

Was it worth Escaping? A Death due to Compression of Chest

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Abstract: A young male was brought to the mortuary of Gandhi Medical College by the police, under Chikkadpally P.S. limits. Death was due to Traumatic Asphyxia resulting from compression of the chest. Fatal cases in Traumatic Asphyxia are due to accident. The importance of Post Mortem Examination here lies in the fact that: the victim was found in an unusual position at the scene of crime, and, this gave rise to a lot of speculation; and consequently, mystery as to what actually might have happened, as the police were clueless in solving the crime. Moreover, this case establishes the role of a Forensic expert in solving crime, dispelling unnecessary doubts in the media and society, and, ultimately help in the correct administration of justice.

Keywords: Traumatic Asphyxia, Compression of the chest, Post Mortem Examination, Crime Solving, Forensic Medicine.

1. Introduction

Compression of the chest in Traumatic Asphyxia results in respiratory arrest due to mechanical fixation of the chest, by an unyielding substance or object, so that the normal movements of the chest wall are prevented. Fatal cases are only due to accident. Usually, there is gross compression of the chest and/or abdomen by a force, due to which chest expansion and diaphragmatic lowering are prevented. The usual causes are (1) Deaths in cases of fire in a theatre where large crowds gather in an enclosed space or in riot crush where chest is pressed violently or even crushed under the feet. (2) Falls of earth or building collapse, earthquakes, and landslips. (3) Victim, being pressed to the ground by some heavy object like a motor vehicle or machinery. (4) Indirect compression – “jack knife position”: wherein the body is subjected to such a force that thighs and knees are driven against the chest.

2. Brief History

A 32yrs old male, was brought by Chikkadpally Police to Gandhi Medical College mortuary for Post Mortem Examination. As per the Investigation Officer, the deceased was a petty thief, who used to steal from locked houses. One day, he entered a house, with an intention of theft.

While he was searching for gold & silver in the almarah, the owners entered the house and found the thief, stealing; they apprehended him, and kept him in another room and locked the door from outside. Subsequently they lodged a complaint in the Police station. The Police arrived at the crime scene, only to be baffled at the peculiar position of the deceased; half of his body inside the house, and the other half hanging outside the window. The media was quick to speculate, and many motives

to the crime were ascribed – some even suggesting murder by the residents, some suggesting torture.

All of this led to a gross confusion, the crime remaining unsolved and a likeliness of miscarriage of justice, as innocent people were being blamed.

3. Post Mortem Examination – External Findings

The Face and upper part of the chest was congested; Eyes were congested, with petechial haemorrhages on the upper part of the chest. Fingers of both hands were cyanosed. The impression marks of the iron window rods were found on the front of chest, horizontally placed at level 3rd & 4th intercostal spaces; similar impression mark was seen at the back of the chest at the level of T4 & T5 vertebrae.

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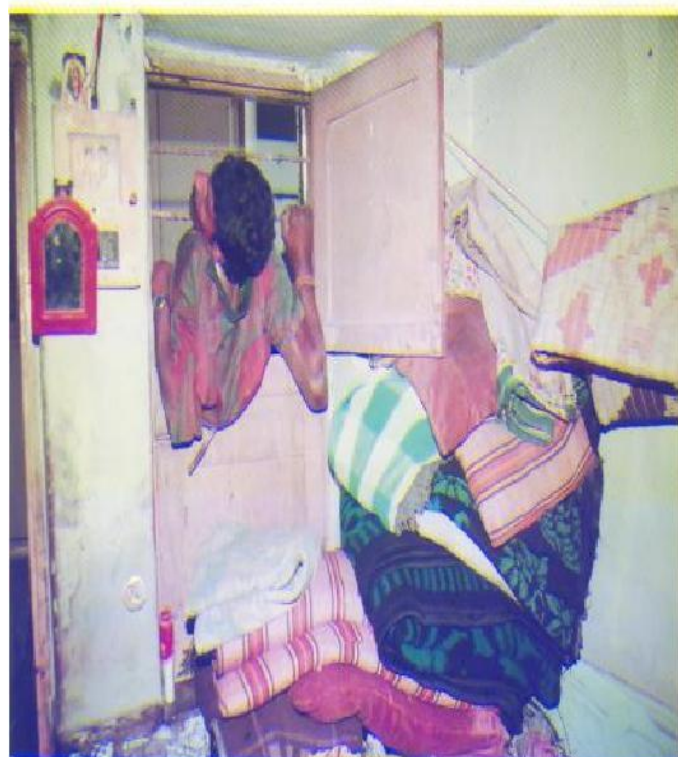
Rigor mortis was well developed and Post mortem staining was found on the lower part of the body.

5. Post Mortem Examination - Internal Findings

The Brain was congested with petechial haemorrhages; lungs were congested and oedematous, on cut section frothy fluid oozing out; Visceral congestion was widespread; Blood was fluid and dark.

6. Pathological Aspects

Petechial haemorrhages are caused due to increased venous pressure from impaired venous return, resulting in over distension and rupture of venules. Congestion occurs due to obstructed venous return and capillo venous congestion. Oedema of the lungs is common, and is usually due to combination of hypoxia and raised pulmonary vessel pressure; its presence indicating struggle for survival at a time.



7. Discussion

Every case is not a text book presentation. A typical scenarios are part and parcel of the medical profession; Forensic Medicine, being no exception. It is these atypical presentations that pose a serious challenge to crime solving. If not interpreted properly, innocent people can sometimes be charged with crimes they did not commit. When the Police is helpless in solving crime, it is up to the scientific professionals of Forensic Medicine, to come to the rescue.

Well, in the present case, the deceased, after being apprehended, panicked. Threatened by the owners, and in a hurry to escape, he did not have any other option, other than the ill-fated route. He noticed that the window of the room was open, though it was guarded by iron rods, he tried to escape by bending two iron rods of the window. After bending the horizontal rods, one up and the other down, he managed to pass first, his lower limbs and abdomen, up to the trunk level through the partially bent rods. In his anxious attempt to escape, he forgot to compress the lowermost iron rod of the window with his left hand. As the left hand was not utilized in time while the trunk was coming out, he was stuck in between the two iron rods at the level of upper part of the chest. The time lapsed in between two acts i.e. trunk passing out through the window rods and not utilizing the left hand in time, caused the compression of the chest between the rods; subsequently

leading to mechanical fixation of the chest, thereby preventing normal expansion of the chest required for adequate respiration and consequent Asphyxia; the nature of Asphyxia being traumatic.

8. Conclusion

An unusual case, out of the box, posed difficulty in solving crime. But, scientific method of approach as adopted by Forensic professionals helped the police in coming to a rational conclusion. The cause of death was established to be due to Compression of the chest - Traumatic Asphyxia and death was found to be Accidental in nature. This helped to put to rest unnecessary speculation, brought the case to a reasonable conclusion and also, most importantly (as the definition of Forensic medicine states) – “To aid in the administration of justice”, prevented the innocent from being convicted.

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