

Evaluation of Unnatural Death of Newly Married Women in Rajkot Region

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Abstract

Context: The unnatural deaths of newly married women, at present, are a burning problem of the society, increasing day by day. This has thrown a major challenge to the police personnel, medico-legal experts as well as to judicial officers not only to wipe out this social menace but also to penalize the culprits in deterrent manner. This study focuses to learn socio-epidemiological profile of unnatural death of newly married women in Rajkot region. *Aims:* To evaluate unnatural deaths of newly married women in Rajkot region. *Method and Materials:* The present study was conducted on 153 cases of newly married female victims of unnatural death cases during year 2013 at Department of Forensic Medicine, P.D.U. Govt. Medical College & Hospital, Rajkot. All required information was collected by inquiring investigation officers and relatives of deceased and from postmortem findings. *Results:* Total 153 cases of unnatural death of newly married women with minimum age of 18 years and maximum age of 34 years. Maximum cases of unnatural death were found in age group of 23 to 26 years (39.87%). Maximum cases were found within first year of married life. *Conclusion:* Commonest reason for unnatural death of newly married women is dowry related harassment. Lower education in bride, lower income of husband and maladjustment of bride in new family are reasons for higher incidence of unnatural newly married female deaths. If responsible authorities focus on these factors while designing policy to deal with crime against women, incidences of unnatural death of newly married women will decrease.

Keywords: Unnatural Female Death; Newly Married Women; Burns; Crimes against Women.

Introduction

The unnatural deaths of newly married women, at present, is a burning problem of the society. It is increasing day by day owing to prevailing socio-economic fabric and life style in the family. It is hitting the headlines of every newspaper every day. Hardly a day passed when the newspapers do not report the occurrence of this tragic event. This has thrown a major challenge to the police personnel, medico-legal experts as well as to judicial officers not only to wipe out this social menace but also to penalize the culprits in deterrent manner.

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In past 50 years, many revolutionary laws are made by law makers for the safety and well-being of women in society. Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted in 1961, while IPC section 304B (Dowry deaths) and 498A (Cruelty by husband or in laws) was incorporated in the year 1980. In 1985, home ministry of Gujarat issued circular in case of suspicious death of young married women under instruction of central government, as per which inquiry in such cases should be conducted by police officer not below rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police, and postmortem should be conducted by panel of two doctors [1]. Even after enactment of such rules, crime against women is on rise as ever. As per National Crime Records Bureau, crimes against women have continuously increased during 2010-2014 with 2,13,585 cases reported in 2010, which increased to 2,28,649 cases in 2011, which further increased to 2,44,270 cases 2012 and 3,09,546 cases in 2013. In 2014, a total of 3,37,922 such cases were reported [2].

Reasons for such rise could be many. The condition of uneducated and non-working class of women is pathetic in many sections of society. They suffer from low self-esteem and are soft targets for domestic violence. Other reasons are dependency of women on their family for money, cumbersome judicial system and attitude of police towards women.

In present study, we have tried to analyze various factors responsible for increasing cases of unnatural deaths of newly married woman in society. Results of this study can be useful for concerned authority to formulate stronger steps to decrease crime against women.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted on the newly married female victims of unnatural death cases during the year 2013 at Department of Forensic Medicine, P.D.U. Govt. Medical College & Hospital, Rajkot. Out of 2503 autopsies conducted during that year, 153 cases with following criteria were included for the study.

1. All the cases of married women who had died within 7 years of married life whose cases were registered under section 302, 304 (B), 306 or 498 (A) of IPC.
2. All the cases of unnatural death of married women who had died within 7 years of married life whose inquest was conducted by magistrate or police under CrPC 174 or 176, but cases were not registered under any section of IPC at that time.

Cases of death of women due to natural causes and unknown dead bodies were not included in the study.

The information regarding the cases was obtained (1) from investigating officers and police papers, (2) from dying declaration and suicide notes if available, (3) by interviewing the parties of both sides (Parents & In-laws) regarding age, education, socio-economic status, duration of married life etc. (4) post mortem examination findings, (5) chemical examination reports.

The data so collected were entered in proforma, compiled and tabulated in master-chart and were analyzed statistically using Microsoft Excel and conclusion were drawn after comparing and discussing with similar type of work carried out by other authors.

Results

We have studied total 153 cases of unnatural death of newly married women with minimum age of 18 years and maximum age of 34 years. Maximum cases of unnatural death were found in age group of 23 to 26 years (39.87%), while only two cases were found in age more than or equal to 31 years (1.31%) [Table 1].

Maximum cases of unnatural newly married women death were found within first year of married life (22.88%), followed by within 4 to 5 years of married life (18.30%) and least cases were found within 6 to 7 years of married life (6.54%) [Table 2].

Maximum cases of unnatural newly married women death were found where deceased's educational status was up to primary school (32.03%), and least cases were found where deceased were studied up to higher secondary school (11.76%) [Table 3].

Maximum cases of unnatural newly married women death were found where occupation of deceased's husband was labour (45.10%), followed by business (31.72%), and least cases were found where deceased's husband was government or private employee (5.88%) [Table 4].

Maximum number of cases of unnatural newly married women death were found in lower middle socio-economic status (43.79%), followed by upper middle socio-economic status (26.14%) and least commonly found in middle socio-economic status (6.23%) [Table 5].

Commonest cause of death in cases of unnatural newly married women death was burns (50.33%), followed by poisoning (23.53%) and least commonly found cause of death was drowning (0.65%) [Table 6].

Table 1: Distribution of cases according to age

Age Group (years)	No. of Cases
18 - 20	28 (18.30%)
21 - 22	30 (19.61%)
23 - 24	21 (13.73%)
25 - 26	40 (26.14%)
27 - 28	19 (12.42%)
29 - 30	13 (8.50%)
=31	2 (1.31%)
Total	153 (100%)

Table 2: Distribution of cases according to duration of marriage

Duration of Marriage (Years)	No. of Cases
≤1	35 (22.88%)
>1 to ≤2	21 (13.73%)
>2 to ≤3	24 (15.69%)
>3 to ≤4	14 (9.15%)
>4 to ≤5	28 (18.30%)
>5 to ≤6	21 (13.73%)
>6 to ≤7	10 (6.54%)
Total	153 (100%)

Table 3: Distribution of cases according to educational status of deceased

Educational status	No. of Cases
Illiterate	24 (15.69%)
Primary	49 (32.03%)
High school	32 (20.92%)
Higher secondary school	18 (11.76%)
Graduate	30 (19.61%)
Post Graduate	0 (0%)
Total	153 (100%)

Table 4: Distribution of cases according to occupation of husband

Occupation of Husband	No. of Cases
Farmer	28 (18.30%)
Labourer	69 (45.10%)
Govt. or Private Employee	9 (5.88%)
Business	47 (30.72%)
Unemployed	0 (0%)
Total	153 (100%)

Table 5: Distribution of cases according to socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status	No. of Cases
Higher	14 (9.15%)
Upper Middle	40 (26.14%)
Middle	8 (5.23%)
Lower Middle	67 (43.79%)
Lower	24 (15.69%)
Total	153 (100%)

Table 6: Distribution of cases according to cause of death

Cause of Death	No. of Cases
Burns	77 (50.33%)
Poisoning	36 (23.53%)
Hanging	24 (15.69%)
Drowning	1 (0.65%)
Head Injury	10 (6.54%)
Other	5 (3.27%)
Total	153 (100%)

Table 7: Distribution of cases according to manner of death

Manner of Death	No. of Cases
Suicide	89 (58.17%)
Homicide	6 (3.92%)
Accidental	58 (37.91%)
Total	153 (100%)

Commonest manner of death in cases of unnatural newly married women death was suicide (58.17%) and least commonly found manner of death was homicide (3.92%) [Table 7].

Discussion

In last 60 post-independence years, India has progressed tremendously in all fields of development of society, but we have not succeeded to curtail crime against woman, particularly crime against newly married woman. Shaken by such magnitude of unnatural death of newly married woman, bench of Justices Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Mishrasaid in one such judgment that “The hallmark of a healthy society is the respect it shows to women. Indian society has become a sick society. This is evident from the large number of cases coming up in this court and also in almost all courts in the country in which young women are being killed by their husbands or by their in-laws by pouring kerosene on them and setting them on fire or by hanging/strangulating them.” In the present study, we have studied factors responsible for higher incidence of unnatural death of newly married woman, results of which can be useful for concerned authority to formulate stronger steps to decrease such incidences.

In present study, out of total 165 women, who had died within 7 years of married life, whose autopsy

were performed at our institute in the year 2013, 153 (92.72%) were victims of unnatural death. This shows that incidence of unnatural death in newly married female is really higher.

Most victims of unnatural death in present study were ageing between 23 to 26 years (61.07%), while only two victims were ageing more than or equal to 31 years (1.31%), similar results were found by Singh J et al. [3] (35.85% cases in age group of 22 to 25 years) and Arora P et al. (31.47% cases in age group of 23 to 26 years).

Most victims of unnatural death in present study died within first three years of married life (52.30%), and least victims died within 6 to 7 years of married life (6.54%). Similar findings were observed by Singh J et al. [3], Shakya NK et al [4], Verma RK et al. [5] and Arora P et al. [6] (72.64%, 50%, 57.46% and 60.14% respectively within first three years of life). Reason for such findings is that usually demands of dowry by in laws is more during initial years of marriage, while during later years of marriage, as brides become settled with in-laws family and as they have children, in-laws stop demands of dowry to save their family. Moreover, during later period of marriage, most women have children, so they do not commit suicide thinking about future of their children. Another reason for such findings is that women commit suicide during initial marital period due to mal adjustment in new environment.

Most of the victims of unnatural death in present study were studied up to primary school (32.03%). In least number of cases, victim were highly educated (11.76%-up to higher-secondary school and 19.61%-graduate). Similar findings were observed by Shakya NK et al [4] (37%-up to primary school, 20.1%-up to higher-secondary school and 7.8%-graduate) and Arora P et al. [6] (37.76%-up to primary school, 4.20%-up to higher-secondary school and 2.80%-graduate). Verma RK et al. [5] found higher incidence of unnatural death in illiterates (35.75%). Reasons for such findings are awareness of well educated women about rights of women and women friendly dowry related laws, moreover they are economically independent, so, they choose dissolution of marriage instead of committing suicide if they are unhappy with their married life.

Husbands of most victims of unnatural death in the present study were labourers (45.10%) or farmers (18.30%), while in least number of cases, husbands were private or government employee (5.88%). Similarly, most victims were belonging to lower middle socio-economic class (43.79%), while less number of victims were from middle (5.23%) or higher socio-economic class (9.15%). Similar findings were

observed by Arora P et al. [6] (55.25% in lower middle and 2.80% in upper middle socio-economic class). Verma RK et al. [5] found higher incidence of unnatural death in lower (37.10%) and lower middle socio-economic class (34.29%). Reason for such findings is monetary needs of economically poor in-laws. They harass brides to get dowry to fulfill their need, and to end their sufferings, brides commit suicide.

Commonest cause of death in victims of unnatural death in the present study was burns (50.33%), followed by poisoning (23.53%). Similar findings were observed by Verma RK et al. [5] (39.82% burns, followed by poisoning 19%). Burns was commonest cause of death in the study of Shakya NK et al [4], Verma RK et al. [5] and Arora P et al. [6]. Incidence of burns in unnatural death is higher due to the fact that in-laws usually choose burns to kill bride so they can save themselves by stating incidence as an accident in front of judiciary. Commonest manner of death in victims of unnatural death in the present study was suicide (58.17%), followed by accidental (37.91%) and least commonly found manner of death was homicide (3.92%). Similar findings were observed by Verma RK et al. [5] and Shakya NK et al [4]. Reason for such higher incidence of suicide in newly married women could be mal-adjustment in new family as well as cruelty and harassment by in laws, as they choose suicide to end their mental and physical suffering. The reason for higher incidence of accidental deaths in newly married women could be due to increase events of kitchen accidents, however, such higher incidence of accidental deaths could be false as it is difficult to discriminate between suicidal, homicidal and accidental burns, so some suicidal or homicidal burns cases might have ended as accidental cases in police inquiry.

Conclusion

From the present study, it is evident that despite of efforts by government to stop dowry deaths, dowry related harassments are still commonest reason for unnatural death of newly married women in most parts of India. Lower education in bride, lower income of husband and maladjustment of bride in new family are reasons for higher incidence of unnatural newly married female deaths. If responsible authorities focus on these factors while designing policy to deal with crime against women, incidences of unnatural death of newly married women will certainly decrease.

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