

## A Case of Parricide: An Analysis of Variables

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### Abstract

The cases of crime against the elderly are on rise across India. Among the various manifestations of intra-familial violence, parricide-homicide is the most horrific. Though studies of parricide are reported in western countries, only few cases have been reported in the literature in India. The etiology is multifactorial in both the offenders and the elders, with psychiatric disorders being reported as most common cause. We present here a case of homicidal death of an elderly woman by her grandson as a result of long-standing conflict over money or property. Early behavior management of the aggressive offender with an efforts to strengthen and respect for family relationships would hinder the incidence of such cases.

**Keywords:** Parricide; Homicide; Elder; Head Injury.

### Introduction

Parricide-homicide is a rare and the most heinous act among the domestic violence. In the eyes of many, the killing of an elderly is an incomprehensible event. The parricide is defined as murder of the father or the mother or any other legitimate ascendant [1]. Violence against parents has been reported earlier [1-5]. The causative factors of such acts range from psychological and sociological to economic. Studies on parricide show that quarrels are usual preconditions for the killing in very different contexts [2,5]. It is often seen as a dysfunctional harmony of the most family. In most countries, to deal with such quarrelsome and disobedient children, parents from all social backgrounds use the legal instruments available. Frequent complaining about their improper

behavior, disrespect, drinking, swearing, debauchery and moral decay led to possible escalation to physical assault [6]. Factors associated with elder abuse and assault include low income, advanced age, functional impairment, and lack of social support particularly in elderly widows [7]. The case presented here portrays such a case of elderly homicide as a result of long-standing interfamilial conflict over money or property.

### Case Report

A seventy-year-old woman with alleged history of assault by her grandson by stone, was admitted in our hospital where she died after four days. The reason was homicide being an argument over money/property. A medico-legal case was registered and post-mortem examination was conducted. At autopsy, the following antemortem injuries were noted. Sutured wound of size 3 cm x 0.1 cm present with 2 intact black sutures over left parietal region of scalp (Fig. 1). On removing the sutures, lacerated wound of size 3 cm x 1 cm x soft tissue deep present over left parietal region 2 cm in front of left parietal eminence. On reflection of scalp, sub-scalp contusion and pericranial hemorrhage present over both temporo-parietal region. Both temporalis muscles contused. On the vault of the skull, fissure fracture of length 6 cm present involving left parietal and

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Fig. 1: Sutured lacerated wound over left parietal region of scalp



Fig. 2: Fissure fracture over left parietal and squamous temporal bone

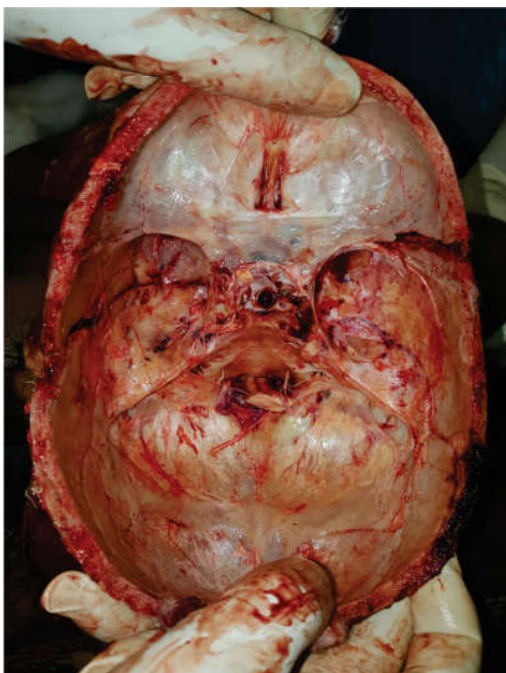


Fig. 3: Hinge fracture

squamous temporal bone (Fig. 2). On the base of the skull, in continuation with above mentioned fracture hinge fracture of length 20 cm extends along left squamous temporal bone passing through sella turcica of sphenoid bone and extending along the anterior border of middle cranial fossa on left side between lesser and greater wing of sphenoid bone (Fig. 3). On examination of the brain, diffuse subdural hemorrhage and subarachnoid hemorrhage present over cerebral hemisphere and cerebellum. Contusion of size 4 cm x 3 cm present over the lateral surface and tip of both temporal lobes. Bilateral lateral ventricle bleed present. The cause of death was opined as head injury.

### Discussion

In India, according to the National Crime Records Bureau's report (2015), out of total of 20,532 cases of Indian Penal Code crimes against senior citizens registered during 2015, 5.1% were murder (1,053 cases) [8]. In the study conducted by Bourget D et al. between 1990 and 2005, 56 perpetrators (4 daughters and 52 sons) were involved in killing of 64 parents (27 mothers and 37 fathers) [2]. Walsh et al. reported 2,599 parricide cases during 1976-2003 which included killing of parents and stepparents. Female victims were 336 and male were 2,263. 21.8% were aged above 51 years [3]. Singhal and Dutta observed in their study that patricide was common than matricide and further noticed that fathers of perpetrator are significantly more punitive, and that the mothers being overprotective and more tolerant [4]. Phillip reported Bourget et al study reported that the main motives for the killings of mothers (matricide) and fathers (patricide) were depression or psychoses of perpetrators (65.5%) followed by long-standing intra-familial conflicts [2]. Psychiatric factors as major contribution of parricide was also described by other studies [9-11]. In a study by Heide and Petee, 2.9% parricide offences occurred due to argument over money or property. In western countries, fire arm and knife are reported as the most common weapon for infliction, followed by blunt object [3,5]. There were no studies that the author could find pertaining to parricidal deaths describing the patterns of injuries particularly with respect to head injuries. The study conducted by Sundaragiri et al. reported head injuries were common of homicidal deaths followed by strangulation and others [12]. Others studies also reported similar observations [13,14]. The Study of homicidal skull fractures by Sundaragiri et al. reported that out of 211 cases, 46%

cases had skull fractures with 85.6 % caused by blunt force trauma [12]. In their study, 5 cases (5.15 %) of homicidal deaths of elders were reported. Homicidal studies of Malik et al. [14] and Punia [15] also revealed such high incidence i.e. 71.3% and 75% respectively. Blunt force trauma of head in homicidal cases was also reported by other authors[13,14].

### Conclusion

Most cases of parricide-homicide tragedy cannot be predicted and occur without prior knowledge or warning. However, in the cases where warning signs could be noticed in perpetrator, such as a recent behavioral disorganization with assaultive tendency, especially within the family, targeted approach to help perpetrators, how to deal properly with such strong emotion and to converse in more effective manner would be a promising area to start with. The efforts to strengthen family bonds and respect for family relationships should be made at every levels in the communities.

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### Ethical clearance

None required

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