



## **(NON-FATAL) STRANGULATION, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

In recent years research has confirmed that strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of violence used by men against their female intimate partners, unconsciousness may occur within 10 seconds and death within 4-5 minutes. When domestic violence perpetrators choke (strangle) their victims, not only this is a felonious assault, but it may be an attempted homicide. Strangulation is an ultimate form of power and control where the batterer can demonstrate control over the victims's next breath; it may have a devastating psychological effects or a potentially fatal outcome. While the primary focus of this paper is on domestic violence, most of the research is relevant as well to sexual assault cases, particularly spousal sexual assault. In many cases, the lack of physical evidence caused the criminal justice system to treat "choking" cases as minor incidents, much like a slap to the face where only redness might appear. Today, based on the involvement of the medical profession, specialized training for police and prosecutors, and ongoing research, strangulation has become a focus area for policy makers and professionals working to reduce intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

Strangulation is in fact one of the best predictors for the subsequent homicide of victims of domestic violence (Journal of Emergency Medicine, 2008). International studies have indicated that between 23% and 68% of women victims of domestic violence have experienced at least one strangulation assault by a male partner during their lifetime. Strangulation is more common in domestic violence cases than previously thought. It can have serious health implications for women and their unborn children and can ultimately lead to their death (Journal of Emergency Medicine, October 2001).

The US Alliance for Hope International leads the international recognized Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention (TISP). They conducted the first and largest study of 300 strangulation cases in 1995. The results of their study were eye-opening and revealed that on a regular basis victim had reported being choked. Victims who are strangled may have no visible injuries whatsoever, yet because of underlying brain damage due to the lack oxygen during the strangulation assault, they may have long term serious injuries or die days, even weeks later. The lack of external injuries and the lack of identifying near-fatal strangulation cases among professionals led to the minimization of this type of violence, exposing victims of violence to potential serious health consequences, further violence and even death! Studies now clearly show that a victim who is strangled one time is 700% more likely to be seriously assaulted again and 800% more likely to become victim of a homicide by their partner (Journal of Emergency Medicine, 2008)

<https://www.strangulationtraininginstitute.com/life-and-death-in-your-hands-strangulation-more-common-in-domestic-abuse-cases/>

### **Characteristics of Strangulation**

Strangulation is a lack of oxygen in which blood vessels and air passages are closed as a result of external pressure on the neck. There are 3 forms of strangulation, hanging, manual (like using one or two hands) and ligature (like using wires). The most common form in domestic violence cases is manual strangulation. An attempt of strangulation does not always lead to death, but symbolizes an

abuser's power and control over the victim. The victim is completely overwhelmed by the abuser, vigorously struggles for air and is at the mercy of the abuser for her life. The feeling of short of breath without is commonly accepted as one of the most frightening experiences in life. A single traumatic experience of strangulation or just the threat may instill so much fear that victims can get trapped in a pattern of power and control by the abuser and extremely vulnerable for further intimate partner violence. Strangulation is typically one of the last abusive acts committed by a violent domestic violence partner before actual murder. When an abuser decides to put his hands around the victim's neck and squeeze, he has indicated intent to cause great physical harm and most likely murder. Victims who are strangled are 7x or 800% more likely to be killed. Minimization makes strangulation one of the most dangerous forms of actual violence that occurs in domestic violence. It is minimized by the abuser, the victim and the criminal justice system, including medical personnel and social workers. The lack of visible injuries generally causes strangulation, in the eyes of professionals and law enforcement, to be missed and mishandled. The consequences are that victims don't receive adequate medical attention, police reports and therefore there will be no prosecution of the batterer. Most strangulation victims will not have visible injuries but they may have symptoms. Without professional training, subtle signs and symptoms will be missed. Lives can be saved when professionals adequately understand and address a "choking" case. The last decade many European countries developed policies and programs to deal effectively with domestic violence with many encouraging results. Within Europe there's however a big lack of knowledge and expertise on strangulation in domestic violence cases. For the last 18 years, there has been a growing awareness to the seriousness of strangulation cases which is causing systemwide changes, saving lives, holding abuser's accountable, increased trainers and experts as a result of the work and expertise developed by the Institute on Strangulation Prevention.

The European Family Justice Center Alliance is currently developing in close collaboration with the U.S. Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention the European Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention.

### **Why should professionals and policy-makers know and learn more about Strangulation?**

- Early intervention, prior to a homicide will save money and lives.
- More strangulation cases will be prosecuted as high-level misdemeanour or felony level and not result in long-term incarceration unless it is a homicide.
- Any felony strangulation statute should not be a substitute for strong, misdemeanour intervention in domestic violence cases. In one study, victims had been physically abused on average for 3 years before ever being strangled (Wilbur, 2001). In a San Diego Study, 89% of the victims had a long history of prior and documented domestic violence.
- How long does the state have to wait to adequately intervene in a serious, life threatening domestic violence case?
- The impact of children witnessing strangulation violence cannot be underestimated. Children witness approximately 50% of all strangulation incidents – causing deep, long-term emotional trauma and dramatically increasing the likelihood that male children will repeat the violence as teenagers and adults. (Bancroft, 2009)
- Strangulation violence is a felony under virtually any assault statute in Europe countries. A specialized strangulation statute will not create a new crime, it will simply provide clear elements of an offense for existing lethal force being used consistently by violent and abusive intimate partners in Europe.

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