

## Vaginal "Fisting" as a Cause of Death

Dawn B. Fain, M.A., Ed.S., and George M. McCormick, M.D., Ph.D.

We describe the death of a young girl that resulted from the insertion of a clenched hand and forearm into her vagina during heterosexual activity. (The male homosexual practice of rectal fist insertion has been described previously.) We believe this death to be the first reported case of a "fisting" death due to vaginal fist insertion during heterosexual activity. This death is reported to alert forensic pathologists, medicolegal death investigators, and coroners aware of the role of aberrant sexual activity and its potential to cause death.

**Key Words:** "Fisting"—Vaginal trauma.

The practice of "fisting" or fist fornication has been described in several articles (1-4). These articles focused on rectal fist insertion as practiced by homosexual males as a form of sexual gratification. Shook et al. (5) also described vaginal fist insertion as practiced by female homosexuals. We report here the death of a young girl who died as the result of extensive hemorrhage due to vaginal laceration caused by the insertion of a clenched hand and forearm into her vagina during heterosexual activity.

### CASE REPORT

Local police received a call from a man indicating that a female companion had been discovered lifeless in her motel room. Police officers arriving on the scene confirmed the girl's death, and called for detectives, crime scene personnel, and the coroner. The man was detained for questioning.

The man indicated that he had picked up the 16-year-old girl at a mutual friend's home. The two had visited a local mall, and purchased alcoholic beverages. The beverages were consumed en route to a neighboring town, ~60 miles from the girl's home town, where she wished to visit some friends. The man indicated that he dropped her off in front of a small bar, and that she went into the establishment. She remained indoors for ~45 min, and returned to the vehicle. The two began the return to their place of origin, but stopped in a roadside park to take a nap. (The man indicated that the alcohol had made him sleepy.) When they reached their destination, the girl indicated that she could not return home intoxicated, and the man agreed to rent her a room at a local motel. He dropped her off at the motel and returned to his residence. Later in the morning, he checked on the girl and discovered her to be dead. He then called the police.

There was no abnormal accumulation of blood in the motel room, nor was there any sign of a struggle. The decedent was found lying on the bed, with her head toward the foot of the bed. She was not under the covers, and appeared to simply have been laid out

---

From Forensic Pathologists, Inc. (D.B.F., G.M.M.) Bossier City; and Coroner's Office (G.M.M.), Caddo Parish, Shreveport, Louisiana. Director (D.B.F.), President and Coroner (G.M.M.).

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Dawn B. Fain, M.A., Ed.S., Forensic Pathologists, Inc., 1529 Doctors Drive, Bossier City, LA 71111, U.S.A.



**FIG. 1.** The victim as she was discovered, lying on the bed. There was no evidence of a struggle.

on the bed (Fig. 1). She was fully clad in a pair of shorts, and a short-sleeved, buttoned shirt. Her body was removed and transported to the morgue.

At autopsy, the body was found to be that of a young black girl who appeared to be the stated age of 16 years. Small abrasions were noted on her lower legs, patellae, and lower abdomen. A large amount of paper toweling was discovered firmly placed into her vaginal and rectal openings. The removal of this packing revealed a large laceration of the vagina, with surrounding contusion (Fig. 2). This laceration, which measured 8 cm, was posterior to the cervix, and through the posterior wall of the vagina. Extensive contusion was seen over the serosal surface of the bladder and rectum. This contusion extended into the muscularis of the rectum, without laceration of the mucosa (Fig. 3). Smaller lacerations were noted of the lateral walls of the vagina. Two pubic hairs were found in the abdominal cavity—one on a loop of small intestine and the second on the bifurcation of the abdominal aorta; 75–100 cc of hemorrhage remained in the peritoneal cavity. No other significant trauma was discovered at autopsy. The patient's blood ethanol level was 0.20%, but there was no evidence of recent abuse of the other common drugs. Pap stains of smears taken from the vagina, rectum, and mouth were negative for the presence of sperm. The pubic hairs discovered in the abdominal cavity exhibited microscopic characteristics similar to those of the pubic hair of the man. The girl's death was attributed to shock from blood loss due to the vaginal laceration. The coroner ruled the death a homicide.

When the man was confronted with this information, he changed his story. He indicated that he did pick up the girl at a friend's house, and had visited the mall. He voluntarily drove her to the neighboring town, where they both went into the lounge and consumed more alcohol. On the return trip, they stopped at the



**FIG. 2.** Laceration of the vagina, with surrounding contusion.



**FIG. 3.** Extension of laceration into the muscularis of the rectum, without laceration of the mucosa.

rest area, and the man began to manipulate the girl's vagina digitally. He stated that she called for more and more and, before he realized what was happening, his entire fist and most of his forearm was in her vagina. At that point, he became aware of the fact that the front seat of the vehicle was covered with blood, as was his arm and hand. He panicked and returned to their place of origin. He took the girl to the motel, cleaned her, and went to seek the help of his wife, who was a nurse's aide. He left his wife to clean the vehicle, while he returned to the motel with a stethoscope to check the vital signs of the victim. He realized that she was dead, and called the police.

The matter was presented to a grand jury and indictments were handed down against the man and his wife. He had recently been dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Air Force for a morals charge, but the Office of Special Investigations would not reveal the actual charge. He was arrested and charged with second-degree murder, and his wife was charged with being an accessory after the fact of second-degree murder. The man pled guilty to a lesser charge of man-

slaughter and was sentenced to 21 years. The charges against his wife were dropped.

## DISCUSSION

The use of the forearm and hand as a means of sexual gratification in homosexual activities has been widely documented in medical literature (1-3). The use of this behavior in heterosexual activity is not as widely documented, but the literature indicates that it does exist (5). Rectal injuries have been reported, as well as deaths attributed to rectal and anal trauma. Other reports confirm the use of drugs and chemicals to relax the rectal sphincter during this type of sexual behavior (5,6). In this reported case, alcohol, in all probability, played a vital role in the general, as well as vaginal, relaxation of the decedent which allowed for this vigorous activity, without complaints of pain from the victim. Some indication was given in the victim's personal journal that she preferred digital and manual sexual activity, but this could not be confirmed. We believe the case reported here to be the first documented death attributed to vaginal "fisting" during heterosexual activity. This report should make forensic pathologists, medicolegal death investigators, and coroners more aware of the role of this type of unusual sexual activity, and its potential to cause death.

## REFERENCES

1. Sohn N, Weinstein MA, Gonchar J. Social injuries of the rectum. *Am J Surg* 1977;134:611-2.
2. Sohn N, Robilotti JH. The gay bowel syndrome. *Am J Gastroenterol* 1977;5:478-84.
3. Morneau RH, Rockwell RR. *Sex, motivation, and the criminal offender*. Springfield IL: Charles C Thomas, 1980.
4. Torre C. Delayed death from "fisting." *Am J Forensic Med Pathol* 1987;8:91.
5. Shook LL, Whittle R, Rose EF. Rectal fist insertion: an unusual form of sexual behavior. *Am J Forensic Med Pathol* 1985;4:319-24.
6. Reay DT, Eisele JW. Sexual abuse and death of an elderly lady by "fisting." *Am J Forensic Med Pathol* 1983;4:347-9.