

Case Report

Crash helmet – the harbinger of death: a case report

Mojahid Anwar, Mohammad Asrarul Haque*, Faiz Ahmad, Munawwar Husain,
Jawad Ahmad Usmani

Department of Forensic Medicine, JNMCH, AMU, Aligarh, UP, India

Received: 17 August 2015

Revised: 20 August 2015

Accepted: 08 September 2015

***Correspondence:**

Dr. Mohammad Asrarul Haque,
E-mail: asrar428@gmail.com

Copyright: © the author(s), publisher and licensee Medip Academy. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

ABSTRACT

In one of the rarest form of freak accident, a young woman surrendered to her death in a manner that belie the reality only to be played back in a slow motion sequence. History is replete of instances in which death struck individuals in otherwise innocent forms. In this case – elaborated below – a helmet tucked under the crook of an elbow became the undoing causing the woman to topple backward in a slow-motion, the head striking the hard surface of the road and precipitating her death later in a hospital.

Keywords: Helmet, Elbow crook, Freak accident, Pillion rider, Strap entanglement

INTRODUCTION

There are innumerable instances of bizarre circumstances causing death, each one fiercely competing for slot number one in weirdness. The philosophy behind this irrationality becomes conspicuous when that event happens in a conducive environment and friendly situation. Otherwise, who would think of death in sporting events, life sustaining work place, lawful demonstrations and travelling? The subscribed citing belies such beliefs. Few happenings have been randomly picked up from historical sheets illustrating that confidence reposed has been battered by betrayal.

Case 1: In 1977, Tom Pryce, a Welsh Formula 1 driver was killed while driving his car at the speed of 270 kph (170 mph) and the fire extinguisher overhead struck his head.¹

Case 2: In 2011, Joe Luis Ochoa, 35 years old, died after being stabbed in the leg. He was watching an illegal cock fight in Tulane County, California, USA. This unbelievable accident occurred when one of the birds who had a knife attached to its leg suddenly diverted and stabbed him. He died later.²

Case 3: Robert Williams, a worker at the Ford Motor Co. plant, on August 11, 1983, was the first known human to be killed by a robot³ after a one ton factory robot hit him in the head. The jury adequately compensated him posthumously.⁴

Case 4: In 1871, Clement Vallandigham, a lawyer in Ohio, USA, was accidentally killed while he trying to demonstrate to the presiding judge proving the possibility of gun being fired by the deceased. He was defending the suspect. This happened as he raised himself from the kneeling position the loaded gun still pointing towards him.⁵

Case 5: Tragically, in 1927, Isora Duncan, dancer, died of a broken neck when her long scarf caught on the wheel of a car in which she was a passenger.⁶

Case 6: A five year old girl in Jaipur died after ‘manjha’ slit her throat.⁷

This case report has similar level of unbelievability and that is one reason why the authors decided to bring this to the attention of its varied readers.

CASE REPORT

A young woman, 22 years of age, recently married was riding the pillion on a motor bike driven by her husband. She was not sitting astride her legs but riding with both the legs on the same side left to the driver. This position is not considered to be safe. The motor bike was going with slow-speed. As it entered a busy market area, it became difficult to drive at a steady pace. The man was not wearing helmet, instead the husband has asked his wife sitting behind to hold the helmet for him which she did by sliding her right arm inside the locked strap. Unfortunately, the strap was not locked tightly close to the ears of the helmet; rather it was locked loosely causing it to dangle loosely. It rested in the elbow of the lower arm abducted.

The version given by the husband ran thus: as the motor bike entered the crowded bazaar, he cut the speed drastically and continued driving. However, suddenly he found an empty area and the urge to speed took over. All of a sudden he realized that the back seat has gone light. He looked back and saw his wife toppling backward. In actuality the loosely held helmet suspended by a long strap got entangled in the commodity carried by a pedestrian. There was no time to get the helmet disengaged and the force of speed and resistance offered by the innocent pedestrian holding his commodity firmly created a sudden deceleration and the woman toppled over backward and struck the hard surface by the head. She became unconscious. Immediately she was carried to the hospital, put in ICU. She dies after 4 days never regaining consciousness.

On examination

[A] Vitals: B.P.: 110/66 mm of Hg

Pulse rate: 98/min regular
Respiratory rate: 16/min
Temperature: afebrile
EMV (Glasgow coma scale): 4/15
Pupils bilaterally dilated and fixed

[B] CT scan report indicated the following:

1. Extra axial haematoma along the left fronto-temporo parietal convexity causing mass effect and midline shift
2. Thin extra axial haematoma along the right temporal convexity
3. Haemorrhagic contusion in bilateral frontal and left parietal region
4. Diffuse subarachnoid bleed
5. Cerebral oedema

[C] Injuries: facial injuries include:

1. Abrasion on left side of forehead 2 x 0.4 cm, fresh
2. Abrasion on left maxillary prominence 2 x 0.3 cm, fresh.

DISSCUSION

Ironically such type of occurrences can neither be predicted nor prevented. They are freak accidents simply because they defy the normal course of smooth action, intervening to cut the sequence. The condition of Indian roads is extremely poor so that driving becomes hazardous activity. The roads are full of pot holes and devoid of pavement for pedestrians with the result that pedestrians walk on the road adding to overcrowding. It is not surprising that these roads become accident-prone because stray animals like cats, dogs and buffaloes roam freely on the road. The chaos is accentuated when the road passes through market places. At such places the buyers throng the road unmindful of the traffic on the vehicle since they are preoccupied with their own buying. In this case too, carrying the helmet tucked under her arm seems to be an innocent activity, though not wearing it was illegal. Nevertheless getting death in the bargain defies all imagination.

CONCLUSION

This incident reminds us to be proactive in following rules on the road and never to short cut them. Had the helmet being worn by the driving husband one life could have been saved. The other collateral explanation would be to make the driving apparatus into a compact package as small as to be physically allowed. Make sure that nothing should unnecessarily jut out. Such an effort gains importance and appreciation while driving in to crowded spaces where rule of chaos reigns altogether and does not respect any one. Observance of such simple measures may help though ultimately it is the destiny that governs each and every one of us.

Funding: None

Conflict of interest: None declared

Ethical approval: Not required

REFERENCES

1. Ceiton, Cynthia. Thinning the herd: tales of the weirdly departed. Globe Pequot, 2007; p185. ISBN 978-1-59921-691-1-to be deleted.
2. Peralter, Eyder. "Weird News: California man fatally stabbed by rooster: The Two-Way". NRR, 7 February 2011.
3. Kiska, Tim. Robot firm liable in death. The Oregonian, 11 August 1983.
4. Kiska, Tim. Death on the job: Jury awards \$10 million to heirs of man killed by robot at auto plant. The Philadelphia Inquirer, 11 August 1983, pp A10.
5. "Fatal accident to Mr Vallandigham". The Western Reserve Chronicle (civil-war-150.com).2-(to be deleted) 21 June 1871.

6. Brown, Ismene. "Isadora Duncan, sublime or ridiculous?" *The Telegraph* (London). 6 March 2009.

7. *Times of India*, 15 January 2014.

Cite this article as: Anwar M, Haque MA, Ahmad F, Husain M, Usmani JA. Crash helmet – the harbinger of death: a case report. *Int J Res Med Sci* 2015;3:2886-8.