

A CASE OF ACCIDENTAL DEATH DUE TO AUTOEROTIC ASPHYXIATION

Ilina Brainova-Michich*, Metodi Goshev*, Alexandar Alexandrov*, Stanislav Hristov*

** Department of Forensic Medicine and Deontology – Medical University, Sofia*

Corresponding author: Ilina L. Brainova-Michich, MD, PhD Student

Department of Forensic Medicine and Deontology – Medical University, Sofia

Zdrave 2 Str., Sofia 1431, Bulgaria

Tel.: 0889364148, e-mail: ilinka_brainova@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Cases of autoerotic deaths are relatively rare in the forensic medical practice. They are mostly accidental deaths and are more common among men. In such cases it is crucial to determine the cause and manner of death on the basis of death scene and forensic medical examination of the cadaver. The conclusion should be given after all the facts are carefully analyzed. **Materials and methods:** Full forensic medical examination of the death scene and cadaver, additional tests and analyses. **Case presentation:** The case that is presented was a case of 37-years old man, who was found dead, dressed in female clothing and tied to the bed in his apartment. The inspection of the death scene revealed presence of accessories showing homosexual, fetishistic and masochistic behavior. The cadaver was examined in the Department of forensic medicine and deontology-Sofia. The external and internal examination revealed findings that led to the conclusion that the cause of death was autoerotic mechanical asphyxiation due to combination of postural asphyxiation and aspiration of vomited stomach content. **Discussion and conclusion:** In most of the cases, as the one presented, the victims are men and the cause and mechanism of death include mechanical factor causing hypoxia. Although cases of autoerotic deaths are relatively rare, they are of great importance for forensic medical practice and investigation. The comparison between data of death scene investigation and autopsy findings gives basis to justified conclusion on the cause and manner of death.

Key words: *autoerotic asphyxiation; mechanical asphyxiation; accidental death; forensic medical examination.*

INTRODUCTION

Autoerotic deaths are defined as unintentional lethal events that occur during solitary sexual activity, as a result of an unexpected effect or outcome of a device or substance that as being used to facilitate sexual activity (Capatina et al., 2009; Byard et al., 2012). Most of the victims in cases of autoerotic deaths are men, although occasional cases involving female victims have also been reported (Byard et al., 1988; Byard et al., 2012). Cases of children victims of accidental autoerotic deaths have been described, although they are more common among adults (Andrew et al., 2007). Autoerotic deaths usually involve rigging a device with ligatures to induce asphyxia (Atanasijević et al., 2009). In some cases hypoxia may occasionally be increased by the inhalation of solvents (Singer et al., 2006). Evidence of secretive and repetitive behaviour is common in the cases of autoerotic asphyxiation (Byard et al., 1990). Examination of the accident scene might also reveal signs of homosexual behaviour, fetishism, masochism (Atanasijević et al., 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The cause and manner of death were established by inspection of the death scene, full forensic medical examination of the cadaver including external and internal examination, and toxicological analysis.

CASE PRESENTATION

A case of unintentional autoerotic death is presented. The victim is 37-years old male. The cadaver was found in the apartment where he lived (Fig. 1). It was in a relatively advanced stage of

decomposition. The timing of death is approximately 4 days prior the finding of the cadaver. Examination of the death scene revealed that the cadaver was tied by ligatures over the ischial area and the lower extremities for the board of the bed, and the torso was in a lying position on the bed. The head was lying on the covers of the bed. The arms were free and held a rope. The clothing was feminine, tightened strongly around the body with cords. There were different sexual accessories such as ropes, handcuffs, belts, and vibrator over the bed (Fig. 2). There was a thin scarf over the mouth and nostrils, and under the scarf there was a folded cloth. There was a semi soft rubber ball strung on a belt in the mouth (Fig. 3). The belt that held the ball in the mouth was tightened with a loop over the neck and occipital area, and buttoned with a metal buckle. After the removal of all the clothes it was found that there was a condom put on the testicles, additionally tightened with a rubber band (Fig. 4).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

The rubber ball was taken out of the mouth and it was found that there was stomach content – pieces of meat and vegetables, into the rhinopharynx. The internal examination of the cadaver showed that the esophagus, the larynx, and the trachea were fulfilled with the same stomach content – pieces of meat and vegetables. The lungs' surface looked mosaic, with areas of emphysema and atelectases due to aspiration of stomach content. There were spot-like hemorrhages under the conjunctiva of the left eye and visceral pleura, the blood was dark red and liquid, and the internal organs were cyanotic. Samples of blood, urine and aqueous humor were taken. The toxicological analysis showed presence of ethylic alcohol in the samples as follows: 0,20‰ in the blood sample, 0,50‰ in the urine sample, and 0,70‰ in the aqueous humor sample. There were no other substances detected toxicologically.

The cause of death established after the analysis of the forensic medical examination compared with the data of crime scene inspection was autoerotic mechanical asphyxiation caused by two mechanisms – immobilization of the body which caused difficulty in breathing movements and obstruction of the airways with vomited stomach content.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the presented case the death occurred by accident due to autoerotic mechanical asphyxiation. It was caused by the combination between postural asphyxiation and aspiration of vomited stomach contents. Most probably the partial hypoxia due to postural asphyxiation led to vomiting and aspiration because the rubber ball in the mouth and the scarf over the mouth and nostrils made it impossible the vomits to come out. The gross morphology showed that the fatal outcome occurred quickly which was related to the acute decrease of oxygen in the blood. The presence of alcohol points that prior to death the victim had drunk some. Concentrations of the alcohol in the sample were very low, so they did not take part in the mechanism of occurrence of death. The investigation of the death scene showed no data that might raise suspicions that it could be a case of suicide or homicide.

Autoerotic deaths are relatively rare, but these cases are of great practical importance for forensic medicine (Byard et al., 1988; Byard et al., 2012). As in the case presented, most of these cases include different types of mechanical asphyxiation (Atanasijević et al., 2012). Establishing the cause and manner of death is the main purpose of the examination. In the majority of cases the death occurs by accident (Shields et al., 2005; Andrew et al., 2007), but it is important to exclude the possibility of suicide and especially homicide (Byard et al., 1990). It is possible in cases of alcohol intoxications, the mechanism of occurrence of death to be combined (Тимонов и съавт. 2012). This is possible only by careful and detailed examination not only of the cadaver, but also of the death or crime scene (Byard et al., 1990).

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FIGURE LEGEND

Figure 1. View of the death scene – position of the cadaver.

Figure 2. View of the death scene – accessories found on the bed.

Figure 3. Rubber ball fixed in the mouth with a belt, tightened over the neck. The scarf was removed from the mouth and nostrils.

Figure 4. A condom put on the testicles, tightened with a rubber band.