



## AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF MEDICOLEGAL MASQUERADE CASES:

<b>Dr. C.R. Ram Reddy</b>	Bsc MD, Phd. Prof & HOD - Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Malla reddy Institute of Medical Sciences ,Hyderabad Telangana.
<b>Dr.M A Sattar</b>	MD Asst.prof Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Malla reddy Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad Telangana.
<b>Dr.T.Vikramaditya</b>	MD Asst.prof Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Malla reddy Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad Telangana.
<b>Miss Deepika</b>	Msc Forensic Sciences, Tutor Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Malla reddy Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad Telangana.

### ABSTRACT

Things are not always what they seem to be at first sight. Some cases of homicide go undetected, due to lack of suspicion and inadequate police and scientific investigations. All cases of death should be regarded as unnatural, until proved otherwise. The investigating officer collects the connected information and materials objects concerning to the circumstances of death in arriving at cause of death deceased. Sometimes criminally, violent deaths may be presented with the masked evidences of any injuries or poisons and conversely, the natural deaths can be exhibited with false interpretations and physical fabrications of violence over them. A person who appears to have died from acute alcohol poison may be due to either (accidental overconsumption) or committed suicide by self mixed poison or someone homicidally administery the poison in the alcohol. The medicolegal masquerade cases presented in this article are from self conducted pool of autopsies during the tenure 1988-1997 and 2000-2006 at Gandhi medical college and Osmania medical college respectively in Hyderabad city. In addition to the above cases, some sensational cases are also recorded from internet.

### KEYWORDS

suicides, homicide, accidents postmortem examination and masquerades

### Introduction with study design:

- Masquerade literally means false presentation of facts or dissimulating the real issues. Here the issues are medicolegal cases. The real medicolegal cases are falsely reported either with ignorance or with intention. Legally both of them are viewed seriously and punished accordingly. The cases of the medico legal masquerades are physically seen at casualties, outpatient departments and mortuaries. Usually these cases are of suspicious, confusing, controversial and contrary to the expectation. Unless, until full focus is projected on to these cases with scientific outlook and proper circumstantial evidences, it is difficult to do justice to the cases. Preservation of objects during the crime scene investigation and medical sample collection during the scientific examination sometimes stand as treasury of incredible evidences in the court of law. Use of knowledge of forensic sciences and exercising common sense with technical applications will stand as hall mark in the investigation.
- In cases due to accidental, suicidal or homicidal death, the scene may be altered or rigged or falsely interpreted to change the nature of death as per their criminal plan. Upset furniture, overturned lamps and other disturbances, and blood stains on walls and floors are consistent with a struggle between assailant and victim. However, similar disturbances may also be seen in cases of suicide committed while the victim was acutely intoxicated and agitated by alcohol or drug or under psychological excitement. Persons dying from natural causes may become hypoxic and become confused terminally, due to which they may fall against furniture or any object disturbing the scene.
- Postmortem cases of pressure over the neck with ligature mark and controversial allegations are one of the common scientific tasks for the forensic specialist in establishing whether it is the hanging or strangulation, because hanging is always suicidal and strangulation is a homicidal, which are until otherwise proved.
- Post mortem ant bite marks over the front of the neck are sometimes alleged as ante mortem ligature mark or the vice versa, the allegation of which may pose challenge to the forensic pathologist.
- Bleeding aquatic bite marks in drowning cases may be projected as ante mortem injuries and may change the cause and manner of death, if discrimination of both is not taken into consideration.
- In some cases of drowning with the absence of water in airway track creates suspicious situations like post mortem drowning or dry drowning. Presence of features related to other cause of death and diatoms test will rule the autopsy proceedings.
- Association of drowning case (with positive airway signs for drowning) with the injuries over the body will complicate the issue whether the injuries are produced at the time of drowning or before the drowning. Nature of injury and time since injury play a major role in the issue.
- In some decomposed cases of train run over injuries it is difficult to establish whether they are of ante mortem or post mortem in nature. There is a lot of forensic study at scene of crime as well as at autopsy dissection to know the exact nature of death, whether ante mortem or post mortem, and weather, accidental, suicidal or homicidal. If the injuries are post mortem in nature (death before the run over) then the cause and nature of death has to be established. Even in cases of ante mortem rail run over injuries, the investigation is to be carried to know whether it is a suicide, accident or homicide.
- Self inflicted cut injuries sometimes may be falsely alleged as homicidal injuries in vengeance. These injuries are produced usually on himself or herself at their own approachable parts of the body mostly on left side of the body by the right handed individuals and on right side of the body by the left handed individuals.



**Cadaveric spasm of the Hand**



**Self inflicted tentative cut wounds**



**suicidal cut throat wound**

The presence of cut injuries over the outer aspects of the upper limbs, palms, fingers and web spaces of the hands will denote as defense cut wounds seen in violent physical struggle involving sharp edged weapons.

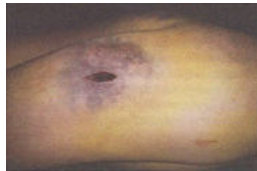


**Defense cut wounds at root of the fingers**



**defense cut wounds over outer aspects of elbow joint**

- Post mortem stains are often alleged as contusions, but with small incision over the area will establish whether it's a contusion or the post mortem stain. In contusion there is underlying collection of blood clot but in post mortem stains there will be passive collection of thin red colored fluid.



**Contusion over the Shoulder**



**Post mortem stain**

- False blisters are produced by applying counter irritants over the body and allege for infliction of the contusion injuries to punish the rival individual. False blisters are allergic in nature with tiny vesicles.
- Post mortem blisters are mistaken for blebs of dry burn or wet burn injuries. Post mortem blisters are due to advanced stage of decomposition appearing around 30 hours of death. These blisters have bubble like appearance with pale yellow base with scant fluid and gas without any inflammatory signs. The ante mortem dry or wet burns blisters will have red colour base and line of redness on the border with albuminous inflammatory fluid inside it.



**Ante mortem burn blister**



**post mortem blister**

- Sometimes unnatural deaths like poisoning or concealed trauma are attributed to the cause of death due to snake bites for exgratia of government sanction but autopsy will definitely establish the nature of the death.
- In cases of altered consciousness state of sick individuals there could be any attributable causes like head injury, infections of brain and ménages, alcoholic intoxication, serious metabolic disorders or even due to any drug induced problems. In these cases proper clinical evaluation and laboratory investigations are important in establishing its cause with the medico legal nature.

**Medico legal procedures:**

- In these special cases of medico legal masquerades, during the course of progress, different dimensional investigations are under taken by police as well as scientific experts. There is likely hood of alteration of legal sections in IPC, Crpc and IEA from time to time based on alterations in criminality perception.

**Materials:**

Materials involved in this study are

- 1) Consideration of self conducted post mortem reports during the period of 1988-1997 at Gandhi hospital Secundrabad and Osmania general hospital Hyderabad during 2000-2006
- 2) Collection of data regarding the forensic investigation procedures of suspicious death cases from the website.
- 3) Reference studies from the popular forensic text books.

**Methods:**

In these cases of medico legal concern the following events of succession are important in fulfillment of criminal justices system.

1. Record of dying declaration or dying deposition
2. Immediate scene of crime examination by the forensic clue team.
3. Collection of physical evidence at the scene of crime.
4. Recording of circumstantial evidences.
5. Avoiding any delay in the initial investigations.
6. Timely post mortem examination.
7. Simultaneous collection of required biological and non biological samples during the autopsy.

8. Subjecting the viscera samples and other related objects for physical and chemical analysis in the state government or central government forensic laboratories.
9. Early submission of preliminary opinion as to the cause of death by the forensic doctor if, required.
10. Early receipt of FSL report.
11. Timely dispatch of final opinion of PME report to the police station.
12. Immediate filing of case charge sheet in the court.
13. Finally, early delivery of the verdict by the court.

#### Case studies:

The following are some of the interesting examples cited from the autopsies records which were conducted by the author.

- These real time cases presented in the article will focus about the suspicion and confusion created by altering the in situ observations over the bodies, in reports, in crime scenes and simultaneously charging the opposite with false allegations threatening the criminal justice system. The intention of presenting this article is purely scientific and academically related and not designed to malign and disrespect any persons or plea or in any situation.

**1.** This young lady was brought to the mortuary along with inquest and requisition from CI of police, opining the cause of death was due to high fever.(submission of inquest was done on neighbor's allegation).



On post mortem examination, the cause of death was found to be throttling with physical evidence of marks of contusion in the right side of the neck with the underlying fracture tips of thyroid hornuae. The same cause of death was later accepted by the police and the mother of the victim in the mortuary itself.

**2.** A dead body of an old man wrapped up in burnt bed sheets was brought to mortuary with inquest and requisition by the SI of police with the cause of death due to burns.



On removal of the all the clothes, a tight coconut rope was found around the neck which was concealed by a brown colour muffler. On post mortem examination there was circular imprint abrasion of ligature mark over the thyroid encircling the neck with underlying contusion and fracture tips of both thyroid hornuae. Cause of death was opined as ligature strangulation.

**3.** A dead body of a middle aged woman was brought to mortuary with inquest and requisition by SI of police with the cause of death due to heart disease.



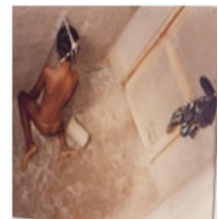
But while on academic discussions of the case with the post graduates, the case was discussed in detail with the photos of crime scene and inquest report. IO was asked for visit of scene of crime as the body was in decomposed status. Masking of the fresh physical signs over the dead body is quite expected. After the scene of visit, it was established that the room was not bolted from inside

and there was missing of her male servant boy. IO was told to investigate the case on the lines of homicidal death. Ultimately her servant was traced and on interrogation he confessed that he throttled the lady after the sexual act. In this case the visit of crime scene has completely changed the cause and nature of death.

**4.** An unknown decomposed dead body of young man was brought to mortuary with inquest and requisition by SI of police with the unknown cause of death. The findings recorded during autopsy were multiple ante mortem contusions on the left side of the mouth and in front of the neck. There was ante mortem circular complete ligature mark around the neck over the thyroid. There was also underlying contusion with ante mortem fracture tips of the thyroid hornuae depicting the cause of death was due to ligature strangulation with smothering.



**5.** A dead body of very young boy was brought to mortuary with inquest and requisition by SI of police with the cause of death due to hanging. Taking into consideration of the age of the victim, visit to scene of the crime was ordered.



Visit revealed that the door of the bathroom was bolted from inside, supporting the photographic evidence and autopsy findings confirming the asphyxial death due to partial hanging.

**6.** The fact of a young lady being strangled by her own mother emerged out, during interrogation of a driver, who was arrested for possession of illegal weapons. As per his statement they drove the vehicle, along with the dead body, in the same car to the outskirts of a village, where they burnt the dead body. Based on his confession, the police suspected the mother and conducted enquiries about her. On police enquires the mother has misled the police investigation, by saying that the victim was her sister and she has sent her to overseas for further studies. But possession of the victim's passport with her fiancée has raised a suspicion over the mother's statement.

As per the police investigation, mother has three husbands alive and one daughter, who was the victim. Basically all these people were involved with money matters, family relations, property disputes and popularity differences which could have lead to the death of the victim. The police subjected the partly burnt bones of victim for superimposition test as well as DNA finger printing test which confirmed the identity as that of her own daughter.

**7.** A case of unplanned duel murder of daughter and their servant in a fit of anger by the land lords (doctors), that has lead to lot of problems in the investigation by the police. Though the accused completely changed the scene of crime, by wiping out the blood etc and fabricating the injuries by surgical precision over the neck of the both victims, he could not be successful .The girl's dead body was kept on the normal bed, covered with a white bed sheet. The servant's dead body was shifted to the terrace leaving the evidences of dragging marks. The intentions of the accused were apparently evident to show that the servant was responsible for committing the offence thus misleading the investigation. But by the basics of the scene of crime and postmortem injuries on the both the victims with the circumstantial evidences, it was concluded that parents themselves were involved in the murder of

their daughter and their servant.

8. In another murder mystery case of an upcoming heroine, involving with her boy friend who, both together, consumed cool drink mixed with poison and both together were admitted in hospital in a serious condition. After which the heroine died the next day in the hospital but her boy friend survived to take a charge of abatement to suicide. In this case, the hospital declared the cause as "death was due to cardiac arrest consequent to poison".

In such situations recording of the dying declaration from the victim if he or she is in fit condition and preservation of victim's clothes are usually expected in hospital death cases while undergoing treatment.

Mother alleged that she was not allowed to see her daughter while the parents of boy were allowed inside which made her still more suspicious about daughter's death. The next day after the death, different papers published news with different versions like suicidal death? (Poisoning) or homicidal death? (Throttling with sexual offence)

As per the PME report, the cause of death was opined as death due to manual strangulation with sexual assault (The viscera and the vaginal swabs were preserved).

Later on the case was handed over to the CBI to probe into the controversies over the death of victim. Subsequently expert committee was formed to reexamine the findings of police investigation and postmortem findings. The committee gave the final opinion as death was due to "poisoning" based on following observations.

- PME reports do not exhibit facial congestion of strangulation.
- There was no bluish discoloration of face and body due to strangulation.
- PME doctor reported 150 ml of yellowish brown liquid in the stomach with abnormal odor which is consistent of poisoning.
- PME doctor opined that the victim was sexually assaulted with the injuries over the neck and groin but the expert committee expressed that in fact they were of therapeutic interventions only.
- PME report denotes discharge at vagina indicating it as sexually assaulted but experts opined that it was due to the application of medicated jelly during urethral catheterization.
- Initially, there was a controversy between murder with sexual assault or the suicide, but with proper investigation and further scientific evaluation, the case was finalized in the court as cause of death was due to "poisoning".

9. A murder mystery of 19 years old nun, whose dead body was found in a well, behind the building of a convent, which is still pending in the court, with suspicious status either suicide or murder. Initially crime branch police finalized the case as suicide [drowning] in their opinion.

- During active investigation of the case, the CBI has submitted 3 different types of reports to the court at different stages of progress
- **First CBI report** - stated that they could not determine whether victim's death was suicide or homicide.
- **Second CBI report**-concluded that victim's death was a homicide, but they could not establish the identity of the perpetrators. With this they requested the closure of the case for lack of evidence; however, the request was rejected by the courts.
- **Third CBI report** – revealed that there were some initial manipulations and attempts by the local police and crime branch, regarding the nature of injuries, disappearance of victims' clothes, missing of injuries photos, missing of victim's personal diary and tampering of crime scene.
- During the initial inquiry, the post-mortem, chemical examination and laboratory report were erased and were rewritten in the documents due to influence.

- As per the CJM order, the CBI directed the case to Narco Analysis tests on the three accused, who spoke, that the sister had hit the victim on her head thrice and dumped the body into the well with the help of other two persons.
- Initially, the case was observed as a suicidal death, later on the controversies' appeared to be either suicide or homicide and then, on further investigation, the case was charge sheeted as homicide. So the opinion which first appeared, changed to the different opinions basing upon proper and aggressive investigation and forensic reviewing.(medico legal masquerades)

**Discussion:** In the above mentioned 9 cases, the final observation emerged out as a surprise to the contrary of the initial impressions.

1. In the case of young unmarried girl (no1) which was cited above the cause of death was natural disease and that has turned to be a homicidal case after autopsy.
2. The case of old man with muffler around the neck (no2) which was brought for autopsy with accidental dry burns was found to be murder case with ligature strangulation.
3. The case of old lady with heart disease (no3) as cited above was brought with death due to natural disease, which turned to be a murder case (throttling) after crime scene visit.
4. The case of unknown dead body (no4) as cited above was brought to mortuary as unknown cause of death was changed to known cause of death as death due to murder (ligature strangulation with smothering).
5. In a case of dead body of young boy (no5) who was brought to mortuary with a cause of accidental hanging has turned to be case of suicide (partial hanging) after crime scene visit.
6. A missing case of a lady (no6) as cited above, mother has murdered her daughter (strangulation and subsequently burning the dead body) and mislead the investigation by saying victim was at overseas for further studies. Mother further mislead the investigation initially, saying that the girl was her sister, though the girl was her own daughter.
7. In a case of double murder (no7) as cited above, the land lords with alteration of a scene of crime, as well as fabricating injuries, planned to throw the blame of murder on to the servant. But later on the case has turned upside down, with the court's verdict that the land lords themselves were the two culprits in the double murder case.
8. In a case of upcoming heroine (no 8) which was thought to be a murder case with sexual assault has turned to be a suicide case of poisoning as per the expert opinion.
9. In the case of death of a nun (no 9) as per crime branch reported in the 1st level of charge was due to suicide, but later in the subsequent CBI charges, the case is getting turned to be a murder in nature.

#### Conclusions:

- It is necessary medico legally, to look into all possible inconsistencies between the real cause of death and apparent cause of death at all levels like circumstantial evidences, autopsy, scene of crime and at all types of investigations. Like in cases of hanging, the method by which a ligature is applied onto the neck or the mode of suspension of a body and examination of scene of crime, which determines the manner of death. In all medico legal cases, the cause of death, identification of body, time since death, identification of inflicting weapon importantly manner and mode of death can be established by the uninfluential scientific autopsy. Scientific evidences in police investigations with circumstantial evidences will definitely boost up its quality in delivering the success full verdict of criminal justice system.

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