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Case Report

Accident To Homicide- A Case Report

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Article Info

Abstract

Key words

Homicide,
Accidental Death,
Defence wound.

Homicide is defined as killing of one human by another. Homicide cases can often present at mortuary with the mask of accidental death. This case report describes such a case which turned out to be homicidal in nature even though information from police marked it to be an accidental death. The deed was revealed by the presence of defence wounds on the fingers of the cadaver.

1. Introduction

Section 299 of Indian Penal Code (IPC)¹ defines culpable homicide as "Whoever causes death by doing an act with the intention of causing death, or with the intention of causing such bodily injury as is likely to cause death, or with the knowledge that he is likely by such act to cause death, commits the offence of culpable homicide" while murder is defined under section 300 of IPC as "If the act by which the death is caused is done with the intention of causing death, or If it is done with the intention of causing such bodily injury as the offender knows to be likely to cause the death of the person to whom the harm is caused, or If it is done with the intention of causing bodily injury to any person and the bodily injury intended to be inflicted is sufficient in the ordinary course of nature to cause death, or if the person committing the act knows that it is so imminently dangerous that it must, in all probability, cause death, or such bodily injury as is likely to cause death, and commits such act without any excuse for incurring

the risk of causing death or such injury as aforesaid". A study done by UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)² showed that there is an increase in homicide cases from 395,542 in the year 1998 to 464,000 in the year 2017; whereas, in India, the number of homicide victims reduced from 48,167 in the year 2000 to 46,460 in the year 2010 and then 44,373 in the year 2015 to 42,678 in the year 2016. However, many cases come disguised as accidental deaths and hence meticulous examination may reveal otherwise.

2. Case report:

We received a 50 years old male cadaver for autopsy at our institute. He was a labourer working for construction of a building. On that very morning, he was found lying dead on the ground, where the

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construction was going on, with injury to head (Refer to **Photograph no 1**). He was a known alcoholic and on history from the co-workers by the police, one hypothesis was made that in drunken condition he might have slipped from the top of the building.

Photograph no 1: Deceased with head injury



Photograph no 2: Contused abrasion over right parietal region of scalp.



of decomposition. There were twenty-four numbers of injuries all over the body. Major amongst them were- A) One contused abrasion measuring 5cms x 2cms, was present on the right parietal region of the scalp on midline and is situated 10cms above medial canthus (Refer to **Photograph no 2**).

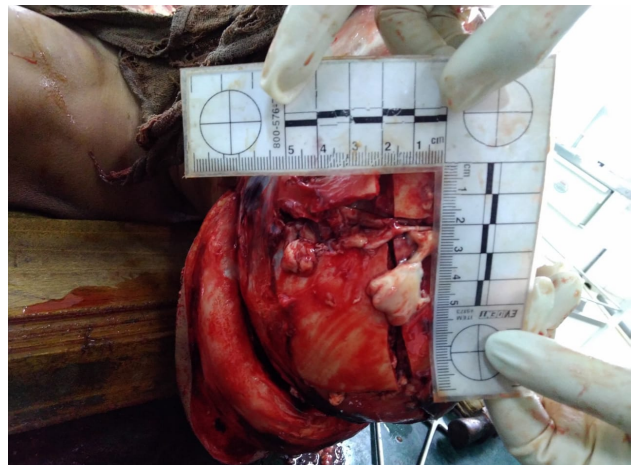
Photograph no 3: Defense wound over right index finger.



Photograph no 4: Defense wound over left middle finger.



Photograph no 5: Cranio-cerebral trauma with multiple skull fractures.



3. Autopsy findings:

External examination- The length of the body was 166cm and weight was 63kgs. Head was shaved and contour of the head was disfigured. Head and neck was smeared with blood and mud. Black eye was present bilaterally on both lids. Right eye ball was depressed and parts of cornea were abraded. Face was congested and finger nails had bluish discoloration. Rigor mortis was fully developed all over the body and postmortem staining was appreciated on the back of trunk and back of lower limbs and fixed. There were no signs

B) Multiple contused abrasions(5 in number) were present on left side of forehead over an area 6cm x 4cm, ranging in measurement from 3 cm x 1 cm to 1 cm x 0.5 cm. C) Multiple contused abrasions (3 in number) were present on right side of forehead over an area 8 cm x 5cm, ranging in measurement from 4 cm x 2 cm to 2 cm x 1.5 cm. D) One lacerated wound (Defense wound) measuring 5 cm x 3 cm x bone deep was present on the inner aspect of right index finger, 2 cm from metacarpo-phalangeal joint (Refer to **Photograph no 3**). E) One lacerated wound (Defense wound) measuring 4 cm x 3 cm x bone deep was present on the inner aspect of left middle finger, 2cms from metacarpo-phalangeal joint (Refer to **Photograph no 4**).

Internal examination: On dissection of the head, one sub scalp haematoma measuring 10 cm x 4 cm was found over frontal region and another measuring 18 cm x 8 cm over bilateral temporo-parieto occipital region. Whole skull was fractured into several pieces and inwardly displaced into brain matter (Refer to **Photograph no 5**). Stomach was empty and all the internal organs were intact and pale. Meninges were torn at multiple places. Subdural and subarachnoid haemorrhage was present all over the brain. Brain was lacerated at many places over the outer aspect of cerebral hemisphere.

Viscera were sent for chemical analysis. Chemical examiner's report came positive for ethyl alcohol. Cause of death was opined as Head Injury and all the injuries were antemortem in nature, caused by blunt weapon and homicidal in nature.

Discussion: Homicidal deaths are present since the beginning of human existence. Jealousy, feuds, wars, family issues all can be the cause of such action. Many a time, homicidal deaths appear as accidental deaths. In this present case, the presence of defense wound helped us to state the manner of the injuries and to exclude accidental death as suggested by the police. Defence wounds occur as a result of spontaneous reaction of the victims during an assault so as to protect them. This is an instinctive behavior that is present in all life form. The medico-legal importance of such wound is that it specifies the victim to be conscious and aware of the attack. Also it can point out the type of weapon used. It also signifies that the victim defended

himself. In one study conducted by Basappa et al³, it was found that defense wounds were present in 33% cases out of 121 homicidal deaths that were studied. Another study conducted by Lakmali et al⁴ stated that out of 213 cases of defense wounds, male victims were 75% and majority falling in the group 30-40 years. Most of them were struck by blunt weapon (72.3%). In another study conducted retrospectively in Egypt for a period of five years stated that 32.3% of the cases had defence wounds⁵.

4. Conclusion:

To aid in the administration of justice, we as autopsy surgeons should examine the cases with diligence and if defense wounds are found, it should be notified to the investigating officer so as to help them fast-track their investigation.

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