavior in children, old people, even pregnant women. There are chapters on suicide and violence and suicide among psychiatric patients.

Part III is mainly directed towards the treatment of suicidal behavior. Among the many approaches discussed are pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy and multidisciplinary approaches to the management of suicidal behavior. And finally Part IV attempts to explore how suicide can be prevented.

The book caters to an International market, dealing with the problem of suicide all over the Globe. The spectrum of suicide is somewhat different in different parts of the world. The schism is more apparent when we compare and contrast the developing with the developed world. The editors have been wise enough to invite a number of contributors from all over the globe so that a correct picture of this problem from all possible angles be investigated.

All in all, it is an extremely well researched book. It would definitely serve as a good reference work for specialists in the field of psychology, psychiatry, sociology and forensic medicine. The book can be heartily recommended for workers in these fields.

Purchase the book by clicking here

Encyclopedia of Forensic Sciences, August 2000 *Edited by* Jay A. Siegel, Pekka J. Saukko, Geoffrey C. Knupfer
Academic Press, Harcourt Place, 32 Jamestown Road, London NW1 7BY, UK ; ISBN 0-12-227215-3; Library of Congress Catalog Number: 99-67362; 3 Volumes, Pages 1,440; Hardcover, Price $925.00. Available online too.
Volume 1-Accident Investigation to Criminalistics: Pages 1-478
Volume 2-Deoxyribonucleic Acid to Forgery and Fraud: Pages 479-990
Volume 3-Geographical Profiling to Wood Analysis: Pages 991-1440
Glossary, Major Forensic Science Journals and Index follow text of each volume.

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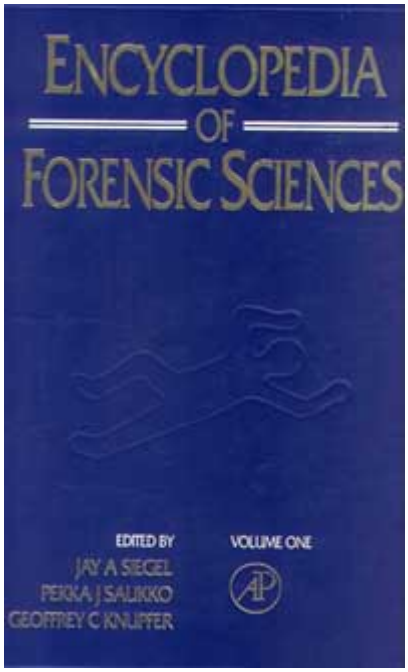


Forensic science has very broadly been defined as the application of laws of nature to the laws of man. This includes almost everything from archaeology to zoology within the realm of forensic science.

Inclusion of subjects like mathematics, statistics, engineering and economics make it really an all-encompassing subject. A need has long been felt by almost everyone working in the field for an authoritative reference text where he could find everything; something like Encyclopedia Britannica of Forensic Science.

The current encyclopedia, written by 186 contributors, and spanning 3 volumes admirably fulfils this need. So impressive and all-encompassing is this work, that it might be called "Encyclopedia Forensicana" on the lines of Britannica. Currently we have two broad classes of forensic books available in the market. Either they tend to cover too many topics (more range), or only some topics in more detail (more depth). Obviously one of the two is sacrificed at the altar of other. The current encyclopedia is a happy blend between the two; it tends to cover both range and depth, and therein

lies its main value. Almost everything of note appears here - and in reasonable depth. All normal entries are of course included, but try finding exotic terms in it and the chances are you would still be right there. Written in an A-Z style, this encyclopedia tries to give it all.

Entries of three main types appear in the text: Single Article entry, Multiple Article entry and - what the editors have preferred to call - Dummy entries. Single Article entries comprise of just one article. Examples include "Cheiloscopy", "Computer Crime", "Criminal Profiling", "Dust", "Ear Prints", "Entomology", and "Internet Crime". A substantial number of entries are "Multiple Article entries". These are the topics which are much wider in scope and a single article could not do justice to them. For instance if you are looking for information on "History", you would find not just one but as many as five different articles, each written by a different author (in some cases however, two or more articles in a single entry are written by a single author). In the current case you would find articles entitled "Crime-Scene Sciences", "Fingerprint Sciences", "Forensic Anthropology in the USA", "Forensic Medicine" and "Forensic Sciences" - each article written by a different specialist and spanning about 5-6 pages each. Although the editors do not call them as such, these could be called "secondary entries".

A typical "Single Article" entry. Click to enlarge.



ANTHROPOMETRY

Primary and secondary entries can be differentiated by their fonts. All Primary entries are COMPLETELY CAPITALIZED and are in a bigger font, while the secondary entries are in Lower Case and in a smaller font. They are separated by a slash. Every page gives them as Headers. So if you open one of the volumes at random and find "ANTHROPOLOGY/Archaeology" as header, you know you are currently on an article entitled "Archaeology", which appears under the Primary Entry "ANTHROPOLOGY". You might get curious and want to see what other articles are dealt with in this topic. You can simply leaf back the pages till you come to the main article, and get the complete list (which by the way is very extensive and covers as many as 12 different articles!)

In some topics you would even find "tertiary entries". For instance if you browse through the topic "Hair", you would find this entry again with five different articles entitled "Overview", "Comparison", "Deoxyribonucleic Acid Typing"," Hair Transfer, Persistence and Recovery" and "Identification of Human and Animal Hair". However the secondary entry "Comparison" is further subdivided into three tertiary entries - "Comparison: Microscopic", "Comparison: Other" and

"Comparison: Significance of Hair Evidence". This sort of treatment really takes the reader into great depth.

"Dummy Entries" is an interesting innovation incorporated by the editors. An example would make it clear. The entry "Document Analysis" is a multiple article entry having five different articles within it (Analytical methods, Document dating, Forgery/Counterfeits, Handwriting and Ink Analysis). Since Handwriting has been dealt with under this entry, this has not been dealt with separately (under the heading "H"). So what happens if a reader is trying to look up information on Handwriting? In a normal encyclopedia, he would go to the section "H", and find that the topic simply is missing. He might keep the encyclopedia aside, thinking the topic has not been dealt with. However this does not happen here. The reader finds a dummy entry like this: "HANDWRITING see DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: Handwriting". This tells him that the topic "Handwriting" has been dealt with as a secondary entry in the multiple entry article DOCUMENT ANALYSIS. Sometimes synonyms have been dealt with in similar fashion. A reader trying to find information on Cheiloscopy may decide to look up "Lip prints" instead. Since the topic has been dealt with under the heading "Cheiloscopy", he gets a dummy entry saying like this: "LIP PRINT see CHEILOSCOPY". This is really quite an easy and painless method of wading through this vast mass of literature.

A typical "Multiple Article" entry. Click to enlarge.



C

Capillary Electrophoresis and Analytical Techniques

Cars and Accident Investigation

CAUSES OF DEATH

Contents

Overview

Asphyxic Deaths

Blunt Injury

Burns and Scalds

Postmortem Changes

Scene of Death

Sharp Injury

Sudden Natural Death

Systemic Response to Trauma

Traffic Deaths

Overview

Introduction

Taking into consideration that this encyclopedia has been written by as many as 186 different contributors, editors have done a commendable job combining and assimilating information without internal inconsistencies, which sometimes become inherent in a work of such nature. How long does a sperm remain motile in vagina? Ask ten different experts, and you are likely to have ten different answers (I did that once and got answers ranging from 4 hours to 17 days!). So if you ask one author to write on spermatozoa, another on sexual assaults, another on necrophilia and still another on viability of cells after death, you are likely to get four different values for the viability on spermatozoa, and many times these get incorporated in the book under different sections, confusing the reader completely. The editors of this encyclopedia have carefully avoided inconsistencies of this nature.

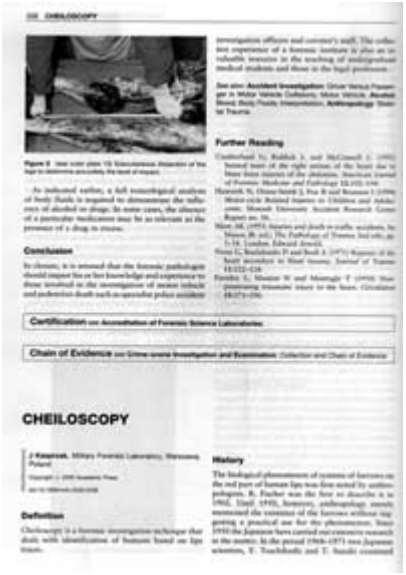
In an encyclopedia of this magnitude, one of the key features has to be some reliable, authentic and foolproof system of finding information. How for instance do you find information on "Tire marks" or "Blood spatter interpretation"? The encyclopedia provides you not with one, but several different

ways of finding such information. The first and quite logical way is to look for this information straightaway as you would in a dictionary. So if you are trying to dig up information on "Tire marks", pick up the 3rd Volume (It starts from "G" and goes till end), leaf through the pages till you reach the letter "T" and then look for your topic. In this particular case, you first reach the entry "Time Since Death"; you leaf through it further and find the next entry entitled "Tool marks". So is the information "Tire marks" missing? Quite possibly no. Try the second method and turn to index. And lo! You get the entry "tire marks/impressions 1228-1235". Turn to these pages and what do you find? It is a Secondary article under the primary entry "Pattern Evidence". The benefit? You not only get to read "Tire marks", which you intended to begin with, but such additional entries as "Plastic bag striations", "Bare footprint marks", Footwear marks", "Serial numbers", "Shotgun ammunition on a Target" and "Tools". A person who is interested in "Tire marks" would quite possibly be interested in these additional entries too.

There is a third system of finding information too - that of "Cross references". Every article in the Encyclopedia has been extensively cross-referenced. These cross references appear at the end of each article, and are provided at three levels - to indicate if a topic is discussed in greater detail elsewhere, to draw the reader's attention to parallel discussion in other articles and to indicate material that broadens the discussion.

So much so regarding the methods of finding information. But what about the quality of information itself. In this reviewer's opinion, the standard of writing is very high. The information is up-to-date and without any factual errors. Care is taken to impart information to the non-initiated without injuring his self-pride. I don't know much about spectroscopy, especially as it is applied in forensic sciences, and I wanted to give it a try. What do I see? This entry is given as a secondary article under the primary entry "ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES". So first of all, I get to know other related techniques such as "Capillary Electrophoresis in Forensic Biology", "Capillary electrophoresis in Forensic Science", "Gas Chromatography", "Hyphenated Chromatographic-Spectroscopic Techniques", "Mass Spectrometry", "Microscopy", "Presumptive Chemical Tests" and "Separation Techniques". I decide that I would return to these later, but first let me see what the encyclopedia has to offer on Spectroscopy. And I find a neat article "Spectroscopy: Basic Principles" with a fine line diagram of the representation of a ray of electromagnetic radiation traveling through space on the opening page itself. I get encouraged, as this is something I do know, and decide to go through the article. In half an hour I am through with the article and am armed with enough knowledge to wade through the main article which I had intended to begin with. This article incidentally is entitled "Spectroscopic Techniques". I ask my wife to make a cup of coffee for me, and by the time she brings me one, I am already through the first two pages quite painlessly. I would complete the whole article in about one hour time.

A typical page with a photograph. Some "dummy" entries can also be seen. Click to enlarge.



CHEILOSCOPY

Most of the articles are accompanied by crisp line diagrams, tables and black and white pictures. The pictures are of a high standard, and reproduction is very good. The tables are really very informative. While thumbing through the book, I came across several tables which attracted my attention and I spent quite some time just looking at them, as they were so informative. Take as an example the table on congener contents of alcoholic beverages given on page 95 of Volume 1. It takes 21 alcoholic beverages (such as Rosé wine, French cognac, Blended Scotch, Canadian Whisky and so on) and gives the levels of 7 congeners (Methanol, Propan-1-ol, Butan-1-ol, Butan-2-ol, Isobutanol, 2-Methylbutan-1-ol and 3-Methylbutan-1-ol) in each of them: an astonishing total of 147 entries appearing in this single table itself. I am quite intrigued by some of the figures and dwell deeply. I find that Williams, Cherry brandy and Plum brandy have extremely high concentrations of methanol in them, a fact which I never knew before. I dwell further into the table and keep getting surprised at many new revelations, till my wife tells me alcohol is no good for me, and would I be interested in going out for a walk with her (she is a chemist who had been poring over the book over the back of my shoulders, and I suspect she had extracted her information before she asked me for that). Reluctantly I keep aside the book, but the first thing I do on coming back is to get back to that intriguing table.

There are color plates in each volume (about 15-20 in each; 48 in all). As an additional feature, their Black and White counterparts are given in appropriate sections, with instructions to see the color plates as well. These color plates are also quite revealing.

The value of the encyclopedia? Quite simply and plainly put - "Extremely valuable". This encyclopedia would be useful to researchers, students, professors - indeed everyone who is connected with forensic science in any way. In this reviewer's opinion, this encyclopedia should adorn the bookshelves of every person connected with forensic science. Highly recommended reading.

The Forensic Evaluation of Traumatic Brain Injury - A Handbook for Clinicians and Attorneys, First Edition, 2000 *Edited by* Gregory J. Murrey
CRC Press LLC, 2000 N.W. Corporate Blvd., Boca Raton, Florida 33431; ISBN 0-8493-2035-6; Pages 168; Hardcover, Price $99.95

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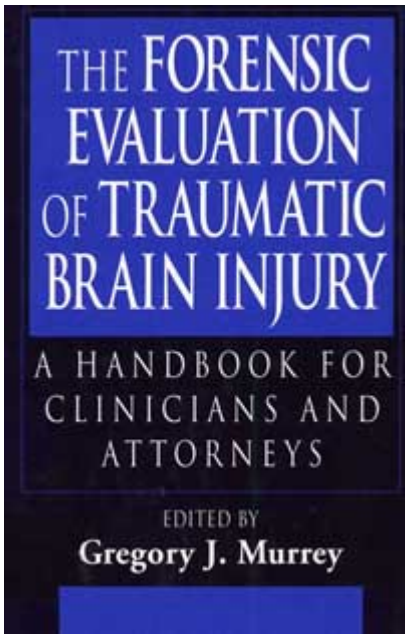

Trauma has become a part and parcel of modern life. It is perhaps the cost which we pay for modernization. Vehicular accidents, Industrial accidents, fall from heights, scuffles, all cause physical trauma. Often it is not only necessary to treat the injury, but to assess its extent for various legal purposes. Compensation in industrial and vehicular accidents may depend entirely on the surgeon's estimate of the degree of physical trauma.

We have an umpteen number of books dealing with various aspects of trauma, but probably none of the extant books cater to the legal problems, especially those concerning assessment of trauma for legal purposes. The book under review attempts to provide the clinician with guidelines on how to assess Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

The book opens straightaway by telling us the criteria for assessing TBI. These are given in the first chapter itself. Four criteria are suggested. These are (i) The occurrence and period of loss of consciousness (ii) the degree of loss of memory for events immediately before and/or after the accident (iii) the degree and duration of alteration in mental state at the time of the accident and/or (iv) the degree of focal neurological deficits, which may or may not be transient. The rest of the chapter explains how each of these criteria is assessed.

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The second chapter is on Forensic Neurological assessment of TBI. It gives us the various elements of forensic neurologic diagnosis of TBI, and how the neurologic examination must be done for forensic analysis. The third chapter introduces to us tests like Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt test, The Wechsler-Adult Intelligence Scale, The Comprehensive Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Evaluation and so on. This chapter is on Forensic Neuropsychological evaluation.

There are chapters on the Forensic examiners as an expert witness, which give important tips on how best to face the courts. There are three valuable appendices, out of which Appendix A quite informative. It gives us a model outline for the assessment of mild Traumatic Brain Injury.

Perhaps the value of the book lies in its innovativeness and a fresh approach on the subject of TBI. The author laments in the preface that he could not find a single text with a concise overview of the forensic assessment process and the issues in TBI, and this spurred him on to write the book. He had discovered - as all of us do at some point in our professional lives - that to be comfortable and confident in courts, it was important to be knowledgeable in the entire assessment of TBI. This reviewer believes that after reading this book, most doctors dealing with brain trauma cases, would be better able to evaluate the degree of brain trauma for forensic purposes, and would be able to deal with courts more confidently.

Request a PDF file of this review by clicking here. (If your screen resolution can not be increased, or if printing this page is giving you problems like overlapping of graphics and/or tables etc, you can take a proper printout from a pdf file. You will need an Acrobat Reader though.)