

Circumstances surrounding 24 cases of bathtub drownings in the elderly

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Introduction: Personal hygiene (washing) is an essential activity of daily life that can lead to drowning for the elderly. It is therefore crucial to study the circumstances surrounding these events, to prevent them.

Objective: Document the circumstances surrounding cases of elderly individuals drowning in their bathtub.

Method/approach: Analyzing coroner reports regarding drowning incidents in victims aged 50 years and over between 2010 and 2014 in Quebec (Canada).

Results: Twenty-four (24) out of 42 bathtub drowning victims (57%) are over 50, with a median age of 75 (± 12 yrs.). Probable cause of drowning for nearly half the victims is heart trouble (46%). Autopsies performed on 22 of the 24 victims reported the presence of a cardiac problem for 19 individuals (86%). However, only 13% of the 24 victims had a history of heart trouble. Accidental fall was mentioned for a single drowning, but was raised as a hypothesis for three other cases.

Conclusion: There is a significant number of bathtub drownings among the elderly in Quebec. Circumstances surrounding these drownings align with the rare articles on the subject (mainly Japanese). Indeed, heart trouble is the most often mentioned medical condition as a risk factor for bathtub drownings. However, few victims had a known heart condition. Could personal hygiene be an activity that can lead to these episodes in the elderly? To contribute to prevention, occupational therapy should initiate research projects on elderly bathtub drownings.