



STUDY OF UNNATURAL DEATHS IN FEMALES : A MEDICOLEGAL STUDY AT PATNA MEDICAL COLLEGE PATNA

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken in the department of forensic medicine & toxicology, Patna with aims & objective to study the incidence of unnatural deaths in females with special reference to DOWRY DEATH in which medico legal autopsies were conducted. Data of total 5103 cases were taken for study purposes from PM reports, injury report and through interrogation from the relative, neighbor, police officials, accompanying dead body.

KEYWORDS : Dowry Death ,bride burning ,unnatural death ,manner of death ,burns ,poisoning ,vehicular accidents, asphyxia, firearm.

Introduction – There is one thing certain in life “We all shall die”.

Death is unnatural when caused prematurely against the order of nature due to injury, accident, poison or other means of violence. Unnatural death happens almost everywhere in the world. A low value should be described in favor of peace harmony and security. There is a rapid increase in unnatural death in females especially in the 1st few years of married life in last decade. Women who constitute about half of the human population have been harassed and exploited irrespective of the country to which they belong, unmindful of the religion which they profess and oblivious of the frame in which they live. From the time immemorial crime against woman existed, only pattern changed with time and place. Women always have been at receiving end of male dominated society. Types and trends of crime however, kept changing with change in mind set and techniques. Besides there also developed situational and institutional violence against women along changing trends of time where they have to step out of the confines of their home to earn a living.

Thus crime against women is an outcome of deprivation of socioeconomic rights. In recent time there has been a phenomenal spurt in violence and crime against females and this has not been the concern of the contemporary society but also is present since time immemorial. Selective female foeticide is perhaps the one of the worse form of violence against women where a woman is denied her basic right to live. The long standing tradition of son preference coupled with medical technology now gives to the status conscious Indian families, the choice between the large dowry for their daughters and elimination of female foetus. Working women are most commonly affected due to change in the recent life style.

In the Present study an attempt has been made to find out various causes of unnatural death in women with special reference to suicidal, homicidal and accidental death.

Material and methods –

The present study was carried out in department of forensic medicine and toxicology, Patna medical college Patna. The retrospective data from June 2011 to June 2013 was collected for this study purpose. This study includes all cases of unnatural deaths in female brought for PM examination in the mortuary of Patna medical college Patna. There were total 5103 postmortem conducted during this period. Out of which 1686 cases were of female death which constitutes almost 33% of total deaths. The various epidemiological features and medicolegal aspects of the cases were collected from police inquest, PM reports and through interrogation of the relatives, friends or neighbour accompanying the dead body. In selected cases chemical analyses and histopathological examination of viscera were taken and analysed.

This study has been evaluated according to age, marriage, religion, treated / untreated, habitat, manner of deaths and cause of death.

OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Table 1 Overall habitat composition of females under study

Sr no	Composition	Number	Percentage
1	Urban	525	31.13%
2	Rural	1042	61.80%
3	Unknown	119	07.07%
4	Total	1686	100%

Table 2 Religion wise distribution of autopsies during study period

Sr no	Religion	No of autopsies	Percentage
1	Hindu	1496	88.73%
2	Muslim	66	03.91%
3	Christian	5	00.30%
4	Unknown	119	7.06%
5	Total	1686	100%

Table 3 Pattern of death according to marital status

Sr no	Marital status	No of autopsies	Percentage
1	Married	1333	79.06%
2	Unmarried	234	13.88%
3	Unknown	119	07.06%
4	Total	1686	100%

Table 4 Season wise distribution of autopsies during study period

Sr no	Season	No of autopsies	Percentage
1	Rainy season	516	30.60%
2	Winter season	492	29.18%
3	Summer season	678	40.29%
4	Total	1686	100%

Table no 5 Pattern of death in general

Sr no	Pattern of death	Types	Total	Percentage
1	Mechanical injury	Hard blunt Sharp cutting Fire arm injury	303	17.9%
2	Regional injury	RTA Rail injury	215	12.75%
3	Thermal injury	Burn Lightening Electrocutation	914	54.21%
4	Poison	-	110	06.52%
5	Asphyxial death	Hanging Strangulation Throttling Drowning	95	05.63%
6	Natural death	-	41	02.43%
7	Other cause	-	08	00.47%
8	Total	-	1686	100%

Table no-6 Pattern of female death with respect to age

Sr no	Types	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-above	Total
1	FIREARM	0	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	7
2	HBF	8	21	35	61	76	48	31	4	284
3	RTA	9	10	29	31	25	25	17	3	149
4	RAIL	0	4	18	14	13	07	9	1	66
5	SHARP WEAPON	0	1	3	3	2	02	1	0	8
6	HANGING	02	19	29	06	2	01	0	0	59
7	STRANGULATION	04	5	9	4	0	01	0	0	23
8	DROWNING	01	4	5	1	2	0	0	0	13
9	POISON	01	37	37	20	06	7	2	0	110
10	BURN	10	195	437	142	49	30	34	6	902
11	ELECTROCUTION	00	1	1	3	2	1	0	0	08
12	LIGHTNING	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	04
13	DISEASE	05	0	6	5	7	5	12	4	44
14	OTHER	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	05
15	TOTAL	41	301	612	295	185	128	107	17	1686

Table no - 7 Manner of death

Sr no	Pattern of death	Suicide	Homicide	Accidental	Total
1	Burn	385	96	421	902
2	Poison	59	51	0	110
3	Drowning	03	0	10	13
4	Hanging	59	0	0	59
5	Strangulation	x	21	x	23
6	Sharpe cutting weapon	0	12	0	12
7	Accident Rail & road	x	x	215	215
8	Electrocution	x	x	08	08
9	Fire arm	x	07	x	07
10	HB force	x	122	162	284
11	Other	x	x	x	x
		506.	311.	816.	1653

Discussion-

In recent times the issue related to women have been raised and discussed at various forum. Among these issues the crime against women has occupied the Centre stage. The fact that a dozen and more cases of crime against women are register daily while many more such cases undoubtedly unreported. Among these crimes against woman dowry death and sex related crimes are the most heinous one

It has been observed that total 5103 autopsies performed during the period of 1st June 2011 to 30th June 2013 out of 5103 cases, 1686 were females which were subject material for study.

Burn and scald- Burn is most common and one of the important cause of death in respect to other causes. It is accounted for maximum no of death among female mainly between 21 to 30 yrs. of age group. Out of 1686 cases, 902 cases (53.5%) were of burn. Out of 902 burn cases only 38 victims were of Muslim and Christian religion. Unnatural death in northern Indian a profile during 1994 – 2003, burn accounted for 18.3%. Among 902 cases , 421(46.7%) were accidental and 385 (42.7%) were suicidal and 96 cases (10.6%) were homicidal in nature

RTA(Road traffic accident) - Everyday around the world more than 16000 people die from injures of which more than 20% are RTA. RTA accounted for 149 (8.4%), maximum death was among 21-40 yrs. of age group. Among them 90.6% where Hindu and 4% were Muslim. In India more than 80000 people die in RTA annually and more than 1.2 million are injured seriously and more than 3 lac disabled permanently. Unnatural death in northern Indian a profile during 1994-2003 RTA accounted for 36.3% cases.

Rail traffic accidents – Rail traffic accidents were mostly accidental some suicidal and few homicidal. Rail TA accounted 66(3.9%)

victims. Out of 66 victims maximum no of death among 21 to 50 yrs. age groups

Death related to hard and blunt force accounted for 284(16.84%) death out of 284 , maximum number of death was among 31-50 yrs age group

Unnatural death in northern India a profile 1994-2003 death related to fall accounted 1%

Hanging – common cause of suicide among young age group there accounted 59 (3.50%) victims. Out of 59 maximum no of death was among 11-30 yrs. age group

Hanging is usually suicidal. Out of 32 cases of hanging that come under Modi observation during a period of over 6yrs. , 30 were suicidal (Modi jurisprudence and toxicology 23rd edition pg no 571)

Unnatural death in northern India a profile (1994 – 2003) Hanging accounted for 3.8% cases

Drowning –

Death related to drowning accounted 0.77%(13 cases) during the observation period. Out of 13 cases 11 victims were Hindu of which 5 victims belonged to urban and 6 to rural

In India drowning occupies the 1st position of all modes of community suicide

Accidental drowning often in India ,nearly 40,000 Indians dies unnaturally from drowning (modi's medical jurisprudence and toxicology 23rd edition pg 609)

Unnatural death in northern India a profile. Drowning accounted 29 (1%) cases

Poisoning –

Among agro chemicals, organophosphorus and aluminum phosphide accounted maximum number of victims

Modes of death related to poisoning were suicidal in observation. Out of 110 victims maximum number of death was among 11 -30 age group

Unnatural death in northern India a profile(1994-2003) Poisoning accounted 21%

Celphos poisoning is increasingly getting importance because of great degree of mortality among victims. This is of particular importance because of its easy availability and commonest use in preservation of food grains leading to accidental as well as intentional intake of this poison leading to inevitable fatality.

Death related to sharp cutting pointed weapon- accounted total 12 (0.7%) victim during the observation period. Maximum no of death was during 21-40 yrs. age group

Sharp cutting cum pointed weapon were used mostly in case of homicide. About 27% victim were killed with sharp weapon in England and Wales (2002-2003)

Firearm –

Death related to fire arm accounted total 7 (0.42%) of 11- 40 yrs. age group. The no of firearm injures remain high in US as compared to rest of world. Globally death rate due to fire arm are more. Undoubtedly death rate were less amongst female almost everywhere.

Disease

Disease related death during the observation period were 44 (2.61%) . out of 44 victims maximum death occurred among 61 -70

age group. Unnatural death in northern India a profile (1994 -2003) death related to disease were 7.4%

Strangulation

It accounted for 23(1.31%) victims during the period of observation

Maximum death occurred among 11- 30 age group. Strangulation is one the commonest mode for homicidal death.

Lightening

It accounted 4(0.24%) victims during the observation period. In US average of 67 people are killed due to lightening

Electrocution

Electrocution related death accounted a total of 8 (0.47%) victims during the observation period. In US The national Institute for occupational safety and health estimate that an average of 411 death per yr. occurs at job site as a result of electric contact. Unnatural death in northern India a profile electrocution accounted 38 (1.23%) cases, (1994-2003). Death from electrocution are usually accidental (Fatovich 1992)

Other causes

Accounted a total of 5(0.03%) victims during observation period. Unnatural death in northern India a profile , other causes accounted 169 (6%).

An unnatural death is one of the indicators of level of social and mental health of female and status of female in male dominated society. Responsibility for prevention of violence and other crimes related to society doesn't rest only on law enforcement personals. People health and other human service agency must assist in preventing primary violence.

Summary and Recommendations

Social and economic measure

Dowry death can be reduced by –

- Early marriage should be discouraged
- Discouraging costly and ostentatious marriage ritual
- Strict implementation of anti dowry laws
- Motivating and explaining to mother in law regarding dowry laws and social boycott of tented males and their families in future marriage negotiation by society
- For satisfactory inter personal relationship counselling through NGOs and social organization
- Strict regulation regarding storage and sell of commonly used agro chemicals
- Vocational courses and employment for upliftment of female status\
- Promote education among women to increase educational status and to know their rights special provision under which they can fight against the crime
- Magistrate inquest should be compulsory in all cases of female death below age of 40 yrs.
- Separate female court with female judges for speedy trials should be constituted

Susan B Anthony States that The time will come when men will recognize women as his peer, not only at the fire side, but in Council of the nation then , and not until then,there will be the perfect comradeship , the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race

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