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Death of a male black adolescent stowaway in the wheel-well compartment of Lagos bound plane: A case report

Sunday Soyemi,
Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Nigeria

Abstract

The body of a young black male suspected of stowing away in the wheel- well of a Lagos bound plane was found dead after it returned from a flight to New York, United states. The body was reportedly discovered during a check on the aircraft panel as it was being prepared for another flight. There was no any means of identification on the body. External examination revealed a body of an adolescent age group. There were no signs of trauma or violence on the body although petechial haemorrhages were noted on the conjunctiva. Striking wrinkling of the extremities reminiscent of Washerman's sign was however, observed. Internal examinations revealed essentially, marked fluidity of blood, petechiae on the interlobar surfaces of the lungs and epicardiun. The left and right lungs weigh 550 and 600gm respectively and showed congestion and oedema. The brain weighs 1600gm, oedematous and showed narrowing of the sulci and flattening of the gyri. Toxicological studies could not be done due to lack of facilities. Cause of death was ascribed to asphyxia from a confined space (unpressurised and unheated) in (wheel-well) tyre compartment of a plane.

Conclusion: Porous security at the airports needs to be improved upon and access to airside must be stringently prohibited especially now when there is increasing terrorist attacks. Punitive measures must be meted out to airline operators and handling companies since it is a form of security laxity. If possible, the front and rear wheel compartments should be checked before any flight. It is likely such occurrence will continue.

Mass media campaign amongst youths emphasizing the fact that wheel- wells stowaways are not safe should also be commenced.