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NIBRS Coding Scenarios

Asphyxiation or Strangulation

Issue: How would you code Asphyxiation and Strangulation? What is the difference?

Definitions: Asphyxiation is the unconsciousness that occurs when the supply of oxygen to your brain is cut off and can ultimately result in death.

Strangulation is an inordinate compression or constriction of a tube or part of the throat which causes a suspension of breathing.

Scenario: When an offender chokes their victim and it causes unconsciousness, then use code "13A - Aggravated Assault" and "85 - Asphyxiation" for Type Weapon/Force Involved. If the choking continues after unconsciousness and the victim dies, use code "09A - Murder/Non-Negligent Manslaughter" and "85 - Asphyxiation" for Type Weapon/Force Involved. If an offender chokes someone with their hands and the victim has a little redness, then the correct coding would be "40 - Personal Weapons" and the offense would be "13B - Simple Assault".

If the choking leads to asphyxiation, there is a specific Force Type in NIBRS, "85 - Asphyxiation" and the incident would be coded to offense "13A - Aggravated Assault" unless the victim dies and then it would be coded to "09A - Murder/Non-Negligent Manslaughter".

If a victim dies in a fire from Arson, the offense would be "09A - Murder/Non-Negligent Manslaughter" and the two Type Weapon/Force Involved codes would be "65 - Fire/Incendiary Device" and "85 - Asphyxiation". Up to three entries are allowed for Type Weapon/Force Involved.

Turning on the gas in a house to kill someone, holding a victim under the water until they drown, or using a pillow to smother someone would all be coded to "85 - Asphyxiation".

When an object such as a rope is used to choke a victim, you could use both "40 - Personal Weapons" and "90 - Other" (rope) as the Type Weapon/Force Involved. If Asphyxiation occurred, you would add a third Type Weapon/Force Involved, "85 - Asphyxiation".

Keep in mind that the investigation is very important in this area including victim and witness accounts as well as the doctor's report of what took place including injuries. That will be the determining factor as to if it should be a "13B - Simple Assault" or "13A - Aggravated Assault". Witness and victim may say the offender briefly grabbed them around the neck and immediately released hold and only minor, and I stress minor, injury was observed (redness).

If witness or victim reports that they were about ready to pass out while the offender was choking them, then that would be a "13A - Aggravated Assault" and use code "85 - Asphyxiation" for Type Weapon/Force Involved.

Additionally, when the doctor examines the victim the doctor may find internal injuries related to the choking. Again, Asphyxiation and Strangulation (85 - Asphyxiation) should only be used when serious compression of the neck takes place and where the victim becomes unconsciousness or near unconsciousness or internal injuries are noted.

Reference: NIBRS Volume I: Data Collection Guidelines (blue cover), Assault Offenses, pages 22-23; Murder and Non-Negligent Manslaughter, page 29; and Weapon Type/Force Involved, page 81.

Note that the preceding gives general examples. It is not meant to be all inclusive. Coding is based on individual case circumstances. Please direct NIBRS questions to:

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