

Case Report

HOMICIDE DISGUISED AS ACCIDENT

Dr. VP Meshram, Dr. SD Wakde, Dr.KU Zine, Dr.SAWaghmare

Authors

Dr. VP Meshram, Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine, GMCH, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Dr. SD Wakde, Resident, Department of Forensic Medicine, GMCH, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Dr.KU Zine, Professor and Head, Department of Forensic Medicine, GMCH, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Dr.SAWaghmare, Asst. Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine, GMCH, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Number of pages: Three

Number of tables: Nil

Number of photographs: Three

Corresponding author: Dr. VP Meshram, Assistant Professor,
Department of Forensic Medicine,
GMCH, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Case Report

HOMICIDE DISGUISED AS ACCIDENT

Dr. VP Meshram, Dr. SD Wakde, Dr.KU Zine, Dr.SAWaghmare

Abstract:

Drowning is a type of violent asphyxial death. Deaths due to drowning are usually suicidal and accidental in manner, but homicidal drowning is not uncommon. Homicidal drowning can often be disguised as other manner which is misleading to the investigating officer. A case of drowning is presented herewith in which 17 years unmarried female was brought dead to GMCH Aurangabad for medico-legal post mortem examination with alleged history of accidental drowning. Autopsy revealed cause of death as "Drowning associated with ligature strangulation and insecticidal poisoning". Necessary samples for investigations were preserved. Manner of death was assigned as homicidal.

Key Words: Drowning, Ligature strangulation, Poisoning , Homicide etc.

Introduction:

Drowning is a type of violent asphyxial death where air entry into the lungs is prevented due to submersion of mouth and nostrils into water or any fluid medium. Signs of asphyxia are more pronounced in typical drowning unless death occurred immediately on submersion following laryngeal spasm, vagal inhibition, head injury, etc¹.

In India, drowning is common method of committing suicide especially amongst women and more particularly in localities nearby sea, river or canal². Accidental drowning is more common amongst non swimmers, children, drunkards, epileptics and persons suffering with underlying pathology. Homicidal drowning is one of the method of choice in infanticides¹, however is not uncommon in adults and it is usually associated with marks of violence.

Strangulation is always presumed to be homicidal unless proved otherwise. Evidence of signs of struggle on the person of victim are usually noticed and if it is associated with signs of poisoning then it strongly favors homicide even in absence of signs of struggle¹.

Case Report:

A Body of 17 yrs old unmarried female was brought dead for medico-legal post mortem examination with alleged history of accidental drowning. Body was retrieved from well in the farm situated 200 meters from her house.

P. M. Findings: The body was moderately built and nourished.

External examination:

1. Signs of asphyxia were prominent in the form of subconjunctival hemorrhage and cyanosis of nail beds.
2. Whitish, copious, tenacious, lathery, fine froth oozing from the nose.(Fig. No. 1.)
3. Pressure abrasion in the form of ligature mark over anterior aspect of neck, running horizontally at the level of thyroid cartilage.(Fig. No. 1.)
4. Abrasions present over right side of chin of size 0.5x0.5 cm and undersurface of chin of size 1x1 cm. (Fig. No. 1.)



Photo 1

Internal examination:

1. On opening the chest cavity both lungs were ballooned. Weight of right & left lungs were 550 & 500 gm respectively. Lungs were pale pinkish, crepitant on cut section and there was exudation of frothy fluid on squeezing. (Fig. No. 2.)
2. On opening stomach, strong smell of insecticide was perceived. Stomach content was 100 cc whitish fluid and mucosa was congested at places.
3. On neck dissection, contusions were present on soft tissues over anterior and left lateral aspects of thyroid which were consistent with ligature mark. (Fig. No. 3.)



Fig. No. 2

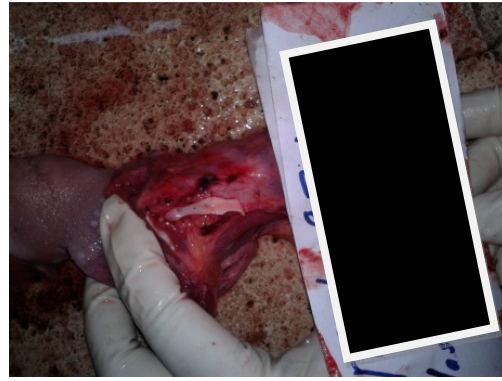


Fig. No. 3

In this case routine viscera were preserved for chemical analysis which revealed organophosphorus poisoning. Final cause of death was opined as “Drowning associated with ligature strangulation and organophosphorus poisoning, and manner of death as homicidal”.

Discussion:

An increasing death rate as a result of violence constitutes a large group in medico-legal autopsies especially deaths due to asphyxia are one of the most important cause in violent deaths³.

Drowning is one of the common forms of violent asphyxial death. Deaths due to drowning are usually accidental and suicidal in manner, but homicidal drowning is not uncommon. Homicidal drowning is not uncommon because victim’s body remains concealed for some time. Identity may be difficult due to decay and injuries from predators. An adult may be intoxicated, drugged, or overpowered and then thrown into water⁴. Evidence of violence coupled with poisoning favors homicidal manner.

In a study conducted by Dr. SV Kuchewar, RD Meshram, SJ Gadge, and RR Khetre, manner of death as homicide in drowning was found to be in only 3.4% cases. As it is easy to disguise the case as suicidal or accidental, a thorough and meticulous autopsy is essential to conclude the manner.⁵

Fine, white, copious, tenacious, lathery froth oozing from the nostrils and mouth is essentially a vital phenomenon in a case of typical drowning. Similarly the lungs are ballooned, voluminous, and edematous in such cases⁶. In this case, these classical signs of drowning were observed which concluded that the victim was made helpless by forceful intoxication, with attempted ligature strangulation and then was thrown in to water.

Further follow up and information gathered from the police revealed that she was elderly amongst 5 sister siblings and there was allegedly difficulty in finding her suitable marital match. During the police interrogation, her father and uncle confessed her killing in the manner consistent with autopsy findings and tried to disguise as accidental death.

This case was beyond suspicion of the investigating authority to presume as homicide but meticulous and thorough autopsy guided police to proceed on the ground of homicide.

References:

1. Mukherjee J. B. Violent asphyxial deaths. Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Academia Publishers, 2007, 3rd Edition, 631-51.
2. Reddy. K.S.N. Mechanical asphyxia. The essentials of Forensic Med. and Toxicology, Published by KSugunadevi, 2009. 28th Edition, 329.
3. Ankur P Patel, Rajesh R Bhoot, Dhaval Jivanlal Patel, Khushbu A patel. Study of violent asphyxial death. International journal of medical toxicology and forensic medicine. 2013. Vol.3(2).
4. Parikh C. K. Violent asphyxial deaths. Textbook of medical jurisprudence, Forensic Medicine and Toxicology. CBS Publishers. Edi. 6th. 3.71.
5. Dr. S. V. Kuchewar, R. D. Meshram, S. J. Gadge, and R. R. Khetre. Epidemiological study of drowning in Yavatmal. Medico-Legal Update. 2013, Vol. 13(1).102-5.
6. Bardale R. Violent asphyxia. Principles of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology. Jaypee Publishers. 2011. Edi. 1st. 309.