Epidemiology of Femicide: An autopsy based study at DHQ Teaching Hospital Sahiwal.

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ABSTRACT... Objective: To know the epidemiology of female homicidal deaths in Sahiwal. Study Design: Descriptive Retrospective study. Setting: Department of Forensic Medicine, Sahiwal Medical College and DHQ Teaching Hospital Sahiwal. Period: 1st January 2016 to 31st December 2018. Material & Methods: This study includes 73 cases of female homicide from a total of 314 autopsies conducted at DHQ Teaching Hospital, Sahiwal. These cases were examined regarding their age, marital status, residential background, cause of death, alleged offender and apparent motive of Killing. Result: The study revealed that commonly involved age group was 20-29 years (45.2%), 45 (61.6%) females were married and 64 (87.7%) female victims belonged to rural area. Firearms were the causative agent in 31 (42.5%) cases. In 19 (59.5%) cases the alleged offender was husband. Honor killing, financial/property disputes were the main reason for homicides. Conclusion: The violence against women in Sahiwal is higher in rural areas and more commonly affecting the married women of child bearing age.

Key words: Autopsy, Death, Femicide, Homicide, Women.
Instances of respect murdering in Pakistan are on the ascent. As per data report the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan around 15222 instances of honor Killing occurred from 2004-2016.\textsuperscript{10} In 2014, the number was 837 ladies including 75 minor, and 1,100 ladies were killed in 2015.\textsuperscript{11,12} Another figure shows that 460 cases were accounted for in 2017, including 376 ladies as victims\textsuperscript{13}, as indicated by Human Rights Watch, around 1000 respect killings are done every year in Pakistan.

Causes, nature and frequency of this social issue are not well documented in this region. This study would be helpful in providing valuable input to minimize this social issue through collaborative efforts by concern sectors of government and social organization.

**MATERIAL & METHODS**

It's was a descriptive retrospective study. At Department of Forensic Medicine, Sahiwal Medical College and DHQ Teaching Hospital Sahiwal after approval from Ethical Review Committee (57/DME/SLMC/SWL). It was 3 Years from 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2016 to 31\textsuperscript{st} December 2018. All autopsy cases of female homicide. Negative autopsies and exhumations were excluded from the study.

This study includes all 73 cases of female homicide from a total of 314 autopsies conducted at the DHQ Teaching hospital, Sahiwal. These cases were labeled as homicide on the basis of police inquest reports, injury statements, autopsy reports. Data was collected and recorded in predesigned Performa and analyzed in SPSS V-25. For numerical values (e.g. age), mean + SD was calculated; while for categorical variables marital status, residential background, cause of death, alleged offender and apparent motive of Killing) frequencies and percentages were calculated.

**RESULTS**

The total number of medico-legal deaths during the study period was 314. From this, the homicidal manner of women was observed only in 73 cases giving an incidence rate of 23.24%. The age group in which the most number of deaths occurred was 20-29 years (45.2%) followed by the 30-39 (20.5%). Least number of victims were from the extreme age groups i.e. 0-9 and above 60 years.

| Age (Years) | Cases (%) |
|-------------|-----------|
| 0-9         | 1 (1.4%)  |
| 10-19       | 13 (17.8%)|
| 20-29       | 33 (45.2%)|
| 30-39       | 15 (20.5%)|
| 40-49       | 4 (5.5%)  |
| 50-59       | 6 (8.2%)  |
| >60         | 1 (1.4%)  |
| **Total**   | **73 (100)** |

Table-I. Age distribution of female homicidal cases (n=73).

Our study revealed that the maximum number 45 (61.6%) was married followed by unmarried 25 (34.2%) and least number of victims were widow and divorced.

| Marital Status | Cases (%) |
|----------------|-----------|
| Married        | 45 (61.6%)|
| Unmarried      | 25 (34.2%)|
| Widow          | 2 (2.7%)  |
| Divorced       | 1 (1.4%)  |
| **Total**      | **73 (100)** |

Table-II. Marital status of female homicidal cases (n=73).

As regarding the residential background of the sufferers; 64 (87.7%) cases belong to a rural area and 9 (12.3%) cases were inhabitants of the urban area as shown in Figure-1.
Majority of victims died due to firearm injuries 31(42.2%) followed by asphyxia 14(19.2%), blunt injury 9(12.3%), sharp injury 8 (11%), asphyxia plus sexual assault 4(5.5%) and poisoning 3(4.1%). Only 1(1.4%) were died of burn, stab injury, sexual assault and criminal abortion (Table-III).

| Cause of Death          | Frequency (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| Firearm                 | 31 (42.2%)    |
| Asphyxia                | 14 (19.2%)    |
| Blunt Injury            | 9 (12.3%)     |
| Sharp Injury            | 8 (11%)       |
| Asphyxia + Sexual Assault| 4 (5.5%)     |
| Sexual Assault          | 1 (1.4%)      |
| Poisoning               | 3 (4.1%)      |
| Burn                    | 1 (1.4%)      |
| Stab injury             | 1 (1.4%)      |
| Criminal Abortion       | 1 (1.4%)      |
| Total                   | 73 (100)      |

Table-III. Causes of Female Homicidal deaths.

In majority of deaths 41(56.2%) the alleged offender was father/brother and husband followed by acquaintance and unknown10 (13.7) (Table-IV).

| Alleged Offender    | Frequency (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Father/Brother      | 22 (30.1%)    |
| Husband             | 19 (26.1%)    |
| Other relative      | 6 (8.2%)      |
| Acquaintance        | 10 (13.7%)    |
| Stranger            | 9 (12.3%)     |
| Unknown             | 10 (9.6%)     |
| Total               | 73 (100)      |

Table-IV. Distribution of Female Homicide according to alleged offender.

In 40.5 % cases the apparent motive was other reason followed by 25% family dispute, 23.8% Honor killing and 10.7% financial dispute (Table-V).

| Apparent Motive    | Frequency (%) |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Honor killing      | 16 (21.9 %)   |
| Property dispute   | 16 (20.5 %)   |
| Financial dispute  | 15 (20.5 %)   |
| Family dispute     | 7 (9.6 %)     |
| Sexual assault     | 5 (6.8 %)     |
| Other reason       | 11 (15.1 %)   |
| Unknown            | 4 (5.5 %)     |
| Total              | 73 (100 %)    |

Table-V. Distribution of cases according to apparent Motive.

DISCUSSION

Sahiwal is the 22nd largest city of Pakistan by population. A demographic data shows that the total population of Sahiwal was 2.517 million in 2017. During 3 years study period, 73 female deaths reported out of total 314 autopsy conducted accounting for 23.24% of the entire postmortem conducted. In this study we have focus on the homicidal violence against women. A significant number of variables have been reviewed such as age of the victim, marital status, and residential background, methods used for violence and reasons of homicide.

The maximum age range of female victims of homicide in this study was at 20-29 (45.2%) and 30-39 years (20.5%). This has been shown in many other studies conducted internationally in Jammu Region, India, Sri Lanka and Ethiopia. This may be due to the fact that this is the group of females who are to be married or belong to young married class. These females are working physically and socially active and also take new responsibility at home as well as outside. In this study the incidences of homicide sharply decreased by age (0-9 & >60) which are in line of other studies.

In this study marital status wise distribution showed that maximum numbers of females 61.6% were married which is consistent with the findings of other studies. The reason behind that is marriage leads to change in social
environment. Sometime, it may cause physical, social and mental stress. In present study, majority of victim’s 87.7% belong to rural area followed by 12.3% urban which are in the line of other studies. The higher percentage of female deaths in rural areas can be attributed to more of gender inequality, low literacy rate less of employment avenues and more of economic dependence in these regions.

The victims of homicide due to firearm were maximum 42.2% which correlates with the study conducted at Faisalabad, Sahiwal, and in the United States. Firearms remain dominant weapon for murder, despite of legislation against possession of firearms in various parts of the world. Our study shows 19.2% (14 cases) of Asphyxial deaths, which is not consistent with the findings of local studies, but in the line of international study conducted in Sri Lanka, where these incidences were 17%.

Alleged offender in 56.2% of homicides was the husband, Father or Brother. Worldwide, Intimate partner violence has been considered as a public health problem. Many women are killed by their husbands or intimate acquaintances. Women are rarely killed by strangers.

CONCLUSION
The incidence of violent deaths is higher in married women as compared to unmarried females. The majority of females were inhabitants of rural area. In homicidal deaths, either husband or blood relatives were responsible for killing. Honor killing, property, financial or family disputes were the common motives or circumstances leading to death. Therefore, there is dire need to implement existing laws through collaborated effort by involvement of governments, law enforcing authorities and civil society to control the violence against women.

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