

May 23, 1958

# SOMETHING FISHY WITH THE MINAMATA BAY BAN!

FROM THE WIRE

**Fishing was banned in the Minamata Bay one year ago today, but the number of victims continues to grow!**

In 1957, the research committee from the Kumamoto University medical center found that the majority of Minamata Disease victims depended upon fish as their primary source of nutrition. Their recommendations included a ban on fishing until further research could be conducted.

During the first few months of the ban, there were a few cases of fetal Minamata Disease.

Records indicate that fetuses have a much greater sensitivity than adults. Minamata Disease causes the arrest of brain cell development and depending on the stage of development, the fetus will either be aborted or born deformed.

This year, three new patients have contracted the disease including the third child of Mrs. Watanabe, the mother of the first two official Minamata Disease victims. All three of these victims started exhibiting symptoms during the summer, but researchers have not been able to link this to any previous clues.

Because there has continued to be an increase in victims despite the fish ban, officials are questioning whether fish and shellfish are the actual cause of Minamata Disease.

It has been two years since the first official cases of Minamata Disease and officials are still asking the following questions:

- What is the cause of the disease?
- What is the vector of the disease?
- Why is it localized to the specific area of Minamata City?

Kumamoto University Medical School

Autopsy Report

Date April 16, 1958

Physician(s) Present Dr. Takeuchi, Dr. S. Shiranui, Dr. L. Niigamu

**Patient Description:**

7 year old boy  
Lived in Minamata City (Father is a fisherman)  
Died in a coma  
No sign of genetic or other inflictions  
Sister died at the age of 8 in coma (1957)

**Observations:**

The joints of the subject were bent and stiffened in an irregular position rendering the examination somewhat difficult. The boy had a severely elevated blood sugar. Because all of the symptoms indicate damage to the central nervous system, we thoroughly examined the brain (Figure 1).

The brain's cellular architecture was damaged. The white matter of the brain atrophied. The weight of the brain was less than that of an average unaffected 7 year old boy. There was a thinning of the myelin sheaths. There was also a degenerative thinning of the cerebral cortex.

This degenerative pattern in the brain was seen in the patient's sister as well (Fig 2 above). For comparison, I have included a picture of the brain from an old man who died of natural causes.

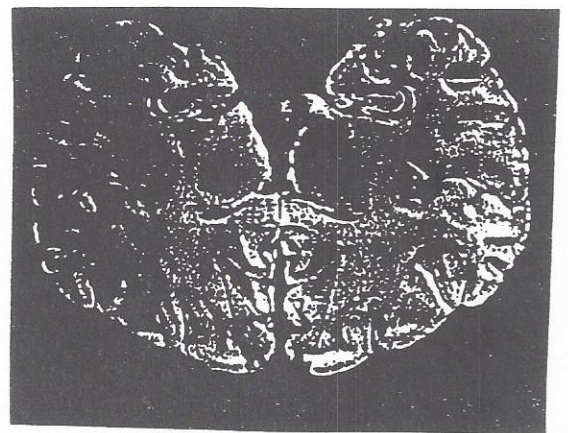
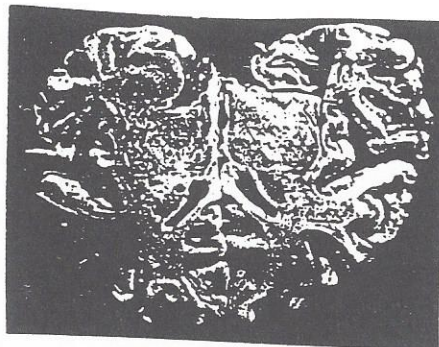
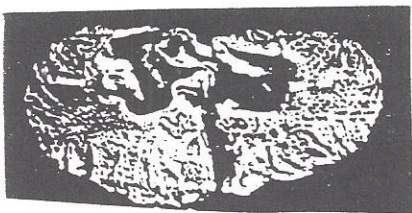


Figure 1.  
7 year old boy

Figure 2.  
8 year old girl

Reference:  
Unaffected Adult

Notes: This degenerative pattern seems indicative of Minamata Disease victims. I hypothesize that the cause of the disease is an external chemical introduced into the bodies of these villagers. If this were a viral or bacterial infection, the patients would have died before their brain atrophied this much.