

COMMENTARY ON ARTICLE

Robert C. Chisnall. Distinguishing between homicide and suicide knots and ligatures: A comparative analysis of case and survey data. *J Forensic Sci.* 2021; 66: 209–228.

I make the following observations on the applicability of the above article content and conclusions to our case:

1. The article is a review article about the differences, if any, between external tying and self-tying of ligatures and knots. It is a general overview and an evaluation in broad and non-specific terms. It would also appear that the author was probably not a medical practitioner or pathologist but of another category of forensic scientist.
2. Despite that the subject of knots and their technical complexity and terminology (dealt with over most of the substance of the article) is beyond my immediate competence, and that the various minute details of ligature and knots could not be applied to the case of the late Dr Haffejee because of our lack of that information, the following two findings arose from the reading and which can be relevant:

I. Strangulation was “more likely” in external tying cases and “not likely” in self-tying cases (Table 11, page 224).

II. The article did not consider ligature twists and number of twists, but did look into ligature tension. It found that – page 214:

“In all homicides involving strangulation with knotted ligatures, the neck ligatures were tight or extremely tight – smaller than the relaxed circumference of the neck ...”

“Suicides were more frequently characterised by loose neck ligatures and the presence of an inverted ‘V’ mark in the soft neck tissue ...”

‘The incidence of tight, self-tied neck ligatures was lower than loose ligatures’

3. It is noted that we have only two knots in Dr Haffejee's death, one of the principal ligature (trousers), and the other of the handkerchief, and as both of these are not available at this stage we are unable to comment upon the nature of the knots and comment upon chirality (issues of knot symmetry) or of the other ligature characteristics discussed.

4. A question in our case that does arise is not addressed by the article (and also out of the ambit of forensic pathology). This relates to what the need would have been for the additional knot securement by the handkerchief, especially if the trouser leggings were of a length ample enough for effective and immediate knotting to the low bar of the grille door. The extended process of the use of a handkerchief for the knotting might be considered somewhat redundant and superfluous for its purpose.

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