

## Socio-Demographic Profile of Dowry Death Victims in a Tertiary Care Unit: A Medico Legal Analysis

Karukuri Rajesham\*, Nishat Ahmed Sheikh\*\*, Abhijith Subhedar\*\*\*, P. Harikrishna\*\*\*

### Abstract

*Background:* The Indian National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that there were about 8083 dowry death cases registered in India in 2013. India reports the highest total number of dowry deaths with 8,391 such deaths reported in 2010, 1.4 deaths per 100,000 women. *Aim and Objective:* To know the recent pattern regarding unnatural deaths among newly married females so that effective preventive measure can be taken. *Study Design:* Cross sectional Prospective. *Place of Study:* Osmania General Hospital Mortuary Hyderabad. *Duration of Study:* From Nov 2010 to Aug 2012. *Material and Method:* The present study was conducted in Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Osmania general hospital. A total number of 296 autopsied cases of married woman within 7 years of marital life were studied, brought by polices of various police stations in Hyderabad city, and the inquest, were conducted by the Executive Magistrate. *Observation and Discussion:* Dowry death is most common in the age group of 21- 30 years, no age group is an exception to harassment for dowry that finally lead to death of the individual. Hindu females comprised of an alarmingly large group 87%, while the number of deaths in other religion groups the Muslim (12%) and in Christian community is almost negligible. 60.1% in-laws of husband and husband are responsible for killing or forcing the victim to end her life. majority of deaths are due to burns (59.8%), followed by deaths due to hanging (23%), whereas poisoning(11.1%) and other injuries accounts for lowest incidence of deaths(6.1%) 89.2% are found to be suicidal, where as 10.8% are homicidal. Even though the Government of India has passed the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961, till today this social evil was not totally eradicated from our society and has become a major issue of unnatural female deaths. *Conclusion:* This social curse has to be attacked by a multipronged and organized approach by police, women welfare organizations, reputed public servants, and judiciary and by awarding deterrent punishment to all offenders. In our opinion, a rational and practical approach on the above mentioned matter will certainly be helpful.

**Keywords:** Dowry Deaths; Autopsy; Domestic Violence.

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### Introduction

Where the death of a woman is caused by any burn or bodily injury, or occurs otherwise than normal circumstances, within 7 years of her marriage & it is shown that soon before her death, she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or any of his relatives for, or in connection with any demand for dowry, such death shall be called Dowry death [1].

'Dowry' means any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly (a) by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or (b) by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to

the marriage or to any other person; at or before or any time after the marriage in connection with the marriage of said parties [2]. In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act, making the dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. In 1986, the Indian Parliament added "dowry deaths" as a new domestic violence crime. section 304-B of the Indian Penal Code, where the death of the bride is caused by any burn or bodily injury or occurs other than under normal circumstances within 7 years of her marriage, and it is shown that soon before her death she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or any relative of her husband for, or in connection with, any demand for dowry, such death shall be called 'dowry death' and such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death. Various sections of IPC (304-B, 498-A, 113-A, 113-B) are directly or indirectly related to the dowry death. The offenders can be sentenced for any period from a minimum of 7 years in prison to a maximum of life [3].

The Indian National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that there were about 8083 dowry death cases registered in India in 2013. India reports the highest total number of dowry deaths with 8,391 such deaths reported in 2010, 1.4 deaths per 100,000 women [4]. We undertook the study to evaluate the recent pattern regarding unnatural deaths among newly married females so that effective preventive measure can be taken. The most obvious reason behind such deaths is unending demands for Dowry by the husband or in-laws.

**Aim & Objective:** To know the recent pattern regarding unnatural deaths among newly married females so that effective preventive measure can be taken.

### Material and Method

The present study was conducted in Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Osmania general hospital, Hyderabad during the period of Nov 2010 - Aug 2012. A total number of 296 autopsied cases of married woman within 7 years of marital life were studied, brought by police of various police stations in Hyderabad city, and the inquest, were conducted by the Executive Magistrate. Details of medico - legal aspects, socio-cultural, economic and other factors were obtained from the investigating officer, friends, relatives, parents, husband or in-laws of the deceased; manner and cause of death from Postmortem examination and toxicological analysis reports. Proforma of the

study was filled accordingly from the above details. All the data were reduced to tables, graphs and subsequently subjected to computer aided statistical analysis.

#### Inclusive Criteria

- All the dead bodies of married women dying within 7 years of marital life, brought to the Osmania General Hospital mortuary, cases have been booked under section 304 (B), 306, 498 (A), I.P.C. and 176n Cr. P.C., whose inquest is conducted by Executive Magistrate.
- All the cases of homicide of women within the 7 years of married life are booked under section 302 I.P.C whose inquest was conducted by police inspector.

#### Exclusive Criteria

- Married women dying after 7 years of married life.
- Death of women due to road traffic accidents, snake bite, natural causes and due to various natural calamities.

### Observation and Discussion

In recent times, crimes 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. Most dowry deaths occur when the young woman, unable to bear the harassment and torture, commits suicide. Most of these suicides are by burns, hanging, or by poisoning. Sometimes the woman is killed by setting herself on fire; known as "bride burning", and

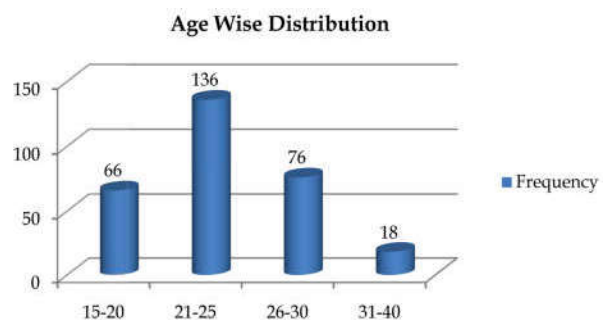


Fig. 1: Age wise distribution of victims

sometimes disguised as suicide or accident. Deaths by burning of Indian women have been more frequently attributed to dowry conflicts [5]. In dowry deaths, the groom’s family is the perpetrator of murder or suicide [6].

The statistical analysis on age incidence of dowry deaths reveals the fact that the dowry death is most common in the age group of 21- 30 years. With highest percentage of preponderance being observed in the age group of 21- 25 years (45%), followed by 25.7% cases in the age group of 26- 30 years and 22.3% in the age group of 15 - 20 years, and very less in the age group of 30 - 40 yrs. This suggests that no age group is an exception to harassment for dowry that finally leads to death of the individual. This age group is

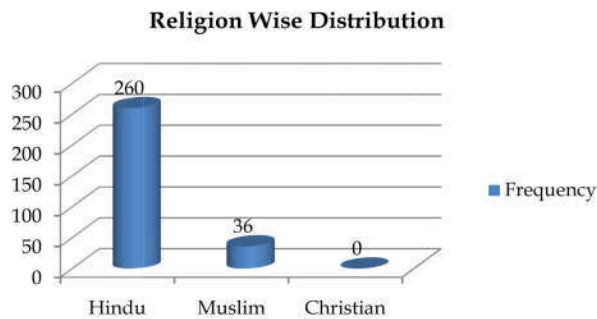


Fig. 2: Religion wise distribution

mostly affected as they are the young females who fall into the marriageable age in India and marital discord, quarrels and dowry demands may cause depression leading to suicidal deaths. Also career oriented women seeking jobs may commit suicide due to frustration.

When dowry deaths are analyzed according to religion Hindu females comprised of an alarmingly large group 87%, while the number of deaths in other religion groups the Muslim (12%) and in Christian community is almost negligible. It may be argued that these religions are minority in India hence low

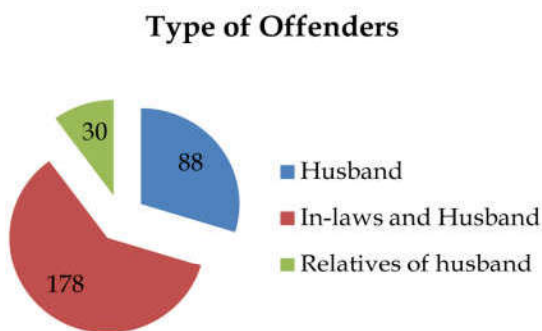


Fig. 3: Dowry deaths - Offenders involved

incidence of dowry death rates in these communities are proportional to their numbers in population. Yet lesser number of dowry deaths in females of Muslim community at Hyderabad is quite surprising since Muslim population is considerable and that too of



Fig. 4: Causes of dowry deaths

low socio-economic strata.

In the majority of dowry deaths 60.1% in-laws of husband and husband are responsible for killing or forcing the victim to end her life and that husband alone is found to be most common offender responsible for 29.7% all dowry death cases.

The fact and figures in the shows that majority of



Fig. 5: Manner of death

deaths are due to burns (59.8%), followed by deaths due to hanging (23%), whereas poisoning (11.1%) and other injuries accounts for lowest incidence of deaths (6.1%). Nilesh Kumar et al 2016 [7] supports our study that most common cause of death was burn injury. Roy et al, 2015 [8] also supports our findings and found majority of female deaths were due to burn (66%).

As per fig no 5, it shows that the nature of deaths homicidal or suicidal. Of these cases 89.2% are found to be suicidal, where as 10.8% are homicidal. Shrivastava et al 2007 [9] and Nilesh Kumar et al [7]

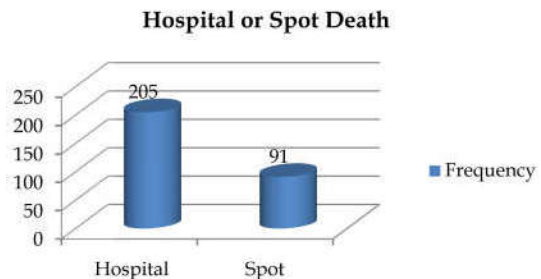


Fig. 6: Hospital or spot death

study support our study most of the deaths were suicidal (50.35%) in nature. The effects of modernization, specifically in India, have led to sweeping changes in the socioeconomic, socio

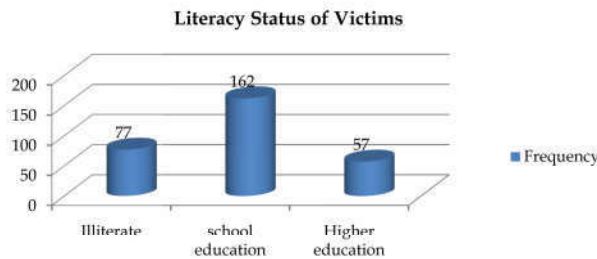


Fig. 7: Literacy status of victim

philosophical and cultural arenas of people’s lives, which have greatly added to the stress in life, leading to substantially higher rates of suicide [10].

Regarding hospital and spot deaths shows that majority of deaths happened in hospital (69.3%),

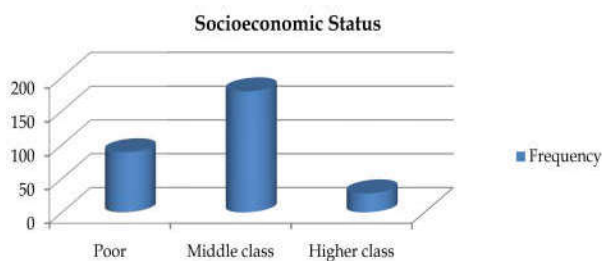


Fig. 8: Socio - economic status of the victim

whereas spot death cases are 30.7%, owing to shifting of the deceased to nearby hospital after the incident. Majority of dowry deaths (80.7%) reported in females who are either illiterate, below metric or matriculate and only few are educationally highly qualified. Shrivastava et al 2007 [9] supports our study that most of the victims were literate up to primary standard.

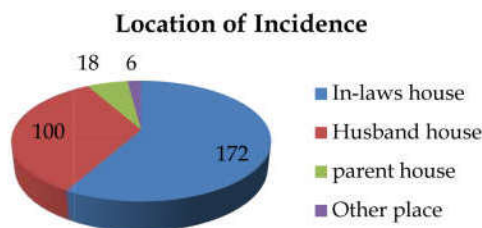


Fig. 9: Location of the incidence - Dowry deaths

Our study highlights that most of the cases (90.5%) in low socio economic and middle class group and 9.5% in high income group. There is a fairly strong association between unemployment rates and suicide, but the nature of this association is complex. Unemployment may drive up the suicide risk through factors such as poverty, social deprivation, domestic

difficulties, and hopelessness [11].

Regarding the location of the crime, it is observed that majority of dowry deaths the first and foremost location of incidence is the in-laws house (58.1%), followed by husband’s house (33.8%). Even though the Government of India has passed the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961, till today this social evil was not totally eradicated from our society and has become a major issue of unnatural female deaths.

### Conclusion

From our study it can be concluded that mostly 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. A social and public health approach acknowledges that Dowry death is preventable, and promotes a framework in integrated system of interventions across multiple levels within society including the individual, the family, the community and the health care system. This social curse has to be attacked by a multipronged and organized approach by police, women welfare organizations, reputed public servants, and judiciary and by awarding deterrent punishment to all offenders. In our opinion, a rational and practical approach on the above mentioned matter will certainly be helpful.

### Legal Aspects

The different legislations to protect females from dowry deaths include Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 1; Sec. 498 (A) IPC, Sec. 304 (B) IPC, Sec. 113 (A) and 113(B) of IEA9 etc. Constitutionally, women were provided special protection under Article 21 and Article 1410. Supreme Court of India extended the ambit of Article 21 and held that mere existence is not the right to live, it is the right to live with dignity. The Government of India passed a Domestic Violence Bill, 2001, “To protect the rights of women who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto” [12].

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#### *Conflict of Interest*

This study is an insight and eye opener of scenario in India and there is no conflict of interest involved so ever.

#### *Source of Funding*

The article does not have any funding issue involved in its generations.

#### *Ethical Clearance*

The articles do not violate any ethical, moral or legal guidelines pertaining to original scientific work.

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