

**A 5 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF DOWRY RELATED DEATHS IN VISAKHAPATNAM**

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**ABSTRACT****BACKGROUND**

The objective of the study is to determine and classify the various types of dowry related deaths at Andhra Medical College Mortuary, Visakhapatnam city.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This is a retrospective study of all the dowry related deaths seen in the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam city over a 5 year period (January 2011- December 2015) as recorded in the autopsy registers and postmortem reports of the department.

**RESULTS**

A total of 8831 autopsies were done during the period. One hundred and thirty three (133) cases received by the mortuary were dowry related deaths. Among them 44 cases were registered under 304B IPC, 84 cases under 498A 306IPC and 5 cases under 498A 302IPC. Majority of victims (77%) were aged between 18 to 30 years. Suicide was the commonest manner of death accounting for 87%. Hanging was commonest cause of death with 56 cases followed by burns (52 cases), poisoning (17 cases) and others (8 cases). Period of marital life, employment status and type of family was also ascertained.

**CONCLUSION**

This study gives preliminary data about dowry related deaths in Visakhapatnam and also help to formulate policies to reduce crimes against women.

**KEYWORDS**

Dowry Related Deaths, 304B, 498A, 306,302 IPC, Suicide, Hanging, Crimes Against Women.

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**BACKGROUND**

Dowry deaths' comprise a unique category of deaths in India. The custom of payment of dowry by the bride's family to the prospective bridegroom's family is ancient and widely prevalent. Hindu Succession Act, which even after its amendment in 2005, confers less than equal property rights on the female child. As a result, customarily dowry is a one-time payment of 'streedhan' in lieu of her share of the family wealth at the time of her marriage <sup>1</sup>

The Indian Penal Code was amended specifically to deal with dowry-related violence, cruelty and dowry deaths in 1983.<sup>2</sup> The 91<sup>st</sup> Report of the Law Commission enumerated

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the need for such a presumption in order to ensure that an unnatural death of a woman will entail "the need for investigation by the police or an inquest by the Magistrate into the cause of death".<sup>3</sup> Unnatural death of a woman within seven years of marriage attracts penal provisions of section 304B IPC.<sup>4</sup> This section defines dowry death as the unnatural death of a woman following harassment or cruelty by her husband or his relatives in connection with a demand for dowry.

Section 498A IPC. penalizes harassment (or any kind) of a woman by her marital family. In cases where a woman commits suicide, as a result of harassment (not related to dowry) from her husband or his relatives, section 306 IPC addresses abetment of suicide and if it is a dowry-related suicide both 304B and 306 applicable.

Section 113A of the IEA. gives the court the powers to presume abetment on the part of the husband or his relatives if a woman commits suicide within 7 years of marriage, if the husband or his relatives subjected her to cruelty. Section 113B provides that the courts 'shall' presume dowry death in case of unnatural death of a woman within 7 years of marriage, where prior to death either the

husband or his relatives subjected the woman to harassment or cruelty.

The present study was conducted with an aim to determine and classify the pattern of dowry related deaths in Visakhapatnam over a period of 5 years.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Study Design- An Observational Retrospective Study.  
 Study Setting- King George Hospital Mortuary, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

Period of Study- January 2011 to December 2015.

Sample Size- All Cases of dowry related death autopsies during the study period i.e. One hundred and thirty three (133) cases. Among them 44 cases were registered under 304B IPC, 84 cases under 498A 306IPC and 5 cases under 498A 302IPC.

**Inclusion Criteria**

1. Cases sent from different wards in KGH and other hospitals within Visakhapatnam city.
2. Cases brought in dead either from home or by police or common public to hospital.

**Exclusion Criteria**

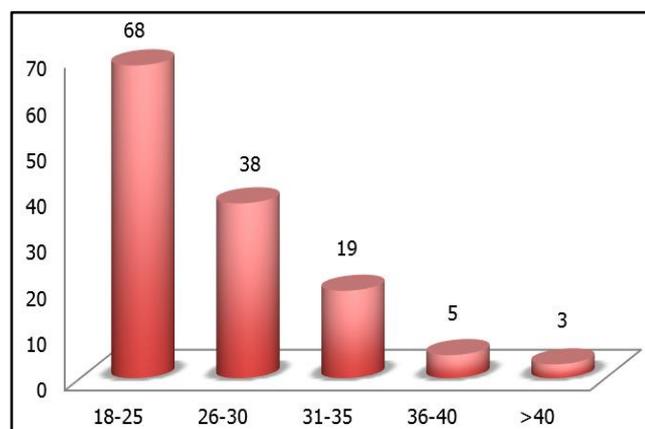
Three cases of children who were killed by their mothers and committed suicide by themselves were excluded from study.

Sources of information included autopsy registers of department, personal data from inquest forms and autopsy findings from post mortem reports.

**RESULTS**

Year	Number of Autopsies	Dowry Related Autopsies
2011	1670	21
2012	1780	25
2013	1848	33
2014	1786	29
2015	1747	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>8831</b>	<b>133</b>

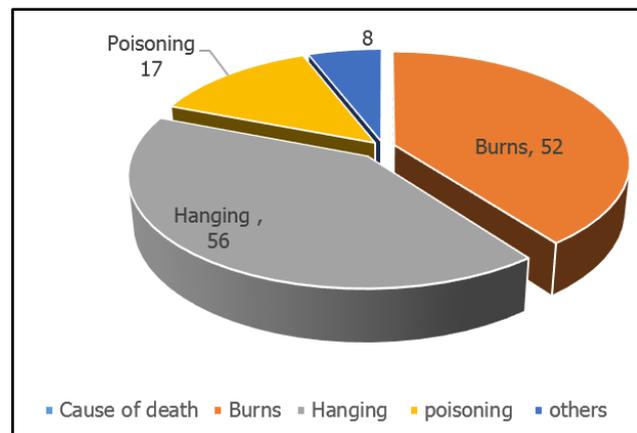
**Table 1. Total Autopsies Vs Dowry related Autopsies**



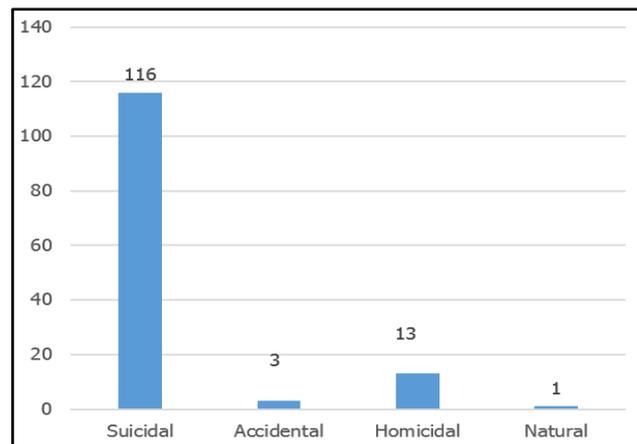
**Figure 1. Age wise Distribution of Cases**

Marital Life (in Years)	No. of Cases (n)	%
<1	16	12%
1-2	2	1.5%
2-3	17	12.78%
3-4	22	16.54%
4-5	11	8.27%
5-6	10	7.51%
6-7	9	6.76%
7-8	5	3.75%
8-10	18	13.53%
10-15	13	9.77%
>15	10	7.51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

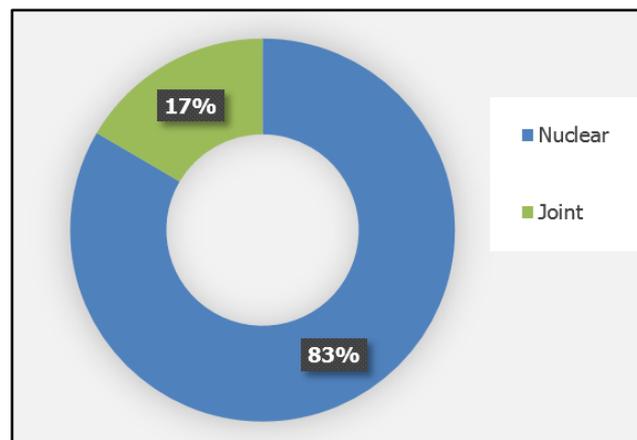
**Table 2. Duration of Marital Life**



**Figure 2. Cause of Death**



**Figure 3. Manner of Death**



**Figure 4. Type of Family**

## DISCUSSION

During the 5 year study period a total of 8831 cases were reported of which 133 cases were dowry related deaths (Table 1).

There was a progressive increase till 2013 where there is a sudden surge but later on there was a decrease in dowry deaths. There was a drop in 2015. There was, however, a progressive decrease in dowry deaths as per NCRB stats from 2011 to 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Majority of victims (77%) were aged between 18 to 30 years (Figure 1).

Highest no. of cases reported were of 2-4 years of marital life amounting for 30% of cases followed by <1 year, 4-5 and 5-6 etc. (Table 2)

Hanging was commonest cause of death with 56 cases followed by burns (52 cases), poisoning (17 cases) and others (8 cases). This shows the changing trend for replacement of title 'bride burning' for dowry deaths to 'bride hanging', which is different from other studies.<sup>5</sup> Others (8 cases) in this include fall from height, Stab injury on abdomen, head injury, drowning, case of hypovolemic shock due to repeated miscarriages & 2 cases of strangulation. One case of natural death (TB) was also reported which shows the misuse of the section by relatives of deceased (Figure 2)

Suicide was the commonest manner of death accounting for 87% (Figure 3), which is matching with other studies.<sup>6</sup>

83% of the victims were of nuclear family and 17% belong to joint family (Figure 4).

## CONCLUSION

Government of India passed a Domestic Violence Bill, 2001, "To protect the rights of women who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto".<sup>7</sup> As a part of Effective Surveillance system in married women deaths, reliable estimates of dowry deaths from various

sources is important at the regional and national level.<sup>8</sup> our study gives preliminary data about dowry related deaths in Visakhapatnam where we observed hanging replaced burns as dominant cause of death and 2<sup>nd</sup> common victims of dowry related deaths are with 8 to 10 years of married life.

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