



Lost and found: The identification process of human bodies recovered from the North Sea



Wilma Duijst ^{a, b, d, *}, Charlotte Passier ^c, Bernice Oude Grotebevelsberg ^d, Dorothee de Kat ^c, Marjolijn van Daalen ^e, Roelof Jan Oostra ^f

^a Radboud Academic Medical Center Nijmegen, The Netherlands

^b GGD IJsselland Zwolle, Hanzelaan 351, 8017 JM, Zwolle, The Netherlands

^c GGD IJsselland Zwolle, The Netherlands

^d NFI The Hague, The Netherlands

^e Isala Diaconessenhuis Meppel, The Netherlands

^f Dept. of Anatomy, Embryology and Physiology, Academic Medical Center, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 December 2015

Received in revised form

9 March 2016

Accepted 1 April 2016

Available online 12 April 2016

Keywords:

Identification

'Linking pin'

North sea

Missing persons

International databases

ABSTRACT

Files of the Dutch bureau of missing persons at the North Sea (BVPN) were investigated to analyse the process that led to identification of human bodies recovered from the North Sea between 1980 and 2013. Of the 94 cases that were analysed 41.5% was identified by the family, 23.4% by the use of DNA and 17% by the use of the dental status. The linking pin for the identification was the place where the body was found (14.9%), the general appearance (12.8%), jewellery (11.6%) and media attention (9.6%). In only a few cases the DNA or fingerprint database was used for identification.

When a person is not reported missing the identification is problematic because of the lack of antemortem data. National and international databases of people who have gone missing, can help solve this problem.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd and Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

There is a significant amount of scientific literature about identification methods, but very little articles are written about the process of identification. Identification is a process in which post-mortem and antemortem data are compared to find out whether they belong to the same person. Both body dependent characteristics including stature, weight, fingerprints, dental status and DNA, and body independent characteristics such as clothes, shoes and jewelry are collected.¹ A comparison is only possible when both post- and antemortem data are present.

Since 1980, data of missing persons from the North Sea and bodies recovered from the North Sea have been collected by Bureau

Missing Persons North Sea (Bureau Vermiste Personen Noordzee, BVPN) of the maritime police forces in Den Helder, the Netherlands.

In this paper, the results of the study on the identification process of the bodies recovered from the North Sea is reported. Our research questions were: How were the bodies identified? Which factors contributed to the process that ultimately led to the identification of human bodies included in this study?

1.1. National and international legislation on missing persons

A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established in circumstances that are out of character or context'. This definition suggests that a person may be the subject of a crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.² A person is declared missing when someone else has reported that person missing to the police. Depending on the circumstances a search will be initiated. Finding a missing person is of great importance for the family and friends of the person that has gone missing. When the person missing is younger than 12, older than 70 (and vulnerable), sick or in any other way vulnerable, a search is started immediately. When

* Corresponding author. GGD IJsselland Zwolle, Postbus 1453, 8001 BL, Zwolle, The Netherlands. Tel.: +31 651567235.

E-mail addresses: w.duijst@ggdijsselland.nl, ackenniscentrum.nl@gmail.com (W. Duijst).

it concerns a healthy adult the police starts a search after a longer period of time. The period of time after which a search is started and the reasons for starting a search vary significantly, because there is limited legislation on missing persons in the Netherlands.³ When a crime is suspected a criminal investigation will be initiated and DNA of the person missing can be collected and stored in the DNA database for criminal offences. This database contains DNA of suspects, convicts, crime victims and DNA samples collected on crime scenes.⁴ The comparison of ante- and postmortem samples is executed by the Netherlands Forensic Institute (NFI) in The Hague.⁵ When a person is reported missing without suspicion of a crime, a way to facilitate the identification process is the website on missing persons of the Dutch police. The data gathered per case vary markedly.⁶ The Dutch privacy law (Wet bescherming persoonsgegevens) allows to start a database on missing persons. The DNA of a person that is reported missing can be recorded in a DNA database.

Interpol has an international alert system which is used by the police to exchange information about crimes, criminals and threats to their counterparts around the world: 'the DNA Gateway'. In the DNA Gateway, started in 2002, DNA of offenders, crime scenes, missing persons and unidentified bodies is gathered. In October 2015 the DNA Gateway contained more than 158,000 DNA profiles contributed by 73 member countries. In 2014 the DNA Gateway was used 158 times to post a notice of an unidentified found body (black notice). Although the Interpol system was primarily intended for combating international crime, the system is mainly used for people who are missing without criminal suspicion. Searches of the database by member countries led to 72 international hits during the period from January until October 2015. For missing persons a 'yellow notice' can be placed to file their DNA in a database. This yellow notice was used 2814 times in 2014.⁷ When the DNA of a missing person in the Netherlands is placed in the Dutch databank, the DNA will be placed in the DNA Gateway of Interpol as well.

1.2. Identifying human remains

In the Netherlands, when a person is found dead a forensic physician (FP) assisted by forensic police officers performs an external postmortem investigation.⁸ The FP issues the death certificate and in order to fill in this form he has to be convinced of the identity of the dead person. Identification is usually done by a police officer, by comparing the photo on the identification papers with the features of the person that is found. To make sure the right person is declared dead, often next of kin ascertain the identity. A legal obligation to do so, however, does not exist.

When the identity of the deceased person is unknown and there is no reason to think a crime has been committed, the mayor has the legal obligation to take action by appointing forensic police officers, to start the identification process.⁹ The gathered data are stored at the NFI.

When a crime is suspected the public prosecutor is in charge and he appoints the police officers to start the identification process. When a crime is suspected the data of the deceased can be filed in the national DNA and fingerprint databases. ('HAVANK'; *Het Automatisch Vinger Afdrukkensysteem Nederlandse Kollektie*, Automatic fingerprint system, Dutch collection).

Antemortem data are obtained from the family members and medical files of the deceased who, of course, can only be consulted if there is a presumed identity. The clue that gives rise to the correctly presumed identity is the 'linking pin'. When there is no presumption of the identity, the only possibility is comparing the postmortem data with the (criminal) DNA database, with HAVANK or the database for missing persons.

The database at the BVPN is initiated and managed by the police. In this database only data of persons presumably missing at the North Sea are gathered. The Interpol DNA Gateway can be used to report an unidentified corpse by means of a 'Black notice'. Identification by using this Gateway is only possible when a person has been reported as a missing person to the database in an earlier

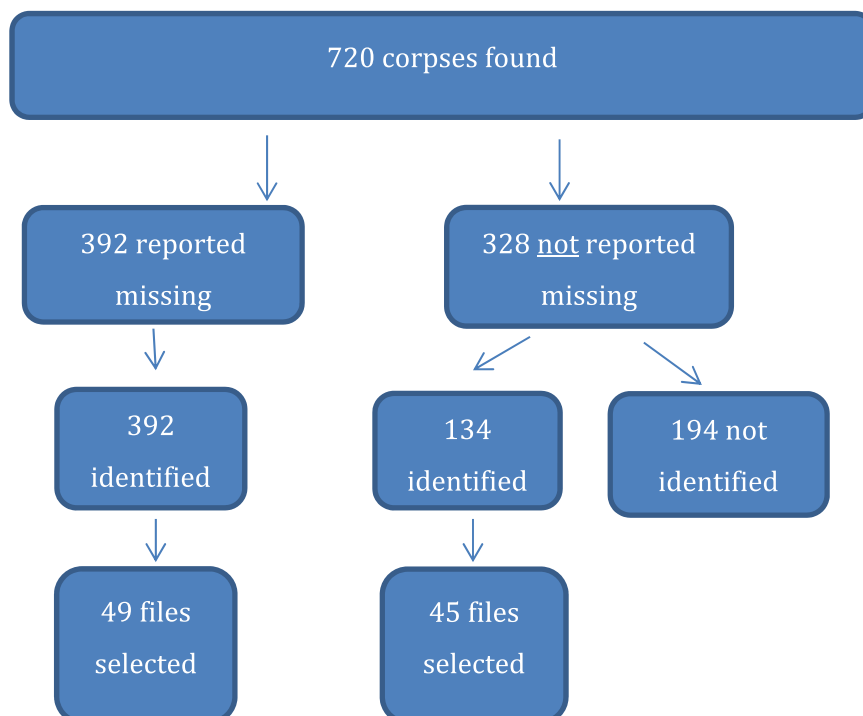


Fig. 1. Selection of files.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6555139>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6555139>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)