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## Homicide Or Accident? Meticulous Forensic Investigation Solved The Case - A Case Report.

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### ABSTRACT

History plays a great role in crime investigation. In spite of that, autopsy findings and circumstantial evidence can lead to the actual truth. A 16-year-old boy was brought to the emergency with profuse bleeding from his left axilla and was declared dead. It was an alleged case of homicide, complained by the family members of the deceased but after thorough investigation and post-mortem findings, the case led to somewhere else. It was claimed that the victim was killed by his friends during a birthday party celebration. Autopsy findings revealed an incised wound over the left axilla which led to transection of the axillary artery and the victim died due to hypovolemic shock. Circumstantial evidence corroborated with autopsy findings and finally the manner of death was established as accident.

### Introduction

During post mortem examination, history furnished by police plays an important role in determination of cause and manner of death. Unfortunately sometimes history can lead to a biased opinion.<sup>[1-4]</sup> In an investigation of unnatural death, every single post mortem finding is of great value. Sometimes it helps the investigating agency to initiate the investigation. During the process of investigation, when circumstantial evidence corroborates with significant autopsy findings, a conclusion can be drawn and the case can be solved.<sup>[5]</sup> Here we will discuss such a case where an alleged homicide case turned into an accident by thorough forensic investigation.

### Case history

Here is such a case where a 16-year-old boy was brought to the emergency with profuse bleeding from his left axilla, and it was a brought dead case.

History from the victim's friends suggested that it was a birthday party where a group of friends were enjoying together. According to some witness, they had arguments on some issue and suddenly the boy was found to be severely injured with profuse bleeding from the left axilla. He was immediately taken to the hospital by the father of the birthday girl and on reaching the hospital, the boy was declared to be

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dead.

The parents of the deceased disagreed to believe that it was a mere accident. They said that it had to be a murder. Prima facie, it looked so because his parents were not informed in the early hours. Also there were some abnormal behaviours of his friends - like posting on facebook how they enjoyed in the party even after such a horrible incident.

So his parents lodged a complaint of homicide to the police. Medicolegal autopsy was done and the authors (Except SD) visited the alleged crime scene just after conducting the autopsy.

Autopsy findings: The deceased was of an average built and moderately nourished. There was an incised wound at the left axilla measuring 4cm x 2.5cm x muscle deep [Figure:1] and some abrasions in his knuckles, rigor mortis was set in the whole body and post-mortem stain was fixed.

Fig 1. Incised wound over left axilla



Internal autopsy findings were - complete transection of the left axillary artery. The autopsy surgeons also got a smell of apple from his abdominal cavity and from his cranial cavity as well (which was later confirmed to be of apple flavoured vodka and FSL report also confirmed the presence of alcohol in blood and viscera sample of the deceased.).

No other external or internal injury could be detected. Viscera and blood were preserved for toxicological analysis.

## Discussion

Axillary artery gets direct blood supply from the heart via aorta. So, if it gets transected completely, it will lead to hypovolemic shock and ultimately death - which occurred in this case.<sup>[6,7]</sup>

Chemical analysis of viscera and blood revealed presence of alcohol in the stomach. During police investigation, receipt of green apple flavoured vodka was found from one of the friends and it was established from the CCTV footage that they bought the liquor from a shop. It corroborated with

the smell of apple from his stomach and cranial cavity as alcohol can cross the blood brain barrier. From the crime scene, police also got broken piece of glass with blood stains that matched with the blood of the victim.

According to CCTV footage, the boy was, he was walking in an unstable gait holding a bottle by the support of his left axilla. He collided with a wall, fell down and his bottle got broken. In all probabilities, broken piece of glass from the bottle injured him in his axilla. He tried to walk, but could not, he fell down and could not get up anymore. Thus the accident occurred.

Considering presence of rigor mortis all over body and fixation of post mortem stain over dependant parts of body, death occurred between 12 to 18 hours prior to post mortem examination. Time since death from autopsy also matched with exact time of death revealed from CCTV footage.

That's how we can see how an alleged case of murder turned into accidental injury and death by meticulous forensic investigation; otherwise it could lead to false accusations and harassment of his friends - that did not happen here.

## Conclusion

This is the implications of forensic medicine and toxicology - the subject that teaches us - we should not always rely only upon history, because history can be biased and misleading. Only an unbiased autopsy is the real guide to reveal the actual truth.

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None

## Ethical approval

Not applicable

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