

A Post-mortem Observational Study of Suspicious Deaths in Married Females Aged 30 Years or Less

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Abstract

Introduction – Suspicious death in married female is always a sensitive case and needs our full attention. So, current study was undertaken at S.S.G. Hospital, Vadodara for a period of 1 year.

Material & Method –Of all cases coming for the postmortem examination, cases in which the victim is female and below 30 years of age were taken for the study when there was suspicion regarding the cause of death.

Results – Out of all the medico-legal autopsies 5.7 % autopsies were Unnatural deaths of married females less than 30 years old. Maximum number (40 %) of deaths were observed in the age group of 21-25 years. (86.65 %) of female deaths occurred within 0-7 years of marriage. 75.55 % of deaths were suicidal in nature followed by accidental (18.88 %).

Statistical Analysis –The data collected was analyzed using MS Excel worksheets for averages and percentage.

Conclusion – Many of the findings of current study were correlated with earlier studies, while others were found contradictory. Further detailed study with larger sample size is required.

Key-words –*Suspicious death, married female*

Introduction

In an autopsy whenever there is a case of married female for post-mortem examination, there is always suspicion raised by the family of the female. So, in every case of married female death we have to be extra cautious. And also, the chance of maternal death also should be kept in mind in married females. So, to identify profiles and patterns in suspicious deaths in married females, current study was designed. The current study was undertaken at P.M. room of S.S.G. Hospital, Vadodara

to study the profiles and patterns in suspicious deaths in married females of below 30 years age group. Out of total cases coming from post-mortem examination total 90 cases were selected based on inclusion, exclusion criteria.

Material & Method

An autopsy study of suspicious deaths in married females of below 30 years age was carried out in this Medical College from 1st August 2017 to 31st July 2018. A total 90 autopsy cases of unnatural deaths in married females with age less than 30 years were studied during the study period.

Inclusion Criteria:

The material for the present study consists of the cases of suspicious deaths of married female with age less than 30 years which have been brought for medico-legal autopsy.

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Exclusion Criteria:

1. Deaths due to mass casualties or road traffic accidents.
2. Deaths due to natural disease.
3. Unidentified and Decomposed female dead bodies.

Before performing autopsy, all these cases were studied in details from indoor case records, hospital records (where applicable), history obtained from relatives of deceased and police inquest. A standard proforma was used to collect information regarding age of deceased, duration since marriage, educational background of deceased and husband and types of

family. A careful and complete autopsy was performed in each case. The viscera and necessary samples were preserved in required cases. Statistical analysis of data was done and presented as result and observation in tabular form, graphs and charts.

Statistical Method

The data so collected was tabulated and required calculations were done using MS Excel 2010. No other statistical method was required.

Results

Out of total 1925 autopsies performed in 1-year study period, 90 cases were selected as per inclusion, exclusion criteria. The results are as per tables below.

Table No.1: Distribution of cases according to age.

No.	Age of Deceased	No. of Cases	Percentage
1.	Less or equal to 20	24	26.67 %
2.	21-25 years	36	40.00 %
3.	26-30 years	30	33.33 %
Total		90	100 %

Maximum number (40 %) of deaths were observed in the age group of 21-25 years followed by 26-30 years (33.33 %).

Table No.2: Distribution of cases according to religion

Sr. No.	Religion of Deceased	No. of Cases	Percentage
1.	Hindu	83	92.22 %
2.	Muslim	4	4.44 %
3.	Sikh	3	3.33 %
4.	Other	0	0 %
Total		90	100 %

Most of the deaths (92.22 %) were observed in Hindu religion followed by Muslims (4.44 %) followed by Sikh (3.33 %).

Table No.3: Distribution of cases according to duration of marriage

Sr. No.	Duration since Marriage	No. of Cases	Percentage	
1.	Below 1 year	20	22.22 %	86.65 %
2.	Between 1 to 3 years	33	36.66 %	
3.	Between 4 to 7 years	25	27.77 %	
4.	Above 7 years	12	13.35 %	
Total		90	100 %	

It was observed that significant number (86.65 %) of female deaths occurred within 0-7 years of marriage.

Table No. 4: Number of cases having children

No.	Deceased having children	No. of Cases	Percentage
1.	Yes	49	54.45 %
2.	No	41	45.55 %
Total			100 %

It was observed that 54.45 % of female victims had children while 45.55 % female victims had no child.

Table No. 5: Distribution of cases according to cause and manner of Death

No.	Cause of Death	Manner of death			No. of Cases
		Accidental	Suicidal	Homicidal	
1.	Burns & its complications	10 (11.11 %)	16 (17.77 %)	0 (0 %)	26 (28.88 %)
2.	Hanging	0 (0 %)	18 (20.00 %)	0 (0 %)	18 (20.00 %)
3.	Poisoning	2 (2.22 %)	30 (33.33 %)	0 (0 %)	32 (35.55 %)
4.	Drowning	1 (1.11 %)	4 (4.44 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (5.55 %)
5.	Physical Assault	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (5.55 %)	5 (5.55 %)
6.	Electrocution	2 (2.22 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (2.22 %)
7.	Snake bite	2 (2.22 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (2.22 %)
Total		17 (18.88 %)	68 (75.55 %)	5 (5.55 %)	90 (100 %)

It was observed that 75.55% of deaths were suicidal in nature followed by accidental (18.88 %) and homicidal deaths (5.55%). Total 17.77 % of deaths were burns suicidal in nature, 11.11 % of deaths were accidental burns.

Discussion

An autopsy study of suspicious deaths in married females of below 30 years age was carried out in this Medical College from 1st August 2017 to 31st July 2018. During this one-year period a total of 1925 medico-legal autopsies were conducted, out of that 138 cases (7.16 %) were all age females with suspicious deaths. Out of which 90 cases (5.7%) were suspicious deaths of married female with age less than 30 years. Which is comparable to what was reported by Darji J.A.¹ et al (9.25%), Verma R.K.² et al (7.74%) and similar to Shrivastava A.K.³ et al (4.95%).

In the present study (Table No 1), it was observed that Maximum number (40 %) of deaths were observed in the age group of 21-25 years followed by 26-30 years (33.33 %) and less than 20 years 26.67 %. The findings in the present study are consistent with the study carried out by Zine K.U.⁴ et al (41.30%), Buchade D.⁵ et al (40.93%). Sharma B. R.⁶ et al noted that higher incidence (53.37%) of unnatural female deaths were in the age group of 21-23 years. The study conducted by Dere R.C.⁷ et al most common age group of unnatural death in females was 21-30 years (46.45%). This may be due to the fact that the common age of marriage in our region and many regions all over India is 18 to 23 years and deaths due to torture and mental harassment by husband and in-law's in relation to dowry in newly married females occurs in initial few years of married life. Also, this is the most active period of life where the females are expected to perform work related to cooking and allied work hence are more prone to accidents during kitchen related activities.

In the present study (Table No.2), it was observed that Most of the deaths (92.22 %) were observed in Hindu religion followed by Muslims (4.44 %) followed by Sikh (3.33 %). The study carried out by Darji J. A.¹ et al (94.18%), Pankaj Prajapati⁸ et al (92.04%) showed similar findings where most of the female victims were Hindu by religion. The Majority of the population from this region belongs to Hindu religion and dowry system is prevalent in this region resulting in a greater number of deaths in newly married females. The present

study also revealed that 4.35 % deceased females were Muslims and 2.90 % were Sikhs. These communities are comparatively in minority in this region hence death rate might be less in these communities.

From Table No.3, it was observed that 58.88 % of deaths of married females were within initial 3 years of their marriage which is highly significant followed by 4-7 years of marriage (27.77 %) It was observed that significant number (86.65 %) of female deaths occurred within 0-7 years of marriage. Similar findings were noted by Jaswinder Singh⁹ et al (44.97%), Darji J.A.¹ et al (57.28%), Verma R.K.² et al (57.47%), Praveen Arora¹⁰ et al (60.13%). This might be due to dowry demand, harassment, and physical / mental torture resulting in suicide or homicide of newly married females occurring more commonly in initial few years of married life.

In present study (Table No.4), It was observed that 54.45 % of female victims had children while 45.55 % female victims had no child. This might be due to after marriage there is a family and social pressure on the new couple for begetting child and one of the purposes of marriage is continuing the legacy of family.

From table No.5 it was observed that in accidental deaths in married female accidental burns was most common cause of death (58.82 %, 10 out of 17 accidental death cases). Quite similar findings were noted by Buchade D.⁵ et al (62.02%) and Chavan K.D.¹¹ et al (64.28%). Accidental burns can be explained by females spending most of the time in kitchen and thereby coming in contact with fire following inadequate precautions while cooking on cooking gas, kerosene stove and open unguarded chulha. Also, in rural areas kerosene lamp is still used during electricity failure which is very common. Wearing highly inflammable synthetic clothes, loose clothes like sari of the victims are highly susceptible to catch fire suddenly while cooking causing kitchen accidents. Also, the relatives of females might give the false history suggesting the incident to be accidental in nature for the settlement of property. In suicidal deaths, poisoning (44.11% - 30 out of 68 suicide cases) was most common followed by hanging (26.47 % - 18 out of 68 suicide cases) followed by burns (23.52 % - 16 out of 68 suicide cases) followed by Drowning (5.88 %). Similar findings were observed by Pankaj Prajapati¹² et al in his study on pattern of suicidal deaths in females (35.51% deaths by poisoning, 31.16% by hanging). Easy availability of household and pesticidal poisons in rural population might be cause for these preferences.

Likewise, easy availability of sari or dupatta, kerosene and matchstick might be responsible for such trends in suicidal deaths by hanging and burns.

Abbreviations -NIL

Statement of Conflict of Interest – NONE

Statement of Informed consent – Informed consent of relatives taken

Statement of Human and animal ethics – No ethical issues involved.

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