

UNUSUAL CASE OF SUICIDAL HANGING WITH TIED HANDS

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Abstract

Hanging cases are generally suicidal, where as homicidal hanging cases are very rare. Few cases are accidental, as in cases of children or adult males following masochistic experiments. Suicide by hanging with the hands tied behind back is difficult to commit but also are very rare in day to day medico legal practice. Here is a case report of suicidal hanging where hands were tied behind back at wrist joint.

Key words: Suicidal hanging, manner of death, tied hands.

Introduction

Hanging cases are generally suicidal, whereas homicidal hanging cases are extremely rare. Few cases are accidental in nature as in children or adult males following masochistic experiments. Suicide by hanging with the hands tied behind back are not only difficult to commit but also rare. In such cases examination of scene of death usually gives rise to suspicion of homicide¹. Differentiation between homicide and suicide remains an important and a difficult task for the investigation team. Detailed and careful examination of the scene, thorough medico legal autopsy, examination of ligatures and knowledge of personal history of the deceased remain crucial to make decision about the manner of death. Unusual cases of hanging in which the hands were tied behind are reported by other workers, Benomran F.A.² reported a case suicidal hanging of 35 years old male, with vest

wrapped over his head, neck and lower part of face with hands loosely tied in front of the body. Krzyzonowski M et al³ observed 6 cases of suicidal hanging and in which limbs of the victim were bound. These unusual findings always raise a suspicion of homicide in the minds of the relatives and the investigating authorities. Avis SP⁴ also reported few cases of unusual hanging deaths. Adair TW et al⁵ described a case of suicidal hanging staged as homicide. Blanco Pampin JM et al⁶ described two suicidal hanging deaths in an automobile which is very uncommon. In one case, the deceased used his belt as a ligature and the point of attachment was the window of the car. The second victim used the safety belt of the passenger seat. In both cases, the automobile engine was turned off, all the windows were closed and doors were locked. Cingolani M⁷ reported three cases of planned complex suicides in a three-year period. All these cases after thorough investigation showed suicidal etiology. Madea H⁸ reported a case of suicidal hanging in which multiple deep stab wounds were observed in neck and chest.

During last decade total 312 cases of suicidal hanging were autopsied at Government Medical College, Miraj. This is the only case where we found hands tied behind the back. In this case suspicion of not only homicide but also assisted suicide was in question.

Case Report

In Aug 2009, a 45 years old male, owner of a hotel, found hanging in his hotel by nylon rope with both hands tied on back. Distance of toes from floor was 25 inches. A suicide note

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stating no one is responsible for his death was written in Marathi language, with the mention of money he borrowed from the people was found in the pant pocket. During scene of death examination, a mentally retarded servant of the deceased was found crying & was locked in the kitchen. At autopsy, height of deceased was 5 feet 8 inches and weight was 70 kg. The ligature material was present around neck made of yellow nylon rope, with loose running knot at left back of neck, length of loop was 45 cms (Figure 1). Dried salivary stains present over front of shirt and west. Tongue was protruding out tip of tongue clenched between the teeth and was dark red in appearance due to drying. Dried salivary stains present over mid part of lower lip. Both hands were tied with each other on back by nylon rope with palms overlapping on each other (Figure 2). Two loops present over left wrist and six loops present over right wrist. Externally ligature mark present around the neck, corresponding to ligature material removed, situated above the level of thyroid cartilage, 4 cms below tip of left mastoid, 5 cms below tip of right mastoid, 7.5 cms below symphysis menti, completely encircling the neck, dark brown, grooved, abraded, friction blisters present over right side of neck, 2.5 cm in width maximum. (Figure 3). Furrows present over both wrists with contusion over back of left hand, near the wrist. Toxicological analysis was negative.

Discussion

Hanging is a form of death, produced by suspending the body with a ligature around the neck, the constricting force being the weight of the body or part of the weight of the body⁹. Accidental hanging in children or in toddlers may occur while playing or in persons with transvestic tendencies, even that is very rare. Suspension of a homicide victim to stimulate suicidal hanging is

seen in few occasions but homicidal hangings are extremely rare. Rare cases though reported of homicidal hanging usually include children or adults with disease, intoxicated with drugs or drink. Suicide may be staged as homicide by family members or friends in an attempt to avoid the humiliation or for other personal, social or religious reasons. Staging a suicide as a homicide may be a concluding effort by the victim to gain recognition, attention or to take revenge against friends or family or to ensure his killing¹⁰.

In this particular case suicide was committed in an unusual form of ligature hanging, where in victim tied his both the upper limbs by rope on back. In this case wrists were bound in such a way that the deceased could easily accomplish the task without any assistance. He might have prepared noose first, from the ceiling of room, then he might have locked the room from inside. Victim has taken all these precautions to avoid rescue and to prevent any change of mind. He might have tied his wrists first on front side using teeth and then crossing over legs to get upper limbs on the back. The free end of rope tied to wrists clearly revealed that. Secondly if some other person tied his wrists over back, then possibility of position of knot will be on the outer aspect. He left suicide note which made picture more clear (Figure 4). The way he tied his wrists also ruled out the suspicion that he might had the assistance of his servant, and then locked him in kitchen. Enquiry data gathered during investigation was consistent with that.

Conclusion

Autopsy examination of dead bodies with parts tied and bound masquerade a real problem to the autopsy surgeon. In such conditions, it may not be possible to exclude homicide or to differentiate between suicide and masochistic experiments. A meticulous initial examination

of the scene and examination of surrounding circumstances including psychological history of deceased is essential. Autopsy examination, pattern of ligature, toxicological analysis will provide useful information to determine the exact cause of death, or to describe the manner of death.

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Figure 1 ligature material present around neck made of yellow nylon rope,



Figure 2 Both hands tied with each other on back with palms overlapping each other



Figure 3 Ligature mark around neck