



## Pathology Biology Section – 2007

### G60 Gaggling, Strangulation By Single/ Double Ligature ...or Incaprettamento?

João Pinheiro, MD, MSci\*, and Duarte Nuno Vieira, PhD, Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal, Largo Sé Nova, Coimbra, 3000 213, Portugal

After attending this presentation, attendees will learn that some apparent simple cases of strangulation turn out to be complex ones, with more than one form of mechanical asphyxia involved. This presentation

will also point out how important is to know the mechanism of death in these cases to be able to reconstitute the story.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity through the familiarization with this particular ritualistic way of committing homicide – the *incaprettamento* - practiced not only within the community where it was originally described. Additionally the presentation will emphasize the importance of the differential diagnose between the diverse forms of mechanical asphyxia used in a single victim.

*Incaprettamento* is a typical homicide ritual used by the Italian Mafia as an admonitory significance to traitors and considered a form of vendetta. A rope is tied in a noose around the victim's neck. The other end of the rope is used to tie both hands and feet behind the back. Death is attributed to self-strangulation when, by exhaustion, the victim will no longer be able to support the legs in that forced position. Some authors point out that sometimes, the binding is done postmortem, to facilitate transportation and disposal of the victim.

This research presents a case of a man partially naked, who had been apparently gagged and strangled, with the hands and feet tied at the back, seeming to be a case of *incaprettamento*. He was found in a forest, some meters away from the local road, in a prone position with the head lower than the rest of the body.

The autopsy showed that the victim had been gagged, apart from having two constrictor items around the neck: a ladder belt (which tied simultaneously both hands behind the back, with a twisting device made of a metal part of a bicycle inserted between the rope and the skin) and, underneath it, a synthetic rope. The feet were bound with an electric wire, separately from the hands. Typical ligature injuries were observed, such as asphyxic exuberant signals, osteo-cartilagenous fractures, intimal tear of the carotid artery and bleeding into the muscles and mucosa. A sexual assault was ruled out using a standard protocol for collection and evaluation of the usual specimens.

Taking into account the autopsy diagnoses – gagging and/or a single/double ligature – this paper discusses the real cause of death, and its relation with a case of *incaprettamento*. Finally, this presentation will debate whether this could be considered a real *incaprettamento*, since, contrary to the typical procedure involved in this type of homicide; the feet were bind independently, without being attached to the hands and neck.

**Incaprettamento, Strangulation, Gaggling**