
E82 A Case of Suicidal Hanging or Accidental Asphyxiophilia? A Case Discussion

Sarah Hinnawi, MD, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400042, INDIA; Ganesh Patil, MBBS, HinduHrudaySamrat Balasaheb Thackarey Medical College, Mumbai, INDIA*

Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to present a case of suicidal hanging that had some features of autoerotic death.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing insight into such cases that are brought for autopsy. Establishing the cause and manner of such cases is a challenging task. This presentation will provide important insight into the management of similar cases.

Suicide is the act of taking one's own life. It is often related to severe distress, the etiology of which is attributed to mostly psychosocial stressors and mental illness, such as depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, or alcohol or substance abuse. Autoerotic asphyxia is a paraphilia and category of sexual masochism characterized by self-strangulation up to the point of loss of consciousness to elicit or enhance sexual arousal. It is an accidental lethal sexual practice in which hypoxia is used to enhance orgasm by strangulation, hanging, or suffocation/exclusion of oxygen with a plastic bag. It is often accompanied with other paraphilias such as transvestism and bondage, a great range of paraphilias, sexual aids or pain-stimulating agents, pornographic magazines, intimate feminine garments, ropes, bondage, locks, chains, condoms, rubber items, and chemical anesthetics. The most characteristic feature is the protection of the neck by placing padding between the ligature and skin. Death is usually inadvertent. The practice usually involves young males in the second and fourth decade of life and is characterized by some activity to culminate in ejaculation. Frequently, it is also associated in transvestism. The activity is performed repeatedly, as shown in personal records, diaries, pictures, or local evidence such as grooves in woodwork or verbal communications from friends, partners, neighbors, and family concerning the nature of activities.

Death resulting from the practice of asphyxia, often associated with self-bondage for sexual purposes, creates a query in the mind of the examining forensic pathologist concerning the psychological impact and intentions of the deceased, as well as the manner of death. A case having both the characteristics of suicidal hanging and autoerotic death may lead to confusion in the mind of the forensic pathologist. It is especially important to distinguish from suicidal attempt, as it will be important in the diagnosis of future care or management in living persons. In the present case, the absence of certain characteristic findings as well as the history, the death was designated as accidental. The possibility of suicide must always be entertained, even in cases that have typical appearances.

Hanging, Autoerotic Death, Transvestism