Strangulation, Risk, and Lethality in Domestic Violence

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Agenda

• Overview of Strangulation

• Common Symptoms of Strangulation (Graphic Images)

• Supported Findings from Reviewed Research
  • Non-Fatal Strangulation (NFS)
  • Fatal Strangulation

• Research Review

• Study Limitations

• Summary and Questions
Overview of Strangulation
Overview

- Frequently referred to as “choking”
  - Choking is air flow obstruction to the lungs by an object
- Compression of blood vessels caused by direct pressure on the neck, reducing blood flow to the brain
  - Manual - one or both hands
  - Ligature - constricting band
  - Sleeperhold/Chokehold - arm as constricting device
- Suffocation can be a part of strangulation
## Common Symptoms

**Joshi et al (2012)**

**TABLE 1** Immediate and Persisting Post-Strangulation Physical, Neurological, and Psychological Health Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical and neurological problems</th>
<th>Psychological problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petechiae (tiny red dots)</td>
<td>Insomnia</td>
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<td>Red marks on the neck</td>
<td>Nightmares</td>
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<td>Scratches on the neck</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ligature marks</td>
<td>Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bleeding</td>
<td>Suicidal ideation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neck swelling</td>
<td>Extreme fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tongue swelling</td>
<td>Fear of being alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sore throat</td>
<td>Panic attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty swallowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice changes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoarseness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Neck pain</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Back pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty being in a supine position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartburn</td>
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<td>Loss of appetite</td>
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<td>Pain in pregnant abdomen</td>
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<td>Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling nauseous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical weakness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of consciousness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Graphic Image
Warning
The Faces of Strangulation
How much does it really take?

- Jugular vein obstruction
  - Requires 4 lbs of pressure
- Carotid artery obstruction
  - Requires 5-11 lbs of pressure
- Tracheal obstruction
  - Requires 33 lbs of pressure
- Average handshake is 80-100 lbs of pressure
Non-Fatal Strangulation

• Power and Control
  • Jealousy, sexual dominance, prevent victim from leaving

• Few external signs
  • Approximately 50% of strangulation events show no signs
  • Can present up to 36 hours after victimization

• Internal injuries can be severe
  • Can present weeks after the attack

• White women, ages 30-39 are at greatest risk
Non-Fatal Strangulation

- Sexual Assault by Intimate Partner
  - Sexual assault victims are over 8 times more likely to be victims of non-fatal strangulation
- Predictive factor of more severe future violence
- Frequently accompanied by
  - Verbal abuse (threats, accusations, directives)
  - Other physical abuse
Fatal Strangulation

- Predictive Factors
  - Presence of a firearm (even if no firearm was used)
  - Threat of suicide/homicide
  - History of significant bodily injury
  - History of losing consciousness during prior strangulation

- Strangulation is often present in the year prior to death
  - Estimated 43% of cases
  - Fatal strangulation victims 14 times more likely to be white
Legislative Overview

Where Strangulation Is A Felony Crime

State makes strangulation a felony

Alaska


Hawaii

Note: In Maryland, applies to sexual assault cases only.

Source: The Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention

THE HUFFINGTON POST
Research Findings
Wilbur et al (2001)

• 62 women in two DV shelters interviewed

• Findings
  • 68% strangled by IP (55% husband, 31% boyfriend, 5% fiancé)
  • 87% threatened with death
  • Average length of relationship prior to NFS event: 5.2 years
  • Average length of abuse prior to NFS event: 3.1 years
  • Average number of NFS events: 5.3
  • 88% experienced other abuse surrounding NFS event
Wilbur et al (2001)

- Characteristics of the abuser
  - 93% lived with the victim
  - 24% had record of abusing and strangling other partners in previous relationships
  - 77% had a history of abuse as children
## Current Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Strangulation (%)</th>
<th>Abuser</th>
<th>History of Abuse</th>
<th>Lethality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armstrong et al (2016)</td>
<td>300 strangulation cases</td>
<td>97% manual strangulation</td>
<td>94% current partner</td>
<td>89% history of DV</td>
<td>7.5x more likely to be victims of homicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mcquown et al (2016)</td>
<td>1,542 medical records</td>
<td>23% NFS cases (93% manual)</td>
<td>38% current partner</td>
<td>36% history of strangulation</td>
<td>97% significant risk for homicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zilkens et al (2016)</td>
<td>1,064 women from DV shelter</td>
<td>7.6% NFS cases</td>
<td>58.2% current partner</td>
<td>NFS 8.4x more likely if DV history</td>
<td>7.5x more likely to be victims of homicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshi et al (2012)</td>
<td>17 women from DV shelter who were strangled</td>
<td>88% experienced multiple events</td>
<td>100% Intimate partner at time of abuse</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass et al (2008)</td>
<td>194 female homicide cases 427 control abuse cases</td>
<td>27% of homicide victims experienced NFS</td>
<td>Partner at time of abuse</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>7x more likely to be victims of attempted or completed homicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Limitations
Study Limitations

• Relied heavily on self-report and report by proxy

• Little information collected on the offender
  • General recidivism vs. domestic violence recidivism
  • Demographics

• Intimate partner violence and domestic violence grouped

• Mostly older studies
Summary

• External signs of strangulation are not always visible

• Frequently not reported, but common in domestic violence

• Non-fatal strangulation consistently increases the level of risk for serious injury and homicide
Why does it matter?

While the prevalence of strangulation has not been fully determined, current research suggests that when strangulation occurs, the offender’s risk level and the victim’s vulnerability increase drastically.
References


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