



INTOXICATION BY CRIMINAL USE OF “SCOPOLAMINE”: CASE REPORT AND REVIEW

Forensic Science

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ABSTRACT

Dozens of cases have been reported in local police station of Ethiopia, when victims are robbed by organised gangs using some unknown powder/drugs. The pattern of carry out the crime is getting done in a very fine and smooth way. In the first case, criminals blow the powder into the face across the nose and mouth of an unsuspecting victims of the public. Within seconds the person is under the drug's powerful spell and there's not a thing they can do to stop it. In the second reported case powdered form of the drug has been spiked with the alcoholic drink, and after drunk victim could not resist himself to say no and handed over all money and valuable belongings to the criminal.

KEYWORDS

Crime, Scopolamine, Robbing, Date rape drugs

INTRODUCTION

Case-1

The victim was woken up by members of the public, who notified him that he had been sleeping at a backstreet corner for about three hours.

John Mekonnen was on his way to purchase some groceries items in the late evening. He was approached by the a couple as he passed the nearby road. They were stranded and were asking for directions to bus station, and being the good Samaritan, the victim volunteered to help them. The couple seemed satisfied with the directions he had offered and asked to exchange details. After a firm handshake they both separated. When he woke up, the victim was feeling nauseated and dizzy, only to discover his backpack was open and his camera, laptop and other valuable items including all currency were gone, he has carried.

Case-2

A victim named Saige went to a night club for weekend parties. Some unknown girl, preferably prostitute seduced him after few drinks by making susceptible looking in bars, then when he is not looking, the women spiked the victim's drink with the drug. Within a few minutes of the victim ingesting the deadly liquor. After few minutes, the women derived her victim around the town asking the victim to withdraw all their monies from a series of ATMs and hand it over, which he gladly obliged to, because he had lost his ability to say “no”.

DISCUSSION

In both cases, a powdered form of drug has been used for criminal activity of robbing the victims. In both cases, uses of Scopolamine have been reported. Scopolamine sometimes also known as “Burundanga”, and by its street name “Devil's Breath”. Scopolamine found in a plant named “Brugmansia(also called Borrachero)”, under the Solanaceae plants, commonly referred to as “angel's trumpet” has been popular in Latin America and African countries. Though it is found in the leaves, roots and seeds of the Borrachero tree, mainly powders prepared from after drying and grinding of seeds are used as criminal activities. However, it is not generally known by the public that this plant contains tropane alkaloids(scopolamine, atropine and hyoscyamine). The alkaloids contained in the plant (most notably scopolamine) cause post-synaptic competitive inhibition of cholinergic muscarinic receptors (in central and peripheral regions). Symptoms develop rapidly, sometimes as early as 5–10 minutes after ingestion or dermal application.

In scopolamine intoxication, people initially experience salivation and sweating, followed by a dry mouth, mydriasis, and loss of accommodation and tachycardia. As the dose increases, urinary retention and hyperthermia ensue. At this point, confusion, agitation and anxiety can be witnessed as being due to acute anticholinergic poisoning by the plant. Neuropsychologic assessment of the patient can reveal impairment of orientation, affective lability, incoherent thoughts, flight of ideas, tangential thinking, and auditory or visual

hallucinations. Easy availability of Brugmansia has been suggested to be one reason behind its frequent abuse in many African countries. Some of the ways used to administer the drug include using foods and beverages and blowing it into the victim's face. Once it enters the bloodstream, the victim loses free will and becomes suggestible.

This substance has been blamed for thousands of crimes in North, central and south America including some European countries. There are various reports of the incapacitating drug used in street robberies in Paris. Various colourful historical stories represented by scopolamine, where it has been used by Nazis as an interrogation tool, and also in the middle ages by witches.

There are thousands of urban myths about the Burundanga drug, and the horrific stories that have become those who've unwittingly taken the drug. One story documented in a scientific paper tells of a young man who amputated his own tongue and penis after drinking just one cup of tea made using Scopolamine powder.

The drug basically suppresses your free-will and makes you susceptible to doing absolutely anything you are told to. It's so effective in fact that it was used as a truth serum by the CIA; they got a whole lot of truth, but they also got a load of stories about purple elephants and complete rubbish as well, because of its powerful hallucinogenic Properties.

It's also used as a date-rape drug as easy availability rather than benzodiazepines and barbiturates class of drugs, as these are sold under medical prescription only.

Medicinal use

Other than criminal use, it has medicinal use also, the medicine is commonly known as Hyscione butylbromide. The medicine is licensed for the treatment of urinary incontinence, motion sickness or relieving of abdominal pain, bladder spasms. Even it's on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines – a list of the most important medications needed in a basic health system.

The drug can be administered in several dosage forms, including oral (hard gelatin capsules, oral drops, syrup, powder), injectable and through a transdermal patch.

This agent blocks the activity of a naturally produced chemical (the acetylcholine), and when it acts on unintended tissues, it would produce adverse drug reactions.

CONCLUSION

Stories of bizarre and ingenious ways borrachero has been administered are also common in various parts of the globe. There are tales of it being mixed into chocolates, laced through pamphlets and dispersed into the air as a powder. There's even accounts of women rubbing men's faces into their scopolamine-smeared breasts. We need to be incredibly careful about leaving your drinks unattended and

never accept food, drinks or cigarettes from strangers. A scopolamine overdose will leave us very vulnerable and there a plenty of reports of it being used in bars and nightclubs.

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