DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STRANGULATION

SAN DIEGO COUNTY HEALTH CARES

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IS IT IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY NONFATAL STRANGULATION?

True or False?

Non-fatal strangulation of an intimate partner is associated with an increased risk of future homicide.
NONFATAL STRANGULATION AND HOMICIDE

TRUE

One of the most lethal forms of domestic violence and sexual assault

Associated with a

- SIX-fold increased risk of attempted homicide
- SEVEN-fold increased risk of completed homicide (some sources say 8x)
STRANGULATION WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION!

Affects all ages

All races

All genders

All sexual orientations
Strangulation is a form of **asphyxia** characterised by closure of blood vessels and/or air passages of the neck as the result of **external pressure on the neck**.

*Asphyxia* = a condition arising when the body is deprived of oxygen, causing unconsciousness or death; suffocation.
ANATOMY OF NECK

- Thyroid cartilage
- Cricoid cartilage
- Thyroid gland
- Jugular vein
- Common carotid artery
- Trachea
- Hyoid bone
- Brachial plexus
- Subclavian artery
STRANGULATION VS. MECHANICAL ASPHYXIA

Strangulation

▪ External pressure to the neck that causes restriction or complete closure of blood vessels and/or airway, resulting in asphyxia
  ▪ Manual
  ▪ Ligature
  ▪ Hanging

▪ Fatal vs. Non-Fatal

Mechanical Asphyxia

▪ A weight is placed on the torso or chest area, restricting breathing

▪ Examples: knee, sitting on or placing a heavy object on a person
STRANGULATION VS. CHOKING

Strangulation is not “choking”

- Choking involves INTERNAL airway obstruction rather than an external force applied to the neck
STRANGULATION PRESSURE COMPARISON

60-80 psi (pounds of force per square inch)

20 psi

Pressure needed to block carotid arteries/veins ~

4.4 to 20 psi
STRANGULATION IS SERIOUS!

Only 4 pounds or external pressure required to occlude jugular veins

Only 5 to 11 pounds of pressure required to occlude carotid arteries

**Unconsciousness** can occur *within seconds*

**Death** can occur *within 3 to 5 minutes*
UNCONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN SECONDS
## STRANGULATION SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Signs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary urination/defecation</td>
<td>Bruising (may be delayed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty speaking</td>
<td>Eye findings</td>
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<td>Trouble swallowing</td>
<td>Facial droop</td>
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<td>Ringing in ears</td>
<td>Hoarse voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty breathing</td>
<td>Swollen tongue</td>
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<td>Pulmonary edema</td>
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Recognizing strangulation signs and symptoms during medical examinations can save lives!

However, >50% of victims have NO EXTERNAL SIGNS
BILATERAL CAROTID DISSECTIONS
SIX DAYS AFTER STRANGULATION ASSAULT

May have NO externally visible injury, but can have significant symptoms, and become fatal days after an event.
SYMPTOMS OF ASPHYXIA OR HYPOXIA INCLUDE BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

- Early
  - Restlessness and violence
  - Hostile (“she woke up fighting”)
- Long term
  - Psychosis
  - Amnesia
  - Personality changes
  - Progressive dementia

Hippocampus critical for forming/organizing/storing memory

Very sensitive to lack of oxygen

If no blood flow, the brain is NOT working

No blood flow = no memory

No memory means damaged hippocampus

“Fight or Flight”
SHORT & LONG-TERM HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

- Hypertension
- Chronic Pain
- Heart Disease
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Stroke
- Anxiety/Depression
- Substance Use
- Miscarriage
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IMPROVING PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PRACTICES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND STRANGULATION

Kurt Mechals, Chief of Family Protection, San Diego County District Attorney’s Office
There are approximately 17,000 domestic violence (DV) incidents reported to law enforcement in our county each year (SANDAG).

DV can have short and long-term impacts on:

- Physical health such as hypertension, chronic pain, headaches, heart disease, miscarriage, and stroke.
- Behavioral health such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and substance misuse.
WHY IMPORTANT?

- Non-fatal strangulation is a strong indicator of future lethality in intimate partner relationships.
- Healthcare staff have an important role in screening for intimate partner violence (IPV) and strangulation.
- Referral for a Domestic Assault Forensic Examination (DAFE) can make a difference in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.
- 13% of domestic violence homicides in our county in the past 22 years were the result of strangulation.
BACKGROUND

- Feb 2017, our county’s first Strangulation Protocol and documentation form was approved by the Chiefs/Sheriff/DA/CA for law enforcement and prosecution.
- Training for sworn personnel followed.
- A grant funded Domestic Violence Assault Forensic Exam program was launched.
- Significant outcomes:

![Chart showing Felony Strangulation Filings 2013-2019]
PASSING THE TORCH
FROM CRIMINAL JUSTICE TO HEALTH CARE
WHAT IS THE HEALTH CARES INITIATIVE?

TOOLS & TRAINING FOR HEALTHCARE STAFF

* UNIVERSAL SCREENING FOR INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE
* STRANGULATION ASSESSMENT

* FURTHER EVALUATION & REFERRALS FOR FORENSIC EXAMS
* SUSPICIOUS INJURY REPORTING
* PATIENT SAFETY PLANNING
* CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCES
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C Conduct Screening for current and former intimate partner abuse
A Assess for signs and symptoms of strangulation
R Report suspicious injuries to law enforcement
E Evaluate patient (evidence collection by a Forensic Examiner)
S Safety Plan and connect patient to resources
ONLY YOU DECIDE WHAT GOES ON YOUR NECK
TALK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER TODAY IF SOMEONE HAS PUT THEIR HANDS OR AN OBJECT AROUND YOUR NECK

San Diego County Health C.A.R.E.S
about your safety and wellness.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-7233 (24 Hour/Confidential)
WWW.THEHOTLINE.ORG

2-1-1 San Diego
(24 Hour/Confidential)
WWW.211.ORG

LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO

SU SALUD IN_VOLUCRA DE LO QUE SE PUEDE
HABLE CON SU PROVEEDOR DE SERVICIOS DE SALUD ACTUAL O ANTERIOR LA/LO ESTÁ LASTIMANDO. HAY AYUDA

¿Sabías esto?
- La violencia doméstica puede generar en mayor riesgo de tener resultados negativos de salud, alterar psicomotrices y problemas de salud mental y de sustancias.
- Los episodios repetidos de violencia doméstica que resultan en una lesión cerebral transitoria pueden causar daño permanente.
- El estrangulamiento de una persona a menudo no deja lesiones visibles.
- La exposición a la violencia doméstica puede afectar a un hijo emocionalmente, físicamente y cognitivamente.

Linea Nacional Contra la Violencia Doméstica
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- October 2019
  - Press Conference
  - Training Launch for “champions” to 60+ healthcare sites
- Distribution of 500 toolkits to healthcare providers
- Awareness campaign: 27,000 wallet cards and brochures in multiple languages and 9,000 posters
- Website
- 6 Week Webinar series on CARES topics (Feb 2020)
- Onsite training and technical assistance at each major healthcare organization (March 2020-June 2021)
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE?

- Ensure all BHS providers have received at least basic training on domestic violence (e.g. DV Essentials one day training is offered by the SDDVC at no cost. Visit www.sddvc.org)

- Conduct “universal screening” for current and former DV at all behavioral health programs
  - Follow best practices for screening and response for DV
  - Include a screening question on whether a “hand or object” have been placed on or around the person’s neck.
  - If “yes,” refer the person to the DAFE program at Palomar Health Forensic Services.

- Provide support and connection to resources.
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