

Case Report

Quest to Find the Mother - Abortus Found in Hospital Washroom: A Case Report

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Abstract

Abortion can be a natural event, or it can be done as a legal therapeutic procedure. In some cases, abortion can be illicit or illegal. Many a times, the aborted foetus can be found in drains, dustbins or even in public washrooms. In such cases, finding the mother becomes the challenge. In the present case, a two-month-old foetus was found in the washroom of Yenepoya Medical College Hospital, Mangalore, foetal autopsy was done, and efforts were made to trace the mother. In the present case, CCTV findings as well as hospital records were checked. Since the hospital is a busy place with thousands of patients visiting daily, it becomes difficult to ascertain who the mother is. Even in this modern era, 67% abortions in India are unsafe and causes nearly 8 maternal deaths every day. The reason for hiding the abortion can be many like, unmarried pregnancy, low socio economics status, female foeticide, etc. The role of a Forensic surgeon in such cases is to ascertain the viability of foetus as well as its identity and to find out the mother if possible.

Keywords: Foetus, abortion, identity, mother

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Introduction:

Abandonment of foetus is a matter of grave concern in India. We do come across of various reports of dead fetuses found in garbage bins, gutters, toilets, forested areas, fields etc.¹

According to Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita section 94, concealment of birth by secret disposal of dead body is an offence².

According to MTP Act, In India a pregnant woman can legally procure abortion at the Government authorised center. According to

the latest amendment abortion is allowed up to 24 weeks. Hence unlike some countries where abortion is illegal, India has a progressive outlook pertaining to this matter where any pregnant woman above the age of 18 can procure abortion with professional secrecy maintained.

Even with these liberal laws and policies, criminal abortions are still done, many a times by quacks endangering the health and life of the mother.³

The reason for such practices might be because of underage pregnancy, female feticide, unwanted pregnancy etc.⁴

Case Report

In the present case, a two-month-old foetus (Figure 1) was found in the washroom of Yenepoya Medical College Hospital, Mangalore. It was found inside the trap of the

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drain of washroom. Foetal autopsy was done, and efforts were made to trace the mother.



Figure 1: Two months old foetus

External examination

Partially developed foetus, (Picture 1) bearing length of 9cm and weight 20grams. Head circumference was 9cm. Portion below ribcage was absent. Vertebral column was visible. Eyes, nose and mouth were in developing stage. Only left upper limb was present. Head soft in consistency, appears reddish in colour at certain places.

Internal examination

Costal cartilage and left forearm and hand bones showed dried appearance and were brownish black in colour. All the other organs were absent.

Entire foetus was sent for DNA analysis.

The DNA report confirmed the gender of the foetus to be Male of human origin.

CCTV footage and patient data was reviewed and handed over to the investigating authorities.

Since more than 2500 patients visit the hospital along with their relatives, it is difficult to identify the mother.

The quest to find the mother is still on.

Discussion

Abortion means premature expulsion of the product of conception at any period of human gestation before full term. Abortion can be natural or accidental. It can be justifiable,

criminal, or induced under MTP Act⁴. The causes of abortion can be maternal, foetal, dietary or defective fertilization. In India nearly 6-8 million abortions take place every year and around 2 million of which are spontaneous and 4 million are induced. Out of all the induced abortions, only 5-6 lakh are legal and rest are illicit abortions⁵.

In the present case the foetus was found inside the trap of the drain of washroom indicating some effort was made to conceal the abortus, and the mother did not seek medical help in the hospital after abortion. These actions indicate that the mother did not want anyone to find out about it and it might have been an unwanted pregnancy.

An autopsy study done by Jatinder P et. Al⁶ on dead fetuses and newborns in 2022 showed, in 43.5% of cases the identity of fetus mother was known and in 56.5% of cases the identity of fetus mother was unknown. In 32.6% of cases the fetuses were unviable. All the unknown cases were found in abandoned places like street, bushes, canal side, water bodies that mainly include pond and railway tract. In this case we encountered, the foetus was not viable, and the identity of the mother is unknown.

An autopsy study done by Behra C et. Al⁷ on abandoned fetuses in India in 2016 showed, equal number of male and female fetuses, 36% of the fetuses were non-viable, which is similar to the case encountered by us.

Conclusion

Even though abortion laws are liberal in India, illicit abortions are common because of various social issues. The root cause for hiding birth/abortions sometimes might be because of underage pregnancy. Seeking help from experts will reduce maternal complications following abortion. Educating young women regarding birth control measures will avoid unwanted pregnancies and concealment of birth/abortion. A national

protocol must be developed for investigating foetal/infant deaths.

Conflict of Interest: None to Declare

Ethical permission: Obtained from Institutional Ethics Committee.

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