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# A Prospective Study of Executive Magistrate Inquest Cases at Gmkmch-Salem

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Executive magistrate's inquest 176(1), CrPC refers to inquest held by an executive magistrate. Executive magistrates inquests held in cases of (i) Suicide of a woman within 7 years of marriage. (ii) Death of a woman with in seven years of marriage in any circumstances raising a suspicion that some other person has committed an offence in relation to such woman(homicide etc), (iii) Exhumation.

**Objectives:** To perform a study on the pattern of unnatural deaths in married woman within seven years of marriage. To evaluate the socio- demographic profile of dowry victims. To identify the risk group. To analyse the socio etiological factors involved and suggest preventive measures.

**Materials And Methods:** This was a cross sectional study done in a Government Mohan Kumaramangalam Medical College and Hospital, during the period of 1 year (July 2022 to June 2023). All the executive magistrate cases autopsied at GMKMCH were studied. Official permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional human ethics committee. Data entry was done in EXCEL and analysis was done using SPSS Software. Appropriate descriptive statistics were used.

**Results**: Among the 99 cases, the mean (SD) age was 24 (6) years, with most women (72.7%) aged 20–29 years. The mean (SD) duration of marriage was 3 (1) years, and 74.7% had been married for 0–3 years. Most participants were housewives (80.8%), belonged to rural areas (64.6%), lived in nuclear families (82.8%), identified as Hindus (92.9%), and belonged to the lower socioeconomic class (76.8%). Hanging (45.5%) was the leading cause of death, followed by poisoning (29.3%), and the majority of deaths were suicides (83.8%). Dowry-related issues (28.3%) and domestic violence (23.2%) were the most common contributing factors, followed by economic crises, psychiatric illnesses, and love failures. Most deaths related to dowry, domestic violence, and psychiatric illnesses were suicides, while the only homicide was associated with love failure. Most deaths occurred within the first three years of marriage, particularly among women facing dowry-related issues, domestic violence, and economic difficulties.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that most of the victims belong to 20-29 years of age and has been married for 0-3 years. Most had high school education, belonging to lower class socio economic status and are housewives and most died of hanging, followed by poison intake. Most of the deaths were suicide and most were brought dead. Most were menstruating. Most of them were Hindu, belong to nuclear family and resided in rural area. Most viscera reports were negative. Most common provoking factor was dowry, followed by domestic violence. The dowry issues, domestic abuse, psychiatry illness resulted in suicide.

**Key Words**: *Magistrate inquest, Women deaths, Provoking factors, Manner of deaths*

## INTRODUCTION

An inquest by an Executive Magistrate happens[1] according to Section 176(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code in situations that involve a woman's suicide or suspicious death within seven years of her marriage and also in cases of exhumation. These inquests are important in the medico-legal system because they help ensure that investigations into unnatural deaths are fair and thorough[2-3]. Unnatural deaths among women, particularly in the early years of marriage, are a major public health and social concern, with common causes being suicide, homicide, accidents, domestic violence, and issues related to dowry harassment[4-6]. These events point to deeper social, psychological, and legal problems and call for quick medico-legal evaluations to find out the cause and manner of death[7-10]. Studying the demographic details, circumstances, and trends of these deaths is necessary to improve forensic investigations, enhance legal results, and create effective measures to safeguard women's health and rights. This study has the aim of providing insights into patterns and causes of deaths that are investigated by Executive Magistrates and it will identify important public health and social issues. The study will look at how effective medico-legal investigations and inquest procedures are. It will also contribute to improving forensic practices and legal processes and will provide evidence that can be used for policy development. Furthermore, the findings will be used as an educational resource and will support initiatives that are aimed at strengthening the justice system, improving public health interventions, and preventing deaths that could be avoided.

## AIM & OBJECTIVES

1. To perform a study on the pattern of unnatural deaths in married woman within seven years of marriage.
2. To evaluate the socio- demographic profile of dowry victims.
3. To identify the risk group
4. To analyse the socio etiological factors involved and suggest preventive measures

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was a hospital-based cross-sectional study that took place in the Department of Forensic Medicine at Government Mohan Kumaramangalam Medical College Hospital located in Salem, Tamil Nadu. The duration of the study was one year, starting from July 2022 and ending in June 2023, and it was conducted after receiving approval from the Institutional Human Ethics Committee.

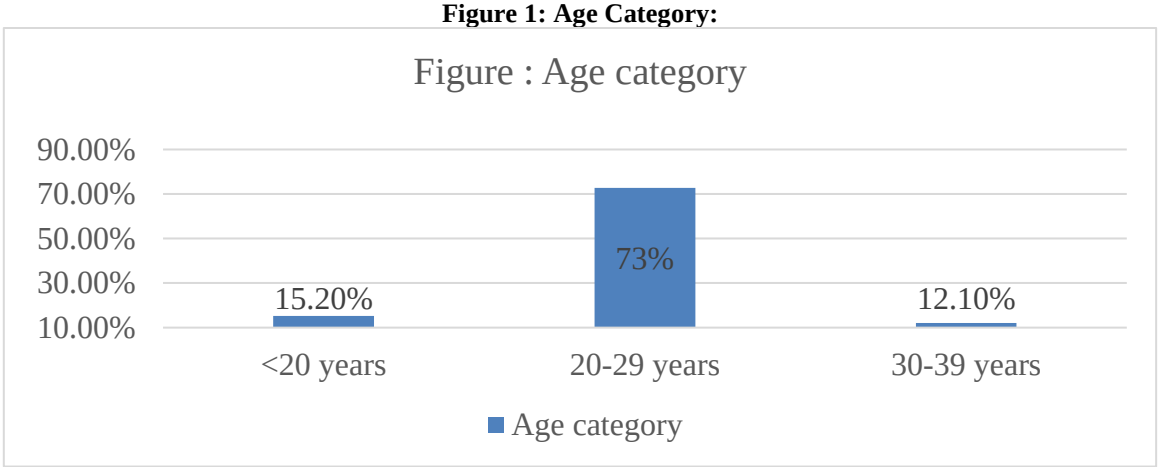
The study included all inquest cases that were conducted by Executive Magistrates and that underwent medico-legal autopsy during this timeframe. Deaths from road traffic accidents and police inquests were excluded from the study.

Data were collected in a prospective manner using a structured proforma that was derived from Executive Magistrate inquest reports, requisition forms, case records, postmortem findings, chemical analysis reports, and relevant medical records. The collected data were entered into Microsoft Excel and were analyzed with the use of SPSS software, utilizing appropriate descriptive statistics. Continuous variables were reported as mean plus or minus standard deviation, and categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages.

## RESULTS

The study included a total of 99 cases of Executive Magistrate inquests. The average age of the participants was 24 years and the standard deviation was 6 years. A majority of the participants, which was 72.7%, were in the age range of 20 to 29 years, while 15.2% were younger than 20 years and 12.1% were in the age range of 30 to 39 years. The average duration of marriage among the participants was 3 years with a standard deviation of 1 year. A total of 74.7% of individuals had been married for a duration of 0 to 3 years and 25.3% had been married for 4 to 6 years. Most of the deceased individuals were housewives, making up 80.8% of the total, while the remaining deceased were engaged in daily wage work, coolie labor, had jobs, or were students.

**Figure 1: Age Category:**



Hanging was the cause of death that occurred most frequently, making up 45.5% of the total. Poisoning followed as the second most common cause at 29.3%. Burns accounted for 9.1% of deaths, drowning for 6.1%, and medical causes for 5.1%. A large majority of the cases, which is 83.8%, were labeled as suicides, and 59.6% of the individuals were found deceased. A notable number of those who died, which is 79.8%, were menstruating, and 92.9% identified as Hindu. Additionally, 64.6% resided in rural settings, 82.8% belonged to nuclear families, and 67.7% had viscera reports that were negative. About 47.5% had finished high school, and 76.8% were placed in the lower socioeconomic class. The main factors that contributed to these deaths were related to dowry issues at 28.3% and domestic violence at 23.2%. Other contributing factors included economic crises at 14.1%, psychiatric illness at 10.1%, and failures in relationships at 7.1%.

**Table 1: Place of Death**

| Group | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Brought dead | 59 | 59.6% |
| Hospital death | 40 | 40.4% |
| Total | 99 | 100% |

An analysis of the factors that contributed to the manner of death showed that issues connected to dowry, domestic violence, economic difficulties, and psychiatric disorders were only associated with suicide. Cases of love failure or affairs mainly led to suicide, with one instance of homicide noted. Most of the deaths related to dowry, domestic violence, and other identified factors happened within the first three years of marriage, suggesting that this early period of marriage is especially vulnerable.

**Table 2: Provoking factors compared to Manner of Death:**

| Group | Accidental | Homicide | Suicide | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dowry | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 28 (100%) | 0 (0%) |
| Domestic violence | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 23 (100%) | 0 (0%) |
| Economic crisis | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 14 (100%) | 0 (0%) |
| Love failure/ Affairs | 0 (0%) | 1 (14.3%) | 6 (85.7%) | 0 (0%) |
| Psychiatric illness | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 10 (100%) | 0 (0%) |
| Not known | 6 (42.9%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (14.3%) | 6 (42.9%) |
| NA | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (100%) |

**Table 3: Provoking factors compared to Married years**

| Group | Married since | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Dowry | 7 (25%) | 9 (32.1%) | 7 (25%) | 4 (14.3%) | 1 (3.6%) | 0 (0%) |
| Domestic violence | 7 (30.4%) | 6 (26.1%) | 3 (13%) | 4 (17.4%) | 2 (8.7%) | 1 (4.3%) |
| Economic crisis | 4 (28.6%) | 2 (14.3%) | 3 (21.4%) | 4 (28.6%) | 1 (7.1%) | 0 (0%) |
| Love failure/ Affairs | 1 (14.3%) | 2 (28.6%) | 2 (28.6%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (14.3%) | 1 (14.3%) |
| Psychiatric illness | 0 (0%) | 2 (20%) | 5 (50%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (30%) | 0 (0%) |
| Not known | 5 (35.7%) | 4 (28.6%) | 2 (14.3%) | 1 (7.1%) | 1 (7.1%) | 1 (7.1%) |

## DISCUSSION

The mean age of the deceased was 24 ± 6 years, with the majority (72.7%) belonging to the 20–29 years age group. The mean duration of marriage was 3 ± 1 years, with 74.7% married for 0–3 years, and 80.8% of the deceased were housewives. These findings are consistent with the studies by Bharath Kumar[11] et al., Sandhya Arora[12] et al., Kitulwatte[13] et al., Rizwi[14] et al., Kachhadia[15] et al., Anvit[16] et al., Haroon[17] et al., and Selvaraj[18] et al.

Hanging was the most common mode of death (45.5%), followed by poisoning (29.3%), burns (9.1%), and drowning (6.1%), consistent with findings of Kitulwatte[13] et al, and Anvit et al.[16] Suicide was the predominant manner of death (83.8%), similar to Bharath Kumar[11] et al., Sandhya Arora[12] et al. but contrasting with Kitulwatte[15] et al. Most cases were brought dead (59.6%), with findings comparable to Bharath Kumar[11] et al. The majority were menstruating (79.8%), Hindu (92.9%), from rural areas (64.6%), and belonged to nuclear families (82.8%), consistent with studies by Selvaraj[18] et al., Bharath Kumar[11] et al., Sandhya Arora[12] et al., Kachhadia[15] et al., Anvit[16] et al., and Haroon[17] et al. Negative viscera reports were observed in 67.7%, similar to Selvaraj[18] et al. Most had high school education (47.5%) and belonged to lower socioeconomic class (76.8%), comparable with studies by Selvaraj[18] et al., Bharath Kumar[11] et al., Rizwi[14] et al. and Anvit[16] et al.

The most common provoking factors were dowry-related issues (28.3%), followed by domestic violence (23.2%), economic crisis, psychiatric illness, and love failure/affairs, with 14.1% cases having unknown reasons. These findings were comparable with studies by Bharath Kumar[11] et al., Kitulwatte[13] et al., and Rizwi[14] et al. Dowry issues, domestic violence, and psychiatric illness were mainly associated with suicide, while love failure/affairs resulted predominantly in

suicide with one homicide case, consistent with Bharath Kumar[11] et al. Most deaths related to dowry, love failure, and unknown factors occurred within the first three years of marriage, while domestic violence and economic crisis-related deaths were more common within the first two years, similar to findings by Bharath Kumar[11] et al.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that there was a high rate of suicide among young married women and it points out that problems related to dowries, domestic violence, and mental health issues are major factors contributing to this situation. Most of these suicides happened within the first three years after marriage which indicates that this time is especially risky for these women. The methods most often used for suicide were hanging and poisoning, and most of the victims were housewives. The results indicate that there was a pressing need for interventions that can effectively tackle issues of domestic violence, dowry-related problems, mental health support, and raising social awareness, particularly in rural areas and among communities with lower socioeconomic status.

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