

Original Research Paper

A Medico-legal Study of Unnatural Deaths In Newly Married Females

¹Jaswinder Singh, ²Jaspreet Kaur, ³R.N. Tandon, ⁴K.A. Shah, ⁵V.R. Patil, ⁶Vinod Kumar

Abstract

Crime against women can be traced back to the beginning of human civilization. But it was expected that a more civilized human being will be more respectful to the women but this is not to be seen in society and crime against women are on rise as ever. Present study was conducted with the aim to study the pattern of deaths in newly married females which comprises a significant proportion of all the crimes against women. In this study it was found that most common victims were newly married Hindu brides. Most common age of victim was found to be between 22-25 years. Burns was found to be the most common cause of death. Most of the incidences occurred during 12pm to 6pm. Newly married females within first year of marriage were most common victims. Most of the incidences occurred in in-laws house.

Key Words: Crime, Women, Newly married Burn injuries, Death

Introduction:

History of criminal acts of human is as old as his origin. In the ancient times crimes were there but there were no laws. So it was difficult for the rulers to dispense the justice.

Recent years have witnessed the revolutionary judgments by law makers for the safety and well-being of women in society which generated a hope that time has come when women will get her long due respect and dignity. But crime against women is on rise as ever.

The condition of uneducated and non working class of women is pathetic in many sections of society. They suffer from low self esteem and are soft targets for domestic violence. Studies and common observations had shown that family is the first place where most women suffer from ill treatment and physical and mental violence. [1]

Physical and mental abuse during initial years of marriage is common practice in many Asian countries, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. [2-6] In India, incidents of bride burning and dowry death acquired notoriety. When husband and his family started making demands to extract more money and articles by putting pressure on wife, who will then indirectly put pressure on her family and this led to the increase in cases of bride burning and dowry started increasing permanently and getting highlighted.

The payment of a dowry has been prohibited under 'The 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act' in Indian civil law and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498A of Indian Penal Code.

The severity of this can be easily imagined from the fact that every year there are approximately 9000 registered case of dowry demand and deaths.

However different NGO'S claim that, number is well above 9000. On July 25, 2007 India elected its first female president which very well showed the rising power of women in India and this was boosted by the controversial yet historic Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and state legislative bodies, was passed in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, 9th March 2010.

The current study focuses on the core issues like why newly married females are being harassed despite new and stringent laws. Why social indifference to female does not end even when every tool at lawmakers hands are being used. Why after so much social participation in

Corresponding Author:

¹Assistant Professor
Department of Forensic Medicine,
Shri Ram Murti Smarak Institute of Medical Sciences,
Bareilly-243202, U.P. India

E-mail: drjasvinder.singh@ymail.com

²Research Associate, Dept. of Biochemistry,

³Assoc. Prof & HOD, Dept. of Forensic Medicine,
B. J. Medical College, Ahmedabad-380016, Gujarat

⁴Prof, Department of Forensic Medicine,
B. J. Medical College, Ahmedabad-380016, Gujarat

⁵Prof & HOD, Dept. of Forensic Medicine
Government Medical College, Vadodara-390001,

⁶Prof & HOD, Dept. of Forensic Medicine
SRMSIMS, Bareilly-243202, U.P. India

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the form of websites, 24 hours toll free help lines, NGO'S and other social welfare groups promoting dowry free group marriages this monstrous evil continue to flex its muscles?

With 29 states and 6 union territories mother India give its people, considerable freedom to move from one place to another in search of livelihood and due to other factors in the same state or the other.

This intra and interstate migration, along with acculturation (mixing of cultures), has lead the people to adopt new customs in their families. Urbanization inter-caste marriages and nuclear families are on rise which is also promoted by reality sector boom in both rural and urban areas.

More and more people are shifting from houses to flats thus leading to nuclearization of families due to lack of space at the same time providing them freedom for decision making and liberal thinking at the price of newer economic burdens, tension and stress syndromes unheard and unseen before, leading to the new trifle in the lives of newly married couples.

With late marriages getting positive nod from society, newer kind of problems are arising which psychiatrists and psychologists today are clearly able to visualize in form of rising number of marriage counseling's, early divorces, premature senile disorders, rising, female feticide spouse suspecting each-other's fidelity, late child bearing, rising infertility issues etc.

And to spice up the issue government presents the handy tool in the form of S.498A which gives the women considerable freedom to harass her husband and in-laws at her will with single complaint.

According to NCRB in 2008 alone there were 8147 cases of dowry death reported along with 81344 cases of cruelty against women by husband and relatives with conviction rates as low as 33.4 and 22.4 respectively. It has now become difficult to assess how much the scenario has improved because of the adulteration with the fake allegations due to over awareness of some people.

The present study was conducted to find the incidence and causes of unnatural deaths in women with special reference to death within seven years of marriage in the Ahmedabad district of Gujarat.

Materials and Methods:

The present study was comprised of 318 cases of unnatural female deaths received in the civil hospital mortuary at B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad for medico-legal autopsy examination during the period from June 2009 to

May 2010. All the cases were studied with reference to history, epidemiological aspects, the nature of injuries, and their medico-legal aspects. The study included the various investigations e.g. X-ray examination, histopathological examination and chemical analysis.

A standardized proforma specially designed for this purpose was used and filled after detailed interviews with investigating officials and parents, relatives, friends and neighbors to gather information regarding incidence, age, socioeconomic background, education, family structure, marital disputes etc. All the data are statically analyzed.

Results:

Considering the cause of death of victim, in this study out of 318 cases studied, 228 (71.7%) were of burns, 29 (9.12%) were of poisons, 43 (13.52%) were of asphyxia, 12 (3.77%) were of accident and 6 (1.87%) were of stabbing.

It was found that the most common cause of death was burns followed by asphyxia. (Fig. 1)With reference to age-wise distribution, most of the deaths occurred in the age group 22-25 years (35.85%) followed by 26-29 years (25.47%). The minimum age of accused was 18 years and maximum age was 33 years. (Fig. 2)

In our study most of the cases were from Hindu families with regard to religion of victim. (Table 1) Most of the cases occurred during 1-3 years of marriage (44.97%). (Table 2)

Present study showed that out of 318 cases, 17 (5.35%) occurred during 12am-6am, 61 (19.18%) occurred during 6am-12pm, 136 (42.77%) occurred during 12pm-6pm and 104 (32.70%) occurred during 6pm-12amWith respect to time of incidence.

Most of the cases are commonly happened between 12pm-6 pm followed by 6 pm-12am. (Fig. 3)In our study the most common place of incidence is in laws house followed by husband/ own house. (Table 3)

Discussion:

Unnatural deaths within seven years of marriage are one of the indicators of the level of social and mental health. Responsibility for prevention of violence in our society does not rest only on the law and enforcement personnel.

Public health and other human agencies should assist in preventing primary violence as they have helped to prevent other major causes of morbidity and mortality.

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the present situation of unnatural deaths in Ahmedabad district in Gujarat and to find out

the possibilities of decreasing the incidences of unnatural female deaths in the state.

Distribution and causes of unnatural female deaths in present study are more or less similar to the pattern found in most of the other Indian studies.

This similarity is there in almost all parameters used in this study. Most of the victims in the present study were young Hindu, married females who died due to burns.

This study showed that most of the victims belong to the age between 22 to 25 years which constitute 37% followed by age group 26 to 29 years which constitute 26% of the cases. This observation is inconsistent with the other studies. [7-10]

In this study age distribution of 30 to 33 years show lowest percentage which mostly constitute couples who had married for more than five years. Further it has been observed in the present study that most of the cases are due to burns. This is in accordance with the other reports. [7, 8, 10-12]

Our study showed that more than 95% victims were Hindus. This data is inconsistent with other observations. [7, 8, 13, 14] This trend is the due to accumulative effect of common occurrence of dowry in Hindu families and their higher population. [15] The study shows that most common place of occurrence of the incidence is in-laws house in case of joint family and husband's house in case of nuclear family.

This is constant with other similar studies. [14, 8] This is also consistent with the fact that a major part of Indian population still lives in rural areas where joint family is common feature. [16]

This study also showed that most of the incidences occur in 1 to 3 years of marriage.

This trend is may be due to the fact that newly married women would have taken her time to adjust in new environment and circumstances before taking some bold steps. Similarly for the groom side it may represent the latent period of old or fresh dowry demands.

Conclusion:

Our study showed that out of 318 cases of unnatural female deaths within seven years after marriage reported for postmortem examination in the Department of Forensic Medicine B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad, most of the deaths occurred in the age group 22-25 years (35.85%).

Majority of married female victims were Hindu females. Most of the death of the victims occurred within 1-3 years of marriage (44.97%). In majority of the victims, the main cause leading

to death was burns followed by asphyxia deaths. Most common place of incidence is in in laws house followed by husband/own house.

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Fig. 1: Cause of Death

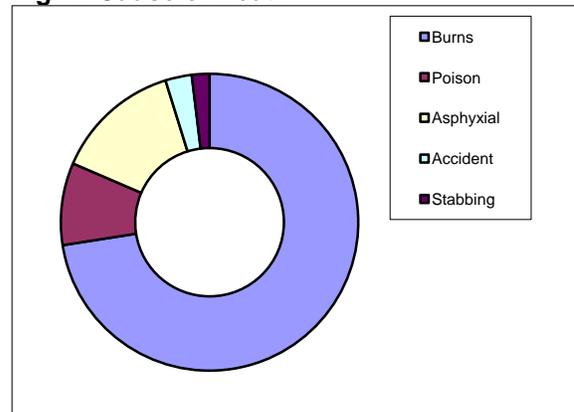


Fig. 2: Age Wise Distribution

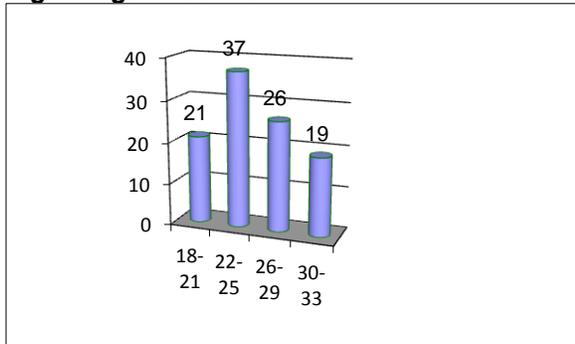


Fig. 3: Time of Incidence

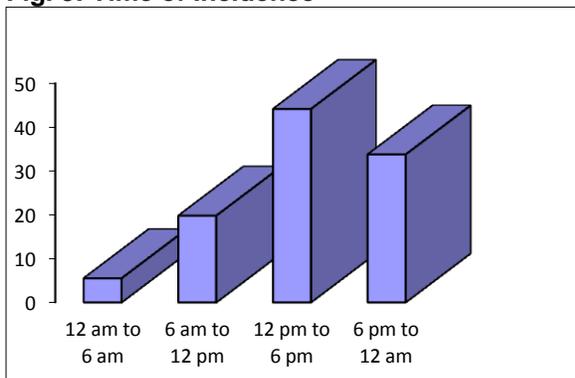


Table 1: Religion of Victim

Religion	Cases	Percentage
Hindu	296	93.08
Muslim	21	6.6
Others	1	0.32

Table 2: Time since Marriage

Years	Cases	Percentage
<1	88	27.67
1 to 3	143	44.97
3 to 7	65	20.44
8 to 10	22	6.92

Table 3: Place of Incidence

Place of Incidence	Cases	Percentage
In Laws House	214	67.30
Own / Husband's House	66	20.75
Parental House	26	8.18
Road Accident	12	3.77