

WEAPONRY PATTERN OF HOMICIDAL DEATHS IN DISTRICT PESHAWAR

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the weaponry pattern due to homicidal deaths in tertiary case setup .

Materials & Methods: The cross-sectional descriptive study was held in Forensic Medicine Department, Khyber Medical College, Peshawar from Jan 2016 – June 2016. Out of total 537 autopsies in this department, 377 samples of homicidal deaths were taken and studied in detail. A pre-designed questionnaire with demographic details was used as research tool. SPSS v 25.0 was used as analytical tool, categorical variables were presented/tabulated in the form of frequency and percentages while numerical variables were presented in the form mean \pm S.D.

Results: Out of 377 autopsies, in 86.7% cases cause of death was due to firearm injury followed by sharp cutting object 6.1%, bomb blast and ligature related deaths were 3.2% and blunt trauma had only 0.8% cases. The male to female preponderance of homicidal cases is not unique one with male more dominant with 87.5% and only 12.5% female cases. The cause of death in these cases shows that maximum died due to injury to brain with 38.5% followed by Heart/Lung injury 93 (24.7%) and then injuries to other organs.

Conclusion: This study concludes that homicide was the most common manner of death in Peshawar. Out of the total unnatural deaths, firearms were used in the maximum number of cases.

Key Words: Homicide; Firearms; Weaponry Patterns; Sharp Weapon; Brain Injury

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INTRODUCTION

The history of trauma parallels the history of the evolution of man, with his aggressive instincts, creative abilities and endless ambitions to conquer the environment without regard to the price he must pay to achieve his goals¹. Instruments (weapons) purposely designed for assault, progressed rapidly with the advancement in time from the primitive club to the more refined weapons such as the axe, the dagger, the spear, the crossbow and the catapult, to mention just a few. With the dis-

covery of gunpowder, came progressively more powerful firearms, and ultimately the splitting of atom has brought the concept of injuring force to unforeseeable dimensions. By definition weapon is an article made or adopted for causing bodily hurt². The most lethal form of violence in USA is gun violence³. From 1987 to 1993, the firearm homicide rate doubled for those aged 15-24 in USA⁴. In 2000, 75685 people (27/100000) suffered non-fatal firearm gunshot injuries⁵. The easy availability of weapons and wide spread exhibition of violence in media has shown a reflection of the same in our country. Moreover, there are certain peculiar circumstances in our setup involving our own cultural and socioeconomic behaviors. The main causes of homicide / unnatural deaths in society are attributed to financial, social and family disputes⁵. The word homicide is a Latin word which means killing of human beings⁶.

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The studies of such deaths are being reported many times from Peshawar and vary from time to time. Homicide is the most common manner of death in Peshawar. The percentage of homicidal deaths in the year 1999 reported at Forensic Medicine Department Khyber Medical College, Peshawar was 82.6 %. The firearms were used in the maximum number of cases 88.0 %⁷. There was an easy access to the weapons in the past, but recently due to the ban on manufacturing of local firearms in Dara Adam Khel, Bara and other arms Factories in the tribal areas and the relatively low availability of the notorious AK47 assault rifle, the pattern of wounding is believed to have changed considerably. Collection of data on crime is the first step towards the goal on punishing, controlling or preventing criminal behaviors and information regarding the weaponry pattern becomes utmost important in this regard⁸. So the study of the weaponry patterns in homicidal deaths at Peshawar has been conducted to compare the results with the figures of the previous two years⁷.

This study encompassed autopsy examinations of all homicidal deaths with an objective to determine the weaponry patterns of homicidal deaths. The study will help forensic experts to know the most common pattern which would further be used to suggest ways and means for control of easy weaponry access.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The cross-sectional descriptive study was held in Forensic Medicine Department, Khyber Medical College, Peshawar -Pakistan from Jan 2016 – June 2016. Out of total 537 autopsies in this department, 377 samples of homicidal deaths were taken and studied in detail. These cases were selected on the bases of proper histories and preliminary general examination of the bodies. Relevant records of the cases eg. Medico-legal certificates, operation notes and Police records were scrutinized. The examination of the victims was performed throughout the day. Proper examination of clothes with external and internal examination was done. All cases undergoing putrefaction, having any element of poison and with incomplete documents were excluded while others were included. A pre-designed questionnaire with demographic details was used as research tool. SPSS v 25.0 was used as analytical tool, categorical variables were presented/tabulated in the form of frequency and percentages while numerical variables were presented in the form mean \pm S.D.

RESULTS

Out of 377 autopsies, which were due to (homicidal) unnatural violent causes there were 327(86.7%) autopsies in which the cause of death was firearm injury while second most common causative weapon observed during the study period, was sharp cutting object 23(6.1%) followed by bomb blast and ligature related deaths in equal number i.e 12 (3.2%) and blunt trauma at the end with 3 (0.8%) cases. The male to female preponderance of homicidal cases is not unique one with male more dominant with 330 (87.5%) and only 47 (12.5%) females. The cause of death of these cases shows that maximum died due to injury to brain with 145 (38.5%) followed by Heart/Lung injury 93 (24.7%) rest shown in Table # 1.

Table 1: Frequency of Cause of Death due to Homicidal death.

Cause of Death	Frequency & % ages
Multi-Organ damage	67 (17.8)
Heart / Lungs damage	93 (24.7)
Brain damage	145 (38.5)
Abdominal Organs damage	30 (8)
Vital Neck Structures Damage	20 (5.3)
Asphyxia / Strangulation	12 (3.2)
Other	10 (2.7)
Total	377 (100)

DISCUSSION

The death manner shows that how death occurred, either homicide or suicide, among which as per worldwide recorded studies homicide is leading. In a study done at south of Continent Africa i.e South Africa, Cape Town, it was presented of all mortality categories homicide was most common with 46%, followed by transport accidents 29%, burns 8% and then suicide 7% with drowning 2% in the end⁹. Similarly few studies conducted USA10 also showed homicide as the one of the leading cause of death, a study by Demeteriodes D, et al¹¹. showed 45.3% of deaths being homicide followed by accidents.

The preponderance of male involved in such homicidal deaths is far more than females throughout the world. Another study on age related patterns also showed male dominance in homicidal deaths, where out of 329 traumas related deaths 69% were male and 31% females, completely out numbering females which may be due to various social reason¹². In another study where data of 10 years time was analyzed only total of

83 homicidal deaths were registered having 58% males in it and 42% females¹². This study in district Peshawar also indicated same ratio of male dominance, which is increased to 87.5% of males and remaining 12.5% females. These are almost in similarity with another national study at Pakistan i.e Bahawalpur¹³ in which male involvement was 87% and female only 13%. Almost same results were seen by another in Peshawar on gunshot deaths, where out of 200 victims 86% were male and rest were females with a ratio of 6:1¹⁴. If we compare different studies and social sector of this region of the world, it becomes almost evident that as our society is male dominant and females are mostly home confined leading to male predominance in homicidal deaths. The use of Pardah and most of females being house wives makes them less prone to environment. The type of cultural we have in our province also makes females secure due to being honored in family disputes and enmities.

Our study also revealed that weapons involved were mostly the firearms 327 in number which was 86.7% of all homicides and the second method adopted for homicidal purpose was the use of sharp edged weapons 6.1% in this area. The study at Newfoundland¹⁵ (1985-93) in which sharp edged weapons were the most common methods and the study of Costa Rica¹⁶ in which cutting / piercing were more common methods used for murders contradict our study. This is because of the fact that in Newfoundland and Costa Rica firearms are not freely available. While our study corresponds with the previous study at Bahawalpur and a study at Peshawar¹⁴ in which firearms were the most commonly used weapons for homicides.

In a study at Oslo and Copenhagen¹⁷ in which homicide by firearm were discussed, it was found that most victims were shot in the head. In another study at Texas¹⁸, it was stated that firearms wounds to the head are often fatal and routinely encountered in the practice of forensic pathology in USA. On the contrary to our results there was a study in eastern Saudi Arabia¹⁸ on firearm fatalities, in which it was found that most victims were shot in chest (41%) and then head (34%). Same were the results in a study at Sweden on homicidal and suicidal sharp force fatalities in which most wounds were found in chest and abdomen in the victims of homicide. But as in our study the firearms were the most common weapons used for homicides so the head and neck was the ideal site for infliction leading to immediate and sure death.

Homicidal firearms deaths are increasing day by day which is of great concern to the authorities. Out of many factors one may be the failure of state with law & enforcement agencies to effectively control the

availability, manufacturing and sale of such weapons which can also be smuggled. The writ of the state is quite weak which, which has encouraged anti-state agencies and artist to pursue their own agenda making a state within a state. Secondly the state has allowed the sections in the society to call the shots within their sphere and so have disrupted the whole fabric of the society. Lastly the education and religious scholars have also failed to teach the application of tolerance among our community which has led to the brutalization of the society²⁰.

CONCLUSION

Homicide was the most common manner of death in Peshawar. Out of the total unnatural deaths, firearms were used in the maximum number of cases.

Recommendation

The study recommends various law and enforcement departments to take strict measure on control of easy firearm weapons access while the relevant medical department must give its input for behavioral change in people prone to have such tendencies.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

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

- Naveed S:** Conception and design Collection and assembly of data
Alam N: Collection and assembly of data
Ahmed MS: Analysis and interpretation of the data, Drafting of the article
Shazia S: Drafting of the article
Khattak MA: Drafting of the article
Iqbal F: Critical revision of the article for important intellectual content.

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.