



G39 The Choking Game: A Deadly Game — Analysis of Two Cases of Self Strangulation in Young Boys

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After attending this presentation, attendees will know about the choking game, which is more frequent than expected and often goes unrecognized.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing the importance of an accurate analysis of the circumstances of death, an in-depth inspection of places and things, and a careful autoptical and toxicological examination to do a correct diagnosis of a death by choking game.

The goal of this presentation is to provide information to show how cases of the “choking game” are more frequent than expected despite the fact that the phenomenon often goes unrecognized. The “choking game,” also called “jeu du foulard” in French-speaking countries, is defined as a self-strangulation or strangulation by another person with the hands or a noose to achieve a brief euphoric state caused by cerebral hypoxia. This provides a dizzy sensation, which is described as “cool.” Loss of consciousness may occur with potential injury from subsequent falling and/or due to hypoxic injury. Death may also occur, but young people do not seem to understand the danger of this behavior. It can involve both males and females, and the age range is 9-19 years, with an average of 13 years of age. Choking game participation is often associated with some health risk categories, such as poor mental health, substance use, exposure to violence, sexual activity, and gambling. These deaths are often classified as suicides or accidental deaths, without considering the possibility that they are a result of a deliberate self-asphyxiation in order to derive pleasure, which then turns into a deadly game. Death scenes and autopsy findings in suicides and asphyxial games are similar, so it is important to know the problem in order to better investigate. That’s why further studies are necessary in order to be able to recognize and adequately prevent this deadly game which can be difficult to identify. This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing key information that can help correctly evaluate asphyxia cases in young persons, to understand if it’s suicide, accident, or a choking game, by presenting two cases involving two young boys who died as a result of a self-strangulation.

In April 2009, an adolescent 11-year-old boy was found by his stepfather, hanged from a bunk bed in his bedroom by a scarf made into a noose. His stepfather removed the ligature and began cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The boy was transported to the local hospital where he was pronounced dead one hour later. An accurate inspection was made, including the analysis of the young man’s computer. The results of this inspection, autopsy findings, and the testimonies of parents and teachers made it possible to confirm the death was a result of a “choking game.”

In June 2012, another adolescent boy, 15 years old, was found with a scarf looped about his neck, suspended on the bunk bed, which was 103cm (3.4 feet) high, by his sister who went to his room to check on him because she hadn’t seen him in three hours. The mother began cardiopulmonary resuscitation while his sister called the ambulance, but the boy was pronounced dead by physicians.

These two cases show the importance of a careful knowledge of this dangerous “game,” which is widespread among young people all over the world. An accurate analysis of the circumstances of death, an in-depth inspection of places and things, and a careful autoptical and toxicological examination are essential in identifying the circumstances and cause of death and for the diagnosis of death due to strangulation during a “choking game.”

Choking Game, Self-Strangulation, Asphyxial Game