

Section **Forensic Medicine**

Original Article

A Study of Epidemiological Profile of Dowry Death Victims in Aligarh

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ABSTRACT

Background: Dowry death is considered as one of the categories of most heinous crime in all the societies against the women in India. It is one of the important causes for the abetment of suicide and murder. **Methods:** This retrospective study was done by Department of Forensic Medicine, J.N Medical College & Hospital in collaboration with district mortuary Aligarh during the period of 2 years from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2015. **Results:** Amongst Out of 1015 female victims, 415 females died within 7 years of marriage unrelated to dowry and 52 victims died in relation or with demand due to the dowry. Most of the deaths occurred in the age group 18-25 years (65.53%). Maximum number of death occurred within first 3 years of marriage in 37 (71.15%) cases. Majority of married female victims were Hindu 39 (75.00%) and used to live in the rural areas (69.23%) belonging to joint family 32 (61.53%).

Burn was leading cause of death in 18(34.62%) cases followed by hanging 16 (30.77%). So the strict laws and proper investigation is the need of hour to save our sisters and daughter from the devil of Dowry.

Key Words: Dowry death, Unnatural death, Burn, Women, Crime

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INTRODUCTION

Dowry death is considered as one of the categories of violence against women along with rape, vitriolage, eve teasing, neglect and domestic violence. Most of the dowry death occurs when the young women unable to bear the harassments and torture commit suicide or the women is burnt by setting her on fire known as bride burning and projected as suicide or accident. After many years of campaigning by several voluntary organizations for awareness against the menace of dowry the number of dowry harassment and dowry death is on rise. According to

Indian National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that there were about 8331 dowry death cases registered in India in 2011.^[1] Aligarh is situated in the middle of Doab – the land between the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, at a distance of 130 km Southeast of Delhi on the Delhi-Howrah rail route and the Grand Trunk Road. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 in Indian Civil Law was passed that prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of a dowry, "as consideration for the marriage", where "dowry" is defined as a gift demanded or given as a precondition for a marriage and was subsequently replaced by section 304-B and 498 A of the Indian Penal Code. Despite the provisions of anti-dowry laws demand for the dowry is increasing daily due to social inheritance, traditional mentality and life style in the family. In majority of the cases of dowry related death the problem is created by the female members of the family against their own sex. It is

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usually found that approach of mother in law is different from bride's mother. In one of the case reported as "Dowry cannibalism" where the wife accused her husband of drinking her blood by extracting through syringe on daily basis and mixing it with liquor for punishing her not to bring enough dowry.^[2] Hence it is must for the medical and legal personnel's to be aware as these events occur all over India. It is a matter of serious concern because these crimes are well planned and executed within the safe boundaries of home and done by family members. Most of the victim dies on the spot and those who survive are threatened or persuaded not to give statement to magistrate. The present study was done to evaluate the magnitude and study the various epidemiological factors of victims of the dowry death in Aligarh and other factor causing the alarming rise in incidence of dowry death.

METHODS

The present retrospective study on the pattern of dowry deaths was done by Department of Forensic Medicine, J.N Medical College & Hospital in collaboration with district mortuary Aligarh during the period of 2 years from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2015. All the cases coming to casualty J.N Medical College Aligarh having injuries related to dowry followed by death of victim within 7 years of marriage in which FIR was lodged under section 304-B or inquest conducted by magistrate under various other sections of dowry death are included in the study. Deaths of women within 7 years of marriage due to different type of accidents or natural cause, homicide or suicide done by victim within 7 years unrelated to dowry are excluded from the study. The various epidemiological characteristics of the cases were obtained from the casualty record section and post-mortem reports. The data was recorded and analyzed in the form of tables and charts.

RESULTS

This retrospective study was carried out in Department of Forensic Medicine in collaboration with the District mortuary Aligarh. Total 3373 post-mortem examinations were done during 2 year period from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2015 with 1015 female victims. Out of 1015 victims, 415 females died within 7 years of marriage unrelated to dowry and 52 victims died in relation or with demand due to the dowry. Thus percentage of dowry death as compared to females within 7 years of marriage is 12.53% and out of total female mortality was found to be 5.12% during the study. In the present study dowry deaths occurred at any age ranging from 18 to 45 years. Maximum number of deaths 32 cases (61.53%) occurred between 18-25 years of age followed by 26-30 years, 12(23.07%) and least 1(1.93%) in the age-group 36-40 years as shown by Table 1 & Figure I. In our study, maximum number of death occurred within first 3 years of marriage 37(71.15%) cases, among these, 12(23.07%) in first years, 15(28.84%) cases in 1-2 years and 10(19.24%) in 2-3 years, and only 2(3.84%) cases in 6 to 7 years of marriage with reference to Table 2 & Figure II. Majority of the victims were

Hindu 39(75.00%) and used to live in the rural areas (69.23%). During this study period, no dowry death was reported from the Christian community while 2(3.84%) cases were reported from Sikh community and in only 1 case religion of the female was not clear (Table 3, 4 & Figure 3). Regarding the type of family, maximum brides belonged to joint family 32 (61.53%) cases and 20(38.47) cases from nuclear family (Table 5). Distribution of dowry death according to their cause like burning, poisoning, hanging, strangulation is shown in Table 6. Burning constituted the maximum number of dowry deaths 18(34.62%) followed by hanging 16(30.77%) and then poisoning 10(19.23%), strangulation 6(11.54%) cases and injuries due to assault 2(3.84) case.

Table I: Age of dowry death victims

Age groups	Cases	%
18-25 yr	32	61.53
26-30 yr	12	23.07
31-35 yr	7	13.47
36-40 yr	1	1.93
Total	52	100

Table II: Duration since Marriage of Victims

S. No	Duration of Marriage	Cases	%
1	< 1	12	23.07
2	1 to 2	15	28.84
3	2 to 3	10	19.24
4	3 to 4	7	13.47
5	4 to 5	3	5.77
6	5 to 6	3	5.77
7	6 to 7	2	3.84
Total		52	100

Table III: Religion of victim

Religion	Cases	%
Hindu	39	75.00
Muslim	10	19.23
Christian	0	0
Sikh	2	3.84
Others	1	1.93
Total	52	100

Table 4: Residential status of victims

Residential status	Cases	%
Rural	36	69.23
Urban	16	30.77
Total	52	100

Table 5: Type of Family

Type	Cases	%
Joint	32	61.53
Nuclear	20	38.47
Total	52	100

Table 6: Cause of Death in Alleged Dowry Cases

Cause of Death	Cases	%
Burning	18	34.62
Poisoning	10	19.23
Hanging	16	30.77
Strangulation	6	11.54
Assault	2	3.84
Total	52	100

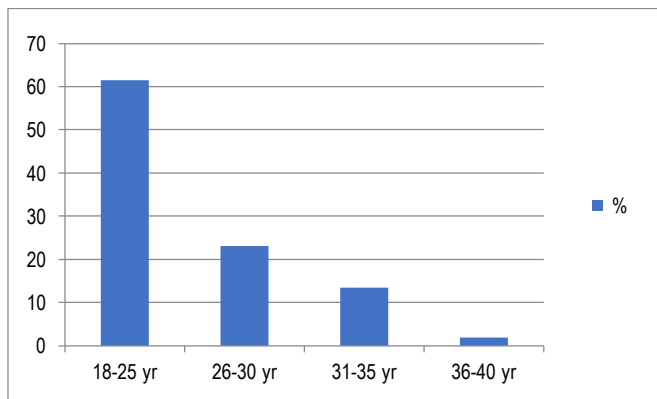


Figure 1: Age of dowry death victims

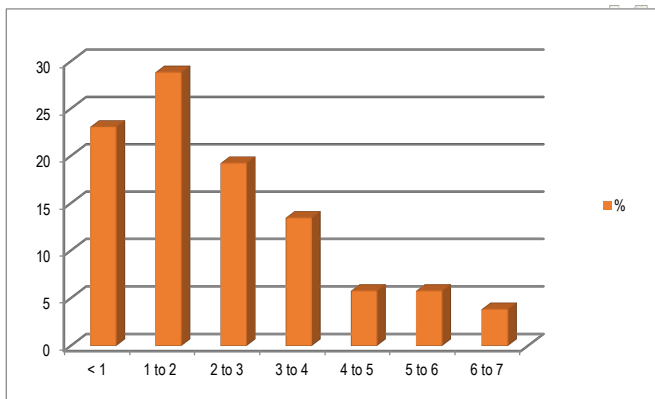


Figure 2: Duration since Marriage of Victims

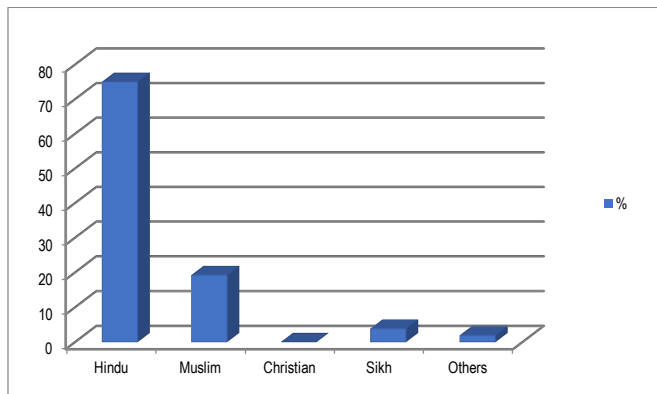


Figure 3: Religion of victim

DISCUSSION

In India status of women is subjected to great changes from ancient time. Indian women continued to face discrimination and are often the victims of abuse and violent crimes because of the male dominated society. Unnatural deaths of females especially within seven years of marriage are one of the critical indicators of the level of mental and social health of the society. The present study was conducted by Department of Forensic Medicine Department of Forensic Medicine, J.N Medical College & Hospital in collaboration with district mortuary Aligarh during the period of 2 years from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2015 and the percentage of dowry death within seven years of marriage was 12.53% which is similar to the study done by Verma RK et al^[3] (15.84%). However the study done by Shrivastava AK et al showed the incidence of fatalities was 27.27%. In present study most of the victim deaths 32 cases (61.53%) occurred between 18-25 years of age followed by 26-30 years 12(23.07%) cases, 7(13.47%) in age group 31-35 years and least 1(1.93%) in the age-group 36-40 years. This is in accordance with studies done by Radhika RH et al^[4] who reported 60% of the cases belonged to 18-25 years of age. Similar findings were from study done by Sharma BR et al showing 56% of victims were in the age group 18-25 years. Kumar V et al^[5], Saha KK & Mohanty S^[6] also reported similar finding. With respect to the duration of married life maximum cases were reported within first 3 years of marriage 37(71.15%) cases, among these 12(23.07%) in first years, 15(28.84%) cases in 1-2 years and 10(19.24%) in 2-3 years, and only 2(3.84%) cases in 6 to 7 years of marriage. The findings were similar to the study done by Verma RK et al^[3] and Shrivastava AK et al^[8] who is also having the opinion of maximum deaths 23.53% and 27.27% within 1-2 years respectively. This is in contrast with the study done by Radhika RH et al^[4] who showed the 40% deaths within 1-2 years of marriage and Sharma B.R et al⁷ observed increase i.e. 23.33% deaths in 3-5 years duration of marriage. This is probably due to the reason of infertility and infidelity. In our study majority of dowry death 39(75.00%) occurred in Hindu religion followed by Muslim 10(19.23%). The high proportion of dowry death belonging to Hindu females within three years of marriage was most probably due to the reason that Hindu population is in majority in India and there is a strong culture of giving and receiving of dowry. There is unending demand of cash and other movable and immovable properties by their husbands and /or in laws for which they kill or abet for the suicide of young brides. This is consistent with the findings of other authors.^[5-13] Sinha US et al^[11] found 94.9% Hindus, 4.22% Muslims, 0.53% Sikhs and 0.35% Christians in their study. No case was reported from Christian community in our study probably because of very low population, different culture and high professional qualification. Majority of population in India used to live in rural area. In our study around two third of the cases were from the rural background and one third were from urban region although JN Medical college is located in Aligarh city but it attracts patients from the entire district and alleged

injuries in relation to dowry is referred to apex centre. This is in accordance with the studies done by Verma RK et al.^[3], Ghaffar UB et al.^[12], Kumar V et al.^[5], Saha KK et al.^[6] According to the type of family our study showed that 36(69.23%) cases were from joint family and 16(30.77%) were from nuclear family. This may be due to the fact that almost all the marriages are arranged and belonged to joint type of family. This is consistent with the study of Verma RK et al.³ and is in contrast with the study done by Radhika RH et al.⁴ who observed that it is most common in nuclear family. With regard to the dowry death in married females according to the present study burning was a major cause of death in 18(34.62%) cases followed by hanging 16(30.77%). Thermal burn as a common cause is also concluded by Kulshrestha P et al.^[9], Sharma BR et al.^[10], Sinha US et al.^[11], Ghaffar UB et al.^[12] but is in contrast with the study done by Radhika RH et al.⁴ in which hanging 78.33% is most common cause of death. In Agnihotri A^[13] study poisoning was recorded as the most common cause of death. According to the history, post-mortem examination and circumstantial evidences it was observed that suicide was the most common manner of death followed by accident and homicide but since the matter is in court so it cannot be said with certainty whether the case is of suicide or accident. The higher incidence of deaths due to burn in newly married female in general, suicidal or homicidal is termed as 'Bride Burning' or 'Dowry Death'. It is often attributed to cooking on open unprotected flames, loose synthetic clothes, saris which are highly inflammable and are alleged to catch fire while working in the kitchen. Indian women prefer to commit suicide by Kerosene oil, stove, L.P.G gas and match sticks as these are easily available in the house and is also used by in laws to kill the bride to conceal the torture and other injury mark on the body and are able to tamper and destroy the circumstantial evidence. India's National Crime Records Bureau reported that 8,233 Indian women were killed in 2012 in dowry-related violence, or nearly one per hour^{1,14}. The incidence of dowry deaths grew by nearly 3% over the previous five years, and torture at the hands of a husband or family increased by 5.4%, with 99,135 cases reported by survivors in 2011.

CONCLUSION

Despite stringent laws along with time to time amendments to prevent the bride from harassment and murder incidence is continuously increasing. Our study showed that out of 1015 cases of unnatural female deaths came for the Post mortem examination at District mortuary Aligarh, 415 married females died within seven years after marriage

unrelated to dowry and 52 females were the victims who died in relation or with demand due to the dowry. Most of the deaths occurred in the age group 18-25 years (65.53%). Maximum number of death occurred within first 3 years of marriage in 37(71.15%) cases. Majority of married female victims were Hindu 39(75.00%) and used to live in the rural areas (69.23%) belonging to joint family 32(61.53%). In majority of the victims, the main cause leading to death was burns followed by asphyxial deaths. Most common manner of death was suicidal according to history, post-mortem examination and circumstantial evidence. So the time has come to take stringent action against the menace of dowry by the government and other law enforcing agencies along with the social measures to save our sisters and daughter from the devil of Dowry.

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