

Case Report

Unusual Autoerotic Death with Hanging Whole body up to Beams and Wrapping inside a Complex Designed “Hammock”

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Abstract

We reported an unusual autoerotic death of a 33-year-old man who died due to asphyxia. The victim wrapped himself in pre-sewn multi-layer cloth bags attempted to enhance the pleasure during sexual activity. No other traumatic manifestations were found in autopsy apart from the signs of asphyxia, while the toxicological test showed a negative result. The posture of the victim also suggested that the death was related to sexual activity. Besides, a complete death investigation confirmed the cause of death was sexual asphyxia and the manner of death was accidental. This case highlights how the victim used a complex device to enhance the sexual excitement which could cause asphyxia.

Keywords: Autoerotic death; Forensic science; Hammock; Multi-layer wrapping ; Sexual excitement; Whole body wrapping

Key Points:

1. The most common pattern of autoerotic death is hanging, followed by plastic bags and/or chemical substances, while excessive wrapping is rare.
2. In this unusual autoerotic death case, the victim wrapped himself into a complex designed “hammock” and hanged it up to the beams to enhance the pleasure of sexual activity by the oxygen deprivation while wobbling.
3. Autoerotic asphyxia is classified as one of the paraphilias (hypoxyphilia). In this case, the method of asphyxia reflected a sexual psychopathy desiring to return to the uterus and mother’s body.

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Introduction

Autoerotic death has been defined as accidental death occurring during the solitary sexual activity that results from a malfunction or an unexpected effect of a device/material or substance that was being used to augment the experience [1]. The most common method of autoerotic practices is asphyxia, which may be caused by hanging, strangling, plastic bag, chemical substances, or a combination [2-6]. Notably, an unexpected fatality occurred because of the failure of release apparatus [7].

Case Report

A 33-year-old man was married and had one son. He was a staff member in the publicity department of a mine. Two days after his disappearance, his corpse was found in a derelict warehouse nearly 2 kilometers from his home. The front door was locked from the inside with no signs of forced entry. In the middle of the room, investigators found a device like a “hammock” suspended from the beams by complicated rope and pulley system (Figure 1). Further investigation revealed one side of the “hammock” (referred to as closing-end) was fastened to the upper ropes by a carabiner and then suspended to the beams through both ropes to keep it stable. Moreover, another end (referred to as opening-end) was sewed to an elastic opening which could be tightened due to the weight of the victim after he got into the “hammock”. The whole design of the “hammock” made the asphyxia condition even worse (Figures 1 & 2). There was a black sofa below opening-end covered by victim’s clothing. Room search revealed many similar banners, pulleys and white nylon ropes. Also, pornographic magazines and lingerie were found in the warehouse.



Figure 1: The “hammock” suspended from beams by complicated rope and pulley system. The red pulley (A) used to adjust the height of “hammock”. The closing-end (B) fasten to a carabiner and then fasten to the beams by ropes. The opening-end (C) could be tightened due to the weight of the victim



Figure 2: The detail of suspensory manner of closing-end (a) and opening-end (b). A strand of rope connected two ends(c)

After removing the "hammock" and the outermost gauze, the victim was found wrapped by four layers of pre-sewn banner-made bags with his head inwards and feet outwards (Figure 3). Livor mortis fixed and present in a distribution consistent with the posture in which the victim was found. Rigor mortis was observed on all major body joints and could not be altered by force. The upper right of the victim flexed with right hand on the genital, while the upper left limb flexed with the left hand on head and face (Figure 4). Splinter hemorrhages were observed in bilateral conjunctivas and cyanosis in the face and lips. A small amount of semen was detected around the urethral orifice. There was no fracture of the hyoid or thyroid cartilage. The result of the toxicology test was negative. The cause of death was determined to be asphyxia due to oxygen deprivation and the manner of death was accidental.



Figure 3: The victim wrapped in pre-sewn multi-layer bags



Figure 4: The posture of the naked victim

Discussion

In this case, the evidences supporting the judgment of autoerotic death are as follows. Firstly, private environment at the scene with door and windows closed and locked from inside. Secondly, no signs of fighting or breaking in. All signs matched the environmental characteristics of autoerotic death [1]. Check of the "hammock" revealed the victim might take the sofa below the opening-end as a footrest and took off his clothing on it. After entering the "hammock" and multi-layer bags, his own weight led the opening to be tightened to enhance asphyxia which improved the pleasure of sexual activity as well as the "hammock" wobbling. Additionally, the victim could also adjust the height of the "hammock" through the red pulley before he got in. No one else was involved according to scene investigation. Moreover, the man was trained to handle suspension through his work

and could be easily take the banners, nylon ropes, carabiners and pulleys from his workplace. According to the autopsy, the corpse had no other traumatic manifestations apart from the signs of asphyxia. Also, the result of toxicological test was negative. Besides, semen detected around the urethral orifice and the observed victim posture both suggested that the death was related to sexual activity.

Chinese study on autoerotic death started in the 1980s. With Professor Li Dexiang [8] first reporting an autoerotic death in 1980 and publishing his work in 1989, wide concerns have been aroused from all the society. A retrospective investigation on cases of autoerotic death over past 30 years in China indicated that the most common pattern of autoerotic death was hanging, followed by strangling [2]. By contrast, wrapping was relatively special and less reported. Some cases of autoerotic death only involved partial wrapping, such as muffling the head with cloths [9] or wrapping the head with plastic bag [10]. In 2014, an uncommon case of autoerotic death was reported in China. It described a man who rolling his head, trunk and lower limbs up with a plastic bag, which finally resulted in suffocation [11]. In another Asian countries, a case of partial wrapping was also reported in South Korea in 2013. A 26-year-old man suffered from autoerotic death in his own room with a plastic bag wrapped around his head [6].

In the western world, the first similar scientific case of autoerotic death was reported by Simpson in the United States in 1947 [12]. Since then autoerotic death came to be known. At present, autoerotic death cases become a subject widely studied. According to reports, only 10-30% of autoerotic death cases were due to autoerotic asphyxia by plastic bags and/or chemical substances [13, 14]. Besides, overdressing/body wrapping cases were approximately 1.5% out of the atypical methods of autoerotic death (5-10% of all autoerotic death) [12, 15]. In 2007, Morgan and his colleagues [16] reported a case of autoerotic death in which a man wrapped his whole body in a plastic bag. Once enclosed within the bag, the deceased could only obtain oxygen from the air outside of the bag by breathing through a tube. Finally, the man died of asphyxia as a result of prolonged oxygen deprivation. A case was also reported in Croatia in the same year, in which a 24-year-old man wrapped his whole body into a plastic bag and inflated the bag with propane gas to achieve asphyxia. The autopsy and field investigation determined that it was an atypical autoerotic death case involving propane gas abuse and full body wrapping [17].

Compared to the peculiar cases mentioned above, the case we reported is even more complex and quite special. The victim combined complicated pulley devices with multi-layer cloths to make a "hammock". The point is, the specially designed "hammock" has an opening end which could response to weight change. The man wrapped himself in the "hammock" to achieve asphyxia during sexual activity in order to enhance pleasure. It was rare to observe such a complicated approach in autoerotic death.

Autoerotic asphyxia is classified as paraphilia (asphyxiophilia, hypoxiphilia) and the association between asphyxia and sexual arousal have been described in cultures and historical periods [18]. Studies shown [18] that autoerotic asphyxia might be related to the victims' experiences in their fetus periods, most of them had experienced asphyxia either in the uterus or during birth, especially in the case of dystocia. As a result, asphyxia became an essential factor to achieve sexual pleasure, which lead to sexual asphyxia in their adulthoods. While according to the victim's behavior in this case, we believe that the reason of entering the "hammock" naked might reflect a sexual psychopathy desiring to return to the uterus in mother's body [16].

Summary

It is uncommon to employ such a complicated approach in autoerotic death (hanging to the beams by a complex designed "hammock", with naked body wrapped by multi-layer bags and enhanced the pleasure during sexual activity as it wobbled). The victim's behavior could reflect a sexual psychopathy.

Conflict of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of this paper. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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