

I12 Autoeroticism and Depression in Lockdown From COVID-19: Accidental Death in Combined Asphyxiophilia—Autoerotic Asphyxia by Nitrogen Inhalation and Secondary Effects of Trazodone

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will know more about the accidental asphyxiating death in a depressed patient during lockdown from COVID-19.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an example of an unusual accidental death in a paraphiliac syndrome.

Reported here is the case of the death of young man B.D.G, ascribed to an accidental mechanical asphyxia. He was found dead by his parents in his house, supine in the bed without pants or underpants, covered only with a sheet and blanket. Around his head and neck was a handmade “device” consisting of a plastic garbage bag, a shoe string that secured it around his neck, and a tube, also stabilized with tape, connecting the bag to a large cylinder of industrial Nitrogen (N₂) gas next to the bed, with the knob closed.¹ The plastic bag was torn by the decedent’s father, who found the body. The investigations uncovered many searches by the patient on the internet for the choice of suicide mode. The time of isolation in the house favored such research. Also found were numerous packs of drugs on the table, most of them psychiatric. After external examination of the body, a blood sample was obtained to analyze the concentration of drugs in the blood. The results showed that the only drug present in the blood of the deceased was trazodone.

Trazodone is a serotonin receptor antagonist and reuptake inhibitor used extensively as an anxiolytic in human and small animal veterinary medicine. It is also Food and Drug Administration (FDA) -approved for the treatment of depression and has been used by mental health and primary care providers for the treatment of multiple psychiatric and medical conditions.^{2,3} Prolonged penile erection is one of the different side effects associated with trazodone use. This drug can enhance penile erection through a proposed mechanism related to the alpha-adrenoceptor blocking properties of trazodone by interference with the sympathetic control of penile detumescence.^{4,7}

The cause of death was assumed to be suffocation caused by the plastic wrap covering the face, combined with nitrous oxide inhalation. Nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas, has a euphoric effect and is used as a recreational inhalant drug that can be purchased legally. Suicide was suspected due to a history of chronic depression aggravated as a result of the imprisonment imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.^{5,6} Deaths caused by recreational nitrous oxide abuse are rare, but may occur if used in combination with a plastic bag over the head. This is the first report of accident by suffocation by external obstruction combined with nitrous oxide inhalation and use of trazodone for auto-erotic practices.

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COVID-19, Nitrogen Inhalation, Trazodone