

A woman walks into an emergency room and tells the staff "I have 45 minutes to be here. If I'm not home in an hour, he will know I was somewhere other than where I told him, and he might kill me this time. He strangled me to the point of passing out last night, and that's a first. He's strangled me before, but I've never passed out before, and I have kids I need to take care of..."

This is a true story. I have been a Forensic Nurse for 15 years, and never in my life would I have imagined I would see the amount of strangulation in interpersonal violence that I see in my practice. Not only are we as health care providers, fighting against the cycle of violence to appropriately care for these victims (their own victimization often keeps them from seeking or completing treatment), we are fighting against stigmas within the healthcare community, stigmas within the law enforcement community, and stigmas in the lay person's community. This could end with the advancement of strangulation to a felony offense.

Studies show that approximately only 22% of victims have outward visible injury. This, unfortunately, adds fuel to the stigma fire that encourages healthcare providers, law enforcement, and lay people not to believe victims. But we NEED to listen because strangulation victims are 800 times more likely to be the victim of homicide. It has been proven that time and time again: **Men who strangle women kill women.** They also are significantly more likely **kill law enforcement officers.** These statistics come from the Training Institute for Strangulation Prevention and the Alliance for Hope International who have studied this intently in an effort to train health care providers, prosecutors, law enforcement, and advocates.

When hands or a ligature are placed around a neck and external pressure is applied, 4 pounds of pressure stops the blood flow in the veins (carry blood to the heart from the brain) and 11 pounds of pressure stops the flow through the arteries (carry blood to the brain). To give a frame of reference, it only takes about 5 pounds of pressure to pull the trigger on a gun. A normal handshake is about 80 pounds of pressure.

At one point in my career I had a patient who was not only strangled her but also bit her on the back of the neck. During her care I decided to do evidence collection (swabs), which we had not done before in "just strangulation" cases (not sexual assault) and see if I could at least get DNA from the reported bite wound for the prosecutor to use. When I called the police officer to pick up the evidence, he told me he didn't know how to book it. "This is all misdemeanor assault..." My patient's perpetrator had wrapped his hands around her neck, stopping the air from being able to get into her lungs and stopping the blood from being able to get to her brain...which in itself is all about power and control, but then bit her as well. Since that case evidence collection for strangulation has become the norm in our practice, although there is not "kit" for this; we made our own. We feel that this is THAT important, and that someday the law will catch up with us. We are pushing the envelope to do what's right.

A small percentage of victims may have petechia... the blood expelled into the tissues when the tiny blood vessels above the strangulation point burst because the pressure in those vessels gets too great the blood can't return to the heart. Those petechia come and go quickly, and once they are gone, if they were there in the first place, there may be no other visible signs. The victim may be left with brain damage from lack of oxygen to her brain, she may be left with vascular injury from the torque of the hands/ligature on the delicate structures in her neck with little to no protection that carry blood to and from her brain, she may be left with soft tissue swelling of the neck that pushes on her airway, making it hard to breathe or swallow...and some of this is only able to be recorded by what she reports.

We must trust her that she has memory loss from that lack of oxygen to her brain, pain with swallowing, difficulty breathing, difficulty sleeping from the emotional turmoil cause by these incidents...so people don't always believe her. Police officers don't always believe her. Medical professionals don't always believe her. Juries don't always believe her. Her own family may not always believe her....

How do we fix this? **PROVE** to the residents of the Great State of Ohio that you believe that strangulation is about power and control. **PROVE** to the constituents you serve that you understand that a perpetrator wrapping their hands around the neck of a victim can lead to lack of blood flow to the brain, lack of air getting into the lungs, to detrimental outcomes **AND DEATH**. **PROVE** to victims that you will help to prevent them from becoming a homicide. **PROVE** to law enforcement that you understand that men who strangle are more likely to shoot at and kill law enforcement officers...and give those officers and prosecutors the tools to **CHARGE STRANGULATION AS A FELONY** and **SAVE LIVES**.

Thank you



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