

An Autopsy Based Study of Deaths in Women within Seven Years of Marriage brought to Agartala Government Medical College & GBP Hospital, Tripura, India

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Abstract: Dowry deaths, a form of violence against women, continue to be a pressing issue in India. This study delves into the incidence, demographic characteristics, socioeconomic factors, circumstances, and causes surrounding these tragic incidents. Through an analysis of 108 cases over a one and a half year period, data were collected from the Mortuary of the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at Agartala Government Medical College. The study uncovers compelling insights, revealing that young women aged 18 to 20 are the most vulnerable to dowry deaths witnesses the highest number of fatalities. Notably, the majority of cases arise within the first three years of marriage, primarily within the confines of the husband's and in-laws' homes. Burns emerge as the leading cause of death, followed by hanging, poisoning, road traffic accidents, and physical assault. Shockingly, suicide represents the most prevalent manner of death among the victims. The study also highlights the prevalence of illiteracy and lower socioeconomic status among the affected individuals, with the majority adhering to the Hindu religion. Addressing this critical issue necessitates a comprehensive approach, encompassing legal measures, educational initiatives, employment opportunities, and awareness programs. Collaborative efforts involving law enforcement agencies, women welfare organizations, public servants, and the judiciary are vital for effecting change. By curbing alcohol and substance abuse, promoting monogamy, and encouraging honest means of income generation, it is possible to curtail dowry deaths. The findings of this study hold significant implications for policymakers and stakeholders, serving as a clarion call to combat violence against women and foster a safer society for all.

Keywords: Marriage, Dowry deaths, Burns.

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Introduction

In ancient Hindu texts, women were revered as powerful figures. Manusmritisholka 3.56 states- "Yatra Naryastu Pujyante, Ramante Tatra Devata" which means- "women must be honored and adorned", and "where women are revered, there the gods rejoice".[1] But societal changes have led to the subordination of women in India. Dowry, illiteracy, and poverty have further exacerbated this issue. Despite legal provisions and progress in some areas, crimes against women, including dowry-related violence and domestic abuse, persist. The number of dowry death reported in CRIME IN INDIA, Vol. – II, 2020 were 7167 in 2018, 7141 in 2019 and 6966 in the year 2020.[2]

This study focuses on conducting autopsies of women who died within seven years of marriage in Tripura, India. By analyzing these cases, we aim to understand the complex societal factors contributing to these tragic outcomes. Dowry negotiation during marriages remains common in Indian community, with dowry taking various forms such as movable or immovable property. Dowry-related crimes, including female infanticide, domestic violence, denial of education and career opportunities, rape, extortion, and discrimination, are interconnected.[2]The Indian government has implemented laws to protect women's rights, but challenges in implementation persist, leading to a

culture of impunity. This study highlights the pressing issue of dowry-related violence is an often overlooked issue of India. The deliberate nature of these crimes, predominantly perpetrated within households, creates significant hurdles for justice. By collaborating with legal and medical professionals, we aim to raise awareness and address the deep-rooted social problems associated with dowry-related violence.[3] Through this research, we seek to contribute to a better understanding of the causes and consequences of deaths in recently married women. The findings can inform policy interventions and drive societal change, fostering a more equitable and just society that upholds the rights and dignity of women.

Materials & Methods

This study employed a prospective descriptive design conducted at the Mortuary of the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Agartala Government Medical College and GBP Hospital in Tripura. The study duration was one and a half years from June 2021 to December 2022.

Study Population: The study included two categories:

1. admitted and deceased cases
2. brought dead cases. The autopsies were performed at Agartala Government Medical College and GBP Hospital.

Inclusion Criteria: The study included all cases of women who admitted and expired in hospital within seven years of marriage and underwent autopsy.

Exclusion Criteria: Unmarried females and cases with advanced stage of decomposition were excluded.

Sample Size

All cases meeting the inclusion criteria during the study period were included. Based on the previous three years' records, the estimated sample size for the next year was determined to be 134 cases. Census sampling was used, including all cases that fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The study utilized the following tools: a structured proforma for recording socio-demographic variables and other epidemiological correlates, magnifying glass, torch

light, measuring tape, scalpel with surgical blade, autopsy saw, sterile disposable gloves, gowns, and an autopsy table. Cases were consecutively selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria during the study period. Data were collected from the Mortuary of Agartala Government Medical College & GBP Hospital, focusing on women who died within seven years of marriage. A structured proforma was used to record relevant information such as age, religion, place of residence, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, date and place of incidence, motive, and more. Collected data for the 108 study subjects were checked for consistency and completeness before being entered into a Microsoft Office Excel data sheet. Descriptive statistics principles were applied to organize and present the data, including frequency, percentage, tables, and diagrams using Microsoft Office Excel software. The study protocol received ethical approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Agartala Government Medical College & GBP Hospital vide letter no F.4(5-244)/AGMC/Academic/IEC Certificate /2021/7072 dated 2nd June 2021, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines.

Results

In this study, out of 108 cases, the majority of victims (62.03%) died in hospitals, followed by deaths occurring in in-laws' house (19.44%), husband's house (10.18%), and parental house (5.55%). In a small number of cases (2.77%), deaths occurred at other locations. Among the causes of death, burns accounted for the highest number of cases (53.7%), followed by hanging (20.37%), poisoning (16.66%), road traffic accidents (4.62%), and physical assaults (2 cases, 1.85%). Natural diseases were the least common cause of death, accounting for only 1.85% of the cases. The majority of the victims (62.03%) belonged to joint families. Regarding the time of death, the highest number of victims (28.70%) died between 1 to 24 hours after the incidents, followed by on-the-spot deaths (23.14%). Additionally, 15.74% of the women died within 1 hour of the incidents. These findings provide valuable insights into the circumstances and patterns surrounding the deaths of women within seven years of marriage.

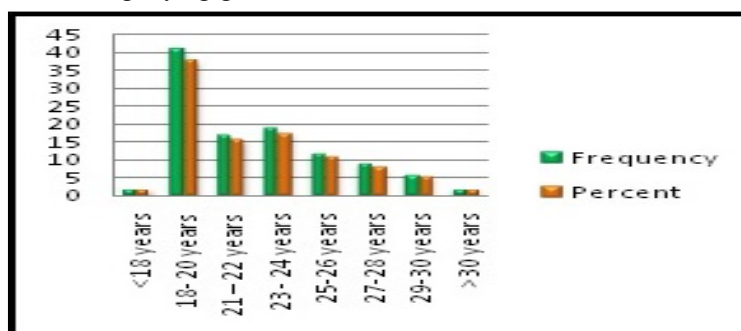


Figure 1: Distribution of the study population according to their age(n=108)

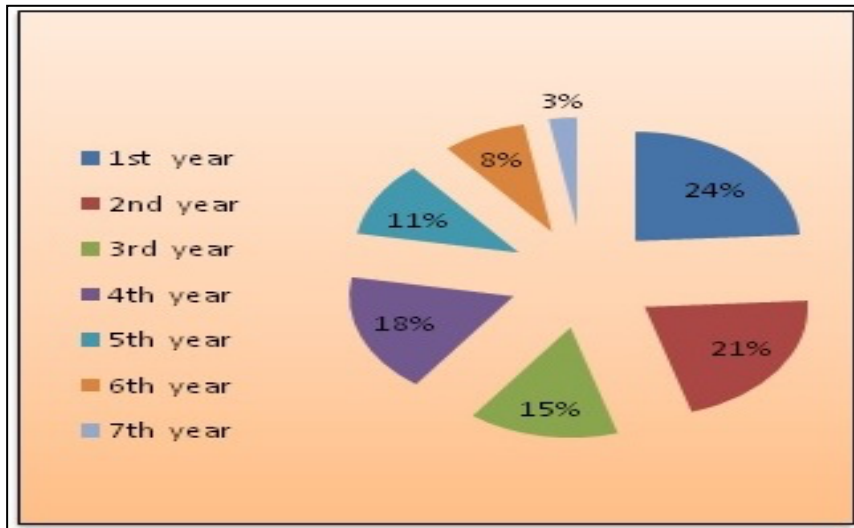


Figure 2 : Distribution of cases according to marriage years (n=108)

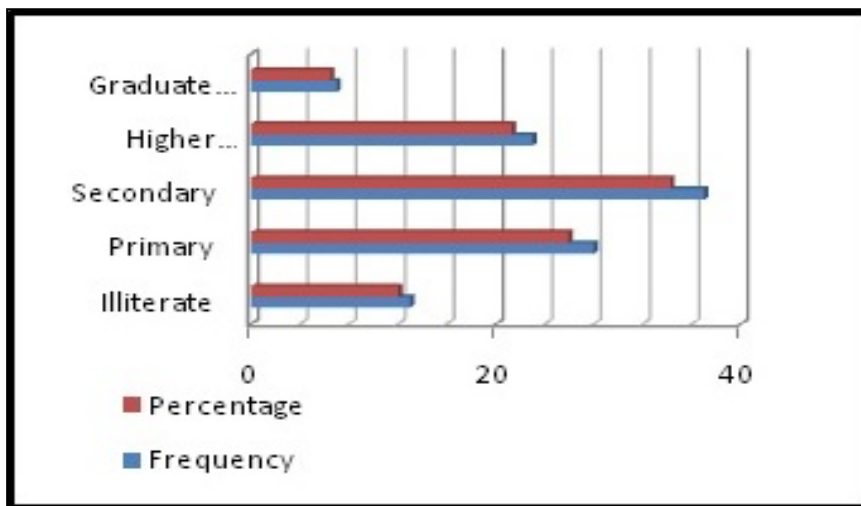


Figure 3: Distribution of Cases According to Education Qualification

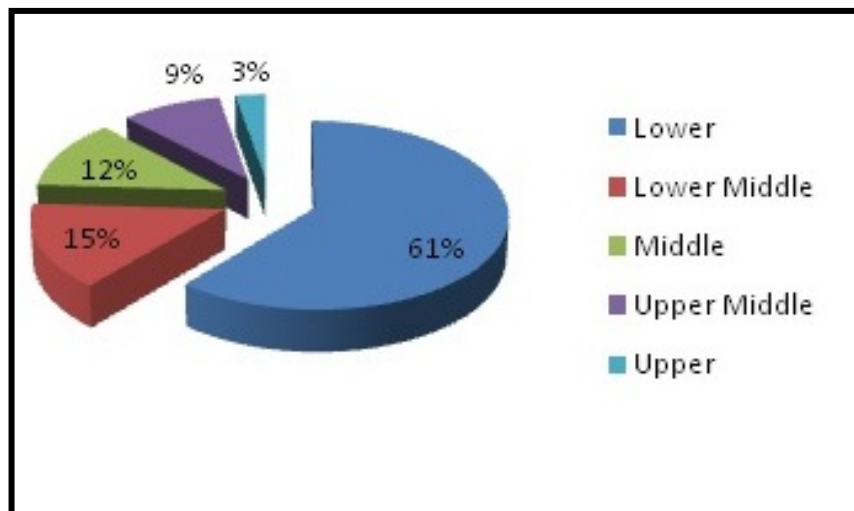


Figure 4: Socioeconomic Status (n=108)

Table 1: Cause of Death

S. No.	Cause of Death	Frequency	Percent
1.	Burn	58	53.7
2.	Hanging	22	20.37
3.	Strangulation	0	0
4.	RTA	5	4.62
5.	Poisoning	18	16.66
6.	Injury (Physical assault)	3	2.77
7.	Natural Death	2	1.85
	Total	108	100

Discussion

Violence against women, particularly in the form of dowry deaths, is a prevalent issue in India. It cuts across various demographics and socio-economic backgrounds. Despite educational advancements and social progress, India continues to witness a high number of dowry-related deaths. Efforts have been made by the government to address this issue through legislation, such as the Domestic Violence Bill, 2001. However, it is evident that enacting laws alone is not sufficient to combat this social problem. A comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is required involving the police, women welfare organizations, public servants, and the judiciary. Based on the findings of this study, certain patterns have emerged. The most vulnerable age group for dowry deaths is between 18 and 20 years (37.96%). The findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Darji JA et al[4], Verma RK et al[5], Das I et al[6], Roy A et al[7]. The majority of the incidents take place within the first three years of marital life and predominantly occur at the husband's and in-laws' homes. This findings are consistent with the study of Kulshrestha P et al[8], Radhika RH et al[9], Kachhadia JP et al[10]. Burns (53.7%) are the leading cause of death, and suicide is the most common manner of death. Illiteracy and lower socio-economic status (61.11%) are prevalent among the victims, and the majority belong to the Hindu religion. In consonance with present study different authors, Darji JA et al[4], Das RK et al[11], Agarwal PK[12], Bharti AK et al[13], Bagadi J et al[14] found Burn as leading cause of death. Addressing this issue requires not only legal measures but also a focus on education, job opportunities, and awareness programs.

Restricting alcohol and substance abuse, promoting monogamy, and encouraging honest and hard work for financial stability are crucial aspects to be emphasized.

A concerted effort involving various stakeholders is necessary to effectively tackle dowry deaths. By adopting a rational and practical approach, it is possible to make progress in reducing these incidents and creating a safer environment for women in Indian society.

Conclusion

In ancient India women played a superior role or an equal role like men and that is reflected by worshipping the mother goddess. Gradually we saw a decline in role and status of women in public life, which is reflected by social evils like dowry. So atrocities like dowry and dowry related crimes which are deeply engulfing the Indian society can be stopped by certain measures like awareness and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) models.

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