

# A Medicolegal Study of Unnatural Death Among Females Within Seven Years of Their Marriage



## Medical Science

**KEYWORDS :** Dowry, autopsy, torture and autopsy.

**NEELES KUMAR SHAKYA**

Junior Resident, Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

\* **PRATIBHA SHAKYA**

Junior Resident, Department of Anatomy, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi \* Corresponding Author

**S.K. PANDEY**

Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

### ABSTRACT

*Aims and objectives- The incidence of unnatural deaths in newly married females within first few years of their marriages is a dark spot on the noble tradition of our society. The most obvious reason behind such deaths is unending demands for Dowry by the husbands or in-laws.*

*So the study was conducted to know the recent pattern regarding unnatural deaths among newly married females so that effective preventive measure can be taken.*

*Methodology- The data was taken from the cases brought for autopsy in our department and history was taken from family members, other accompanying person police inquest report.*

*Result-We reported 154 cases from March 2014 to August 2015. Most of the victims were poorly literate housewives from rural areas. Maximum deaths (22.1%) were reported between 2nd to 3rd year after marriage. In 64.9% cases there was history of demand for Dowry and 77.92% of victims were having history of being tortured by husbands, in-laws or their relatives. In 62.3% cases death was caused by burn injury and mostly occurred in hospital. 61% of the deaths were suicidal in nature.*

### INTRODUCTION

The incidence of unnatural deaths in newly married females within first few years of their marriages is a dark spot on the noble tradition of our society [1]. Such deaths are more common in middle and lower middle socio-economic groups. Women due to their necessity to travel for the purpose of education, jobs or for household reasons are exposed to variety of unsafe environments not only at home and work places but also on roads.

Present study is designed to determine unnatural deaths of married females in Varanasi region. Several factors such as age, occupation, lack of emotional and financial support, inability to bear a child, sexual jealousy and marital infidelity, failure in love and scolding by parents of unmarried girls are the reasons which may also influence the unnatural death [1]. Hence we have undertaken the study to evaluate the causative factors behind the unnatural deaths among women. The most obvious reason behind such deaths is unending demands for Dowry by the husband or in-laws.

Dowry deaths are increasing day by day in our country in spite of enactment of Dowry Prohibition Act 1961[2]. IPC section, 304B (Dowry deaths) and 498A (Cruelty by husband or in laws) has been incorporated in the year 1980. Cr PC 176 deals with the magistrate Inquest in cases of suspected dowry deaths and autopsy must be done by a panel of two doctors [3,4]. However deaths due to dowry could not be stopped because of poor literacy of women, dependency on family for money, cumbersome judicial system and attitude of police towards women etc.

### AIMS & OBJECTIVE

This study was conducted to know the recent pattern regarding unnatural deaths among newly married females so that effective preventive measures can be taken.

### MATERIAL & METHODS

This study was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine, IMS, BHU, Varanasi for the period from March 2014 to August 2015 and reported 154 cases during this period. History was taken from family members, accompanying person and police. Data was collected from inquest paper, post-mortem register

and hospital memos in hospitalized cases and then compiled and analyzed.

**OBSERVATIONS AND RESULT** During the period of study, a total number of 154 cases of unnatural deaths were reported in Varanasi region.

**TABLE-1 AGE OF THE VICTIM**

Age of victim	Frequency	Percent
<20 years	18	11.7
21-30 years	133	86.4
>30 years	3	1.9
Total	154	100

Regarding age distribution of victims the maximum number of unnatural deaths 133(86.4%) occurred within the age group of 21-30 yrs. of age followed by 16-20 yrs. of age (less than 20 yrs) group where 18(11.7%) case reported.

**TABLE-2 EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF VICTIM**

Educational Status of Victim	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	14	9.1
Primary	57	37
Senior Secondary	36	23.4
Higher Secondary	31	20.1
Graduate	12	7.8
Post Graduate	4	2.6
Total	154	100

Educational status of victim indicates that nearly half 71(46.10%) of the victims were either illiterate or poorly literate with only up to primary standard 57(37.0%) and only 4(2.6%) cases were post graduate.

TABLE-3 PERIOD BETWEEN MARRIAGE AND INCIDENCE

Period between marriage and incidence	Frequency	Percent
Within 1 year	21	13.6
1-2 years	22	14.3
2-3 years	34	22.1
3-4 years	26	16.9
4-5 years	22	14.3
5-6 years	10	6.5
6-7 years	19	12.3
Total	154	100

Maximum incidences i.e. 34(22.1%) occurred between 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year after marriage followed by 26(16.9%) Cases between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year after marriage. Cases reported within 1<sup>st</sup> year after marriage were 21(13.6%).Least no. of cases were reported in the years from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> after marriage.

TABLE-4 NUMBER OF CHILDREN

No. of children	Frequency	Percent
One	48	31.2
Two	37	24
Three	17	11
Four	2	1.3
No children	50	32.5
Total	154	100

In 48(31.2%) cases victims were having 1 child, either male or female followed by 37(24%) cases where number of children were 2, either male or female or both. In remaining 50(32.5%) cases victims were having no child.

TABLE-5 DOWRY DEMAND BEFORE MARRIAGE

Dowry demand before marriage	Frequency	Percent
Yes	100	64.9
No	54	35.1
Total	154	100

Regarding demand for dowry in about two third i.e. 100(64.9%) of cases demand for dowry were made in any form before marriage and in remaining one third i.e. 54(35.1%) cases demand for dowry was not made.

TABLE-6 CAUSE OF DEATH

Cause of death	Frequency	Percent
Burn	96	62.3
Hanging	19	12.3
Strangulation	1	0.6
Drowning	6	3.9
Railway accident	7	4.5
Vehicular accident	6	3.9
Fire arm injury	1	0.6
Other weapon injury	3	1.9
Poisoning	15	9.7
Total	154	100

Regarding cause of death more than half of the cases i.e. 96(62.3%) cause of death was burn followed by hanging 19(12.3%), poisoning 15(9.7%), railway accident 7 (4.5%). Deaths due to drowning and road traffic accident reported 6(3.9%) in each case. 1 death was due to strangulation and 3(1.9%) deaths were due to other injuries.

TABLE-7 NATURE OF DEATH

Nature of death	Frequency	Percent
Accidental	46	29.9
Suicidal	94	61
Homicidal	9	5.8
Undetermined	5	3.2
Total	154	100

Out of 154 deaths, majority of unnatural death i.e. 94(61%) were suicidal in nature followed by accidental 46(29.9%) and homicidal 9(5.8%) deaths. In 5(3.2%) cases nature of death could not be ascertained.

## DISCUSSION

In recent times, crime against women are increasing day by day. There are various ways by which women suffer crimes like sexual assault and harassment, eve teasing, rape, torture for dowry, Dowry deaths, torture due to castism etc. Dowry is a major issue regarding torture and deaths of married women within seven years of their marriage. Although many people are in favour of dowry system but many are against it. Now it is considered as status symbol by many families. The evil of dowry has gain access in the roots of our society and uprooting of this stigma is utmost important [5]. Deaths due to dowry demand are considered as one of the most heinous crime against women.

**Pal and Tripathi (2000)** [5] supports our study that 75% of dowry deaths were observed within 3 years of marriage. Study of **Kulshrestha et al (2000)** [8] contradicts our findings that half of the affected females (51.28%) were those who never bore a child. Study done by **Pal and Tripathi (2000)** [5] contradicts our findings that most of the victims of dowry deaths (91%) were tortured mentally. **Shrivastava et al (2007)** [1] supports our study that most of the victims were literate up to primary standard, most common cause of death was burn injury and most of the deaths were suicidal (50.35%) in nature. **Pawar et al (2014)** [6] supports our study that dowry was the most common (34%) precipitating factor in the deaths among newly married women. **Pawar et al (2014)** [6] contradicts our findings and reported accidental deaths (57%) were most common followed by suicidal (30%) deaths. **Roy et al, (2015)** [7] also supports our findings and found majority of female deaths were due to burn (66%). **Radhika et al (2011)** [2] and **Verma et al(2015)** also reported that majority of deaths were suicidal in nature i.e.(93.33%) and (47.98%) respectively.

## CONCLUSION

From our study it can be concluded that most of the unnatural deaths amongst female within seven years of their marriages are due to Dowry and maximum deaths were seen in poorly literate or illiterate victims. These women are dependent on their husbands and in-laws for their survival. This is responsible for increased frequency of unnatural deaths (suicide due to abatement or homicides).

- Most common age group affected was 21-30 years (86.4%) and minimum number of deaths (1.9%) seen in the age more than 30 years.
- Most of the victims were literate up to primary standard (37%) and only 2.6% were post graduate.
- Maximum deaths (22.1%) were reported between 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> years after marriage. Most of the victims (31.2%) were having one child (male or female).
- In most of the cases (64.9%) there was history of demand for dowry before marriage.
- In nearly three fourth cases (77.92%) there was history of torturing the victim in the form of physical followed by

- mental, economic and combined form of above tortures.
- More than half of the cases (62.3%) cause of death was burn followed by hanging (12.3%), poisoning (9.7%), railway accident (4.5%) and others.
  - Majority of unnatural deaths were suicidal (61%) followed by Accidental deaths (29.9%) and Homicidal deaths (5.8%) case.

### SUGGESTIONS

Here are few suggestions which may be helpful in preventing and combating the unnatural deaths in newly married females.

- Effective measure should be taken by government for promoting good and higher qualification of the girls.
- Creating more job opportunities to make them economically independent.
- Child marriage, which is still solemnized in many parts of country, must be strictly prohibited.
- More strict laws should be framed and must be applied effectively.
- Special court, preferably with women judges should be created to deal with the cases related to the women.
- The visit of scene of crime must be made compulsory by the autopsy surgeon.
- The autopsy of suspected dowry death should essentially be done by Forensic expert.

### REFERENCES

1. Srivastava AK, Arora P. Suspicious deaths in newly married females –A medicolegal analysis. *J Indian Acad Forensic Med* 2007;29(4):63-66.
2. Radhika RH, Ananda K. An autopsy study of socio-etiological aspects in dowry death cases. *J Indian Acad Forensic Med* 2011;33 (3):224-227.
3. Parikh CK. Parikh's Textbook of Medical Jurisprudence, Forensic Medicine and Toxicology for Classroom and Courtroom. 6th Edition NewDellhi: CBS Publisher and Distributor 1990;162-65.
4. Reddy KSN. The Essentials of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, 29th edn, Hyderabad, 2010; 293.
5. Pal Snehlata, Tripathi CB. Dowry death: A sociological study 2000.
6. Pawar CK, Bhullar DS, Oberoi SS, Aggarwal KK. Profile of unnatural deaths in females a retrospective study. *Journal of Indian academy of Forensic Medicine* 2014;36:122-124.
7. Roy A, Das A, Dey A, Dalal D, Chakraborty PC. A Study of Socio-Demographical Profile of Dowry Death Victims in a Tertiary Care Unit of West Bengal. *J Indian Acad Forensic Med* 2015;37(3):250-252.
8. Kulshrestha P, Sharma RK, Dogra TD et al. The study of sociological and demographical variables of unnatural deaths among young women in south Delhi within seven years of marriage. *Journal of Punjab Academy of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* 2002;2:7-17.