

# Homicide and concealment of crime

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## Abstract

Homicide i.e. killing of a human by another human being is known since time immemorial and considered as one of the most serious crime. Assaultants are very keen to conceal crime by different methods like defacement of body, electrocution, throwing into the river, burial, burning the body and dismembering the body parts etc. Amongst various methods of concealment of crime, the authors present a rarely reported method which is described in this paper. After strangulating the wife, a husband along with his female lover, enclosed her body in a steel trunk and lodged a missing complaint to the police. Later, on police investigation, the body was found enclosed in a steel trunk. Interestingly, the old religious items of the family were supposed to be buried in the said steel trunk which had been brought by the couple.

**Key Words:** Homicide; Concealment of crime; Strangulation

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showcase the crime in other ways to mislead the investigation and escape conviction. Certain offenders masquerade their offence by manipulating the body of deceased in such a way that identity of the deceased cannot be made out while others dispose off the body in a way that it cannot be traced.

## CASE HISTORY

A young couple went to the market to buy a steel trunk to dispose old religious items and since that date the wife did not return home. Her husband on the evening of that date lodged a missing complaint. During investigation police suspected some foul play on basis of call detail records of her husband and an unknown female. Police traced the unknown female and searched her house and found a steel trunk around which foul smell was noticed by them.[Image:1] On opening the trunk a decomposed body of a female was recovered and on interrogation the female revealed the minutes of the case.[Image:2] It was the same steel trunk which was bought by the couple, on the same day she was murdered by her husband along with that female. After that the body was sent for postmortem examination at district hospital and it was further referred to department of forensic medicine PGIMS Rohtak.

## INTRODUCTION

Homicide means causing death of a person by another person. This homicide may be lawful or unlawful. Lawful homicide includes justifiable and excusable homicides. Unlawful homicides include murder (S. 300 IPC), culpable homicide (S. 299 IPC), culpable homicide amounting to murder (S. 304A IPC), rash or negligent homicide (S. 304A IPC).<sup>1,3,4</sup> There may be several reasons for committing a murder like jealousy, rivalry, infidelity, want of money (burglary), unsoundness of mind, war and etc. As per survey by Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, stabbing, shooting and beating were the common methods of homicide during 2008-2012.<sup>2</sup> With ever increasing knowledge, availability to people, fear of conviction and evolving technologies, people are trying to



Figure 1



Figure 2

female was brought to the mortuary of Department of Forensic Medicine, PtB.D.SharmaPGIMS,Rohtak. Th

### Autopsy Findings

Ligating material: [Image: 3and4]

A black and white coloured ligature material made of two electric wires coiled over each other was tied tightly around the neck and was present in situ. It had a fixed knot placed anteriorly 7 cm below the centre of chin. It was completely encircling the neck and placed transversely. It was situated 2.5 cm below right angle of mandible, 4 cm below left angle of mandible and 8 cm below external occipital protuberance. It had two free ends, one situated 134 cm from the knot and another free end situated 27 cm from the knot. Inner circumference of loop formed by ligature material was 24 cm and width varying from 2 to 2.5 cm. The loop of ligating material around the neck had 4 plies with each ply having two coiled wires. Scalp hairs were entangled within the plies of ligature material. The ligature material was preserved, sealed and handed over to police.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

### Ligature mark:

A ligature mark of length 34 cm and width varying from 1 x 1.5 cm was present transversely around the neck, situated 6 cm below centre of chin anteriorly, 2.5 cm below right angle of mandible, 3.5 cm below left angle of mandible and 7 cm below external occipital protuberance. It was situated at the level of thyroid cartilage. On dissection, underlying soft tissues, deep muscles and laryngotracheal structures were ecchymosed. [Image:5] It was emitting foul smell. Scalp hairs were black, 40 to 45 cm long, peeled off with mild traction. The scalp and the skin over the body showed dark discoloration at places. Ears, eyes, nose, mouth, lips and tongue were deformed. The eyes were open with eyeball putrefied softened and protruding out. The mouth was open with

tongue protruding out and anterior teeth visible. Face distended with bloating of the facial features. Facial features were distorted and partially identifiable. Post mortem bullae were present at places. Axillary and body hairs were peeled off at places. Epidermis was peeled off at places and loosened over both the hands and feet. The chest was tense. Abdomen was distended. Pubic hairs were 2 to 3 cm long, black and curly. Rectum was protruding out. The board of doctors conducting opined that the cause of death in this case is strangulation by ligature.

### DISCUSSION

A murder may be committed due to several reasons and by several methods. This case focuses on not only the

method of murder but also on the manner of concealment of crime. The motive in such cases is predominantly to escape conviction. Similar cases related to unusual disposal of the dead body have been evidenced and documented in the past. Mr. Alavander, a 42 years old former military sub-divisional officer, was murdered by Prabhakar Menon. His headless trunk with arms and legs was found in the third class compartment of Indo-Ceylon Express train at Manamadurai, while his head was found by the police at the Royapuram sea beach. A careful post-mortem examination helped the investigating authority to relate the segregated parts of the crime, generated by the accused to conceal his act.<sup>5</sup> Devi Subbamma, aged about 65 years, was murdered in Masulipatnam by neighbours for the sake of robbery. Her body was recovered from a heavy zinc drum, from the platform of Tondiapat Station, where it was pushed down from a train compartment by some unknown persons. The autopsy provided valuable key points to conclude the case.<sup>6</sup> A similar case was noticed in Maharashtra state where a black bag was found at the roadside in Mumbai. Bystanders informed the local police. On opening the bag, police officer found a dead body of unknown young male individual. Yellow nylon rope was encircled around the neck and burn injuries were present over the body. The hands and legs of body were tied with the yellow nylon rope. Sticking bandage was encircled around the face. An onion was thrust inside the oral cavity of the victim. Autopsy revealed that deceased was moderate built with ligature strangulation associated with burns. The crime was concealed by enclosing the body in a bag.<sup>7</sup> Yet another case was evidenced where the victim's body was left in a sack packed with vegetables and transported from the crime site and found abandoned in a park. Post Mortem Examination showed that it was a sexually motivated homicide combined the perpetrator's obliteration of his victim's identity along with his attempt at concealment of

the corpse and sexual gratification following ligature strangulation of a young unidentified female from a minority Indian state. Sexual bondage was evident with characteristic body tying in a typical posture to fuel the killer's sexual arousal and gratification before, during and then after strangling his victim with a scarf.<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Meticulous autopsy reveals the masquerade done by the accused to conceal the crime. Post-mortem examination, police investigation, forensic evidences, confession of the accused, when all go together can never miss the culprit. Proper knowledge on the possible method of alteration can make the doctor more accurate in his post-mortem examination.

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