

## Investigation of Medical and Legal Autopsies of Alleged Dowry Deaths - a One-Year Study

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### Abstract

**Background:** The practice of paying dowry is becoming more commonplace in India. Dowry is within the very culture of India, which is one of the contributing factors that plays a role in the country's high rate of female suicides. **Material and Methods:** Observational and prospective study of 42 cases of purported dowry-related deaths, with the goal of determining the socio-demographic profile of cases of alleged dowry-related fatalities. **Results:** Dowry and domestic violence are key provoking factors in most suicides within the first seven years of marriage. The victim's inability to provide the requirements in the form of dowry for her family sparked the murderer's unreasonable wrath. Domestic abuse and dowry are crucial causes in most killings after seven years of marriage. Unemployment, love, relationships, and economic issues are insignificant causes compared to dowry. **Conclusion:** Abuse within the home and the pressure to provide a dowry were two of the primary contributing factors that led to deaths that were associated with dowries. Dowries were traditionally given to the bride's family by her father.

**Keywords:** Asphyxia, suicides, menstruation, and alleged dowry deaths.

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### Introduction

The famous American author Harriet Beecher Stowe's popular saying, "Women are the architects of the society." Despite the fact that women are essential to our society's functioning, they are only given supporting positions.<sup>[1]</sup> When it comes to choosing choices that will have an impact on the home, women have relatively little power. They frequently experience discrimination within the confines of the school system.<sup>[2]</sup> In India, women have a disproportionately high chance of being victims of violent crime. In cities, this is especially true. In today's culture, women of all ages and stages of life are vulnerable to a wide variety of discriminatory practices. Parents frequently give their daughters dowries on the eve of their marriages as a token of their love for them.<sup>[3]</sup> It is possible that the goal of this practice was to help newlyweds have a comfortable start to their life. But in recent years, it has turned into a social issue, leading to countless reports of suicides and bride-burning cases. These are the symptoms of a corrupt society, according to.<sup>[4]</sup> Along with all the other variables that contribute to crime and the untimely deaths of women, dowry is one of the most significant elements in India. Data from India's National Crime Record Bureau shows that during the years 2007 and 2011, there were a total of 8618 dowry-related fatalities.<sup>[5]</sup> The issue of dowry-related fatalities in a significant city in the Indian state of Maharashtra is clarified by

this study. It allows an inquiry into the plethora of socio-demographic, medical, and legal aspects that may be connected to so-called dowry fatalities and rates the severity of the issue.

### Material and Methods

Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Nalgonda. The study period was one year, from June, 2021 to May 2022. This study has received the ethics committee's approval. During the study period, 210 female unnatural deaths are analyzed, and 42 of them were alleged dowry deaths. The resources used to stratify and analyze various pertinent socio-demographic and medico-legal aspects include postmortem examination reports, documents from investigating agencies like police inquest Panchnama and Magistrate inquest Panchnama wherever applicable, Accidental Death Report and statements of relatives taken by police during investigation, Spot Panchnama, and suicide notes if applicable. All results are tabulated with justifications, and conclusions are reached. Data is analyzed after entry using frequency distribution and statistical tests with the use of computer-generated software.

### Results

42 purported dowry deaths out of 210 unnatural female fatalities identified in the current research centre are examined. The breakdown of age groups among claimed dowry deaths is shown in [Table 1]. Maximum claimed female dowry victims (57.14%) were between the ages of 21 and 30; the lowest percentage (7.14%) were between the ages of 41 and 50.

**Table 1: Age group distribution among alleged dowry deaths**

Age group (years)	Frequency	Percentage
11 to 20	6	14.28
21 to 30	24	57.14
31 to 40	9	21.42
41 to 50	3	7.14
Total	42	100.0

The alleged victims' occupations are outlined in [Table 2], which can be found below. The majority of alleged dowry victims were housewives (76.19%), while the number of victims who were professionals is relatively low (2.38%), and there is one victim who was working as a Tailor.

**Table 2: Occupational status among alleged dowry deaths**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	1	2.38
Clerical	2	4.76
Homeworker	1	2.38
Housewife	32	76.19
Laborer	5	11.90
Tailor	1	2.38
Total	42	100.0

The number of people with different educational backgrounds is outlined in [Table 3], which may be seen here. Maximum female victims were illiterate (40.47%). Only (4.76%) of female victims were Professionals, and only (2.38%) of them got an education beyond the elementary school level.

**Table 3: Educational status among alleged dowry victims**

<b>Educational status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	17	40.47
Primary	3	7.14
Middle	13	30.95
High school	3	7.14
Intermediate	1	2.38
Graduate	3	7.14
Professionaldegree	2	4.76
Total	42	100.0

According to Kuppaswamy's classification, Table No. 4 provides a description of the socioeconomic position of alleged victims of dowry abuse. The majority of women who were said to have died as a result of dowry-related circumstances belonged to upper lower socioeconomic class (52.38 percent), while only 21.42 percent were from top socioeconomic class.

**Table 4: Socioeconomic status among alleged dowry deaths**

<b>Socioeconomic status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Upper (class i)	1	2.38
Middle (class iii)	10	23.80
Upperlower (class iv)	22	52.38
Lower (class v)	9	21.42
Total	42	100.0

The number of women who are believed to have been victims of dowry abuse is broken down geographically in table no. 5. In 30 of the 42 cases involving female victims of alleged dowry abuse, the incident took place in the victims' own or their in-laws' homes, accounting for 71.42% of the total, while the remaining 28.57% of the cases involved incidents taking place in locations other than the victims' own homes.

**Table 5: Place of incidence among alleged dowry victims**

<b>Place of incidence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Own/in-laws house	30	71.42
Other	12	28.57
Total	42	100.0

The correlation between a menstruating uterus and dowry-related suicides is presented in [Table 6]. There have been a total of 18 menstruating female victims, with 15 (83.33%) having died as a result of suicide and 3 (16.66%) having died for reasons other than suicide. 16 (66.66%) of the 24 non-menstruating females did not die as a result of a suicide attempt, but they died from other reasons, while 8 (33.33%) died as a result of a successful suicide attempt.

**Table 6: Dowry deaths linked to menstruating uterus, suicide**

<b>Uterus</b>	<b>Non-suicidal</b>	<b>Suicidal deaths</b>	<b>Total</b>
Menstruating	3(16.66)	15(83.33)	18
Non-menstruating	16(66.66)	8(33.33)	24

**Table 7: Distribution of manner of death according to provocative factors in alleged dowry deaths**

Provocative factors	Homicide	Suicide	Total
Not known	1(5.26%)	0	1
Love affair	1(5.26%)	1(4.34%)	2
Domestic abuse	4(21.05%)	1(4.34%)	5
Economic crisis	2(10.52%)	1(4.34%)	3
Dowry	10(52.63%)	18(78.26%)	28
Psychiatry	0	1(4.34%)	1
Infertility	0	1(4.34%)	1
Unemployment	1(5.26%)	0	1
Total	19	23	42

As represented in [Table 7], in the majority of suicide cases that take place within the first seven years of marriage, dowry was significant provocative factor, whereas unemployment, romantic relationships, and economic difficulties, infertility and psychiatric problems are the least provocative grounds for fatalities. The female victim's failure to provide financial aid for her family served as the catalyst for the accused's irrational rage, which resulted in the death of the victim. The motive for the killing in three female victims, among the murdered ones is unknown. The majority of homicides that take place during seven years of marriage involve domestic abuse and dowry, which are significant provoking factors. On the other hand, the least provoking factors for homicidal intent include unemployment, romantic relationships, and economic difficulties.

## DISCUSSION

The highest age range for accused female dowry victims was 21 to 30 years old, and the lowest range was 41 to 50 years old, out of 42 female victims of alleged dowry deaths.

The age group between 18 and 25 years witnessed the greatest percentage of deaths (56.56%), whereas the age group between 31 and 35 years saw the least (5.43%), according to research by Rajesh Kumar Verma et al.<sup>[6]</sup> Studies by Shrivastava AK et al,<sup>[7]</sup> Kulshreshta P et al,<sup>[8]</sup> Sharma BR et al,<sup>[9]</sup> Harish D et al,<sup>[10]</sup> Ghaffar UB et al,<sup>[11]</sup> Kumar V et al,<sup>[12]</sup> Saha KK et al,<sup>[13]</sup> and Agnihotri A all produced findings that were similar.

According to the results of other authors, the high occurrence of unnatural deaths in young, emotionally unstable women is most likely due to their husbands' and/or in-laws' repeated requests for dowry (cash/kinds), for which they occasionally kill or torture the bride until she commits suicide herself.

The majority of brides who marry later are between the ages of 41 and 50, which is more typical of educated, independent working women. As a result, this age group experiences proportionally fewer dowry fatalities. The emotional maturity of this age group is thought to make dowry fatalities much less likely. Due to their need/eagerness for money from bride's family, the bulk of claimed dowry victims (76.19%) were housewives(who are non-earning), and there were very few professionals (2.38%), with one victim who worked as a Home working lady.

Similar findings were made in studies by Prajapati P et al,<sup>[15]</sup> and Kumar T N S et al.<sup>[16]</sup> 39.3% of the victims were illiterate women, making up the majority. There is a strong risk that these women will be mistreated and exploited because just 3.6% of victims are professionals and only 2.4% of female victims have at least an intermediate education. Saha et al,<sup>[11]</sup> and Kumar V et al,<sup>[17]</sup> reported findings that were similar to the current study in that the majority of female dowry victims were illiterate while the minority were professionals.

The higher lower socioeconomic class made up the majority (52.38%) of female dowry victims, while the upper socioeconomic class made up the minority (2.38%). dowry is viewed as the evil of a lower socioeconomic category because of illiteracy and stupidity.

Most frequently, persons who have been dowry victims are denied access to medical services, perhaps because their family were not aware that the victims needed to be hospitalized.

The crime occurred at the victims' own house in 30 cases (71.4%) of the 42 female victims of alleged dowry, whereas it occurred elsewhere in 12 cases (28.6%). Similar outcomes are noted by Dasari et al,<sup>[18]</sup> 61% of the ladies (105) who had burns did so at their in-laws' house; the rest had burns somewhere else.

Similar findings were made by Jaswinder Singh et al,<sup>[19]</sup> who discovered that 67.34% of occurrences occurred in in-laws' residences and the remaining 35% did so elsewhere.

The maximum percentage of burns (50%) is 71-90 percent of the entire body surface area, and patients with the worst burn cases are brought in dead 36.36 percent of the time. As the percentage of body surface area injured by burns rises, the mortality rate does as well. Death from burn injuries can occur anywhere between 24 and 48 hours after the accident, but the first week is usually the most deadly, according to Sharma BR,<sup>[16]</sup> and Modi JP.<sup>[17]</sup> There were 18 fatalities who were menstruating; of those, 15 (83.33%) died by suicide and 3 (16.66%) died with exact manner of death unknown. Among 24 Non-menstruating women victims, 8 committed suicide, 16 died from other reasons. Research shows a significant relationship between menstruation uterus and committing suicide.

The first (or menstrual) and fourth (or premenstrual) weeks of the monthly cycle may be connected to frequent suicide attempts in women, claim Baca-Garcia et al.<sup>[20]</sup>

Out of 19 homicides that occurred within seven years of marriage, one (5.26%) of the female victims died as a result of an extramarital affair, four (21.05%) as a result of domestic violence, and two (10.52%) as a result of an economic crisis, such as being involved in property disputes or high-paying insurance policies. The 10 (52.63%) female victims' dowries were a key factor in the homicidal intent. One (5.26%) of the female victims homicide was due to unemployment as a motivating element, and the accused's unreasonable wrath was inspired by the victim's inability to support her family financially. one (5.26%) of the female victims had unidentified homicidal motives.

The highest rate of homicidal killings during seven years of marriage are significantly influenced by dowry and domestic abuse, but unemployment, a love relationship, and financial difficulties are the least provoking factors.

Similar to Biswadeep Paul et al,<sup>[21]</sup> family disputes involving dowry deaths, including failure in love, were to blame for the majority of deaths from fire injuries. In India, there were 8391 dowry fatalities reported overall in 2010 and 8618 in 2016. A dowry death occurs every 77 minutes, according to the National Crime Bureau, and 121 female fatalities were recorded in Assam in 2010. Similar to the findings of Guntheti et al,<sup>[22]</sup> who discovered that harassment from in-laws and dowry are important inciting variables. Similar results were observed by Dere Rajesh et al and Meera T et al.<sup>[23,24]</sup>

Chakrabarty et al,<sup>[26]</sup> assert that home conflict, marital discord, and quarrels are responsible for more than one-third of poisoning fatalities, indicating that family issues are a significant contributing factor.

In a related study, Shrivastav et al,<sup>[7]</sup> discovered that poverty (5.56%) and infertility (4.17%) were the factors that caused the fewest suicide deaths among newlywed females. Domestic abuse (26.39%) and dowry (25%) were also shown to be major provoking variables for suicide deaths. The bulk of dowry-related deaths that were documented (39.29%) occurred in the first year of marriage, and dowry was a significant factor in 84.84% of those deaths.<sup>[27]</sup>

Domestic abuse and dowry were important aggravating variables for death within seven years of marriage in the case of alleged dowry victims. Dowry played a significant role in the

deaths that occurred in the first three years of marriage. When the family's desire to have children grows in the third and fourth decade of marriage, infertility is a big provoking factor, but it also acts as a trigger for unusual fatalities. This study is among the first of its kind study to directly examine the relationship between provocative characteristics and the duration of marriage.

## CONCLUSION

Most alleged female dowry killings allegedly took place in younger, more fertile, and unstable social groups. Housewives from lower socioeconomic strata who are illiterate accounted for the majority of the fatalities. Dowry was a significant factor in the majority of deaths, along with spousal violence and infertility. At their house or their in-laws' residence, the majority of the fatalities occurred. Both the majority of the alleged dowry cases and the majority of the supposed dowry suicides involved menstruation. Asphyxia was the main cause of death, although there were numerous cases of burn injuries that were reported.

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