Murder-Suicide - A Case Report

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Abstract
Murder followed with suicide among elderly man is very uncommon in India. As per available literature, the elderly have the highest rates of suicide in all industrial countries and among many nations suicide rates rise with age. There are various contributory factors including psychological profile of a man to commit murder either wife, children or elderly parents and end life by suicide. In one case, an 85-year elderly man along with wife, age 70-year was staying with the family of their son. As per family history, there was frequent quarrel in the family and mental torture upon the elderly parents since they were burden to their son. The situation made them always unhappy and mentally depressed. One day, the elderly man was found hanging and his wife was lying dead with a piece of long cloth encircling the neck. The death news spread among the neighbours and locals suspected foul play. Further, the locals alleged to have been killed the elderly parents by the family members. The situation was extremely disturbing and agitated people lodged complaint to the police. Subsequently, the forensic team and investigating officer visited the undisturbed crime scene to collect forensic evidence. Observation on crime scene, position of dead body with a piece of cloth encircled the neck, hanging victim, hanging material (margin of a long cloth) and psychological profile of the male victim along with autopsy reports confirmed to be a case of murder-suicide. The details have been discussed in this paper.

Key words
Strangulation; Hanging; Psychological profile; Forensic evidence; Autopsy Study

Introduction
Murder-suicide among the elderly man is very uncommon in the world and India is not exception to it. As per published literature, the elderly have the highest rates of suicide in all industrial countries and among many nations suicide rates rise with age. Moreover, suicide thought is common phenomenon in elderly people [1]. As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), MHA, Govt. of India, 1,31,666 persons committed suicide by various means and 41.8% is contributed by suicidal hanging in 2013 [2]. The following risk factors for elderly suicide are capsulized in (Figure-1) [3, 4].

In addition to the crime scene study on different key points inquest of the deceased persons followed with autopsy studies are helpful to ascertain the cause of death in unusual suspicious hanging/strangulation cases. The following key points are to be followed for proper investigation of the crime scene [5, 6]:

- Detailed investigation of crime scene
- Sketch/photograph of the scene
- Post analysis of hanging/strangulation symptoms
- Examination of hanging material (noose, knot, loop etc.)
- Examination of hanging position/point of suspension
- Evidence of supportive tool to reach the hanging point

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Examination of rope and direction of fiber
Search for suicide note near the scene/or pocket
Collection of family history along with victim’s activity

Case report
The elderly parents, age about 85-year (father) and 70-year (mother), were staying with the family of their son. The financial condition of the family was poor and there was frequent quarrel, as a result the elderly parents were not looked after properly. Being unhappy, they (parents) developed loneliness and old age health and psychiatric illness led them to depression. In such condition, the suicidal thoughts over powered the elderly man resulting killing his wife by strangulation and subsequently self committed suicidal hanging, believing “Life was not worth living for them”.

Observation
The symptoms on the body of the victims and the ligature materials used are shown in Figure 2-5

Case report

Observation

Figure 1: Risk factors for elderly suicide.

Figure 2: Deceased with ligature material around the neck and bleeding from the right ear orifice (one of the symptoms of strangulation).

Figure 3: Deceased having subconjunctival haemorrhage (one of the symptoms of strangulation).

Figure 4: Complete hanging of the elderly man with protruded tongue, dribbling of saliva from right corner of mouth and clenched hands with other hanging symptoms.

Figure 5: Two pieces of ligature materials (margin of a long cloth) used for strangulation and hanging.
Autopsy Findings

Deceased (Female)

External

The deceased was about 70 year old female, 134 cm in height, 35 kg in weight of average built. Mouth of the victim was partially open; both the eyes were partially closed; tongue was inside the oral cavity and was intact; bleeding was present from right ear; the inner walls of the cheek, lips and the frenulums inside the oral cavity were intact and no injuries were found. One ligature mark, brownish in color, non-continuous, hard like parchment and having a maximum width of 2 cm was present obliquely around the front of neck. The mark was situated 3.5 cm below the right angle of mandible, 5 cm below the chin, 8 cm above the suprasternal notch and 1 cm below the left angle of mandible. The mark was absent on the left lateral aspect of the neck, some part of nape of neck and 5 cm of right lateral aspect of the neck.

Internal

The larynx, trachea, bronchi and both the lungs were found congested. On dissection of the neck, the underlying subcutaneous tissue was found pale and glistening and no extravasation of blood was seen in the surrounding neck structures. The thyroid, hyoid and cricoids cartilages were found intact. The thyroid gland was also found intact. The toxicological analysis of viscera and body fluid ruled out the presence of poison and drug in this case. The cause of death was asphyxia.

Deceased (Male)

External

The deceased was about 85 year old male, 156 cm in height, 55 kg in weight of average built. Mouth of the victim was partially open; both the eyes were partially closed; tongue was inside the oral cavity and was intact; the inner walls of the cheek, lips and the frenulums inside the oral cavity were intact and no injuries were found. Dry saliva stain was present over the top of right shoulder. One ligature mark, brownish in color, grooved, non-continuous, hard like parchment and having a maximum width of 2 cm was present obliquely around the front of neck. The mark was situated 6 cm below the tip of right mastoid process, 3 cm below the chin, 12 cm above the suprasternal notch and 1 cm below the tip of left mastoid process. The mark is absent over 4 cm of the left lateral aspect of the neck.

Internal

The larynx, trachea, bronchi and both the lungs were also found congested. On dissection of the neck, the underlying subcutaneous tissue was found pale and glistening and no extravasation of blood was seen in the surrounding neck structures. The thyroid, hyoid and cricoids cartilages were found intact. The thyroid gland was also found intact. The toxicological analysis of viscera and body fluid ruled out the presence of poison and drug in this case. The cause of death was asphyxia as a result of hanging.

Discussion

In this case, the elderly man hanged himself after strangulating his wife with a piece of long cloth - an uncommon honor killing. The investigation of undisturbed crime scene, post analysis of hanging body, position of strangulated body (female) with a piece of long cloth encircled the neck, could help to reconstruct the crime and establish the criminal profile of the killer (elderly man). The external hanging/strangulation symptoms found on both the victims followed with autopsy findings could help to establish the murder-suicide in this case. The criminal profile of the elderly man appeared to be desperate/depressed for family feud resulting killing his wife and committed suicidal hanging for heavenly abode, since elderly man did not want to be apart and live without each other.

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References
