

Body disposal methods in transgender and gender non-conforming homicides: Forensic geomorphology consideration for investigators

Study analysing 298 US transgender and gender non-conforming homicides, focusing on geoforensic themes, body disposal methods, taphonomic factors, antemortem injuries and post-mortem suspect decisions.

Key details

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| Police region | North West |
| Level of research | Professional/work based |
| Project start date | November 2024 |
| Date due for completion | May 2025 |

Research context

This study examines 298 US transgender and gender non-conforming homicides between 1 January 2013 and 1 January 2023, with the aim of identifying geoforensic themes that are relevant for forensic and investigative purposes. The study focuses on identifying forensic patterns that may aid investigators, such as the commonalities in crime scene locations, disposal methods and patterns of concealment.

By analysing these elements, the study aims to offer valuable insights into how bodies are disposed of, the types of injuries sustained, and how post-mortem actions taken by perpetrators may

influence the investigation. Understanding these patterns can help refine investigative strategies and forensic protocols, especially in cases involving vulnerable populations such as transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.

While the primary focus is on US-based cases, the study's findings may have broader implications, providing critical forensic insights that could assist in similar future homicides in other countries, such as the UK. Many of the themes identified in US cases may have international relevance, especially in terms of improving forensic methods, understanding motivations, and recognising patterns of violence targeting transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the development of more effective investigative approaches and enhance the understanding of homicide trends in this marginalised community.

Research methodology

For this study 27,151 published online open-source media reports of US transgender homicides were examined alongside official data sources (that is, government reports, police reports, post-mortem reports, prison records and so forth) over the course of several years. Official homicide victimisation data came from the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR), the most used official data source for homicide data in the US, alongside yearly Uniformed Crime Reports (UCR).

To systematically analyse the data, content analysis was employed to code case information into various categories, including the victim's name, self-identified transgender status, victimology (for example, occupation, risk factors, and unique case specifics), and details of the crime such as the date and location of the homicide, body recovery site and homicide discovery date. Additional categories included the severity and type of injuries, the weapon(s) used, the number of suspects, arrests and convictions, as well as the current case status (solved or unsolved). The study also examined the motives behind the homicide and any relationships between the victim and the offender.

Following data coding, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring forensic patterns and trends across cases. This analysis aimed to uncover insights into body disposal methods, concealment techniques, taphonomic factors (and injury patterns, with the goal of improving investigative approaches. By examining these patterns, the study sought to contribute to a better understanding of how forensic evidence can aid in solving transgender homicides and highlighting potential vulnerabilities specific to the transgender community. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform both

07/09/2025

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forensic practitioners and law enforcement about common themes and emerging patterns in these tragic and often underreported crimes.