A Rare Case of Bucket Drowning

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Keywords
Forensic; Bucket; Drowning; Suicide; Casuistry

Abstract
Statistically, the majority of deaths due to submersion are accidental or suicidal. Suicides by drowning usually happen at home or in sewage. The reason for this act is usually depression due to poor health, death of a loved one, financial problems, chronic or acute pain, or being “tired of life”. A 77-year-old man was found dead in the bathroom of his house. The entry door was locked from the inside, with the key still on the door from the inside. All windows of the house were closed. The head of the corpse was submerged in a small bucket of water. The results of the autopsy and the histological examination concluded that the death has occurred due to acute asphyxia caused by drowning. Except the fact that the case is interesting as casuistry to coroners, it induces many questions with the understanding of the problem with suicidal attempts.

Case Presentation
A 77-year-old man was found dead in the bathroom of his house. The entry door was locked from the inside, with the key still on the door from the inside. All windows of the house were closed. The head of the corpse was submerged in a small bucket of water used for cleaning purposes. Immediately, the man was visited by...

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Received March 26, 2018; Accepted May 02, 2018; Published May 14, 2018

Citation: Ivan Tsranchev (2018) A Rare Case of Bucket Drowning. SF J Forensics 1:1.

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a physician who declared his death. On the table in the kitchen a dying note was found. On the crime scene the external examination of the cadaver was made by a coroner. There were not any signs of struggle. The postmortem lividity was well presented on the anterior surface of the body in the area of face, neck, thorax, abdomen and upper and lower extremities. Also, the postmortem lividity was well fixed to the tissues. The postmortem rigidity was well presented all over the muscular groups of the entire body. The corpse was cold to the touch.

On an external autopsy examination no injuries were noted. Internal examination showed that the brain was with severe congestion and oedema, weighing 1400 grams with few petechial hemorrhages of the white matter. The lungs were presented heavy and on incision fluid and froth were exiting from the cut surfaces. The lungs were congested, edematous and weighed 650 grams each. The bronchi were presented with solid froth. The heart was normal externally and weighed 300 grams with mild atherosclerotic changes of the coronary arteries. Over the lungs and epicardium of the heart pin – point hemorrhages were found, and the blood of the major blood vessels was dark and also liquid. The abdominal organs were presented with severe congestion, the liver weighed 1700 grams, spleen- 320 grams and kidneys- 140 grams each. Organ samples were preserved for histological examination. The microscopic examination of the lung tissues confirmed the cause of death- asphyxia due to submersion. The chemical analysis of blood showed medium degree of alcohol concentration.

Discussion
The results of the autopsy and the histological examination concluded that the death has occurred due to acute asphyxia caused by drowning. The cause that brought about the suicide by drowning is attributed to severe pain induced due to cancer of kidneys, according to the suicidal note and the fact that there are no forensic elements allowing us to confirm the hypothesis of accidental death or homicide. Furthermore, the external examination of the body does not show any signs of trauma referable to the possible intervention of other subjects. In this case homicidal drowning caused by forceful submersion of the head in water seems impossible, according to all circumstances on the crime scene. In many cases of drowning determination of cause and manner of death may be possible in the light of the crime scene investigation, necropsy, psychological autopsy findings and the laboratory analysis together [7]. Rare cases of drowning are cited by many other authors.

The drowning may occur in different fluids than water. Other fluids that in rare occurrences have been mentioned in the literature are: shampoo, wax, paraffin, beer, bitumen, and gas oil [8].

**Figure 1:** The Position of the Corpse on the Crime Scene

**Figure 2:** The Submersed Head of the Cadaver in the Bucket of Water

**Figure 3:** The Postmortem Lividity and Rigidity of the Cadaver at the Crime Scene
Conclusion

Cases of suicidal drownings are rare and there are many reported into the literature [6, 8]. Incidents of drowning vary between countries and within the country itself. The manner of death may remain undetermined even when the diagnosis of drowning is confirmed or declined. It is expected that drowning suicide rates in some of the available studies may have been over- or under-reported because of misclassification [9]. Except the fact that the case is interesting as casuistry to coroners, it induces many questions with the understanding of the problem with suicidal attempts. It is necessary serious analysis of the problem to be made, with the appropriate introduction of preventive and rescue strategies, and preventive programs for patients with chronic pain and manifested depression.

References


