

A Cross Sectional Autopsy based Study of Homicidal Deaths in Vijayapura, Karnataka

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Abstract

Introduction: Homicide is heinous crime and it is one of the oldest crimes in human civilization. Homicidal pattern vary from country to country and from one region to another, and are influenced by many factors like commonly available weapons, methods of killing, etc. In the present day world violence is clearly recognized as a global public health problem. The total number of murders recorded all over India in 2010 was 33,335 and in 2011 were 34,305. **Materials and Methods:** 2 year autopsy based study conducted in Vijayapura. All homicidal cases brought to the department for medico legal autopsy and also the cases which were later registered as homicide were studied. Detailed information regarding the circumstances of crime was sought from the police, victim's relatives and friends, visits to the scene of occurrence or deduced by the photographs of the scene of occurrence. The alleged weapons that were produced in the respective cases were examined and opined. **Results:** Among 67 cases, 43 (46.18%) were male and 24 (53.82%) were female. Most commonly affected victims were from 21 – 30 years age group. Large number of cases occurred in streets. The blunt injuries were most common 31(46.27%) to cause death.

Keywords: Homicide, blunt weapons, murder, autopsy.

Introduction

Homicide is heinous crime and it is one of the oldest crimes in human civilization¹. Death is inevitable to everyone, once life starts, but premature ending of one's life by others has seen an alarming rise in the recent years. Homicide (homos: human being, caedere: to kill) literally means to kill a human being. Homicide is defined as killing of one human being by another human being and is one of the leading causes of unnatural deaths². It is also defined legally as destruction of human life by an act, agencies, procurement or culpable omission of some other person or persons, is the most heinous crime.³ The WHO defines homicide as any death resulting from injury purposefully inflicted by another person, is dealt under codes E960 – E9693. To commit murder, two elements ("Mens-rea" which means preplanning or afore thought and "Actus rea" which means the actual Execution) should work together to constitute the crime⁴. Death of a human being can occur by different methods. Many of the times they may occur in a rage, sometimes with lot of planning. There may be one man involved in a killing or many assailants may be there.

Homicidal pattern vary from country to country and from one region to another, and are influenced by many factors like commonly available weapons, methods of killing, motive behind killing, family relationship problems like marital disputes, cultural, psychological, social influences, religious attitudes, criminal activities, drug culture, political factors, unemployment and socio economics status. The various patterns of homicidal deaths include assault by sharp weapon, blunt weapon, firearms, strangulation, homicidal hanging, smothering, drowning, burns, poisoning etc. In the present-day world violence is clearly recognized as a global public health problem. Violence and injuries account for 9% of global mortality and 12% of all disability adjusted life years (DALY). As per Global Burden of Armed Violence Report, 2011, the average annual global violent death rate between 2004 and 2009, was 79 per million. Globally around 5,20,000 people die each year as a result of interpersonal violence which equates to 1400 deaths every single day⁵. As per National Crime Record Bureau, violent crimes reported in India were 10.9% of the total Indian Penal Code crimes. The total number of murders recorded all over India in 2010 was 33,335 and

in 2011 were 34,305. Very often, the newspapers scream headlines about the rising incidence of these most horrific crimes taking place in different parts of the Vijayapura city. How safe exactly is the city, is a question that has been debated in print with increasing intensity. Where exactly does the problem lie? In the current situation, where murders have become common place, the police system has become an easy target.

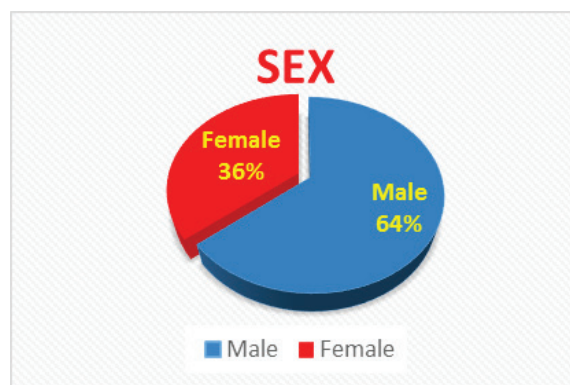
Materials and Method

The present study was conducted in the department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Al- Ameen Medical College and Civil Hospital mortuaries, Vijayapura during the period from June 2013 to May 2015, a period of 2 years. All homicidal cases brought to the department for medico legal autopsy and also the cases which were later registered as homicide were studied. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional ethics committee prior to the conduct of the study. Detailed information regarding the circumstances of crime was sought from the police, victim’s relatives and friends, visits to the scene of occurrence or deduced by the photographs of the scene of occurrence. Socio Economic status of the victim was based on Modified Kuppuswami’s classification (2007 revision)⁶. Post Mortem examination of the victims was conducted. Viscera were sent for Chemical Analysis in suspected cases of alcohol consumption. The alleged weapons that were produced in the respective cases were examined and opined.

Results

67 cases of homicidal deaths were sorted out for this study amongst 896 total autopsies conducted from June 2011 to May 2013. Among 67 cases, 43 (64.18%) were male and 24 (35.82%) were female. It is observed that most commonly affected victims were from 21 – 30 years age group 25(37.31%) followed by 31 – 40 age group 13(19.40%). Most of the victims are in upper lower socio- economic class i.e. 23 cases (34.33%), followed by 16 cases (23.88%) are in lower class. Large number of cases was occurred in streets 39 cases (58.21%) and 6 cases (8.96%) were found in victim’s house, 41 corpses (61.19%) are present in same spot of scene of occurrence and 17 victims (25.37%) are disposed from the scene of occurrence. Most homicides took place in the evening (6pm-12midnight) and late night (12midnight-6am) i.e., about 28 cases (41.79%) and 24 cases (35.82%) respectively. The blunt injuries

were most common 31(46.27%) to cause death followed by sharp injuries 25(37.31%).

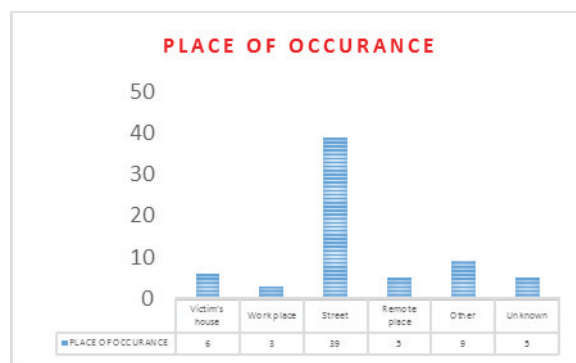


Graph 1: Sex distribution

Table 1: Victims distributed according to socio-economic status:

Si. No	Socio-Economic Class	Number	Percentage
1	Upper (I)	0	0%
2	Upper middle (II)	14	20.89%
3	Lower middle (III)	13	19.40%
4	Upper lower (IV)	23	34.33%
5	Lower (V)	16	23.88%
6	Not known	1	1.49%
	total	67	100%

Graph 2: Homicides distributed according to place of occurrence of crime:



Graph 3: Homicides distributed according to place of disposal of dead body:

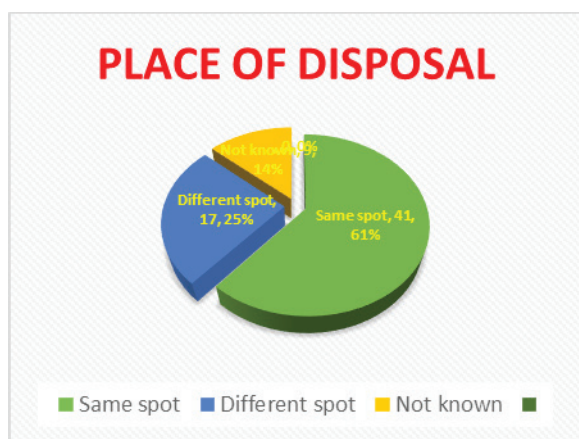
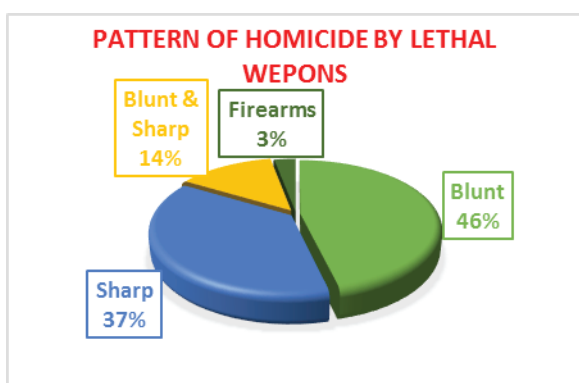


Table 2: Homicides distributed according to time of occurrence of crime:

Sl.no	Time of Occurrence	Number	Percentage
1	Morning (6Am-12Noon)	06	8.96%
2	Afternoon(12Noon-6Pm)	06	8.96%
3	Evening (6Pm-12Midnight)	28	41.79%
4	Late Night(12Midnight-6Am)	24	35.82%
5	Not known	03	4.48%
	Total	67	100.00%



Graph 4: Homicides distributed according to pattern of homicide by lethal weapons:

Discussion

During the study period, from June 2013 to May 2015, 896 medico-legal autopsies were conducted, of which homicidal deaths constituted 67 cases (7.48%). The factors contributing for highest incidents in the

21-30 years age groups were allegedly due to marital disputes, unsuccessful romantic disputes, and infidelity, and related to dowry in females and gang rivalry, unemployment, arguments, drug addiction, property disputes, extramarital affairs were the reasons in males. The next vulnerable age group being 31-40 years of age constituted 19.40%. In studies by Gupta A et al.1, and Mohanty M.K et al.3 most of the victims belonged to the age group 21-30 years which is consistent with our study. The present study is in contrast to the findings observed by Wahlsten P et al.7

Male victims contributed to more than 2/3rd (64.18%) of the cases which can be attributed to the aggressive nature of males than females. Similar observation made by Gupta A et al.1, Mohanty M.K et al.3. The present study observation is in contrast to Kominato Y et al.8 where male to female ratio of the victims was 1:1

In our study the maximum numbers of victim (34.23%) were from the upper lower socioeconomic status followed by lower socio economic status (23.88%), this could be because ours is a developing country and much of the people fall in this group, also the changing social trends of nuclear families, unemployment, illiteracy, financial problems etc. Similar observations are made by Karn A et al.9 lower economic class people committed more crime. The present study contrasts with those by Hugar B S et al.10 where majority was from middle class people.

Our study observed that maximum number of victims (58.21%) were done to death at streets and lonely places, which implies that these homicides were mostly pre meditated as the assailants were aware of the victim’s whereabouts and motive being financial dispute or murder for gain, followed by 9 cases (13.43%) which were in other places which were due to gang rivalry, revenge murders and arguments arising while under the influence of alcohol followed by victims house in which mostly the victims were staying alone and homicide committed by known assailants.

Other places in the study consisted of Railway Station, playground and auditoriums etc. This study is similar to the study conducted by Syed Amjad Agha et al.11, Vijayakumari N et al.12, where majority of homicides took place in the streets and is in contrast with the study of Hugar B S et al.10, where majority took place in victim’s residence & according to Dhaval J et

al.13, it took place in dense forest areas.

In present study, in 17 cases (25.37%) the dead body was moved from the scene of the crime and attempts were made by the assailants to obliterate the identity and as well as the evidence of crime in the form of covering with the slab, or disposing the corpse in lonely places or on roads for masquerading as an accident with ultimate purpose of concealing homicide. The presence or absence of viz. blood stains, signs of struggle/disturbance at the spot of recovery of body were taken into account for the above inference, by visiting the scene, observing the spot photographs and information furnished by the police. This observation is supported by Hugar B S et al.10 where in 15.75% of the cases moved from the spot, Wahlsten P et al.7, where in 8% of the cases the body was moved from the scene of the crime, Mohanty M.K et al.3, the body was disposed in different spot in 14.7% of cases.

Maximum number of the homicides took place in the evening 28 cases (6pm-12midnight) and late night 24 cases (12midnight-6am) which can be attributed to the factors like night fall or in darkness the chances of assailant being recognized is reduced, after a day's hard work the chances of victims and assailant engaging in arguments, be it domestic or financial are high when they meet up after work and as revealed in the study, most of the victims belonged to low socio-economic status. Further alcohol has been a major contributory factor. Similar observations were made in studies conducted by Hugar B S et al.10, and Mohanty M.K et al.3, in all these studies maximum homicides occurred in the evening and night. Our study in contrast to studies conducted by Vougiouklakis T et al.14, where in maximum (26.9%) of cases occurred during noon. The incidence of homicide was more during day time 74.55% in a study conducted by Vijayakumari N et al.¹².

Death due to blunt weapon injuries were 31 cases (46.27%) which outnumbered those due to sharp weapon injuries of 25 cases (37.31%). This is attributed to the easy availability of various blunt weapons in this area. In one case the assailant used sharp weapon to cause fatal injury and also strangled his wife with a ligature. In another case the assailant used multiple methods (blunt, sharp and firearm) to cause fatal injury. Majority of the blunt and sharp weapon injuries were pre-meditated and mainly involved gang rivalry whereas few blunt weapon injuries were unpremeditated and assailants used the blunt weapon available at the scene of occurrence. Only

2 cases of fire arm injury was observed as the law in India is strict regarding gun licensing. Similar study was made by Vijayakumari N et al.12, where blunt weapon injury was the most common cause of death and Mohanty M K et al.3, blunt weapon injuries accounted for 36.5%. Our study is in contrast to the studies by Hugar B S et al.10, Gupta A et al.1, sharp weapons were the most commonly used. Humayum H et al.15 noticed firearms were the most common means used for homicide. This could be attributed to the lethality of weapon and determination on the part of assailant to kill the victim, since most of these cases were premeditated.

Conclusion

- The study group included 67 homicidal cases.
- Maximum number of homicides occurred in the age group 21-30 years in both sexes constituting 37.31%.
- Males are the commonest victims, twice more likely than that of females. Most of the victims (56.25%) were married.
- Most of the victims were in the lower socio-economical class.
- Maximum homicide took place on the streets.
- The corpse was moved from the scene of crime in 25.37% of the cases.
- Most of the homicides took place in the evening and late night.
- Blunt weapon injuries were the commonest pattern followed by sharp weapon.

Conflict of Interest – Nil

Source of Funding – Self

Ethical Clearance – Obtained from institutional ethics committee prior to conduct of the study.

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