

Case Report

Homicide by Gagging: A Case Report

¹N. P. Zanjad, ²M. D. Dake, ³S. H. Bhosle, ⁴H. V. Godbole

Abstract

Gagging is a form of asphyxia which results from forcing a gag such as rolled up cloth, paper etc. deep in to the mouth or oropharynx. As such asphyxia by gagging is rare in occurrence and usually seen in infants and children as homicidal act or in adults suffering from psychiatric disorder as suicidal form of gagging. As young ones and elder people are easily overpowered due to least resistance offered by them, the homicidal gagging is more common in this age group.

We report a case of gagging in unknown newborn male which was found in polythene bag in open garbage area. During autopsy a rolled up cloth was observed in buccal cavity and on internal examination the gag was seen deep inside the mouth surrounded by mucus. In such cases, meticulous examination of nasopharynx, oropharynx and gag material is important.

Key Words: Gagging, Homicide, Asphyxia, Homicide

Introduction:

Asphyxia is one of the common modes of death encountered in medico-legal practice. Asphyxial deaths by hanging & drowning are most common with varying percentage of other causes such as ligature strangulation, throttling, smothering etc. Asphyxial death by gagging is observed very infrequently.

Gagging is a form of asphyxia which is caused when pad or piece of cloth is thrust into the mouth. It is commonly used to prevent the victim from shouting for help and death is usually not intended. Sometimes it may be homicidal particularly when victims are infants, children, females or individuals incapacitated by alcohol or drug etc. [1]

Case Report:

An unknown male new born, about 10 days old, was found in polythene bag near garbage area and was brought for post-mortem examination at Dr. Shankarrao Chavan Government Medical College, Nanded.

Autopsy Findings:

On external examination, body was covered with blue lined dress.

Corresponding Author:

¹Associate Professor,
Department of Forensic Medicine,
Dr. Shankarrao Chavan Government
Medical College,
Nanded, Maharashtra, INDIA; 431601
E-mail:zanjadnp_1@yahoo.com

^{2 & 3} Assist. Prof,

⁴Professor & HOD,

DOR: 01.05.2014 DOA: 14.08.2014

The weight of newborn was 2.4kg, crown to heel length was 50cm, umbilical cord was 3 cm in length & was dried, shriveled with white thread seen tied at the end. Scalp hairs were long and black; nails were projecting beyond tip of fingers.

Ossification center for lower end of femur, upper end of tibia, talus and sternum were present. Signs of decomposition were observed in the form of foul smell, brownish green discoloration of skin, distension of body & abdomen due to gases of decomposition and peeling of skin at places.

Examination of buccal cavity showed rolled up greenish-blue cloth seen deep inside the mouth & some part of cloth was present outside the mouth. (Fig. 1)

On internal examination, the part of cloth was seen reaching up to posterior wall of the pharynx occluding completely oropharynx & nasopharynx. (Fig. 2) Sticky, mucoid, whitish material was present adherent to cloth and surrounding the rim of cloth in contact with oropharyngeal tissue. (Fig.3)

Tongue was pressed below rolled up cloth. Rest of the internal visceral organs showed signs of decomposition.

Final opinion as to cause of death was issued as '**Death due to Gagging**'.

Discussion:

Gag means rolled up cloth or other soft material pushed into the mouth sufficiently deep to block the pharynx will cause asphyxia. [2]

In the present case, cotton cloth (soft material) was used as gag thrust deep inside mouth completely blocking oropharynx and

nasopharynx. Commonly soft material is used as gag but other substances such as toilet paper, tissue paper can also be used for gagging as reported by authors. [3, 4]

Gagging is mostly homicidal in nature and rarely suicidal. Homicidal gagging is common in children, females and old age group where least resistance is offered by victims.

The present case showed newly born fetus abandoned in open space with rolled up gag completely blocking mouth. Considering the rolled up gag inside mouth and the age of new born in this case, we can very well say that the manner of death was none other than homicide.

Saint-Martin P. [3] reported homicidal gagging in 91 year old female by using toilet paper as gag. Though homicidal gagging is rare in healthy adult, Kurihara K. [4] reported a case of 29 year old male where tissue paper was thrust inside his mouth but the man was suffering from mental illness.

Yadav A. [5] reported a case of homicidal gagging which was concealed by fire and the rolled up cloth used as gag was found in mouth up to the root of tongue.

Suicide by gagging is usually observed among persons suffering from psychiatric disorder. Saint-Martin P. [6] reported a case of suicide in 30 year old male suffering from borderline disorder where death resulted from an obstruction of the upper aero digestive tract after inurgitation of pellets of toilet paper.

At times cases are presented with sudden death raising reasonable doubt as to manner of death. The gag used may be completely thrust deep inside mouth and may not be visible on external examination.

Thus high lightening the importance careful examination of nasopharynx and oropharynx during autopsy will provide valuable evidence as to cause of death. Rastogi P. [7] reported a case of an apparently healthy, intoxicated male died of gagging in suspicious circumstances.

References:

1. **Vij K.** Textbook of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology. Reed Elsevier Pvt. Ltd, 2011: 116.
2. **Reddy K.S.N.** The Essentials of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, K. Suguna Devi, Hyderabad, 2009:317.
3. **Saint Martin P, Lefrancq T, Sauvageau A.** Homicidal smothering on toilet paper- a case report. Journal of Forensic & Legal Medicine, 2012; 19(4):234-35.
4. **Kurihara K, Kuroda N, Murai T. et al.** A case of homicidal choking mistaken for suicide. Med Sci Law, 1992; 32(1): 65-67.
5. **Yadav A, Alam F, Kothari NS et al.** A rare case of homicidal gagging concealed by fire. Medico-legal Update, 2013; 13 (2): 8-11.

6. **Saint Martin P, Bouyssy M.** An unusual case of suicidal asphyxia by smothering. Journal of Forensic & Legal Medicine, 2007; 14(1):39-40.
7. **Rastogi P, Nagesh KR.** Gagging: Accidental, suicidal or religious sacrifices? JIAFM, 2007; 29(2):57-58.

Fig. 1: Appearance of Gag (soft cloth) on External Examination



Fig. 2: Appearance of Gag on Internal Examination



Fig. 3: Gag (Cloth) with Mucus

