

## Elderly victim: an unusual autoerotic fatality involving an 87-year-old male

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**Abstract** The average age of autoerotic victims is in the early thirties. Elderly victims of more than 65 years of age are uncommon, consisting of less than 1% of cases. The following case represents the oldest victim ever reported: a 87-year-old man found hanging by a belt in his living room. The body of the deceased was completely naked, with a complex bondage system of ropes. In the victim's bedroom closet, a suitcase contained similar ropes and belts suggesting prior autoerotic activity. Semen was also found at the scene.

**Keywords** Autoerotic death · Autoerotic asphyxia · Age · Elderly victim · Hanging · Forensic pathology

### Introduction

Autoerotic deaths have been defined as accidental deaths occurring during individual, usually solitary, sexual activity in which a device, apparatus, or prop employed to enhance the sexual stimulation of the deceased in some way caused unintentional death [1]. The most common methods of autoerotic activity leading to death consist of asphyxia by hanging, ligature, plastic bag, chemical substances or a combination of these [2].

In a 50-year review of all published autoerotic fatalities, from 1954 to 2004, most victims were males (96%) and

Caucasian (96%) [2]. Victims were aged from 9 to 77 years, with an average age in the early thirties [2]. The following details the oldest victim of autoerotic death ever reported.

### Case report

The body of a 87-year-old man was discovered after police went to his home on a request by the man's employer to "Check-on-his-Welfare." The victim had failed to show for work and according to the employer, the victim had never missed a day of work. The police officers attempted to make contact with the resident by knocking on the doors and windows of the house but did not get a response. The officers also attempted to call but there was no answer. A decision was made to force entry and the officers entered the kitchen as they called the resident's name. As the officers entered the living room area they saw the body of the deceased.

The victim was completely naked and bound from his lower legs to the mid chest with three different ropes in a standing position (Fig. 1). The ropes on the man's legs were looped around each other from the feet up to the chest creating a crisscross pattern. Two of the ropes were looped through and connected to a wrought iron room divider in the living room. These ropes held the man in a standing position. A fourth rope was tied to the same wrought iron room divider and was around the neck of the victim. The victim's hands and genitals were free from the bindings. There was a belt around the rope behind the man's head and a second belt was at the victim's feet. The rope around the victim's neck was loose but tightened when the victim's head was in a forward position. The victim could

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**Fig. 1** Scene photograph illustrating the ropes bondage system

increase or release pressure by moving his head up and down.

The victim had apparently tied the first rope around his ankles and then connected a second rope up his legs by looping as the ropes ascended to the waist. The rope was also looped through the wrought iron room divider and supported the victim's body. The third rope was connected to this series of ropes through the wrought iron divider up to the victim's mid chest and then looped around his neck. The ropes and bindings suggested that the victim was able to achieve this without assistance and had done this many times before. The detectives also discovered a suitcase in the victim's bedroom closet, which contained similar ropes and belts similar to the ones on the victim suggesting prior autoerotic activity.

The Crime Scene Investigators used alternate lighting and discovered semen on the floor in front of the victim as well as on the fingers of his right hand.

Detectives and crime scene personnel examined the home, which was cluttered with boxes, old furniture and various items and collectibles. There was no evidence of foul play or any criminal activity. The only damage or evidence of entry into the home was through the door, which had been forced open by the police officers who originally responded to the call.

Investigation at the scene and subsequent medical examination revealed this case to be a classic accidental death due to autoerotic activity. The cause of death was asphyxia by hanging and the manner of death was accidental. The unusual aspect of this case was the advanced age of the victim.

## Discussion

Autoerotic deaths can be considered to be atypical due to the methods employed or the type of victims. Typical methods include asphyxia by hanging, ligature, plastic bag, chemical substances or a combination of these, whereas atypical methods consist of electrocution, overdressing/body wrapping, foreign body insertion, atypical asphyxial methods and miscellaneous [2]. As for the type of victims, autoerotic deaths generally occur in white males in their early thirties [2]. Therefore, atypical victims can be subdivided into three general groups: female, non-white and elderly victims.

Female victims are very rare: less than 20 cases have been reported to date [3]. However, it was suggested that some female cases are missed because they generally present in a less obvious way to males: female victims do not usually rely on pornographic pictures and literature, complex bindings or cross-dressing, and accessory props are generally limited to foreign body insertion into the vagina or rectum [3, 4].

Non-white victims are also rare, constituting only 4% of victims [2]. Of the non-white victims, the Negroid race dominates (about 50%), followed by Asians (36%) [5].

The majority of victims are males in their early thirties. By combining all reported cases in the literature from 1954 to 2005, the average age of male victims is of 33 years (standard deviation of 15 years) [2]. Studies in different populations have found similar results, with mean ages varying from 26 to 38 years [5–8]. Elderly victims of autoerotic activity are very rare. Victims of more than 65 years of age are mentioned in only five papers [6, 9–12], consisting of about 1% of all published cases [2]. In contrast, adolescent victims aged less than 20 years represent around 25% of reported cases [2].

In a study of 43 autoerotic deaths by Walsh et al, one case of ligature asphyxia in a 75 year-old man is reported [9]. In a case series by Breitmeier et al, only one case out of 16 (a 76-year-old man) was over 50 years of age [10]. Cooke et al, reported the case of a 77 year-old man [11]. In a 70 case study by Hazelwood et al. [12] victims' ages ranged from 9 to 77, with the majority being between 9 and 29 years and only slightly less than a third of victims being between 30 and 77. Finally, in a 46 case study by Behrendt and Modvig, the age range was from 10 to 71, with 64% of

victims below the age of 29 years [6]. In three other case studies of 117, 16 and 8 cases [5, 7, 8] as well as in all other case reports in the literature [2], no other elderly victims were encountered.

Despite population aging in western countries and the popularity of drugs enhancing penile function (PDE-five inhibitors sildenafil, vardenafil and tadalafil), elderly autoerotic death victims are still highly unusual.

### Key points

1. The average age of autoerotic victims is in the early thirties, but victim's ages can range from 9 to 87 years.
2. Elderly victims of more than 65 years of age are uncommon, consisting of less than 1% of cases.
3. The oldest victim ever reported was an 87-year-old white male.

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