Case report

AN UNUSUAL COUPLE SUICIDE: A CASE REPORT
Dr. SH Bhosle, Dr. MD Dake, Dr. NP Zanjad, Dr. HV Godbole

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Number of pages: Three

Number of Tables: Zero

Number of Charts: Zero

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Abstract:
Murder-suicide and suicide pact episodes have a devastating impact on society. These episodes most commonly involve spouses. The death of a newly married young couple within very short period raises doubt of murder-suicide or suicide pact and is very interesting from the perspective of autopsy surgeon. In this report we discussed an autopsy case of couple suicide brought with alleged history of murder-suicide. The thorough detailed autopsies finally conclude the cause and the manner of death.

Introduction:
Suicidal deaths are important social health problem. Every day in India many persons lose their life by committing suicide because of physical, social, economic and emotional reasons. The death of young married couple usually raises suspicion of either murder-suicide or suicide pact. The episodes of dyadic death & suicide pact not only had devastating effect on the families involved, but also have psychological impact on society. Murder-suicide is defined as lethal event in which an individual kills another and commits suicide immediately or within short period. Most murder-suicides are spousal /consortial, involving a man killing his wife, girlfriend, ex-wife, or ex-girlfriend.

Suicide pact is defined as mutual agreements between two or more people to end their lives at the same time and nearly always in the same place. The suicide pacts almost always involve people well known to each other, mostly lovers or spouses. Cases of murder-suicide and suicide pact generate interest in the media and are also discussed in the medical literature. Here we present an interesting case of death of newly married couple brought as suspected murder-suicide which later turned out to be suicide by wife followed by suicide by husband after one day. The case cannot be categorized under suicide pact as the causative /precipitating factors for committing suicide in both cases were different and also it occurred at different times. We also discussed circumstances and psychosocial characteristics of the couple suicide.

Case Report:
The dead bodies of a newly married couple were brought for autopsy with alleged history of murder of wife followed by suicide of husband. The couple was originally native of Andhra Pradesh and migrated to Nanded (Maharashtra) few months ago in pursuit of job. The neighbors narrated about frequent quarrels between the couple and also informed that couple had quarrel in the morning on the day of woman’s death. The husband telephonically informed news of death of his wife to their parents, but didn’t inform Police. He preserved the dead body in portable cold chamber as it was not possible for their relatives to reach Nanded immediately. On arrival of their parents one day after the incidence, he narrated the story of sudden unconsciousness and death of his wife. Parents of deceased female suspected some foul play regarding death of their daughter and immediately rushed to police station to file a complaint. By the time police reached the scene of crime, the husband committed suicide by hanging in the bedroom, while his parents were in outside hall. Both bodies were sent them for autopsy to Department of Forensic Medicine, Dr. Shankarrao Chavan Government Medical College, Nanded (Maharashtra).
Autopsy Findings:

Female- The deceased female was moderately built. The body was very cold & showed pink colored lividity due to preservation in cold chamber. On external examination, five to six days old multiple horizontal, parallel and superficial incisions were present over front of left wrist. There was no any fresh injury over body. On internal examination, stomach showed about 200 ml of brownish fluid material with insecticidal smell and the mucosa was congested, hemorrhagic & also eroded at places. Viscera were preserved for chemical analysis which revealed insecticidal compound.

Opinion as to cause of death: Insecticidal Poisoning.

Manner of death: Considering the autopsy findings and Police report, manner of death was most likely ‘Suicidal’

Male- The deceased male was moderately built. Green colored nylon rope was seen around neck with running noose at right sub-mandibular region. The dried salivary stains were observed passing downwards from left angle of mouth. Oblique, grooved ligature mark above the level of thyroid prominence was present over neck corresponding to nylon rope with knot impression below right angle of mandible. Apart from ligature mark over neck, five to six days old multiple, horizontal, parallel and superficial incisions were present over front of left wrist. Sub pleural and sub pericardial petechial hemorrhages were present. All organs were congested and dark fluid blood was present in heart & large vessels. No any internal injury was found. Stomach contained 100 ml brownish fluid material without any peculiar smell.

Opinion as to cause of death: Asphyxia due to Hanging.

Discussion:
The rate of suicide varies greatly from country to country, with the greatest burdens in developing countries. Suicide is the result of multiple factors, although one factor is eventually identified as the main causative/precipitating factor. In the present case during postmortem examination of wife, we found insecticidal compound in stomach of the deceased female without any signs of struggle which indicates strong possibility of suicidal manner of poisoning. The frequent quarrels in couple indicate marital disharmony which is one of the most important reason of suicide in married people⁶. Presence of multiple superficial, old incisions over left wrists of the couple signified previous self-harm which is also a major risk factor for committing suicide⁷.

In present case, as the husband was the only witness of his wife’s terminal condition and also knew the circumstances of her death; he might be aware about consumption of insecticide compound by her. In such cases of poisoning many times evidences of poisoning are found at place of incidence in the form of vomiting or empty bottles of poison. But in present case no such findings were present at the crime scene. This might be due to delay in reporting the case to police and evidences of poisoning might have been removed by the husband to hide cause of death in an attempt to avoid further legal consequences. Domestic quarrels between them were known to parents of the couple as a result of which the husband tried to conceal the actual cause of death of his wife to anyone; but, it was revealed on autopsy being insecticidal poisoning.

The death of newly married young female always raises suspicion. Parents of female rushed to police station to inform police and launch complaint. Suicide by males facing legal consequences following death of their wives is known phenomenon and not a rare occurrence. In present case, parents of wife rushed to police station & lodged complaint. The fear of impending
legal action was triggering/precipitating factor for committing suicide by husband. This results in clustering of suicide in family over very short period. Agerbo E\(^8\) suggested from his study that, the suicide or mental illness of a spouse imposes an environmental rather than a genetic influence.

Hawton et al\(^7\) reported that most people who die by suicide have psychiatric disorders, notably mood, substance-related, anxiety, psychotic, and personality disorders. However psychiatric disorders are not reported being main reason for suicide in developing countries\(^1,6\). In the present case the relatives did not report any psychiatric illness, or any suicidal behavior was known in both of them. The information given by parents may not be accurate as the relations and/or friends attending the inquest might not divulge if a psychiatric illness was present, due to the stigma attached\(^6\). But on autopsy we found old superficial tentative cuts on left wrist of husband & wife indicating suicidal attempt and/or attention seeking personality trait.

In present case the couple had migrated to Maharashtra few months ago for earning and now living away from other family members. The language used by people in Maharashtra for social interaction is different from their mother tongue. As a result of these things they might be socially isolated and no close one was available to share their disputes/emotions and counsel them to solve their problem. The counseling and psychiatrist’s intervention might have helped the couple to deal their problems and could have avoided suicides in both.

References: