

## Gagging by Unusual Object: A Rare Case Report

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### Abstract

Gagging is a form of asphyxia which results from forcing a gag such as rolled up cloth, paper or any other material etc. deep into the mouth or oropharynx. As such asphyxia by gagging is rare in occurrence and usually seen in infants and children as homicidal act or in adults suffering from psychiatric disorder as suicidal form of gagging. As young ones and elder people are easily overpowered due to least resistance offered by them, the homicidal gagging is more common in this age group.

We report a case of gagging in 16 year school girl which was found in mud below bridge over river and gagging by mud for preventing shouting for help during alleged history of sexual assault during struggle of deceased from accused. During autopsy, mud was observed in buccal cavity, nasopharynx and oropharynx with evidence of multiple surface injuries on body.

**Keywords:** Gagging; Homicide; Asphyxia.

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### Introduction

Asphyxia is one of the common modes of death encountered in medicolegal practice. Asphyxial deaths by hanging and drowning are most common with varying percentage of other causes such as ligature strangulation, throttling, smothering etc. Asphyxial death by gagging is observed very infrequently. Mechanical obstruction of oral cavity is termed as gagging. It is a form of asphyxia which is caused when pad or piece of cloth is thrust into the mouth. It is commonly used to prevent the victim from shouting for help and death is usually not intended. Sometimes it may be homicidal particularly when victims are infants, children, females or individuals incapacitated by alcohol or drug etc [1].

Whatever may be the situation; initially the gag only blocks the mouth and permits air entry through

nostrils. Later the gag becomes progressively soaked with saliva &/or mucus, becomes impervious and gets sucked in with inspiratory gasps. Finally it obstructs the nasopharynx leading to complete obstruction of airways and may cause unforeseen death [2, 3].

### Case Report

A 16 year girl returning from school at evening and then alleged history of sexually assaulted and murdered by unknown accused person/s and found in mud below bridge over river. The deceased, along with inquest and other necessary documents, was referred for postmortem examination to Medical Officer to nearby Rural Hospital, who then referred the body to Civil Hospital of District. Due to unavailability of Forensic Experts they referred body to Govt. Medical College & Hospital, Aurangabad for postmortem examination on 23/08/2014.

### Autopsy Findings

On external examination it was found that body was average built and nourished and wrapped in burgundy colored bed sheet with white cotton dhoti. The clothes are stained with mud and blood at

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places. Rigor Mortis well marked over whole body. Post-mortem lividity fixed. No any signs of decomposition. Each jaw, stained with mud. Both eyes closed and blackish. Mouth was partly open and filled with mud. Oozes blood from both nostrils. Stains of blood present over face, perineal region inner aspect of both thighs and legs. Dried stains of mud all over body present. Presence of mud particles under nail margins noted. Cyanosis was present in finger nail beds of upper hands.

Surface injuries on body were present as follows.

1. Multiple contusions of varying sizes were present in the inner aspect of lower lip, anterior aspect of neck, behind left ear.
2. Multiple abrasions of varying sizes present were over forehead, perioral area on left side, inner aspect of upper lip, root of neck, right middle finger dorsally, ventral aspect of right middle finger, and over both scapular areas of back. All injuries were dark red dish in color.
3. Evidence of genital injuries present suggestive of



**Photo 1:** Mud gagged in oral cavity

recent forceful sexual intercourse.

On internal examination there were evidence of under-scalp hematomas presents over right fronto-temporo-parietal region, left temporal region, reddish in colour. A thin film of subarachnoid hemorrhage seen over left and right temporal area. Oral cavity and posterior wall of the pharynx occluding completely oropharynx & nasopharynx pharynx filled with mud. Esophagus Mucosa congested, contains secretions admixed with mud. In larynx contains



**Photo 2:** Mud gagged in larynx and oesophagus



**Photo 3:** Mud gagged in larynx and trachea

bolus of mud of size 3x2cm impacted at laryngeal inlet. Larynx congested. Petechial hemorrhages found over laryngeal mucosa. Mud along with mucus secretions present in trachea and bronchi. Lung Congested, oozed reddish mud-mixed frothy fluid. Rest all organs congested. Dark fluid blood was present.

Routine viscera retained for chemical analysis and other necessary samples were preserved for analysis and all were negative and inconclusive respectively.

Opinion about cause of death: "Asphyxia due to gagging by mud with head injury with evidence of recent sexual intercourse."

## Discussion

Gag means rolled up cloth or other soft material pushed into the mouth sufficiently deep to block the pharynx will cause asphyxia [4]. In gagging the subject is unable either to breathe adequately or to swallow effectively, and he goes on to die from a combination of respiratory embarrassment & inability to dispose of his oral secretions either by swallowing or expectorating[5]. In such cases, typical asphyxial signs may or may not be present as it depends upon the struggle to breathe [1]. In the present case, unusual object in the form of mud was used as gag thrust deep inside mouth completely blocking oropharynx and nasopharynx. By considering, we can very well say that the manner of death was none other than homicide commonly soft material is used as gag but other substances such as toilet paper, tissue paper can also be used for gagging as reported by authors. [6,7]. In gagging, the gag is sometimes found in position with injuries in the characteristics situation. Gagging is mostly homicidal in nature and rarely suicidal. Homicidal gagging is common in children, females and old age group where least resistance is offered by victims.

Though homicidal gagging is rare in healthy adult, Kurihara K. [7], reported a case of 29 year old male where tissue paper was thrust inside his mouth but the man was suffering from mental illness. Saint-Martin P. [6], reported homicidal gagging in 91 year old female by using toilet paper as gag. Yadav [8] reported a case of homicidal gagging which was concealed by fire and the rolled up cloth used as gag was found in mouth up to the root of tongue. Suicide by gagging is usually observed among persons suffering from psychiatric disorder. Saint-Martin P. [6] reported a case of suicide in 30 year old male

suffering from borderline disorder where death resulted from an obstruction of the upper aero digestive tract after ingurgitation of pellets of toilet paper. At times cases are presented with sudden death raising reasonable doubt as to manner of death. The gag used may be completely thrust deep inside mouth and may not be visible on external examination. Thus high lightening the importance careful examination of nasopharynx and oropharynx during autopsy will provide valuable evidence as to cause of death.

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