



D12 Autoerotic Death Investigations— Validating Training Doctrine

William B. Andrews, MFS, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, 6050 Heatherwood Drive, Alexandria, VA; and Donald A. Hayden, MFS*, U.S. Army Military Police School, 110 Hillcrest Court, St. Robert, MO*

The goal of this presentation is to report findings of research and case studies to validate investigative training to ensure investigators properly recognize the signs of an autoerotic death.

The U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command (USACIDC) investigates unattended deaths on Army installations and active duty soldier deaths wherever they occur, assisting medical examiners in determining the manner of each death.

The U.S. Army Military Police School is responsible for agents' institutional training and develops doctrine covering the manner in which investigations are conducted by identifying characteristics of types of deaths. Per current doctrine, investigators are taught that autoerotic deaths are accidental and can be recognized by identifying the following characteristics: 1) male, 2) secluded area, 3) padded ligature, 4) escape mechanism, 5) signs of prior use, 6) nudity or female clothing, and 7) pornography. This doctrinal guideline was established over 20 years ago and has changed little. Students are also taught to investigate all deaths as homicides until proven otherwise. The cause and manner of death determinations must be based on the entire investigation, and the presence of these seven characteristics at the death scene should not inappropriately focus the investigation to the exclusion of any other possible outcomes.

This paper will describe different types of hypoxic autoerotic activity, including ligature strangulation, inhalant use, suffocation, and electrocution, and define each criterion as it relates to the cause of death.

A retrospective study was conducted of Army CID reports of investigation initiated from Jan 1, 1990, through December 31, 2001. A total of 22 investigations concluded the deaths resulted from autoerotic activity. Demographic information, i.e., gender, age, race, and military rank and occupation, was extracted from each report and is presented in this paper. Each report was reviewed for the presence of characteristics meeting the definitions of the seven criteria.

This presentation will validate the training doctrine, in that the seven death scene indicators were present in one form or another in each case or in a majority of the accidental autoerotic deaths reviewed. Consideration should be given to replacing "padded ligature" with "hypoxic activity" since sexual asphyxial activity is no longer confined to ligatures. Ligatures and their padding would still be taught as examples of hypoxic activity.

This doctrinal approach has served the USACIDC well and has undergone Congressional scrutiny in at least one instance in the 1998 death of a soldier whose parents were not convinced with the outcome of the investigation.

Autoerotic Death, Crime Scene Examination, Army CID