

Near Hanging: A case report

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Abstract

Hanging is one of the most common methods of suicide all over the world. As a method of suicide it is highly lethal in that more than 70% of those who attempt suicide by using this method would die^{1,2}. In few cases, if the person is brought down within very short period of suspension and treated vigorously in hospital, there is always a hope for life.

Key Words: Near Hanging, suicide, Ligature mark

Introduction

Hanging as a method of suicide is a common world wide phenomenon and India is no an exception. Though case fatality following an attempted suicide by hanging is very high, on rare occasions the victims survive^{1,2}. Previous studies^{3,4} on near hanging cases show a favorable prognosis for those patients who are brought down promptly and treated vigorously. Here, we present such an uncommon case of survival after an attempted suicide by hanging.

Case Report

On 5th May '08 a Hindu unmarried male of about 25 years old was admitted in the Central Referral Hospital, Tadong, Gangtok with an alleged history of attempted suicide by hanging. Luckily he was spotted by his elder brother who with the help of other family members rescued him within 2 to 3 minutes of suspension. He remained unconscious for about 15 to 20 minutes. The family members sprinkled water on his head and rubbed his hands and feet till he regained some consciousness. On recovery he uttered irrelevant and meaningless words very loud and clear. Then he was brought to the hospital for treatment.

On examination he was found to be conscious and oriented. He appeared calm and quite co operative. His built was moderate with a body weight of 55 kgs and height 5 feet and 2 inches. Physical examination revealed one oblique bluish purple coloured ligature mark around the neck measuring from 5 to 8 mm in width and 29 cm in length. It extended circumferentially around the neck forming a shallow abraded pattern (of a rope) ligature mark. In the front it was placed just above the thyroid cartilage and on the right side of the neck it was placed 5 cm below the angle of the right mandible (Fig. No.1). About 1 to 1.5 cm long two small abrasions are also seen lying about 1.5 cm above the ligature mark. There was also one small abrasion of about 2.5 cm long 6 cm bellow the ligature mark. On the left side of the neck the ligature mark was seen running 9 cm bellow the left mastoid process and it disappeared near the back side of the neck (Fig. No.2). Anteriorly, the ligature mark was more or less horizontal but on both sides of the neck it ran obliquely upwards and backwards and it became very faint on the backside of the neck and untraceable just behind and above the right mastoid prominence, probably site for the knot.

X-ray and other biochemical investigations were found to be normal though there were some seizure activities on EEG study of the brain. Respiration, pulse and blood pressure were all within normal

Fig. No.1: Ligature mark on the right side of the neck



Fig. No. 2: Ligature mark on the left side of the neck



range and there was no evidence of cyanosis and petechial hemorrhages. Both pupils were moderately dilated but reacting to light and accommodation.

On the same day bronchoscopy was done under local anesthesia. There was marked congestion of nasopharynx and oropharynx which was more on the right side. Pyriform fossae, laryngeal inlet and vocal cords were normal in appearance.

As there was some history of mental illness preceding the incident he was referred and treated in the Psychiatric Ward. On 13th May'08 he was discharged from the hospital with full clinical recovery.

Discussion

Sikkim, situated in the north eastern part of India, is the second smallest state with least population. Though it is one of the best tourist centers in the North Eastern India with a good economic growth, its suicide rate is very high (19.74 per 100,000 population) as compared to that of National Average (11.2) in 1999⁵.

Hanging is a common method of suicide especially among young adults⁶ and increasingly reported from India,⁷⁻⁹ as a method adopted by young adults to attempt suicide. It is described as a painless mode of death with a very narrow failure rate. Average fatal period is about 3 to 5 minutes and death occurs immediately if there is fracture and dislocation of the cervical vertebrae or heart block. Death is delayed in cases where there is only venous obstruction without much compression on the wind pipe / trachea⁹. Those who reach hospital alive have a relatively high probability of survival¹⁰.

In the present case, though he was found hanged completely from the branch of a tree, duration of suspension was short and probable drop distance would be around 3 to 4 feet. His brother, who was in the cow shed, heard some unusual noise so he ran there and immediately lifted up his brother over his shoulders and shouted for help. It took place near the cow shed (only 15 – 20 m away) so there was not much difficulty to spot him though it was a dark night and the terrain hilly. We can not say anything about the type of the knot as it was cut and removed by the relatives all in a hurry. But the most probable site for the knot was found to be behind and above the right mastoid prominence.

To our surprise, though duration of suspension was short and the victim survived without any sequel, there was a well defined ligature mark around the neck. Prominent ligature mark could have been produced by the rough texture and small size of the rope. Actually rope was made of plastic/nylon strips of cement bags woven together. Moreover, the body was also suspended, completely.

After recovery, the victim could not remember anything except putting of the rope around the neck and seeing of some unnatural things (probably visual hallucination). Loss of power and consciousness was so abrupt that there was no question of remembering or doing anything. On recovery there was no complaining except some pain in the neck region.

Mental unsoundness was the motive of attempting suicide. Since the last 10 to 15 days he was having dreams of dead people mainly of his paternal uncle side. They came in his dreams and started inviting him to come along with them. He would often find himself sitting alone in the nearby cemetery at night and later wondered, when and how he reached the place he usually was afraid to tread even in broad daylight. About one week back some unnatural forces also started making him more and more self centered and on that day he became more anxious and worried about some impending doom.

Close family history revealed past history of two suicides, the first one being his paternal uncle who committed suicide by about 20 years back and the second one being his elder cousin (brother) who committed suicide about 7 years back. But there was no such history of suicide or mental illness in his immediate family.

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