

Case Report

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Suicide or Homicide



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Abstract

Suicide by hanging is very alarming in India. As per report of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Government of India, quite good number of hanging cases is reported every year. Most of the hanging cases are commonly suicidal. Homicidal case subsequently creating a scene of hanging is extremely rare. In order to distinguish between suicidal/homicidal hanging, the examination of crime scene on various key points in undisturbed condition followed by autopsy study is necessary to discover the real fact. In one case, a house wife age about 19 year allegedly committed suicide by hanging being claimed by her husband. Observation on crime scene, hanging victim, hanging material (wearing apparel) and findings of PM report have been discussed in this paper. The analysis could prove the homicide victim was strangled and claim of suicidal hanging was discarded.

Keywords: Crime scene; Suicidal hanging; Strangulation; Ligature mark; Hanging material

Introduction

As per report of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Government of India 1,31,666 persons committed suicide by various means and 41.8% is contributed by suicidal hanging in 2013 [1]. Such cases are thoroughly investigated by the police along with forensic team and medico-legal experts. The victim when found hanging initially throws a question "Is it suicide or homicide or accidental?" The observation of the crime scene in hanging cases in undisturbed condition is very important to discover the possible cause of death [2-4]. The following key points are to be followed for proper investigation of the crime scene:

- Detailed investigation of crime scene
- Recording of complete series of photographs
- Examination of scene of hanging (in undisturbed condition) and post analysis of hanging features
- Examination of rope and direction of fibers
- Examination of loop, noose, knot and cut mark
- Examination of the hanging material other than rope
- Examination of fixing position of hanging material (point of suspension)

In addition to crime scene study on different key points, inquest of the deceased followed with autopsy study are helpful

to ascertain the cause of death in complicated, suspicious hanging cases.

Case Report

One day at about mid night a house wife was alleged to have committed suicide in one room inside the house of her father-in-law. The wearing apparel was said to be used as hanging material tied from ceiling fan. It was reported that the body was removed from hanging position and kept down to provide medical aid.

Observations

(Figures 1- 4).



Figures 1: Victim lying on the floor showing sharp ligature mark.



Figures 2: Front side of the neck showing thin, sharp and partial ligature mark (5mm width).



Figures 3: Bedroom showing the position of ceiling fan alleged to be the point of suspension.



Figures 4: Hanging material (wearing apparel) without noose and knot, alleged to be used for hanging.

Discussion

Crime Spot analysis

After having FIR (First Information Report) related to suicidal hanging, the investigating officer and forensic team visited the crime spot to assess the circumstances. It was observed that the hanging victim was down and she had sign of thin ligature

mark showing partial circumference of the neck. The hanging material said to be used was kept aside having no sign of cut mark/noose and knot on it. Moreover, possibility of reaching the height of ceiling fan (8 feet 2 inch from bed) to tie the hanging material was ruled out in absence of supportive tools. Further, the dust deposited on the ceiling fan was also seen undisturbed without any damage to fan blades due to weight of the victim. The observation strongly suggested hanging was not possible by tying the hanging material to the ceiling fan fitted beyond reach. The circumstantial physical evidence clearly indicated a case of homicide and sent the victim for autopsy study to confirm the actual cause of death.

Post Mortem Study

External: Autopsy study was conducted within 12 hours after death. The deceased was about 19 year, weighing 49kg and height 5 foot. Both the legs were straight and the right upper limb flexed. The neck was not stretched and the eyes were partially open. A distinct small cut mark was present over the chin. One brownish colored grooved ligature mark having width 5mm was present over the thyroid cartilage and it was horizontal extending up to the middle part of sternocleidomasteroid muscle. Ligature mark was prominent at the front in a direction of hyoid bone.

Internal: The walls, ribs, cartilages, pleurae of thorax were found intact. The larynx, trachea, right, left lungs, vessels of thorax were congested. The stomach was found normal containing some food material. The liver was congested and spleen, kidneys, bladder and the sex organs were normal. No injury and fracture were detected on the bones, muscles and joints. Toxicological analysis of viscera and body fluid ruled out the presence of poison and drug.

Conclusion

Initially the case was claimed to be a suicidal hanging by the husband of the victim. On analysis of scene of crime and victim, it was suspected to be mysterious and doubtful. Moreover, the ligature mark on the neck does not correspond with the thickness of hanging material. However, based on circumstantial evidence and autopsy findings of the deceased, it is confirmed the death was due to strangulation and ruled out the possibility of suicidal hanging/poisoning.

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