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Case Report

An Unusual Concealment of Homicide with Animal Attack: A Case Report

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Abstract

Homicide is the killing of a human being by another human being and is considered one of the most serious crimes. Perpetrators often attempt to conceal their crime through various means, which can lead to misinterpretation by inexperienced autopsy surgeons and consequently, miscarriages of justice. Therefore, our careful observation and analysis must be definitive in the pursuit of justice. This article presents a case where the deceased's body was brought by the police for a medicolegal postmortem, initially attributed to a suspected animal attack. However, following a thorough autopsy and crime scene investigation, the case was determined to be a homicide. The cause of death was identified as haemorrhagic shock resulting from injuries sustained during a struggle. No evidence of bite marks or puncture wounds typically caused by animal canines were found on the body. This study underscores the critical importance of meticulous autopsy procedures and comprehensive crime scene investigations in establishing both the cause and manner of death.

1. Introduction

Homicide is killing of a human being by another human being. This homicide may be lawful or unlawful. Lawful homicide includes justifiable and excusable homicides. Unlawful homicides include culpable homicide (S. 299 IPC), murder (S. 300 IPC), culpable homicide amounting to murder (S. 304A IPC), rash or negligent act leading to homicide (S. 304A IPC).¹ After committing a homicide, perpetrators may attempt to conceal or dispose of the victim's body, fabricate an alternate crime scene, or destroy critical evidence to delay or avoid detection of the corpse. In forensic pathology,

concealing a body following a homicide is a frequent challenge, exacerbated by increasing access to information, the fear of being caught, and advancements in technology that aid in evading detection and conviction.² Animals can inflict injuries capable of causing death, complicating forensic analysis. Some offenders obscure their crimes by manipulating the victim's remains to hinder identification, or by disposing of the body in locations that defy discovery. Some offenders conceal their crimes by manipulating the deceased person's body in such a way that it is impossible to

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determine the individual's identity, while others dispose of the body in a manner that makes it impossible to locate it.³ In certain cases, injuries caused by animal activity, whether blunt or sharp trauma, may be misinterpreted as post-mortem changes or assault-related injuries, and vice versa.⁴

Therefore, meticulous evaluation of injury patterns, comprehensive scene examinations, and thorough ancillary investigations are crucial in such scenarios.

2. Case report

A 32-year-old male deceased was brought to the mortuary of Saheed Hasan Khan Mewati Government Medical College, Nuh, Haryana on 1st November 2021. As per the history given by family members of deceased, the deceased had gone to graze his goat in a jungle area during the afternoon but had not returned by evening. He was discovered dead in the jungle near Pipaka village by the near passers, with a goat also found dead nearby, suspected to have been attacked by an animal. The initial investigation was conclusive of death of deceased as well as goat by the animal attack which was considered natural.

However, investigating officer along with crime scene experts suspected foul play upon visiting the crime scene. During the detailed investigation, the body was found smudged with sand, grass, and blood all over the body. Adjacent to the deceased, a brick-sized stone with a pointed edge stained with blood was discovered (Fig: 1). The case was recorded under section 302 IPC, demonstrating a homicide. Before conducting the postmortem examination, the deceased's body underwent radiological examination to identify any radio-opaque foreign objects, but none were detected on X-rays. External examination revealed torn areas on the shirt, which was also smeared with grass, sand, and blood. A white undershirt was similarly stained with blood in places. Additionally, a blue pair of trousers was secured with a black belt. Following injuries were noted on the deceased body on postmortem examination.

3. Autopsy Findings:

Multiple lacerated wounds were predominantly present over the head and face.

1. Multiple split lacerations about 9 in number of varying shapes and sizes ranging from 2cm X 1.5cm to 10cm X 1.5cm which were bone deep, present over an area of 13cm X 10cm over right frontotemporal and parietal region, extending from midline to 5cm above right mastoid. The

margins of wounds were irregular. On dissection, the underlying soft tissues and muscles were found ecchymosed. On further exploration, an oval shaped depressed fracture of size 4cm X 3cm was found over right parietal bone. The fractured margins showed infiltration of blood in their bony trabeculae. A fragment of stone of size 0.2cm X 0.1cm was found embedded in the outer table of right parietal bone near to midline and 5cm left to depressed fracture (Fig 2,3,4). On opening the skull cavity, minute dust and stone particles made of concrete were found in the fractured margins of skull.

2. Split lacerated wounds about 4 in numbers with sizes varying from 1cm X 0.5cm to 5cm X 2.5cm which were bone deep, present over an area of 11cm X 7cm over right forehead, extending from midline to 8cm above right tragus along the hairline. The margins of the wounds were irregular. On dissection, underlying soft tissues and muscles were found ecchymosed. On further dissection, a comminuted fracture was found over the right frontal region extending from midline up to right temporal bone, involving the right side of frontal bone, right sphenoid and right temporal bone. The fractured margins showed infiltration of blood in their bony trabeculae. (Fig:2)
3. Multiple split lacerated wounds about 5 in numbers of sizes varying from 0.3cm X 0.3cm to 2.5cm X 0.5cm which were bone deep, present over an area of 9cm X 4cm, extending from the medial end of left eyebrow to lateral end of right eyebrow. The margins of wound were irregular. On dissection, underlying soft tissues and muscles were found ecchymosed, right eye ball was deformed and partially depressed into the anterior cranial fossa. On further dissection, a comminuted fracture was found involving the orbit and anterior cranial fossa. The fractured margins showed infiltration of blood in their bony trabeculae.
4. An obliquely placed split laceration of size 9cm X 2cm which was cavity deep was present over nose, extending from 1.5cm below medial canthus of right eye to upper lip, 3 cm lateral to midline. The margins of the wound were irregular and underlying soft tissue and cartilage were found ecchymosed. On exploration of the wound, nasal bone was found fractured (Fig:5).
5. An obliquely placed split laceration was present over chin, measuring 5cm X 1cm which was bone

deep, situated 3cm below to lower lip. Margins of the wound were irregular. On dissection, underlying soft tissues and muscles were found ecchymosed (**Fig:5**).

6. Four reddish contused abrasions with sizes varying from 2cm X 0.5cm to 5cm X 0.5cm were present over posterior aspect of right wrist (**Fig:6**).
7. Multiple reddish contused abrasions about 20 to 25 in no. with sizes varying from 1cm X 0.5cm to 5cm X 1.5cm were present over an area of 27cm X 15cm over mid and lower back. On opening the thoracic cavity, posterior wall of right-side chest region was found contused with collection of about 300ml of blood in pleural cavity.

Fig 1: Dead body smudged with blood, sand and stone aside the left hand.



Fig 2: Multiple slit lacerated wounds over right frontoparietal region of skull.



4. 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 the crime. The motive in such cases is predominantly to escape conviction. In the above-described case report, the injuries described were not corresponding to the animal attack with lack of bite marks over the body.

Fig 3: Showing oval shaped fracture over right parietal region



Fig 4: Showing fragment of stone embedded in right parietal region.



All the described injuries were mostly over the face, the perpetrator tried to concealed the identity of the deceased. A small fragment of stone was embedded into the outer table of skull which indicate the direct hit of stone over the skull to kill the deceased. A goat was also murdered near to the body to frame the crime scene as animal attack just to save from conviction for the crime.

Similar cases related to the unusual disposal of the dead body have been evidenced and documented in the past.

Fig 5: Showing multiple lacerated wounds over face.**Fig 6: Showing defence wounds over extensor surface of right hand.**

A young couple went to the market to buy a steel trunk to dispose of 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 the 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. On opening the trunk, a decomposed body of a female was recovered and on interrogation the female revealed the minutes of the case. 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.³

Another case of concealment with animal attack was noticed in chena at a remote area of Ampara, Sri Lanka. A 36-year-old male attached to the Civil Security Défense Force was found dead in a hut. He was in a supine position in a pool of blood and a

locally made muzzle-loading shotgun lay on his left side. There was an extensive ripped injury on the left side of the face. There were multiple footprints stained with the dried blood of an adult human on either side of the body but no blood was seen on the soles of the deceased. There was a scrawl on the cement floor written with wood charcoal, stating that he was attacked by three bears in the jungle, fought and escaped with injuries and decided to commit suicide. CT scan was done before the autopsy. The pattern of metal pieces and pathway of pneumocephalus indicated that the direction of firing was from top of the head to the left side.⁵ Another case was proven where the victim's body was left in a sack loaded with vegetables and shipped from the wrongdoing site and tracked down deserted in a recreation area. 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.⁶

Unusual patterns of injuries can indeed complicate the determination of the manner of death. In cases where the injuries are atypical or don't align neatly with common patterns of trauma, it becomes challenging for forensic experts to offer definitive opinions.⁷ It's crucial to approach all evidence, including Crime scene investigation, the deceased's medical history and findings from autopsies and toxicological analyses, with a critical mindset. This scepticism helps ensure that conclusions about the manner of death—whether it's natural, accidental, suicidal, or homicidal—are based on a thorough and unbiased evaluation of all available information.^{7,8,9,10,11,12}

5. Conclusion

In this case, thorough scene examination, careful evaluation of the pattern of injuries, and sufficient ancillary investigations revealed that the circumstances of death favour human attack over animal attack. The doctor's post-mortem examination may be more accurate if he or she has adequate knowledge of the potential method of modification.

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