

# Leave the Gun. Take the Cannoli: A Perspective on Traumatic Injury in *The Godfather*

John L. Falcone, M.D., M.S<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Department of Surgery, Pittsburgh, PA (USA).

Correspondence: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Presbyterian University Hospital, F-675, 200 Lothrop Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15213 (USA).

e-mail: [falconej@upmc.edu](mailto:falconej@upmc.edu)

Received 18 March 2012; accepted 29 April 2012.

---

## Summary

**Introduction:** *The Godfather* is one of the most popular American movies of all time. The aims of this study are to describe the morbidity and mortality portrayed in *The Godfather* with a thorough video review.

**Methods:** In this descriptive study, *The Godfather* was viewed for incidents of traumatic mechanisms. On-screen traumatic mechanisms were documented by time in the movie. Characters that died during the film were evaluated for type of mechanism and cause of death. Comparisons by timing and gender were made with Chi-Square tests, using an  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

**Results:** There were 24 incidents of on-screen traumatic mechanisms for 21 unique characters. A total of 22/24 (92%) of the mechanisms involved male characters whereas 2/24 (8%) of the mechanisms involved female characters ( $p < 0.001$ ). There were 7/24 (29%) incidents of a traumatic mechanism in the first half of the film with 17/24 (71%) incidents of a traumatic mechanism in the second half of the film ( $p = 0.03$ ). A Chi-square test showed a higher proportion of deaths in the second half of the film ( $p = 0.01$ ). A total of 17/18 (94%) of the mortalities involved male characters whereas 1/18 (6%) of the mortalities involved a female character ( $p < 0.001$ ). Penetrating injury was the cause of 67% of the deaths. Blunt injury was the cause of 17% of the deaths.

**Conclusions:** There are gender differences in the characters that suffer a traumatic mechanism and death in *The Godfather*. A majority of injuries are penetrating in mechanism, and are more deadly in the second half of the film.

**Keywords:** History of Medicine, Motion Pictures, Trauma, Violence, Wounds and Injuries.

---

## Resumen

**Introduction:** *El Padrino* es una de las películas americanas más populares de todos los tiempos. Este trabajo pretende describir la morbilidad y mortalidad retratada en ella mediante su análisis.

**Methods:** en este estudio descriptivo se proyectó *El Padrino* en busca de incidentes relacionados con mecanismos de lesión traumática. Los mecanismos que aparecen en escena fueron documentados en función del punto de la película en el que se produjeron. Los personajes que murieron durante el transcurso de la acción fueron evaluados en busca del mecanismo y causa del fallecimiento. Las comparaciones entre el momento de la acción y el género se llevaron a cabo mediante pruebas  $\chi^2$ , utilizando la fórmula  $\alpha = 0,05$ .

**Results:** en pantalla se aprecian un total de 24 incidentes con mecanismos traumáticos relacionados con 21 personajes diferentes. Un total de 22/24 (92%) de estos mecanismos, se producen en personajes masculinos, mientras que en solamente 2/24 (8%) de ellos estaban involucrados personajes femeninos ( $p < 0,001$ ). Durante la primera mitad de la película se dan 7/24 (29%) de los incidentes relacionados con lesiones traumáticas, dándose el resto, 17/24 (71%), en la segunda mitad ( $p = 0,03$ ). Mediante una prueba  $\chi^2$  se comprueba que se produce una tasa más alta de muertes en la segunda mitad de la película ( $p = 0,01$ ). Un total de 17/18 (94%) de las muertes las sufren personajes masculinos, mientras que en solamente 1/18 (6%) se trata de un personaje femenino ( $p < 0,001$ ). El 67% de las muertes se producen por lesiones penetrantes, mientras que el 17% se producen por un traumatismo cerrado.

**Conclusions:** en *El Padrino* se dan diferencias en cuanto al género de los personajes que sufren muertes relacionadas con lesiones traumáticas. La mayoría son debidas a lesiones de penetración, produciendo estos mecanismos mayor cantidad de efectos letales durante la segunda mitad de la película.

**Palabras clave:** historia de la medicina, películas, traumatismos, violencia, heridas y lesiones.

The author states that this article is original and that it has not been previously published.

## Introduction

*The Godfather* is arguably one of the most popular movies of all time. It won three Academy Awards in 1972, including the Academy Award for Best Picture<sup>1</sup>. It won five Golden Globes in 1972, including one for Best Picture—Drama<sup>2</sup>. In 2008, *The Godfather* was the top gangster movie according to the American Film Institute, and was ranked as the second best movie of all time in 2007<sup>3-4</sup>.

This popular gangster movie portrays the activities and evolution of the fictitious Corleone crime family. The movie offers interesting insights into violence and traumatic injury as portrayed in the 1940s and 1950s. There have been no published manuscripts evaluating traumatic injury in *The Godfather*. The aims of this study are to describe and discuss the morbidity and mortality portrayed in *The Godfather* with a thorough video review, focusing on mechanism of injury, injury patterns, morbidity, and mortality.

## Technical Details

**Original Title:** *The Godfather*.

**Country:** USA.

**Year:** 1972.

**Director:** Francis Ford Coppola.

**Music:** Nino Rota.

**Cinematography:** Gordon Willis.

**Film editors:** William Reynolds and Peter Zinner.

**Screenwriters:** Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola based on Mario Puzo's novel, *The Godfather* (1969).

**Cast:** Marlon Brando (Don Vito Corleone), Al Pacino (Michael), James Caan (Sonny), Richard S. Castellano (Clemenza), Robert Duvall (Tom Hagen), Sterling Hayden (Capt. McCluskey), John Marley (Jack Woltz), Richard Conte (Barzini), Al Lettieri (Sollozzo), Diane Keaton (Kay Adams), Abe Vigoda (Tessio), Talia Shire (Connie Corleone Rizzi), Gianni Russo (Carlo), John Cazale (Fredo),...

**Color:** Color.

**Runtime:** 175 minutes.

**Genre:** Crime and Drama.

**Production Companies:** Paramount Pictures and Alfran Productions (as Alfran Productions, Inc.).

**Synopsis:** "The early life and career of Vito Corleone in 1920s New York is portrayed while his son, Michael, expands and tightens his grip on his crime syndicate stretching from Lake Tahoe, Nevada to pre-revolution 1958 Cuba" (imdb).

**Awards:** Oscar for Best Actor in a Leading Role (Marlon Brando), Best Picture (Albert S. Ruddy) and Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium (Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola); nominated for Oscar for Best Actor in a Supporting Role (James Caan, Robert Duvall and Al Pacino), Best Costume Design (Anna Hill Johnstone), Best Director (Francis Ford Coppola), Best Film Editing (William Reynolds and Peter Zinner), Best Music, Original Dramatic Score (Nino Rota) and Best Sound (Charles Grenzbach, Richard Portman and Christopher Newman)(1973).

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068646>

[Trailer](#)



## Methods

In this descriptive study, *The Godfather* film was meticulously viewed and reviewed for incidents of traumatic mechanisms<sup>5</sup>. The nature of the mechanism(s) and the timing of the start of the mechanism to the nearest

second were noted. A composite timeline of traumatic injury was graphed and evaluated.

The subset of characters that suffered on-screen and inferred fatal outcomes were evaluated with descriptive statistics. Comparisons were made using timing of the incidents and outcomes with Chi-square tests. Gender differences were compared with binomial tests, using an  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Statistics were performed using Stata 11.1 statistical software (StataCorp, College Station, TX).

## Results

*The Godfather* has a running time of 175 minutes. Table 1 shows all of the characters that suffer on-screen mechanical force applied to the body during the course of the movie, with the associated mechanisms of injury. During the film, there were 24 incidents of on-screen traumatic mechanisms (1 mechanism/7.3 minutes). These mechanisms occurred for 21 unique characters. Don Vito Corleone suffered from two different mechanisms at different points in the film and Carlo Rizzi suffered from three different mechanisms at different points in the film. A total of 22/24 (92%) of the mechanisms involved male characters whereas 2/24 (8%) of the mechanisms involved female characters. A binomial test showed a disproportionate number of males suffered a traumatic mechanism ( $p < 0.001$ ). There were 7/24 (29%) incidents of a traumatic mechanism in the first half of the film with 17/24 (71%) incidents of a traumatic mechanism in the second half of the film. A binomial test showed a higher percentage of traumatic mechanisms in the second half of the film ( $p = 0.03$ ). A 2 x 2 Chi-square test of movie half (first/second) and traumatic mechanism outcome (life/death) showed a higher proportion of deaths in the second half of the film ( $p = 0.01$ ).

Figure 1 shows a composite timeline of traumatic mechanisms portrayed on-screen in *The Godfather*. The highest concentration of mechanisms occurs in the 160<sup>th</sup> minute of the movie, where there are eight unique characters that suffer traumatic injury.

Table 2 shows all of the characters that died during the course of the film. There were 19 characters that died during the film. This includes characters that died on-screen or characters that died off-screen. A total of 17/18 (94%) of the mortalities involved male characters whereas 1/18 (6%) of the mortalities involved a female character. A binomial test showed a disproportionate number of male characters died ( $p < 0.001$ ). One of 19 (5%) of the characters was an animal. A total of 4/19 (21%) of the deaths occurred in the first half of the film whereas a total of 15/19 (79%) of the deaths occurred in the second half of the film. A binomial test

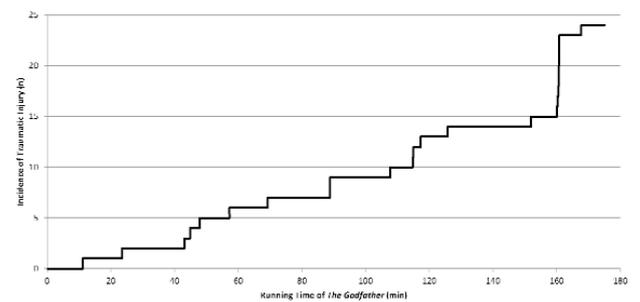


Figure 1: Incidence of on-screen traumatic mechanisms in *The Godfather*

showed that more deaths occurred in the second half of the film ( $p = 0.01$ ). Traumatic injury was the cause of death 84%-95% of the time. Penetrating injury was the cause of 67% of the deaths. Blunt injury was the cause of 17% of the deaths. There was an unknown mechanism in 11% of the deaths, 5% of the deaths were from atraumatic mechanisms.

## Discussion

In this study, there are 24 incidents of on-screen traumatic mechanisms in *The Godfather*, and there are 19 characters that die during the course of the film. More of the mechanisms occur in the second half of the film. This is the first known critical evaluation of the portrayal of traumatic injury in *The Godfather* in the published literature.

Trauma is the third leading cause of death in the United States, and is the leading source of mortality for patients between 1 and 44 years of age. Of these deaths, approximately two-thirds are unintentional where one third are the result of violence<sup>6</sup>. In *The Godfather*, traumatic injury is the leading cause of death (84%-95%), and is the leading cause of mortality for characters between age 1 and 44. All (100%) of the traumatic deaths in *The Godfather* are the result of violence.

Approximately 80% of traumatic injuries are from a blunt mechanism whereas approximately 20% of traumatic injuries are from a penetrating mechanism<sup>6-7</sup>. In *The Godfather*, approximately half of the mechanisms had a blunt force component. However, regarding mechanism of death, anywhere from 70%-82% of the traumatic deaths are a result of penetrating injury in the film. *The Godfather* portrays a much higher incidence of penetrating injury.

Regarding the timing of death after injury, approximately 50% of the deaths occur immediately, approximately 30% of the deaths occur in hours, and 20% of the deaths occur from days to weeks after injury<sup>6</sup>. A majority of the deaths in *The Godfather* occur immediately. Only

**Table 1. Characters that suffer on-screen traumatic mechanisms in *The Godfather*.**

Character Name	Mechanism(s) of Injury	Timing of Trauma (min)
Unnamed Photographer	Pushed	11,10
Johnny Fontaine	Shaken and slapped in the left cheek	23,48
Luca Brasi	Through-and-through stab wound to the right hand, strangle mechanism with a garrote wire	43,07
Don Vito Corleone	Five gunshot wounds to the trunk	44,90
Peter Clemenza	Pushed into a wall	47,92
Paulie Gatto	Three gunshot wounds to the occiput	57,22
Michael Corleone	Punch to the left jaw	69,20
Vigil "The Turk" Sollozzo	One gunshot wound to the frontal region	88,80
Captain McCluskey	Gunshot wound to Zone 2 of the neck, gunshot wound to the frontal region	88,83
Carlo Rizzi	Blunt assault with punches/kicks/his own shoe/garbage can/lid, human bite to right hand	107,75
Constanzia "Connie" Corleone	Multiple blunt assault with belt	114,82
Carlo Rizzi	Struck with a poker chip carousel	115,00
Santino "Sonny" Corleone	Multiple gunshot wounds to the trunk and extremities, kick to the head	117,27
Apollonia Vitelli-Corleone	Car bomb explosion	125,78
Don Vito Corleone	Fall from standing	151,97
Don Victor Stracci	Kicked and two shotgun blasts	160,08
Moe Green	Gunshot wound through right orbit	160,27
Don Carmine Cuneo	Four gunshot wounds to the trunk	160,50
Don Philip Tattaglia	Multiple gunshot wounds to the trunk	160,63
Don Tattaglia's Prostitute	Multiple gunshot wounds to the trunk	160,63
Bodyguard to Don Barzini	Two gunshot wounds to the trunk	160,75
Driver of Don Barzini	Gunshot wound to the trunk	160,78
Don Emilio Barzini	Two gunshot wounds to the trunk with subsequent fall down ~20 steps	160,82
Carlo Rizzi	Strangle mechanism with a garrote wire	167,70

**Table 2. Causes and mechanisms of death in *The Godfather*.**

Character Name	Cause of Death	Type of Mechanism
Khartoum	Brain death	Decapitation
Luca Brasi	Traumatic asphyxia	Blunt
Paulie Gatto	Penetrating brain injury	Penetrating
Bruno Tattaglia	Unknown	Unknown
Vigil "The Turk" Sollozzo	Penetrating brain injury	Penetrating
Captain McCluskey	Penetrating brain injury	Penetrating
Santino "Sonny" Corleone	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Apollonia Vitelli-Corleone	Blast/thermal injuries	Blunt
Don Vito Corleone	Pulmonary embolism/ Myocardial infarction	Atraumatic
Don Victor Stracci	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Moe Green	Penetrating brain injury	Penetrating
Don Carmine Cuneo	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Don Philip Tattaglia	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Don Tattaglia's Prostitute	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Bodyguard to Don Barzini	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Driver of Don Barzini	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Don Emilio Barzini	Hemorrhagic shock	Penetrating
Salvatore Tessio	Unknown	Unknown
Carlo Rizzi	Traumatic asphyxia	Blunt

one death occurs late after injury. The cause of death for Don Vito Corleone is debatable. While playing in a garden with his grandson, he collapses after a short episode of coughing. Two likely causes of death would be from a massive pulmonary embolism or from a massive myocardial infarction. His antecedent history of traumatic injury put him at risk for a deep venous thrombosis; his respiratory symptoms and rapid death are consistent with a massive pulmonary embolism. But, for his age and

demographic, a myocardial infarction is statistically more common.

*The Godfather* offers insight into trauma systems. There is no objective data in *The Godfather* that support the notion of established trauma systems. None of the characters receive any on-screen pre-hospital triage, assessment, or treatment. There are three characters that receive on-screen or off-screen medical attention regarding traumatic injury. It is inferred that Michael Corleone suffered a broken left jaw when getting punched. Frederico "Fredo" Corleone mentions the job that a "doctor" performed. Santino "Sonny" Corleone mentions calling a doctor for the battered Constanzia "Connie" Corleone. The third character to receive medical attention during the film was Don Vito Corleone.

Don Vito Corleone is the only character that is treated inside of a hospital. Ambulances are not utilized for transfer to any hospital in *The Godfather*. It is unclear how he was transferred to the hospital. It may have been by private vehicle. Interestingly, there is a three-vehicle convoy, including one ambulance, that returns Don Vito Corleone to his home.

The resuscitation and any interventions performed are also unclear. He did suffer gunshot wounds to the chest and flank. He possibly could have benefitted from placement of a chest tube, or from a laparotomy. Some dark-colored IV fluid in a glass bottle is being delivered to Don Vito Corleone in the hospital. This might have been blood. Don Vito Corleone did have a nasogastric tube in the right nare while in the hospital. But, no other tubes or catheters are clearly visible.

Regarding protected health information, he was in a private room (#2). But, "Corleone" is written just outside the room, his injury and some discharge information was printed in the newspapers, and there were numerous individuals that knew the room location.

Don Vito Corleone has transferred home for further recovery after discharge. He was discharged home instead of a skilled nursing facility or a rehabilitation center. The overall care of the trauma patient is not very well portrayed in *The Godfather*.

There are a few strengths to this study. It is relatively straightforward as a descriptive study, and it is easily reproducible. This study does not have any effect on patient care or trauma care, but it does provides unique insight to traumatic injury as it is portrayed in one of the most famous American movies of all time. The portrayal of traumatic injury in popular media does indirectly shape patient views of traumatic injury, and may be a source of bias for patients.

Source of Financial Report / Conflicts of Interest: None

## References

1. The 45<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2011. [Cited 2011 Dec 15]. Available from: <http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/legacy/ceremony/45th.html>
2. The 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Golden Globe Awards, Golden Globes, Hollywood Foreign Press Association, 2011. [Cited 2011 Dec 15]. Available from: <http://www.goldenglobes.org/browse/year/1972>
3. Top 10 Gangster, American Film Institute, 2008. [Cited 2011 Dec 15]. Available from: <http://www.afi.com/10top10/gangster.html>
4. AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, American Film Institute, 2011. [Cited 2011 Dec 15]. Available from: <http://www.afi.com/100Years/movies10.aspx>
5. *The Godfather*. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Perf. Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, James Caan. 1972. DVD. Paramount Pictures, 2008.
6. Peitzman AB, Rhodes M, Schwab CW, et al. The Trauma Manual: Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2008.
7. Injury Prevention. The American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma, 1999. [Cited 2012 Feb 22]. Available from: <http://www.facs.org/trauma/injuryprevention.ppt>