

## Combined Method of Homicide-A Case Report

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### Abstract

It is one of the prime duties of the Forensic Pathologist to decide upon the cause of death in all unnatural deaths including homicidal deaths and it becomes very crucial when more than one method have been employed to kill the victim in homicidal deaths. It is very important to decide whether all the methods used were fatal or one among them is fatal and other methods contributing or hastening the death which plays an important role in the court of law while deciding as to the role of multiple offenders involved in the act. Hence the present case of ligature strangulation with stab injury to the abdomen is being discussed in the light of available literature.

**Key words:** homicide, methods, cause of death

### Introduction

Homicide is willful killing of one individual by another.<sup>1</sup> It is the most serious crime committed against a person and embraces every mode of violent death<sup>2</sup>. Homicide is widely accepted as a public health problem,<sup>3</sup> which can be understood to reflect the contemporary societies concerned with the heightened incidence of deliberate physical violence seen in all industrialized countries over the last decades. About 80-100 cases of homicide take place everyday in India.<sup>4</sup> Homicide represents one of the leading causes of death.<sup>5</sup> The manner of death, whether homicide or not, determined by the Forensic pathologist is an opinion based on the known facts concerning the circumstances leading upto and surrounding the death, in conjunction with the autopsy findings and laboratory tests. But determination of cause of death is one of the main objectives of conducting the medico legal autopsy where in Forensic pathologist has to take in to account the circumstances, the history of symptoms prior to death and the autopsy findings. Injuries in homicidal deaths cannot be determined on the basis of any general rules; every case has to be considered on its own merit in relation to the circumstances obtaining at the time injury. The various methods employed by the offenders for homicide are sharp weapon injuries (stab injury, chop injury, cut throat injury) blunt weapon injuries, asphyxiation (strangulation, smothering, hanging etc), poisoning, burns etc. Sharp injuries span the spectrum of incised and stab wounds.<sup>6</sup> The presence of defence injuries indicate an assault by some other person or persons.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes defence injuries may be absent if the victim is incapacitated or restrained. A stab wound is produced when force is delivered along the long axis of a narrow or pointed object.<sup>8</sup>

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When more than one offender are involved employing more than one method to kill the individual it becomes very crucial to decide as to which one of the method was fatal and if all or any other methods used were also fatal or they have contributed or hastened the death. This is very important as the severity of punishment depends on the role played by the different assailants employing the different methods.

### **Case Report**

A twenty six year old well built, well nourished male was subjected for autopsy (P.M. No. 348/10) on 23/05/2010 referred from Kodigihalli police station who was alleged to have been done to death by some unknown people on the previous night and thrown the body beside the road. Hands were tied together in front by using piece of his vest. Another piece of his vest which was blood stained was tied around the nostrils and blood stained shirt was tightly tied around the neck. Other clothes brought with the body were blood stained. Dried blood stains were present at places over the body. Pupils dilated and fixed; postmortem staining was present over the back of the body and was fixed; rigor mortis was present all over the body.



### **Injuries on the body**

1. One wedge shaped stab wound, 5 cms x 0.5 cms into abdominal cavity deep present over middle of front of upper part of the abdomen, underlying stomach was perforated through and through and superior mesenteric vessels were nicked with collection of about 600ml of blood and blood clots in the peritoneum. The injury was directed inwards and backwards for a depth of 9 cm.
2. Faint broad ligature mark, 12cms x 04 cms present over and above thyroid cartilage, present in front and sides of neck with extravasation of blood in to underlying neck structures but hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage were intact.
3. Left eye contused.
4. Multiple small linear incised wound were present at places over the body.

All other internal organs were intact and pale.

The opinion in this case was furnished as

1. "Death is due to combined effect of ligature strangulation and stab injury to the abdominal sustained".
2. Injury was ante mortem in nature and fresh.
3. Time since death -12 to 24 hours prior to conduction of postmortem examination.

### **Discussion**

Considering the physique of the individual and restraintment it is evident that multiple offenders were involved and the time since death was determined based on postmortem changes (Postmortem staining and rigor mortis)

While opining the cause of death following points were considered

1. Since the cloth was tied around nostrils and mouth by using his vest which was loose and the mouth was partially uncovered hence death by smothering was unlikely. The assailants could have used this method just as a means of restraintment or to prevent him from calling for help.
2. The shirt was tied tightly around the neck and the transverse ligature mark with extravasations in to underlying neck structures points towards the role of strangulation causing death. Hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage were intact since the person was 26 year old and the hyoid bone and neck cartilages at this young age are not yet calcified and are still quite flexible and likely to be able to withstand a significant amount of compression before fracturing<sup>6</sup>. That too in this case ligature material (shirt) being broad hence causing no damage to the Hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage.
3. Location of stab wound with underlying visceral damage, external and internal bleeding along with the paleness of organs points towards the role of hemorrhage in causing death.

But taking the factors in this case into consideration

- Strangulation will cause rapid death in 2-3 minutes.

- Stab injury in this case was to the abdomen with injury to underlying stomach, mesenteric vessels which might have caused the slow bleeding which might have continued during the peri mortem period also. Hence the loss of blood and paleness of internal organs.

In this case we are not sure as to what extent the stab injury has played role in causing death. Hence are we justified in giving the cause of death as combined effect or should we give it as due to strangulation but contributed by strangulation or strangulation alone?

We do not know which of the two was first?

1. The victim was stabbed first and when the death was delayed he was then ended by means of strangulation
2. There was an attempted strangulation which was not fatal.
3. Strangulation was a just a means used to restrain and the death was caused by stabbing.

Since strangulation and the stab wound in this case in their individual capacity might have caused the death the opinion was furnished as “Death is due to combined effect of ligature strangulation and of stab injury to the abdomen sustained.”

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