

FREQUENCY OF FEMALE HONOUR KILLING, A CLINICAL AUDIT OF AUTOPSIES

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To assess the frequency of female honour killing, type of injury and weapon used to kill female brought for autopsies.

Material and Methods: This was a descriptive clinical audit of autopsy record from January 2009 to December 2012 conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine, Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, Pakistan. The total sample size was 520 of the female who died of violent unnatural acts above the age of the adolescence. Those female whose death occurred due to mob-massacre, bomb blasts, natural disasters, road traffic accidents and putrefied female dead bodies were excluded from study population.

Results: Out of these 520 cases, 75.70% (352) females were killed at home, while 24.3% (113) outside the home, all of them on suspicion of adultery and the elder females killed outside, were either unclaimed or the relatives were least concerned. According to the history obtained from relatives, among the deaths at home, 70.3% were homicidal in nature, 21.1% suicidal, 6.5% accidental and 2.2% natural but a detailed autopsy revealed that 99.4% were homicidal in nature and only 0.6% were proved suicidal. Majority of the victims were between 13-40 years. 73.8% victims were married and 63.4% victims belong to the rural areas of Peshawar, 82.4% of victims were killed with firearm weapons.

Conclusion: Frequency of honour killing in this study was more than 90%. Married and very young women were the victims of honour killing. Firearm was the most frequently used weapon to kill women.

Key Words: Honour Killing, autopsy, homicide, suicidal, accidental.

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INTRODUCTION

Honour killing (HK) is one of the types of domestic violence that has been portrayed as a custom in which mainly women and occasionally men are killed after allegations of sexual infidelity¹. Transgress, looks to retaliate for the disgrace that victims are blamed for conveying to their families². There are a lot of pretexts, due to which a woman is targeted by her family like, to refuse an arranged marriage, being a victim of sexual assault, wants to break a wedlock with an abusive husband, or a mere suspicion of adultery³. The triggering factor may be a minute perception by a man that she has brought "dishonour" to the family by her actions.

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Honour killings not only take place in sub continent but also in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Morocco and Mediterranean and Gulf countries⁴. It is also prevalent in developed countries like Germany, France and the United Kingdom where immigrant communities are prevalent⁵ studies have shown that honour killings are not only practiced in Muslim-majority societies⁶ but is also reported in non-Muslim communities.

It is estimated that 5000 women per year are the victims of "honour killing" world wide⁷. In Pakistan and India 1000 female per year respectively are killed⁸, although the figures do not reflect true picture as many are reported as suicide are in fact crimes of honour where 'the victims were forced to commit suicide'⁷. Another possible explanation for the low figures is that in most instances they are not reported or are registered as other types of crimes.

The statistics on HK in Pakistan are difficult to estimate as mostly information is given through media but not systematically collected by any health agency. Therefore clear knowledge about the frequency of HK

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may serve to alter traditional practices. Our study focuses to find the frequency of HK and its relation to the history given by the family and autopsy findings. Also type of weapon used and cause of death in females brought to the forensic medicine department of Khyber medical college Peshawar from 1st January 2009 to 31st December 2012.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Descriptive study was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, Pakistan from January 2009 to December 2012. The total sample size was 520, During the study period all the female dead bodies, who died of violent unnatural acts above the age of the adolescence, brought to mortuary of Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, by police for conduction of autopsies, were included in the study. Those female whose death occurred due to mob-massacre, bomb blasts, natural disasters, road traffic accidents and putrefied female dead bodies were excluded from study population.

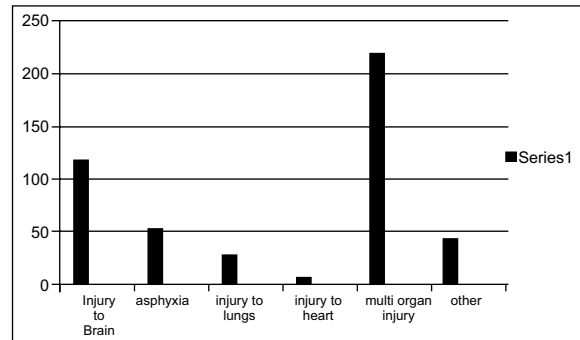
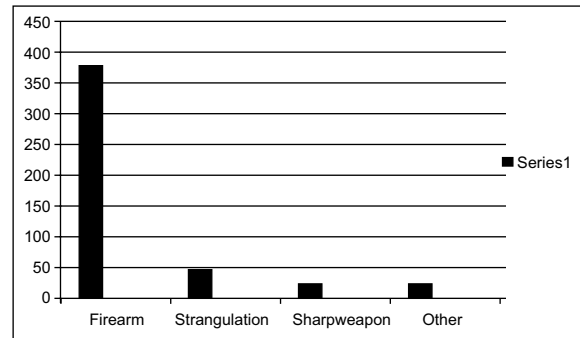
As cases were brought by the police for conduction of autopsies with inquest, so legally there was no need of consent from next of kin of the victim. The autopsy was done by the researcher himself first physical findings on the body of the victims were noted on prepared check list, and then detail history from the relatives and police was recorded. On autopsy type of weapon used, mechanism and manner of death was established and noted. Frequency of honour killing cases among these female dead bodies was calculated and their age and place of residence were recorded in a performa specially designed for the purpose.

All the studied variables for example demographic information, marital status, wounds on the body, type of weapon used, manner of death, place of murder, were calculated for frequencies and percentages. All the study data was analyzed by using computer program SPSS version 16. Ethical approval from the ethical review committee was taken

RESULTS

The mean age of the study population was 29.89 ±13.01 years. 334(71.9%) of victims were in the age group from 13 to 40 years while 107(23.0%) were above 40 years and only 24(5.2%) were 13 years old. 343(73.8%) of the total sample of women who were killed for honour, were married there was no significant difference between honour killing and marital status (P= 0.779). and majority, 295(63.4%) of the victims belonged to the rural areas while 170 (36.6%) of them were from urban area.

The most common weapon used for the honour killing was firearm (of any type) in 82.4%, others include electrocution and poisoning. There was significant



difference between place of residence (urban/rural) and type of weapon used (P = 0.05). On autopsy, the most common cause of death was multi-organ injury 217 (46.7%) followed by injury to brain 119 (25.6%). In 43(9.2%) cases other causes were recorded like.

Three hundred and twenty-seven (70.3%) of the relatives or close contacts reported the death as a homicidal activity followed by 98(21.1%) to be suicidal, 30(6.5%) reported accidental and 10(2.2%) natural cause of death of the victims. Which were contrary to the autopsy findings, where 462(99.4%) were homicidal with only 3(0.6%) as suicidal deaths and there was statistically significant difference between the history as given by the relatives and autopsy finding (p=0.01).

Three hundred & fifty-two (75.7%) of the victims were killed inside home and 113(24.3%) outside the home. The victims of the honour killings were mostly younger and older age groups killed at the home (P=0.000). However there was no significant difference between place of death with marital status and residence. Majority of the dead bodies were unclaimed and in the claimed cases the relatives were least concerned and were just interested in burying the dead bodies. Quite a few females were killed along with their husbands as they had married against the wishes of the family.

DISCUSSION

Due to paucity of data true figures of honour killing could not be found. In this study out of all cases of homicides, the frequency of honour killing was 78.81%.

In Pakistan 943 women were killed under such circumstances in 2011 and 869 in 2013⁹, while according to HRCP database the number of honour killings between February 2014 to February 2016, was 1,276, almost 400 did not have FIRs registered¹⁰.

The most of the victims were shot dead with Firearm¹¹ weapons of all kind, which are easily available in every house in this province and especially in tribal areas; it is symbol of honour and dignity to carry a Firearm weapon on their shoulders. Easy availability and illegal smuggling of arms and ammunition in this province make it possible for men to commit murder of any person, during the anger and females are no exception who are killed on the name of honour, even on just a suspicion of minor act at the spur of provocation, passion and moral heat, which usually they had not committed. This could be combated by radically reducing gun availability to ordinary people and strong political lobbying on ban on purchase of unlicensed weapons¹².

The victims in our study ranged from pubescent girls to grandmothers. They were killed on the mere allegation of having entered 'illicit' sexual relationships. They were never given an opportunity to give their version of the story or to clarify the misconception as in our Pathan culture mere allegation alone is enough to defile a man's honour and therefore is enough to justify him to kill a woman.

The honour killing was seen more in rural areas and gradually becoming more visible in urban areas due to urbanization, low literacy rate, change in economic and cultural values^{13,14}. As women in rural areas are constantly suppressed and is further augmented by low literacy level, male dominance and hidden agendas¹⁵. As female in our culture does not have status unless she is married, then they tend to accept and tolerate injustices that take place in the family tend to sacrifice their individual rights for the sake of preserving the marriage¹⁶. This fact is also evident from our study's results that majority of female victims of honour killing were married who sacrificed their lives on the name of honour.

Majority of the victims were killed inside home because research findings show that there is increased risk of homicide in homes with guns¹⁷ due to easy accessibility of the arms and ammunition. As Guns are highly lethal, require little preparation¹⁸ and desire outcome is achieved with in few minutes. In these cases the victims know their assailant, either a family member or as an acquainting with the victim or victim's family and less likely to be an unknown intruder¹⁹. In order to preserve their family order the incidence is reported as homicidal act by unknown personnel or natural death. Autopsy findings and the response of the relatives to

death of the victim, alerts the medico-legal doctors and police²⁰.

CONCLUSION

On autopsy, the most common cause of death was multi-organ injury as the victims were fired on within close range, point blank and multiple hits to make the kill and in the most instance whole magazine wind up in the victim's body²¹. It is concluded that honour killing is a common practice and usually close relative and married females are the victims. Mass awareness of the public, ban on purchase of arms and ammunition and female empowerment are some of steps needed to address this cultural and social issue.

LIMITATIONS

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings the study was record based data from death certificates. The accuracy and completeness of information and data sources could not be verified.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Following authors have made substantial contributions to the manuscript as under:

Alam N: Main idea.
Naveed S: Data collection & typing .
Naeem M: Bibliography
Gul R: Statistics

Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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