

ALLIANCE for HOPE INTERNATIONAL



“Men Who Strangle Women Are The Most Dangerous Men on the Planet”

October 14, 2021 (San Diego, CA)

In response to recent media attention on the strangulation murder of Gabby Petito, the [Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention](#), a program of [Alliance for HOPE International](#), is providing critical educational information and resources to the public and professionals in the field of domestic and sexual violence. The Institute has taken the position since 2011 that strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence and the most dangerous domestic violence offenders strangle their victims.

What is Strangulation:

“We have been training on these issues for nearly 25 years now. Strangulation in domestic violence cases is a gendered crime. Men strangle women. Rarely will women strangle men. Strangulation impacts all professionals working on sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, animal abuse and human trafficking cases,” said

Gael Strack, the founder of the [Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention](#) and CEO of [Alliance for HOPE International](#).

Strangulation is a predictor of a homicide. If a victim is strangled even one time, she is 750% more likely to be killed by her abuser. If she is lucky to survive, she has most likely suffered some internal injury and/or short and long-term health consequences. Studies now show that 1 in 47 strangled victims are likely to have a carotid dissection (damage to vital arteries) which can lead to stroke (and death) in days, weeks or months after the assault.

While many victims call it “choking,” it is not “choking.” Choking is when something is accidentally, most often food, lodged in a person’s throat. Strangulation is intentional, lethal and deadly. The term “strangulation” should always be used when external pressure is applied to the neck by any means that blocks airflow and/or blood flow,” said Gael Strack. Strack has trained tens of thousands of law enforcement officers in the handling and near and non-fatal strangulation cases for over 20 years.

Basic Terminology:

Strangulation is external pressure to the neck, by any means, that impedes airflow or blood flow or both. Suffocation is the obstruction of airflow to and from the lungs making it difficult to breathe. Continuous pressure and obstruction of blood flow and/or airflow can lead to unconsciousness within seconds and death within minutes. Some use the terms “strangulation” and “suffocation” interchangeably but they are distinctively different mechanisms.

Basic Physiology—Medical Definition:

Strangulation is external pressure to the neck **by any means** which obstructs blood flow or air flow. “Inhibiting a human being’s ability to respire – inhale and exhale – deprives the brain and lungs of oxygen which can lead to hypoxia, loss of consciousness, brain damage and/or death. Death can occur within minutes depending whether blood and/or air was obstructed. Other causes of death can include injury to the arteries and/or thrombosis leading to a stroke and/or death,” said Dr. William Smock.

“Make no mistake about it, strangulation is life-threatening conduct. Pressure on the neck, chest or abdomen can lead to deadly results. Inhibiting a human’s ability to breathe through the application of external pressure results in decreasing oxygen levels in the blood. Strangulation

is an emergency medical condition,” said Dr. William Smock, the Medical Director of [Alliance for HOPE International](#).

Stranglers are Different. Stranglers are Dangerous:

"Our profiling of stranglers makes clear that murder by strangulation is rarely the first time it has happened. All evidence points toward a history of domestic violence, including non-fatal strangulation assault, before the murder. The most dangerous domestic violence offenders strangle their victims. The most violent rapists strangle their victims. We used to think all abusers were equal. They are not. Our research has now made clear that when a man puts his hands around a woman's neck, he has just raised his hand and said, "I'M A KILLER," said Casey Gwinn, President of [Alliance for HOPE International](#).

Many years ago the Florida Supreme Court ruled that strangulation of a conscious victim transformed a murder into a death penalty offense because it is per se “heinous, atrocious and cruel. ...Strangulation involves foreknowledge and the extreme anxiety of impending death. ” Johnson v. State, 969 So.2d 938, 956-957 (Fla. 2007).

Call to Action:

Men who strangle women are the most dangerous men on the planet and many professionals continue to miss this truth. The majority of mass shooters, cop killers, domestic terrorists, and domestic violence killers in this country have two things in common: A history of childhood trauma and a prior history of strangulation assault against women before they kill women or others[1]. When the stranglers of America apply pressure to a woman's neck, they are raising their hand and saying they are killers. Why? What is the connection between strangulation and the mass shooters and the cop killers of America? The reasons are complex but the rage of stranglers, soaked in misogyny, appears to produce what we now refer to as a “loaded God-complex.” Stranglers want their victims to know that they have complete control over whether their victims live or die. Stranglers literally hold victims' lives in their hands. It makes sense that such rage-filled entitlement increases the likelihood that a strangler will kill a police officer or attack others when his power is questioned or challenged. In failing to understand these complex connections, police officers, women, mass shooting victims, and many in the general public are dying because of our failed interventions with stranglers.

It is now our responsibility to do something about it. We cannot continue to hear the words “He choked me” and treat this assault like we would a

slap or a punch. The difference between life and death in most strangulation assaults is only a matter of seconds. We have an opportunity to stop most of them before they kill but we must seize that opportunity in order to prevent homicides.

We must learn to more effectively investigate and prosecute near and non-fatal strangulation assaults as felony offenses even with little or no external visible injury. We must pursue these complicated cases even without victim participation or testimony. We must work in Family Justice Centers and other types of multi-disciplinary teams to effectively hold offenders accountable and provide the victim the needed medical advocacy, treatment, and support. Every time we hold a strangler accountable we reduce the likelihood of a subsequent homicide and we send a message to men who strangle and suffocate women: We see you and we will not let you commit life-threatening and often brain damaging assaults with impunity.

The Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention, a program of **Alliance for HOPE International**, reiterates our position since 2011, Strangulation is deadly force (whether done by a police officer or by an abusive man) and one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence. The most dangerous domestic violence offenders strangle their victims. *We recommend:*

- *All professionals must take “choking” cases seriously and treat each non-fatal strangulation case as if it was the last opportunity to save a life.*
- *All law enforcement officers should watch our **10-minute line-up video** on strangulation and take our **30-minute on-line course** on non-fatal strangulation cases produced by our Institute in partnership with the Pennsylvania State Troopers Association and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.*
- *Every state should develop an Implementation Plan for their strangulation statute and/or the handling of strangulation/suffocation assaults. Read **Chapter 9, of our Strangulation Manual** which discusses promising practices in the handling of strangulation assaults.*
- *Every county in the country should develop a local multi-disciplinary team or Family Justice Center framework (co-located public and private intervention agencies) to develop a county-wide protocol and work in a collaborative approach to hold stranglers accountable and serve victims. Watch the webinar on the **Maricopa County-wide Model**.*
- *Every advocate should improve their advocacy for strangled victims by watching our 1-hour Webinar produced in partnership with*

Domestic Shelters.org on “What Every Advocate Should Know About Strangulation”

- Every judge and court professional can improve their handling of cases in court by watching **“Court Considerations”** with Virginia Judge Lee Chitwood, Jim Henderson, Casey Gwinn and Gael Strack.
- Every judge or magistrate must consider dangerousness at the time of bail. Watch Virginia Judge Lee Chitwood’s comments about the **12 Things Every Judge Should Know** and Casey Gwinn’s comments on **Bail Reform**.
- Every strangled victim should receive a medical forensic examination to identify any life-threatening injuries such as internal swelling, carotid dissections, traumatic brain injury and other potential harm. **Watch our webinar on Forensic and Health Services at Family Justice Centers**.
- Every public health department should issue a medical alert as was accomplished by the **New York Department of Health’s Public Awareness Campaign from 2018**.
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) should lead a national public awareness campaign on the dangers of pressure to the neck whether it is strangulation of a victim, pressure to the neck on a criminal suspect, children playing the choking game or applying pressure to the neck during sex.

Important Resources:

- **IACP Resolution on the Handling of Strangulation Investigations** (2014)
- **Emergency Nurses Association Topic Brief on Strangulation** (2016)
- **IAFN Position Statement** (2016)
- **Media Guide** (2019)
- **AAN Position Statement on the Use of Neck Restraints by Law Enforcement** (2021)
- **Facts about Strangulation – What Every Victim Needs to Know**
- **Safety Planning Brochure** (2021)

The Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention is the most comprehensive training program in the country for judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement professionals, advocates, doctors, nurses, and other professionals handling non-fatal and near-fatal strangulation cases in the domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse context. The Institute’s **online Resource Library** is accessed daily by thousands of professionals across the country.

To follow the Institute, go to www.strangulationtraininginstitute.com to learn more about our life-saving work.

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[1] Gwinn C, Hellman C, *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life* (2018).



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