

Suicidal Death by Hanging in Nepal: Role of Forensic Science in the Determination of Suicidal Hanging

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Abstract

Suicidal hanging method is one of the major suicidal deaths in the globe. It is preferred by male compared to female because of the highest fatality rate and it is much more challenging to the preventive strategies though other types of homicidal hanging, accidental hanging and simulated hanging that may causative factors of death. The researcher used doctrinal dominated primary fact-finding methods to fulfill the research objective the role of forensic science in determining suicidal hanging analytically. The rate of suicidal hanging in the globe from 1990 to 2016 has been increasing at the rate of 32.7 % compared to the increased population of this period. Nepal is also suffering from such kind of problem. It has been increasing at the rate of 6.7 percent in Nepal. Anti-mortem such as elongation of neck, stretched, potentiality of seeing poetical hemorrhages may be seen on the face, neck and conjunctiva, protruded tongue and tip between teeth, discharge of urine, seen of feces and semen are noted in suicidal hanging though autopsy finding is reliable in determining suicidal hanging from homicide. Forensic science is a crucial measuring rod for confirming suicidal hanging that differentiate homicidal hanging. Majorities of crime victim's family were found to have believed on the decisions of medical facts. Those who challenged so-called suicidal hanging was found to have suspected by autopsy as well.

Keywords: Suicidal hanging, homicidal hanging, forensic science, ligature point, stages of suicidal hanging and Nepali legal system of suicidal hanging

Introduction

Forensic science is the discipline of LLM that includes methodologies of examining evidences related to crimes scenes. The subject describes different types of death and suicidal hanging is one of major suicidal deaths of the world. This paper entitled "Role of Forensic Science in the Determination of Suicidal Death by Hanging."

Hanging is one of the most commonly used methods for suicide worldwide. It is said that hanging is suspension of one's body by a rope and/or other objects with ligature, which encircles the neck due to the constricting force created by the weight of human body of suicidal. In such a case, there is use of ligature that may any objects used for suspending body of the suicidal in which rope,

wire, scarf, shawl, shoelace etc. to encircle neck. Though observers can see suspended body of the suicidal hanging, no one can determine whether case of death by hanging or homicide with naked eye in the absence of autopsy. It is the act of forensic science that determines suicidal hanging whether the death of person has happened due to suicidal hanging or homicide.

In the classroom presentation, Waste has defined as it is a mode of violent asphyxia, caused by suspending the body, by a ligature material placed around the neck (Wasti, Suicidal Hanging , 2024). The constricting force is the either full or part of body weight if it compressed lower part of medulla oblongata. According to the expert, if there is stricture of carotid artery in any type of hanging (Saud, 2026) . He also adds that whether

there be complete hanging or partial hanging, if air is blocked from 10 -15 second in medulla oblongata due to such stricture of carotid artery suicidal becomes unconscious.

Forensic science is the branch of knowledge that carries varieties of tests with the use of all sciences in terms of administration criminal and civil justice. In the context of delivering justice to victim, knowledge of the forensic sciences is inevitable. Ramesh Parajuli (2021) has given examples of the application of forensic science for admissibility of crime (Parajuli, 2021). Along with internal examination, the external examination carries a great significance in reaching conclusion of suicidal hanging. Nepal is suffering from suicidal hanging. A great deal of persons committed hanging from 2018 to 2023 (Thapa, 2023). In 2018/19, 4337 committed suicidal hanging whereas in the fiscal year 19/20, 5039 committed suicidal hanging. In the fiscal year 2020/ 21, the number increased up to 5731. The 5696 persons committed suicidal hanging in 2022 whereas 4147 persons committed suicidal hanging in 2023 (Thapa, 2023).

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study were to find out the role of forensic science in determining suicidal hanging with the analysis of factors influencing suicidal death by hanging.

Rationale of the Study

The paper is the doctrinal dominated empirical study that provides conceptual clarity of suicidal hanging that can be taken as purposeful factor in determining suicidal death by hanging in the application of forensic science. Homicidal hanging, in a few cases may create confusions to public and relatives. Arati Saha's suicidal hanging case has been running in the Supreme Court (Nepalkhabar, 2080 BS), The Supreme Court sent her husband jail by reviewing the acquittal decision of the Higher Court, Janakpur. There are various beliefs toward the death of suicidal hanging among public. People, sometimes, make argument that knee bending and ground touching cases of hanging are homicidal hanging. Such study justifies suicidal hanging from various facts by ensuring the application of forensic facts and procedures that differentiate suicidal hanging from homicide. This study also provides forensic inputs that eliminate suicidal hanging related misconceptions in the application of medical privilege oriented judgement instead of hearsay. The conclusions are also vital factors in terms of

establishing scientific lab-based testing evidence-based belief rather than making hearsay argument on suicidal hanging.

Statement of the Problem

Suicidal hanging has become one of the global challenges including Nepal. Though the rate of suicidal hanging is decreasing in the globe compared to its increasing population, the rate of suicidal hanging is increasing in Nepal. There are misconnects of suicidal hanging and homicidal hanging. In the case of ground touching with body of suicidal relatives have found to have raised issue of homicidal hanging by observing outsider bodily posture such as touching ground by legs and other characteristics. The method of suicidal hanging raised question, "How forensic science determine and differentiate suicidal hanging and homicidal hanging?" "Why does Nepal face increased rate of suicidal hanging compared to the decreased rate of it in the globe?"

Methodology of the Study

This paper has prepared from the desk review of various literatures related to suicidal death by hanging with a few primary data. Moreover, it consists of the result of secondary data analysis which been presented categorically.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations: The issues raised by this study may not be applied as it is because of time constraint, use of secondary data and a small scale of study prepared in the use of very minimum resource.

Delimitations: The study described Nepal's situation of suicidal death by hanging from the explanation of suicidal death by hanging, types and stages of hanging as the focused areas of the study.

Discussion of the Results

Based on the secondary and primary facts, the researcher drew results from the following heading wise discussion.

Factors Influencing Suicidal Hanging

Hanging is one of the most commonly used methods. In UK, the fatality rate of hanging is greater than 70 percent (Biddle et al., 2010). The same study has revealed that suicidal hanging was the preference of male compared to suicidal cases committed by females. The study analyzed suicidal death trends of hanging in England also revealed the trend is apparent for men. The study has also disclosed that increasing concern of suicidal hanging has two reasons: firstly, it is lethal method with estimated fatality rate over 70%. Second,

hanging poses a challenge to current suicide prevention strategies, which place emphasis on restricting access to commonly used methods. Death by hanging has become a challenge due to the higher fatality rate. Medical practitioners in the application of forensic science confirmed all these cases.

The team of the researcher revealed that hanging was adopted or contemplated for two main reasons: the anticipated nature of a death from hanging; and accessibility (Lucy Biddle 1, 2010). The study also explored that those favouring hanging anticipated a certain, rapid and painless death with little awareness of dying and believed that it a 'clean' method that would not damage the body or leave harrowing images for others. Materials for hanging were easily accessed and respondents considered it 'simple' to perform without the need for planning or technical knowledge (Lucy Biddle, 2010). Hanging was thus, seen as the 'quickest' and 'easiest' method with few barriers to completion. In addition, sometimes it adopted despite not being a first choice.

Out of 12 respondents, all rejected hanging recognized it could be slow, painful and 'messy', and thought technical knowledge was needed for implementation (Lucy Biddle, 2010). The efforts of suicidal hanging were also found to have confirmed by scientific methods accepted by forensic science. The researcher observed the suicidal hanging of Kavrepalanchok. There were ninety-nine cases of suicidal hanging recorded in the Public Attorney Office in the fiscal year (District Government Attorney Office, Kavrepalanchok, 2083 BS).

The Role of Forensic Science in Determining Suicidal Hanging

Suicidal hanging is a common suicide method. The materials necessary for suicide by hanging are readily available to the average person, compared with firearms or poisons. Full suspension is not required, and for this reason, hanging is especially commonplace among suicidal prisoner. In this context, those who survive a suicide-via-hanging attempt, whether due to breakage of the cord, or being discovered and cut down, face a range of serious injuries, including cerebral anoxia (which can lead to permanent brain damage), laryngeal fracture, cervical spine fracture (which may cause paralysis), tracheal fracture, pharyngeal laceration, and carotid artery injury. Though such characteristics are seen through naked eyes, in the investigation of suicidal hanging, Kavre police told

that people use to debate with the investigation team while seeing half-hanging deceased, the local people who had knowledge of characteristics of ante-mortem could convince such confusions (Inspector, 2026).

Types of Hanging

Generally, there are two methods of hanging: suspension hanging in which there is suspension body at the neck of suicidal and drop hanging another type of hanging that is calculated drop designed to break the neck (Shabnam & Naiem, 2020). Suicidal hanging is a committed by suspending. The suspension hanging has been classified as:

Partial hanging: In the case of Madhav Panta cited in Modi's Medical Jurisprudence 22nd edition page 251 to define partial hanging as hanging from a low point of suspension. A person may commit suicide by partial hanging for which little force about 4.5 kg is enough to occlude (block/obstruct) blood vessels of neck. In such a case, the bodies are partially suspended, or for those in which the bodies are sitting, kneeling, reclining, and prone or any other posture, in all such cases, death is inevitable from asphyxia. This fact has also been proved by forensic science.

Accidental hanging: This is another type of hanging in which there is no need to completely encircle neck. In such a hanging, it is sufficient if the ligature is applied beneath the chin that compresses the sides of the chin. Accidental hanging can take places in children during play, while climbing trees, walking by carrying a bag, potters by their head strap, workmen falling from scaffolding and athletes with habit of exhibiting hanging.

Suicidal hanging: In terms of committing suicide, a person who himself/herself commit suicide by suspending with ligature is called suicidal hanging. In suicidal hanging, usually victim stands on a stool, a chair or other platform and jumps off or kicks away the support. Rarely in some suicidal hanging do the suicide ties own hands together to prevent a change of mind from he or she cannot escape from idea of suiciding.

Homicidal hanging: The homicidal hanging is different from suicidal hanging though it is extremely rare. Hanging another person by a single assailant is difficult. Such kind of homicide occur by intoxicating with drug or injury. The victim may belong to a child or a weak or very old person. The signs of homicide are as follows:

- In this, there is presence of violence marks in body parts of victim.
- The furniture of the scene has been become disorder or other objects at crime scene.
- The pattern of ligature is different in which the pattern of ligature dragging from downward to upward can be seen in acute/ quick examination of ligature.
- The clothing of deceased is found to be torn or disordered.

- There may be presence of injuries, which is created either from offensive or defensive.
- There may be signs of scratches and nail marks.

In the case of Arati Sah there had been mention of hurt in her cheek that extended inside by medical investigation (Dhungana, 2080BS)

In his class presentation, Harihar Avasti mentioned homicidal and simulated hanging with specific characteristics as given in the following:

Table 3:
Homicidal, Suicidal and Simulated Hanging

Suicidal	Homicidal	Simulated
Sign of hanging (+)	*Low body weight	*Other causes of death
No scene disturbance	*Scene disturbance	*Scene disturbance
H/o mental effect (+)	*Situation of conflict	* Reason to kill
LM of hanging	*LM of hanging	*LM of hanging PM
Injuries ()	* Injuries may be	*Injuries more likely
Sign of struggle (-)	*Usually (+)	More (+)

Source (Awasti, 2023)

The table has specified major characteristics of suicidal hanging that are differentiated from homicidal simulated hanging. The presence of sign hanging and H/o mental effect can be seen found. Similarly, there may not be presence of sign of injuries and sign of struggle in the suicidal hanging compared to homicidal and simulated hanging.

Stages of Hanging

The death of suicidal occurs due to asphyxia or cerebral anoxia or vagal inhibition leading to cardiac arrest or injury to spinal cord. In hanging, death occurs due to asphyxia. During hanging, the various sensations or instances occur. These are:

- **Loss of power and subjective sensations:** It is the first stage that occurs in suicidal hanging. In this, flash of light, ringing and hissing noises in the ear are subjective sensations experienced by victim.
- **Loss of consciousness.** Another stage of hanging is the loss of consciousness which takes place 15 seconds if thin rope is used. Such instance happens due to the blockade of jugular vein creating cerebral congestion,¹

and blockade of carotid arteries creating cerebral ischemia and anoxia.

- **Stage of Convulsion:** It refers a sudden violent uncontrolled body movement due to the constriction of muscles in which the face of victim is swollen and livid become prominent and there is violent struggling.
- **Death:** It is the final stage of symptoms where the suspended person completely loses his/her life.

Situation of Suicidal Hanging in Nepal

Nepal has increase in suicidal death by 33% in 2019 compared to 2015. The data revealed that hanging was the most common (70.13%) method followed by the consumption of poison (26.55%). In 2019, Kathmandu University Medical Journal presented a comparative scenario of hanging by age group, sex, religion, marital status, treated and spotted death in the following table in the reference of autopsy from July 2011 to July 2013.

Every year more than 700 000 people die due to suicide globally. For every suicide, there are many more people who attempt to take their lives. Almost 77 percent of suicides occur in low and middle-income countries. Suicidal hanging has

¹ In this, presence of abnormal amount of blood due to blockade of venous flow.

become a great challenge to families and nations nowadays. The authors, in terms drawing a comparative status of choices of various methods adopted in suicide worldwide and to make out if make out if gender differences play a part thus contributing the Nepalese findings in the scientific

arena. In the context of exploring socio-demographic characteristics in cases of death due to completed hanging in Nepal, the authors took 91 autopsy cases and then drew conclusions from those. The following table depicts situation of suicidal death adopted by various methods.

Table 4:
Demographic Features and Treatment Status in Hanging

Demographic Features and Treatment Status in Hanging				
Variables		Frequency		
	From	To	Frequency	%
Age group	11	20	17	18.68
	21	30	25	27.47
	31	40	18	19.78
	41	50	11	12.08
	51	60	9	9.89
	61	70	5	5.49
	71	80	4	4.39
	81	90	2	2.19

Variables		Frequency	
Gender	Male	57	62.64
	Female	34	37.36
Marital status	Married	58	63.74
	Unmarried	30	32.97
Religion	Unknown	4	4.39
	Hindu	82	90.11
	Budhist	5	5.49
Treatment status	Unknown	4	4.4
	Treated	5	5.49
	Spotted death	86	94.51

The table presents variables and frequencies of demographic features and treatment statuses of hanging. The persons belonging 21-30 age group has committed suicidal hanging. The persons who belong to 81-90 years commit very minimum suicidal hanging, e.g. (2.19%) as presented in the above table.

Suicidal hanging is one of the major suicidal death in Nepal. Suicidal hanging is increasing in Nepal whereas it has been decreasing in the globe. A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016 the total number of deaths increased by 6.7 percent between 1990 and 2016 but the mortality rate for suicide decreased by 32.7% when compared to the increase in global population. According to Ritesh Thapa, suicide is

attempted by people when they get no solution to the problem they are facing. They try to find a way out but when they don't, they attempt suicide. In around 90 percent of the suicide cases, the individuals are suffering from some kind of mental health problems.

In suicidal hanging committers may use different materials found nearby him/her. A Pradhan, BK Mandal and CB Tripathi, conducted in all cases of death due to hanging (44 cases) during the year January 2007 to April 2008 coming for post mortem examination at BPKIHS Dharan Nepal. The following table presents a status of suicidal hanging in the application of various materials.

Table 5:**Nature of ligature material used in relation to gender used for hanging**

Nature of ligature	Female	Male	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Bed sheet	0	2(4.54)	2(4.54)
Rope	10(22.72)	11(25)	21(47.72)
Sari	2(4.54)	2(4.54)	4(9.09)
Shawl	13(29.54)	1(2.27)	14(31.81)
Woolen muffler	0	2(4.54)	2(4.54)
Belt	0	1(2.27)	1(2.27)
Total	25(56.81)	19(43.18)	44(100)

Source: (Pradhan, Mandal & Tripathi, 2008)

The suicide may commit suicidal death with different materials. The table has presented various means such as sari, bed sheet, rope, shawl sari and belt and woolen muffler for committing suicidal death. The female suicidal hanging with shawl is greater than (29.54%) male. The highest rate of (47.72%) suicidal hanging with rope has been reported from the study.

Nepalese Legal System on Suicidal Hanging

Government of Nepal has enacted Criminal Penal Procedural Code with detailed out of collecting physical evidences and guidelines of autopsy. The following table explains the circumstantial physical and autopsy of suicidal death that is also applied in suicidal hanging:

Table 6:**Legal Provisions for Suicidal Hanging**

Authority	Provision, section and sub-section	Circumstance of evidence	Autopsy
Generally, Police Officer (?)	Examination of corpse to be made (20, 2) for circumstantial evidence and sub-section 3 for autopsy	Take photographs of the corpse and the concerned scene in a manner to describe the actual situation	Send the corpse to a government medical doctor or an expert designated in that behalf by the Government of Nepal or a licensed medical doctor for postmortem, at the government expenses.
Police Officer and doctor	If it is not possible or seems impossible to examine the corpse because of the corpse being decayed or rotted (20,7)	Investigating authority shall execute a deed setting out that matter, in the presence of local distinguished persons.	A report of post-mortem conducted pursuant to subsection (3) shall be prepared in the form referred to in Schedule-15.
Police Officer	In suspicious condition		Examination of the corpse or any of its parts, such other scientific examination may be carried out
Police Officer and Successor	Hand over the corpse (20,9)	Letter of handing over the corpse	Autopsy report to the police
Team of the doctor	If situation demands that there need of involving team of the doctor (20,11)	Team formation (?)	Team of the doctors conduct autopsy

The Criminal Procedure Act has specified the process and personnel for anti-mortem and post-mortem of hanging. In such a critical situation, the Act has envisioned forming team of doctors but there is no mention of the authority of forming it.

Both the deeds prepared in the presence of local distinguished person and autopsy are the pivotal factors for determining suicidal hanging.

Reasons of Suicidal Hanging in Nepal

Nepal has been a victim of frequent political instability and natural disaster due to which it diverted mental health of its people. At present, government is spending less than 1% of its total healthcare budget on mental health. Some of the key findings include higher rate among women and younger age group, a rising trend among specific groups such as marginalized, migrant workers and disaster affected population. Various studies have shown that mental illness, predominantly mood disorders and psycho-social factors such as interpersonal or marital conflicts and socio-economic issues in triggering suicide and self-harm behavior.

During COVID-19 Period the rate of suicidal hanging increased. According to WHO, Nepal ranks seventh in the world and second in South Asia in terms of total number of suicides. A report has mentioned that the highest number, 742, died by hanging themselves followed by 114 people who committed suicide by consuming poison in this period. Though forensic science, with help of scientific facts and medical procedures, gives judgmental opinion for confirming whether hanging is suicidal or homicidal, there are the legal procedures of evidence collection make very narrow triangulation that is valid for determining the suicidal hanging.

Forensic Examination of Suicidal Hanging

Forensic science is the discipline concerned with scientific examination and interpretations of evidence obtained from the crime scene (Dogan, 2024). It has also mentioned that a careful forensic examination in asphyxia causing pressure on the ligature materials is of great significance in the case of suicidal hanging. It also said that the work of ascertaining anti-mortem characteristics of the lesion and the physio-pathological mechanism of death can exclude the possibility of murder dissimulation. Study has revealed that forensic pathologists use the postmortem nature of ligature marks and signs of life during injury in the inner neck to confirm a suicidal hanging (Sharma et al., 2005). Moreover, the ligature mark being indemnified mainly in a postmortem process and inner neck structure injury indicating intravitality can determine the suicidal hanging. The study has also mentioned confirmation characteristics of a suicidal hanging as dried and hard, faint color, match the rope, high on the neck and not complete.

In the case of not complete the mark often looks like an upside-down "V" and leaves a gap where knot was (Narayan, 2017)/

An autopsy is a reliable method of confirming suicidal hanging by medical experts. In this context, the study done by Jose M. Surez-Penaranda and et.al (2008) mentioned that the hanging mark is the most relevant external sign and its characteristics are well known, but, for unknown reasons, there are major differences in reports on internal findings.

The study investigated the association between the characteristics of the hanging mark and the frequency of bone, cartilage, soft tissue, and vascular injuries with the mode of suspension. Most cases (75.3%) presented some kind of bone or cartilage fracture, but these were unrelated to any of the variables studied. Vascular lesions are clearly more infrequent: intimal injuries are major factors where there are certain signs such as stricture of carotid artery (9.1%), the jugular vein (2.2%), and ruptures of the carotid adventitial layer (21.7%) are concerned with confirming suicidal hanging. These could be partially associated with the use of a hard fixed noose and body weight.

Conclusions

Suicidal hanging is one of the major methods of suicidal death that is a major problem in the globe. Though suicidal hanging is the problem of both male and female. Moreover, majority of the male prefer suicidal hanging since male prefers challenging lifesaving persons and procedures. One of the causative factors of suicidal hanging is linked with the increased mental health problem. The Nepal National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) was carried out between January 2019 and January 2020 in all seven provinces that 10% reported any lifetime mental disorder and 4.3% had a current mental disorder.² About one quarter (23%) of adults sought some type of treatment for their mental disorder.

Life style can also be viewed as another factor for committing suicidal hanging in Nepal where people are inclined to consuming sophisticated products of science and technology. People are busy in messy work without predictability of merits and demerits that may be vital causative factors of suicidal hanging. The forensic science with help of autopsy can determine suicidal

hanging that remove societal confusion and misconception on homicidal hanging as well.

A well designed and comprehensive method can identify the causative factors and prevention of suicidal hanging. More importance needs to be given on mental wellbeing to prevent suicide by hanging. The punishment of eye-teasing and sexual harassment are the extreme measures that can decrease such cases. The Criminal Procedure Code (Act) has both evidential and medical procedure for determining suicidal death by hanging (Law Book Management Committee, 2017). However, the investigation report by medical experts is an authentic evidence in determining fact for confirming suicidal death by hanging.

Social relationship maintains collaborative counselling that has been degrading due to individualistic thought on one hand. There is a cutthroat competition in the societal life and in such a society, the persons having weakest mind set

may fall in committing suicidal hanging. The theoretical education could be one of the responsible factor of promoting suicidal hanging who could lay the foundation of hope with creative mindset.

National development has been viewed as erecting concrete structure with nepotism and favoritism instead of result-based log. However, absence of erecting far-sighting, objective oriented and relational concern our politics is responsible to committing suicidal hanging. In addition, Nepal is investing very minimum budget (1%) on mental health due to political instability and disaster.

Suicidal hanging is committed for spotted death which the result of emotional state of mind who cannot assure him/her for the sustainability of life. Suicidal hanging is linked with human development related psychological problem. Suicidal hanging can also be viewed as feeling related problem of human beings.

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