

“Choking Game” Deaths – Anecdotal Statistical Data Report

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Many have asked, “How many young adults die per year due to the ‘choking game’”. Because even the term “choking game” is only a few years old, the newsletter has uncovered no verifiable data of any sort associating young adult deaths to the choking game. Even accidental suffocation deaths due to autoerotic asphyxiation (AeA), are difficult to count even though AeA has been known about for several decades if not more.

Executive Summary

The Teen Choking Game Newsletter editor estimates that each year 250 young adults, 11 to 19 years old die of either the choking game or AeA. The actual number of annual choking game/AeA deaths may be as low as 25 or as high as 750.

This newsletter estimate is based on the US government’s Center for Disease Control statistics of suffocation deaths by accident and suicide combined with an anecdotal estimate that 30% of current reported suffocation suicides should be reclassified as accidental suffocation and that all accidental suffocations by hanging or strangulation should be attributed to the choking game or AeA.

Source Documents

The primary data sourced for the executive summary above are the “Leading Cause of Death Reports” that can be generated by the public at the CDC’s web page www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/. To generate our figures we queried the following:

Other documents sourced to generate the anecdotal estimate of 30% include the Washington State Child Death Review Progress Report and the multiple AeA reports archived in the 'Publications' section of www.TeenChokingGame.com.

Anecdotal Analysis

Conversations the newsletter editor has had with many newsletter subscribers as well as a reading of the AeA papers have caused the newsletter editor to be of the opinion that at least some percentage of young adult deaths classified as suffocation suicides by the coroner are in fact accidental suffocations. This opinion is drawn by comparing reported circumstances of "suicides" with the medical notion that teen suicides usually involve troubled youth who are in the throws of some life crisis with the majority displaying some sort of pre-suicidal signals such as talking about suicide, giving away personal items, etc.

Few if any of the parents of choking game or AeA victims (who's death was classified as suicide) report that their child showed any pre-suicidal signals or any other evidence that their child was anything more than just a "happy" kid.

Hearsay suggests that many medical examiners need to see a definitive "release mechanism" evidenced in a strangulation ligature before they will consider ruling a strangulation death as accidental. As well, without some sexual component such as pornography or nudity, many medical examiners will not seriously consider AeA as a reported cause of accidental death. Due to the trauma associated with a young adult death though, specific and intimate details of a death scene may be accidentally or purposefully misreported to save a grieving family undue embarrassment.

Conclusion

A reasonable review a literature available on the Internet shows the newsletter editor no significant causes of "accidental strangulation" other than AeA or the choking game therefore it is estimated that all 55 CDC reported accidental strangulation deaths per year of young adults age 11- 19 are from AeA or the choking game.

Pure estimation and "guessing" (after reading available literature on AeA and interviewing newsletter subscribers) causes the newsletter editor to be of the opinion that 30% of the 700 CDC reported suicide strangulation deaths per year of young adults age 11- 19 are actually accidental strangulations attributed to AeA or the choking game.

The only purpose of this newsletter document is to create a “point of departure” for an objective conversation about “how many young adults per year die from AeA or the choking game. The newsletter editor strongly desires to replace the guesswork and conjecture found in the report with hard data on the subject from the medical community if and when it is ever produced.

Is This Important? Yes

What if 500 young adults die each year from AeA or the choking game – is it statistically relevant? Over 7,000 thousand young adults die each year in motor vehicle accidents and almost 4,000 die each year from “purposeful” suicides using a gun. Why the outrage over a possible 500 deaths when 11,000 are dying in cars and by guns? Because every young adult death, even one, has its associated outrage necessarily fueled by a caring populace that desires nothing more than to prevent such catastrophic loss of our future.

The outrage over motor vehicle and gun deaths of young adults has over time manifested itself into our culture in the form of systemic education and prevention programs. Parents know that guns and cars are dangerous and have lectured their children endlessly on the risk potential.

Young adult deaths by AeA or choking game may or may not actually be a new behavior but they are completely brand new when compared to deaths by car and gun and measured by asking parents, “Do you know about the risks of self-suffocation behaviors in young adults and have you discussed those risks with your children?” The infinitesimally small odds of having a child die from a lightning strike don’t prevent parents from advising teens not to stand on a hill waiving a golf club in rainstorm.

Whether actual number of annual young adult deaths from the choking game or AeA is 5, 55 or 750 is irrelevant. What is relevant is that self-suffocation is a risk behavior that exists in young adults, that the parents of most young adults do not know about the dangers of self-suffocation as a risk behavior in young adults and that most parent have yet to discuss the risks of self-suffocation with their children so as to properly warn them as they have done with the risks of smoking, drugs and sex.

While the risk of a self-suffocation death in any particular family may be very small, the time it takes to reduce that risk as much as possible through education about the risk is even smaller.