

CASE REPORT

**Importance of Visit to the Scene of Crime to Determine Manner of Death –
A Case Report**

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Abstract:

Most of the times manner of death is given based upon postmortem findings and spot inquest, without visiting the scene of crime. If a doctor who performs medico legal postmortem examination also visits to the scene of crime, it will be of great importance with respect to solving a criminal case. A team of medicolegal experts attached to SBH Govt. Medical College, Dhule, Maharashtra visited scene of crime, located about 60 km away from the hospital, to determine manner of death in an unnatural death of unmarried young girl and opined that death was not due to accidental fall from height as alleged.

Keywords: Crime Scene Visit, Forensic Expert, Manner of Death, Postmortem Examination

Introduction:

Medico-legal postmortem examination is done to differentiate unnatural death from natural one. If death is unnatural, medical officer/ medico legal expert have to give his opinion regarding manner of death. Manner of death can be of 3 types viz. - suicidal homicidal and accidental. Most of the times manner of death is given based upon postmortem findings and spot inquest, without visiting the scene of crime. If a doctor who performs medico legal postmortem examination also visits to the scene of crime, it will be of great importance with respect to solving a criminal

case. Visiting the scene of crime might help the doctor doing the autopsy in getting a better idea of how the injuries could have occurred. Evidence of signs of struggle at the scene of crime needs to be correlated with the injuries that might have occurred due to struggle [1].

It needs no mention that with the advent of different types of crime in both numbers and peculiarities, the ongoing demand by the public to solve a medico-legal case immediately often creates chaos at society. Several crime incidences depict the important role of forensic expert [2]. A team of medico legal experts attached to SBH GMC, Dhule, Maharashtra visited scene of crime, located about 60 km away from the hospital, to determine manner of death in an unnatural death.

Case Report:

An 18 year old, unmarried young girl, residing in a village, was brought in a dead condition to the SBH Govt. Medical College Dhule with a history of fall from height at about midnight from the terrace of the house where she used to study at night. Clothes of the deceased were intact and dried blood stains were present over salwar kurta and pajama. Following external and internal findings were noted during postmortem examination.

External injuries were as follows-

1. Chop wound present over left parietal region, situated 7cm from midline and 8.5cm behind left eyebrow, of size 5cm x 1cm x bone deep. Underlying bone cut fractured.
2. Chop wound present over left parieto-temporal region, situated 2.5cm lateral to injury no.1 and 8cm behind left eyebrow, of size 7cm x 1cm x bone deep. Underlying bone cut fractured.
3. Chop wound present over left temporal region, situated 0.5cm lateral to injury no.2 and 9cm behind left eyebrow, of size 6cm x 0.5cm x bone deep. Underlying bone cut fractured.
4. Chop wound present over left temporal region, situated 9cm lateral to midline and 4cm behind left eyebrow, of size 3.5cm x 1cm x bone deep. Underlying bone cut fractured. Lateral margin of injury no.3 and medial margin of injury no.4 merging with each other.
5. Chop wound present over left temporal region, situated 0.5cm below and lateral to injury no.4, of size 6cm x 1cm x bone deep. Underlying bone cut fractured. Brain matter exposed to exterior through injuries no. 3, 4 and 5.
6. Chop wound present over mastoid area of left temporal region, of size 4cm x 1cm x bone deep. Underlying bone cut fractured. Anterior end of injury merging with posterior end of injury no.5.
7. Abrasion present over left side of frontal region, situated 7cm from midline and 2.5cm behind left eyebrow, of size 3cm x 1.5cm, reddish in colour.
8. Abrasion present over left occipital region, situated 1cm posterior to injury no.6, of size 1cm X 1cm, reddish in colour.

Externally there were no defence wounds found over body.



Fig. 1: Multiple Incised Wounds over Scalp with Fractured of Underlying Skull Bones



Fig. 2: Iron Mesh Cover of Well



Fig. 3: View of Well and Iron Mesh Cover From Terrace

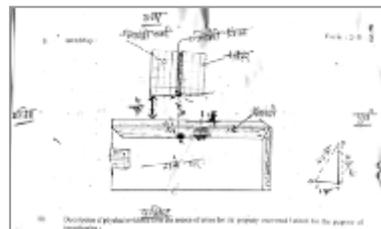


Fig. 4: Sketch of Spot Panchnama

Internal injuries

Vault of skull showed cut fractures over left parieto-temporal regions corresponding to external injuries nos. 1 to 6. Meninges were torn over left parieto-temporal regions, rest of meninges were intact. Brain was having a cut of size 5cm X 3cm X 2cm present over left parieto-temporal regions corresponding to external injuries nos. 2 to 6. Subarachnoid hemorrhage was present all over brain.

Injuries were antemortem and fresh. External injuries nos. 1 to 6 and internal damage present over vault of skull and brain was possible with impact with moderately heavy sharp cutting weapon. Injuries nos.7 and 8 can possible with impact with hard and blunt object.

Negative autopsy findings-

1. Bones of extremities and ribs were intact.
2. Apart from brain all internal organs, internal vessels were intact.
3. Spine, spinal cord, hip bone, tarsal bones, soles of feet were intact.
4. Stomach contained 20cc greenish fluid, having no peculiar smell, mucosa was pale.
5. There was no bleeding from natural orifices.

Crime Scene:

Team of forensic medicine experts from SBH Govt. Medical College Dhule inspected the scene of crime and taken photographs. The scene of crime was a cement concrete house having terrace and four feet away from that house there was a constructed well having water inside it and it was covered by iron mesh. The distance from the terrace upto that well was of 16.5 feet (sketch). There was history that the deceased had fallen from terrace i. e. from 16.5 feet height on to the iron bars of well and sustained injuries over her

head. The place where the deceased allegedly fell was not having any stones or metallic angles with sharp edges.

Team of doctors which visited the scene of crime after completing medicolegal postmortem examination found no disturbance at the scene and no stains were found. On enquiry, investigating officer told that relatives of the deceased cleaned the blood stains a day after the incident as flies were accumulating on blood stains.

Discussion:

Doctors generally do not visit a scene of crime to give their expert opinion regarding manner of death and instead give their opinion based upon documentary and/or photographic material. But documents/photographs don't reveal everything. Hence, visit by a doctor to the scene of crime becomes necessary [3].

In the present case, there was history that the deceased had fallen from terrace i. e. from 16.5 feet height on to the iron bars of well and sustained injuries over her head. If she would have accidentally fallen at night from the terrace where she was allegedly studying, she would have sustained fractures to her extremities, sacrum, hip bone, spine, spinal cord and other internal organs/vessels apart from brain. There was no bleeding from natural orifices.

Thus, we came to the conclusion that death has not occurred due to accidental fall from height as alleged. From postmortem examination itself it was clear that the external and internal injuries had occurred due to impact with moderately heavy sharp cutting weapon, whereas the covering of the well was of iron bars having blunt edges. The place where the deceased allegedly fell was not

having any stones or metallic angles with sharp edges. Thus, from the findings on the body of deceased at the time of postmortem examination and detailed observations at crime scene the circumstances related to death nearly rule out the accidental fall and direct the investigating officer towards possibilities of other manners of death like homicide.

A doctor at a scene of crime is best equipped with the knowledge essentially needed to assist the

investigators to make optimum use of resources available with regards to analysis of biological evidence [4].

Things are not always what they seem to be at first sight. Many cases of homicide go undetected because of lack of suspicion and improper or inadequate or unscientific investigation. This leads to miscarriage of justice and exerts an additional burden upon the autopsy surgeon in any given case [5].

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