

Bodily Injury in Victims of Violence: Contemporary Medico Legal Challenges

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Abstract

Bodily harm resulting from violence represents a major challenge in forensic medicine, with significant medical, legal, and social implications. Victims present a variety of physical, psychological or sexual injuries, requiring accurate and rigorous documentation. Forensic assessment relies on standardized protocols, clinical and complementary examinations, and a multidisciplinary approach involving clinicians, forensic experts, and legal professionals. This review synthesizes current knowledge on the types of violence, quality of forensic examinations, international standards, and challenges related to legal compensation for victims. It emphasizes the importance of inter-expert consistency, continuous training, and alignment with national and European legal frameworks. In conclusion, evaluating bodily harm caused by violence requires updated expertise, harmonized standards, and close collaboration between the medical and judicial systems to ensure reliable reports and fair compensation for victims.

Keywords: Bodily harm; Forensic medicine; Violence; Forensic assessment; Compensation; Medico-legal standards

Introduction

Bodily injury resulting from violence represents a major challenge in contemporary forensic medicine. Victims may present with a wide spectrum of injuries, ranging from blunt force trauma to sharp force and firearm-related injuries, as well as sequelae associated with sexual and psychological violence [1,2,3]. These injuries require accurate and rigorous documentation in order to properly assess the medical and legal impact of the assaults [4,5]. Forensic medicine plays a central role not only in the description of injuries but also in the assessment of harm and in guiding judicial proceedings. The quality of forensic examinations and the resulting medico-legal reports has a direct impact on victim compensation and reparation [6,7]. Contemporary challenges include inter-expert variability, lack of harmonization of assessment protocols, and the complexity of evaluating physical and sexual injuries [8]. The adoption of international standards and the development of multidisciplinary approaches are essential to ensure the reliability of forensic expertise and fairness in the compensation of harm. This review aims to synthesize current knowledge on the medico-legal

assessment of victims of violence and to propose strategies to improve practices and harmonize standards.

Typology of Violence and Bodily Injury

Violence resulting in bodily injury can present in various forms. It includes physical violence, such as injuries caused by blunt objects or sharp instruments, as well as sexual violence and indirect psychological harm. Studies show that the majority of victims experience multiple types of traumas simultaneously, which complicates forensic evaluation [1-3]. The main types of observed violence, their clinical manifestations, and the populations affected are summarized in (Table 1).

Physical violence

Blunt and sharp force injuries are the most frequently observed in forensic medicine units. Ozdemir emphasizes the importance of systematic and detailed documentation for each case to support judicial proceedings [1]. Eze and Ojifinni highlight the challenges related to evaluating sharp force injuries, particularly in determining the nature, severity, and mechanism of trauma [2].

Received date: 19 January 2026; **Accepted date:** 22 January 2026; **Published date:** 29 January 2026

Citation: Fourati H, Cherif Elkhail M, Shimi M (2026) Bodily Injury in Victims of Violence: Contemporary Medico Legal Challenges. SunText Rev Med Clin Res 7(2): 248.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51737/2766-4813.2026.148>

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Sexual and psychological violence

Sexual violence often leads to both physical and long-term psychological sequelae. Haroual demonstrate that the forensic examination of children who are victims of physical and sexual violence requires a multidisciplinary approach involving pediatricians, psychologists, and forensic experts [3]. The accuracy of reports and inter-expert consistency are essential to ensure the legal redress of victims [4,6].

Documentation and reliability of examinations

Inter-clinician and inter-expert variability remain a major challenge. Walz demonstrated that examinations conducted by specialized experts provide more detailed and reliable reports, thereby enhancing the validity of judicial procedures [4]. Bardaa also emphasize that training and the standardization of protocols help reduce this variability [5].

Evaluation and compensation

The assessment of bodily harm, particularly in cases of sexual violence, directly influences compensation and legal redress. Pfefferkorn and Kayem show that compensation depends on several factors, including the extent of injuries, age, and socio-legal context [6,7]. Franceschetti stress the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to evaluate properly complex cases and multiple traumas [8].

Forensic Standards and Methodologies

The forensic evaluation of victims of violence relies on standardized protocols and rigorous methodologies to ensure accuracy, consistency, and legal value of examinations [1,4].

Documentation should include a detailed description of injuries, photographs, objective measurements, and, when necessary, complementary examinations such as medical imaging. Key steps in forensic evaluation, including objectives and tools used, are presented in (Table 2).

Standardized protocols

The use of standardized protocols, such as those inspired by the Istanbul Protocol for the medico-legal documentation of torture and ill-treatment, reduces inter-expert variability and ensures a homogeneous evaluation of physical and sexual injuries [8]. These protocols define clear steps for clinical examination, evidence collection, and report writing, thereby improving the reliability of forensic assessments [4].

Multidisciplinary approach

The complexity of cases, particularly in sexual violence or multiple traumas, requires a multidisciplinary approach. Haroual demonstrated that collaboration between forensic physicians, clinicians, and psychologists allows for a more comprehensive assessment of physical and psychological harm [3]. This approach also facilitates referral of victims to appropriate care and psychological support.

Quality and reliability of examinations

Studies indicate that examinations performed by specialized experts yield more detailed and legally reliable reports than those conducted by non-specialized clinicians [4,5]. Continuous training and standardization of procedures are essential to guarantee the quality of forensic assessments and effectively support judicial processes.



Figure 1: Workflow of Forensic Evaluation of Victims of Violence.

Table 1: Typology of Violence and Bodily Injuries.

Type of Violence	Example of Injuries	Frequency / Most Affected Population	Main Consequences	References
Physical – blunt object	Contusions, bruises, hematomas	Adults and children, frequently observed	Pain, reduced mobility, aesthetic sequelae	[1,2]
Physical – sharp object	Lacerations, cuts, stab wounds	Adults	Risk of hemorrhage, permanent scars	[2,3]
Sexual	Genital trauma, sexual abuse, sexual violence	Women and children	Psychological sequelae, long-term trauma	[3,6,7]
Psychological / emotional	Post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression	All age groups	Impact on quality of life, behavioral disorders	[3,8]
Combined violence	Combination of physical and sexual injuries	Adults and children	Complexity in evaluation, multiple sequelae	[3,4,8]

Table 2: Forensic Standards and Methodologies.

Step	Detailed Description	Objective / Importance	Examples / Tools	References
Clinical examination	Inspection, palpation, measurement of injuries	Identify the nature, severity, and age of injuries	Goniometer, measuring ruler, comprehensive examination	[1,4]
Photographic documentation	Digital photos with scale and multiple angles	Provide objective evidence and traceability	Digital camera, reference scale	[4,8]
Complementary imaging	X-ray, CT scan, MRI as needed	Detect internal or bone injuries not visible externally	X-ray, CT-scan	[4]
Collection of testimony and contextual data	Victim statements and third-party observations	Understand the mechanism of the assault	Standardized questionnaires, interviews	[3,8]
Harm assessment	Physical, psychological, and social analysis	Estimate damage for compensation and legal purposes	Pain scales, psychological assessment	[6,7,8]
Forensic report	Structured report with conclusions and recommendations	Provide reliable information for justice and reparation	Standardized template, clinical and forensic summary	[4,6,7]
Multidisciplinary approach	Collaboration between clinicians, forensic physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists	Ensure comprehensive and coherent expertise	Interdisciplinary meetings, joint consultations	[3,8]

Implications for legal redress

The rigor of examinations directly affects the assessment of harm and victim compensation. Pefferkorn and Kayem underline that precise and reliable reports enable a better understanding of the severity of injuries and guide equitable legal redress [6,7]. The typical pathway of a victim through a forensic unit, from initial

examination to report writing and judicial referral, is illustrated in (Figure 1).

Legal Aspects and Compensation

Forensic evaluation of victims of violence is not limited to documenting injuries: it constitutes a central element in assessing

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harm and determining legal redress. The quality and accuracy of examinations directly influence victim compensation and the conduct of judicial proceedings [6,7].

Bodily harm and compensation

The determination of bodily harm is based on the assessment of physical, psychological, and sexual injuries sustained by the victim. Detailed examinations supported by standardized protocols allow experts to provide clear conclusions on the severity of injuries and their impact on victims' daily lives [1,4,8].

Compensation and influencing factors

Pefferkorn show that compensation for victims of sexual violence depends on multiple factors, including the extent of injuries, age, and the legal and social context of the case [6]. Similarly, Kayem highlight that consistency and rigor in medico-legal reports are crucial for ensuring fair and appropriate redress [7].

Importance of forensic methodology

The adoption of international standards and a multidisciplinary approach guarantee the reliability of reports, thereby strengthening their legal value. Experts must combine clinical skills, legal knowledge, and methodological rigor to produce assessments that effectively support judicial proceedings [3,4,8].

Challenges and perspectives

Key challenges include inter-expert variability, lack of harmonization of practices, and the complexity of cases involving multiple types of violence. Continuous practitioner training and implementation of standardized protocols are essential to improve the quality of assessments and ensure equitable redress for all victims [5,8].

Conclusion

Bodily injury related to violence represents a major challenge for contemporary forensic medicine, involving a wide range of physical, sexual, and psychological injuries that require rigorous documentation and a multidisciplinary approach involving clinicians, forensic experts, and legal professionals [1,3,8]. Standardization of protocols and the adoption of validated methodologies, such as those inspired by the Istanbul Protocol, improve inter-expert consistency, report reliability, and accuracy in harm assessment—factors essential for compensation and legal redress [4,8]. Future directions to enhance the quality of forensic assessments include continuous training of practitioners to reduce variability, harmonization of forensic standards at national and international levels, development of multidisciplinary collaborations for complex cases, and integration of

complementary tools such as imaging and specialized analyses to better document injuries and their consequences. These measures aim to ensure thorough and rigorous evaluation, equitable reparation for victims, and contribute to the prevention and reduction of violence in society [9-29].

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