

Medico-Legal Analytical study of changing trends in Suspicious Deaths among Married Women

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Abstract

The complexity of the problem of “Suspicious deaths among women within Seven years of their married life” is so intense and deep as it involves social anthropology, sociology, civilization, marriage systems and customs. Despite of the appreciable revolutionary amendments by lawmakers for the safety and well-being of women, the atrocities against women is on rise as ever. Though the educational and occupational opportunities are providing women with new roles outside the home, their social position in the family remains unchanged. In our present retrospective research, an attempt has been made to study the changing trends of the medico-legal aspects of the incidence of the suspicious deaths in the women within seven years of their married life in and around Kakinada during 2012 to 2016 in relation to the statistics during 1996 to 2000 as per the “Medico-legal study of suspicious deaths among married women under seven years of their married life in and around Kakinada during 1996 to 2000” by Dr. (Late) P.Sarath Kumar Babu et al., (Rtd). Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine, Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

Keywords: Suspicious Deaths, Married Women, Statistics, Retrospective Research, Changing Trends.

Introduction

India is having diverse standards of civilization with multiple religions and faiths, complex of social customs having urban and rural population, with regional feelings, topping illiteracy, and related social dependency of women especially of lower and middle class group of Indian society. This problem is further heightened with population explosion, unemployment, fast urbanization with unequal availabilities of commodities along with traditions of blind social customs in regard to caste and dowry systems.

Though the educational and occupational opportunities are providing women with new roles outside the home, their social position in the family remains unchanged. History has evidenced and studies have proved that family including both parental and husbands, is the most common place where women suffer from ill-treatment and physical and mental harassment.⁽¹⁾

Physical and mental abuse has been documented most commonly during the initial 7 years the married life in many Asian countries like India along with Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁽²⁻⁵⁾

The drastic increase in suspicious deaths in women within seven years of their married life was observed and forced the socio-political system to investigate and develop preventive measures. The practice of dowry has been abolished under “The Dowry Prohibition Act – 1961”, and its violation has been dealt under section 498(A) IPC and 304(B) IPC. The sec 498(A) IPC was formulated for married women who face physical and mental harassment from husband and in-laws with the demand for dowry driving the women to commit

suicide. Section 304(B) IPC was formulated for Dowry deaths. Despite the appreciable revolutionary amendments by lawmakers for the safety and well-being of women, the atrocities against women are on rise as ever. Common methods adopted by the married women to escape the harassment are Suicidal burning, poisoning and hanging. The pattern and methods adopted for suicide and its incidence reflects the complexity of problems in that area as per the degree of civilization.

Aim of Study

In our present study, an attempt has been made to retrospectively study the incidence of types of deaths among married women within seven years of their married life, place of incidence, incidence in which year of their married life, mode of death, precipitating factors that lead to death and place of death. The necessary data has been retrieved from the Medico-Legal records associated with the postmortem examinations done in the department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh during the period of 2012 to 2016. The changing trends of the medico-legal aspects of the incidence of these suspicious deaths in and around Kakinada during 2012 to 2016 are studied in relation to the corresponding statistics during 1996 to 2000 as per the “Medico-legal study of suspicious deaths among married women under seven years of their married life in and around Kakinada during 1996 to 2000” by Dr. (Late) P. Sarath Kumar Babu et al., (Rtd). Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine,

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Materials & Methods

During the period of 5yrs i.e. from 2012 to 2016, a total of 5,159 medico-legal postmortem examinations were done in the Department of Forensic Medicine, Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. Basing on the records available like requisition from I.O., Inquest report, Hospital case sheet extracts, chemical examiners reports of FSL, we have made an attempt to work on "Suspicious deaths among women under Seven years of their married life". The cause of deaths in case of suicidal poisoning is based on the chemical examiner reports of FSL. In our present work we prepared a statement (Master Chart) to show the incidence, years of marriage, mode of death, predisposing causes of death, place of occurrence and place of death.

Results & Observations

Table 1: Incidence of Total Suspicious deaths

| S.No. | Year | No. of PM's | Women deaths | |
|-------|------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | | | Total | Suspicious Deaths |
| 1 | 2012 | 1015 | 195 | 32 |
| 2 | 2013 | 995 | 189 | 78 |
| 3 | 2014 | 1092 | 272 | 225 |
| 4 | 2015 | 1041 | 209 | 152 |
| 5 | 2016 | 1016 | 235 | 39 |
| Total | | 5159 | 1100 | 526 |

Table 2: Incidence of suspicious deaths of female - year wise

| Year | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 st year | 07 | 03 | 03 | 05 | 01 |
| 2 nd year | 07 | 03 | 03 | 02 | 00 |
| 3 rd year | 02 | 03 | 13 | 04 | 08 |
| 4 th year | 04 | 09 | 02 | 07 | 06 |
| 5 th year | 04 | 15 | 05 | 05 | 04 |
| 6 th year | 05 | 14 | 07 | 00 | 09 |
| 7 th year | 03 | 31 | 192 | 129 | 11 |
| Total | 32 | 78 | 225 | 152 | 39 |

Table 3: Incidence of predisposing causes of the suspicious deaths

| Year | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Total |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Suspicious deaths | 32 | 78 | 225 | 152 | 39 | 526 |
| Husband & in laws harassment | 06 | 07 | 18 | 08 | 07 | 46 |
| Husbands & Boar behavior | 05 | 07 | 12 | 17 | 01 | 42 |
| Financial problem | 00 | 01 | 08 | 03 | 01 | 13 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|
| Disharmony | 02 | 05 | 08 | 02 | 01 | 18 |
| Ill health - Physical & mental | 07 | 18 | 40 | 20 | 06 | 91 |
| Accident | 10 | 38 | 129 | 94 | 20 | 291 |
| Extra marital relations | 02 | 00 | 02 | 02 | 01 | 7 |
| Unknown | 00 | 02 | 08 | 06 | 02 | 18 |

Table 4: Incidence of mode of occurrence of the suspicious deaths

| Year | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Poisoning | 08 | 10 | 31 | 19 | 08 |
| Strangulation | 01 | 00 | 03 | 01 | 02 |
| Burning | 15 | 35 | 108 | 82 | 18 |
| Drowning | 01 | 01 | 04 | 03 | 00 |
| Smothering & Throttling | 00 | 00 | 02 | 02 | 00 |
| Accidents | 02 | 26 | 58 | 35 | 02 |
| Stab injuries | 00 | 00 | 03 | 00 | 00 |
| Hanging | 05 | 06 | 16 | 10 | 09 |
| Total | 32 | 78 | 225 | 152 | 39 |

Table 5: Incidence of place of occurrence of the suspicious deaths

| S.N. | Year | No. of Suspicious deaths | Husband & in laws house | Parents house | Outside |
|-------|------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------|
| 1 | 2012 | 32 | 24 | 05 | 03 |
| 2 | 2013 | 78 | 49 | 08 | 21 |
| 3 | 2014 | 225 | 127 | 07 | 91 |
| 4 | 2015 | 152 | 83 | 03 | 64 |
| 5 | 2016 | 39 | 32 | 02 | 07 |
| Total | | 526 | 315 | 25 | 186 |

Table 6: Incidence of place of death of the suspicious deaths

| S.N. | Year | No. of Suspicious deaths | Spot | On the way to Hospital | Hospital |
|-------|------|--------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2012 | 32 | 05 | 03 | 24 |
| 2 | 2013 | 78 | 10 | 03 | 65 |
| 3 | 2014 | 225 | 41 | 08 | 176 |
| 4 | 2015 | 152 | 20 | 12 | 120 |
| 5 | 2016 | 39 | 09 | 01 | 29 |
| Total | | 526 | 85 | 27 | 414 |

- Out of the 5159 cases from 2012 to 2016, women deaths are 1100 (i.e., 21.32%).
- Of all the women deaths 526 (i.e., 47.82%) are suspicious deaths and occurred within 7 years of their married life i.e., 10.19% of all total deaths.
- Lower incidence of women suspicious deaths was noted in years 2012 and 2016.
- More incidences of women suspicious deaths were noted in years 2014 and 2015.

- Lower incidence of women suspicious deaths was noted in the early 2 years of their married life.
- More incidences of women suspicious deaths were noted in 7th year of their married life.
- Of all the women suspicious deaths 291 (55.32%) are accidental in nature.
- Physical and mental ill-health along with harassment by husband and in laws, are also the significant predisposing causes of suspicious deaths.
- In all the years, the highest percentage of mode of suspicious deaths was burning.
- Poisoning and hanging were the next significant “modes” of “Suspicious deaths”.
- There were very low incidences of registered cases of throttling, strangulation and smothering limited to just around 2 to 3 cases per year.
- The highest percentage of “suspicious deaths” occurred in Husband’s & in laws house’.
- The second highest percentage of “suspicious deaths” occurred outside her residential area.
- The lowest percentage of “suspicious deaths” occurred at her parent’s house.
- Among the suspicious deaths, 16.16% women died on spot.
- 5.13% women died on their way to the hospital.
- 78.70% women died in hospital while undergoing treatment.

Conclusion

- 10.19 % of all deaths during 2012 to 2016 brought for post mortem examination to the department of Forensic Medicine, Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh were suspicious women deaths. This indicates a significant rise in the incidence when compared to the 7.68 % of suspicious deaths in married women during 1996 to 2000.⁽⁶⁾
- During 2012 to 2016, highest percentage of deaths occurred in 7th year of their married life, whereas during 1996 to 2000 highest percentage of deaths occurred in 2nd year of their married life.
- During 2012 to 2016, lowest percentage of deaths occurred in 2nd year of their married life, whereas during 1996 to 2000 highest percentage of deaths occurred in 1st year of their married life.
- Suspicious deaths due to accidental in nature remain the highest contributor during 1996 to 2000 and 2012 to 2016.
- Suspicious deaths due to Burns remain the highest contributor during 1996 to 2000 and 2012 to 2016.
- Husbands and in-laws house remains the most common place of occurrence of the incident leading to the suspicious death during 1996 to 2000 and 2012 to 2016.
- During 2012 to 2016, parents’ house is the least common place of occurrence of the incident leading to the suspicious death.

- During 1996 to 2000, place outside her home is the least common place of occurrence of the incident leading to the suspicious death.
- Deaths in the hospital while undergoing treatment remain the highest contributor during 1996 to 2000 and 2012 to 2016.
- Deaths on the way to the hospital remain the lowest contributor during 1996 to 2000 and 2012 to 2016.

Discussion

The legal issues assume their position in the last stages where the adversities have had its turn and ultimate irreversible loss had happened, even though the legal importance should not be considered as of least importance. As per our study and observations, this is more a socio-economical negligent problem than a medico-legal issue and if society tries improves the standards of below listed subjects it will decrease the casualties.

- Enhancing literacy among women.
- Improvement of economical independency of women.
- Change in parent’s attitude towards disparity among sons and daughters.
- Prevention of early marriages.
- Registration of all marriages.

Suggestion

It was revealed that most of the women suspicious deaths are registered under sec 174 Cr.P.C. but we suggest that every suspicious death in women should be registered under the section 306 I.P.C. Strict and thorough investigation has to be made in each and every case and then can be altered to section 174 Cr.P.C, if nothing abnormal is detected.

Study of religious customs and traditions evolving through decades, social psychology of Indian women according to their standards of living - a Psychological study involving Social psychologists may sort-out solution to the problems faced by the women.

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