

Circumstances of Crime in Homicidal Deaths in Dinajpur District

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Homicide patterns vary from country to country, influenced by many factors. In the two-year period from January 2004 to December 2005, 52 (23+29) homicidal victims were autopsied. The sex ratio was about three males for one female. The largest number of victims was found in the age group 21-30 years. Assaults with blunt weapons were the most common means. Acquaintances committed 34.1 % of homicides. In contrast to males, the killing of a female by a stranger was rare. Revenge was the most common reason followed by arguments. In 40.2% of cases, the location of crime was outdoors, 37.8% were at the victim's house and in 9.7% of cases, the crime was committed at another domicile such as the offender's house, lodgings or a relative's house. In 17.3% of cases, the dead bodies were located away from the scene of crime.

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Introduction

Homicide is defined as the willful killing of one human being by another human being. It is the most serious violent crime and is frequently given disproportionate attention by the print and electronic media. Homicides can be classified into two groups, depending upon whether they were premeditated or unpremeditated. The unpremeditated murder often shows as direct relationship between the assailant and the victim. Premeditated murders are usually well planned and sometimes completely baffle the investigating authorities. The methods used by the murderer in a premeditated situation are many.¹ In many instances of homicidal death, there are no witnesses and it tails upon the investigating officer to determine if the death was due to homicide or not. The manner of death, whether homicide or not, determined by the forensic pathologist is an opinion based on the known facts concerning the circumstances leading up to and surrounding

the death, in conjunction with the findings at autopsy and laboratory tests. The autopsy findings may contradict or agree with the account of how death occurred. Injuries in homicidal death cannot be determined on the basis of any general rules; every case has to be considered on its own merit in relation to the particular circumstances obtaining at the time of injury.

Homicide patterns vary from one region to another and are influenced by many factors. These factors include the method of killing, the availability of weapons, family

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relationships, the motive behind the killing and other social and political factors. The purpose of this study is to find out the role of circumstantial and social factors in homicidal death, and to compare such information with that of the circumstances of homicide in other localities.

Methods

Out of the 489 medico-legal post-mortems performed in two years (from January 2004 to December 2005) in the mortuary of the Forensic Medicine Department of Dinajpur Medical College, Dinajpur, 52 cases (10.63%) were homicidal deaths, which constitute the materials for the study. All cases of justifiable homicide and infanticide were excluded from the present study.

Each homicidal case was examined and evaluated at autopsy examination for injuries on the body of the deceased, both externally and internally, and analyzed for the weapon which caused it. In cases where multiple weapons were used, causing a variety of wounds, the wounds were evaluated accordingly. Simultaneously, information regarding the circumstances of death, such as the motive for killing, the relationship of the victim to the offender, the location of the crime and the place of disposal after committing the crime, was collected by examining the police records and hospital records and also by interviewing the relatives accompanying the corpse. Apart from the above data, some further information was also collected, such as the age and sex of the victim, the method of homicide, the type of weapon used and the number of assailants involved.

Results

Out of 52 homicidal deaths, 39 cases (75%) were male and 13 cases (25%) were female. The majority of them were in the age group 21-30 years (Table I)

Blunt weapons (34.6%) were the most commonly used means for homicide (Table II), and revenge was the motive in nearly one third of the cases (Figure I).

In the majority (87%) of cases, the perpetrators who were identifiable were usually an acquaintance of the victim (Figure 2). In more than half (51.2%) of cases, multiple offenders were involved.

The majority of homicides took place outdoors (40.2%) but female victims died mostly in their own homes (Figure 3).

In the overwhelming majority (82.7%) of cases, the victims were found at the scene of the crime (Table III).

Table I: Age and sex distribution of victims

Age Group in Years	Male	Female	Total	%
0-10	01	00	01	1.9
11-20	02	04	06	11.5
21-30	16	03	19	36.5
31-40	09	03	12	23.0
41-50	04	01	05	9.6
51-60	05	01	06	11.5
61-70	02	00	02	3.8
71-80	00	01	01	1.9
>80	00	00	00	00
Total	29	13	52	

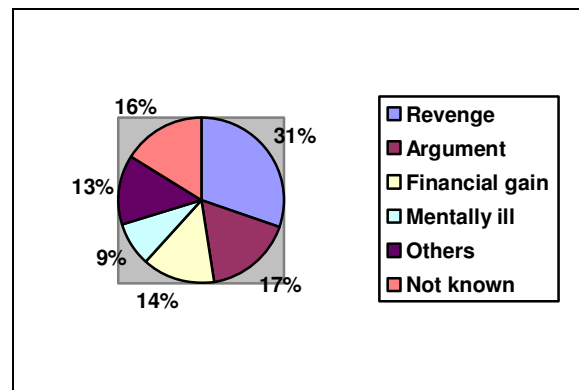


Figure 1: Causes of homicide

Table II: Weapon used

Weapon used	Male		Female		Both genders	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Blunt weapon	17	43.5	1	7.6	18	34.6
Sharp weapon	9	23	3	23.1	12	23
Both sharp and blunt	8	20.5	1	7.7	9	17.3
Firearm	1	2.6	0	0	1	1.9
Asphyxia	3	7.7	6	46.2	9	17.3
Burn	0	0	1	7.7	1	1.9
Poisoning	1	2.6	1	7.7	2	3.8
Total	39	-	13	-	52	-

Table III. Disposal of dead body by offenders

Place of disposal	Male	Female	Both Genders	
			N	%
Same spot	33	10	43	82.7
Different spot	06	03	09	17.3
Total	39	13	52	100

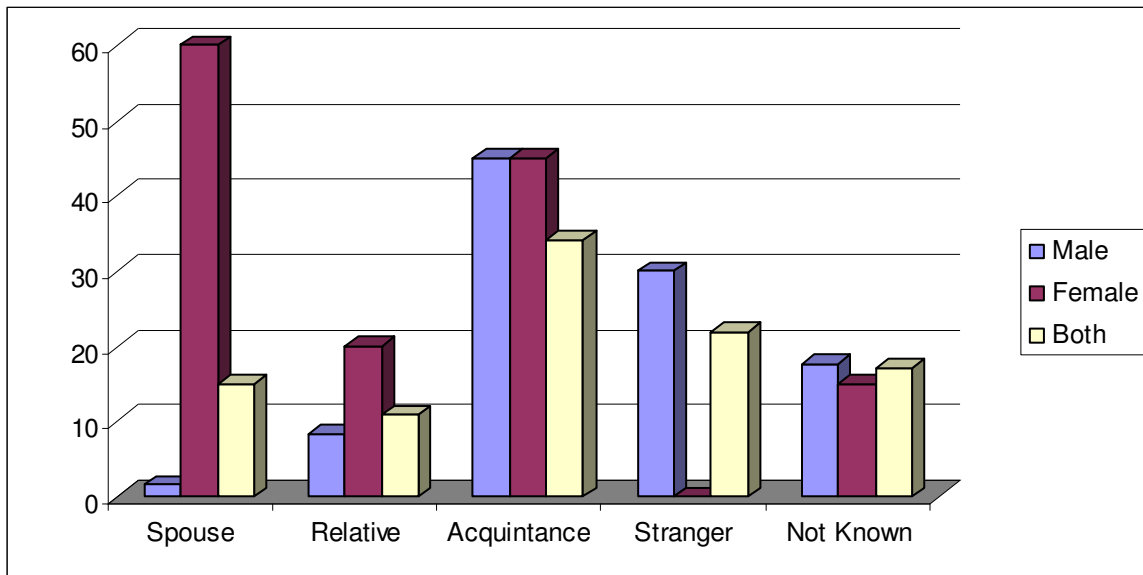


Figure 2: Relationship of offender with victim

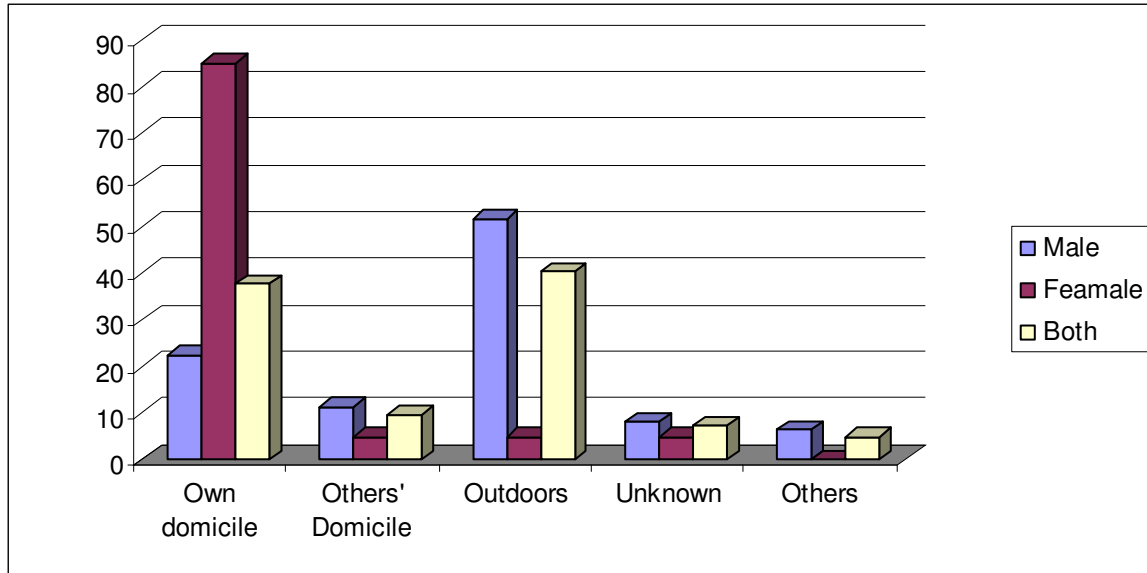


Figure 3: Place of crime

Discussion

Homicide is clearly the most serious consequence of interpersonal violence. The incidence of homicide has been increasing at an alarming rate in Bangladesh. This is probably due to the rapidly increasing population, fast growth industry, high levels of unemployment and frustration in day-to-day life. Circumstantial evidence plays a major role in drawing conclusions about homicidal deaths, as in other aspects of forensic medicine.

The present study shows that people of all age group were involved. The highest incidence was amongst the 21-30 years age-group, which is consistent with other studies.^{2,3,4,5,6} This might be expected as this age group in the population is the most exposed to violent trauma by the nature of its life.³ A higher number of males than females were affected because in Bangladesh males are generally working outside the house and females tend to remain indoors; hence males are exposed more to stress, frustration and violence in day-to-day life. Blunt weapon injury was the major cause of death. This concurs with studies in Germany and in Japan.^{7,8}

Revenge was the main reason for homicide, followed by arguments, as in also reported by Das Gupta et al.⁹ But this contradicts other reports where arguments are the most common reason for homicide.^{10,11,8} Arguments are the second most common reason in the present study, except for strictly among females, where arguments were the main reason for homicide. In 8.5% of cases, the offender was a mentally ill person. He killed his wife and 2 sons. In each case the perpetrator used a knife and targeted the chest and abdomen only.

The present study showed that victims were most likely to be killed by an acquaintance, or secondly by a stranger, which is similar to other studies.^{12,13,14} Acquaintances can include enemies as well as friends. Amongst female victims, their spouses or family members were the offenders in the majority of the cases. Fornes et al. (1996) had similar findings.¹⁴ An acquaintance or stranger most often kills men whereas females are most likely to be murdered by their spouses or other family members, as reported by many others.^{15,16,17} This implies the need for strategies aimed at reducing homicide rates

that focus on the individuals and their living context. In more than half of cases more than one offender was involved which contradicts the findings of others.¹¹

In the present series of the study, homicide took place outdoors in the majority of cases, killing mainly a male person. However, studies in Auckland in Genf Canton and in Stockholm showed that most of the crimes took place in the victim's own home.^{4,6,18} The possible reason for the crime to occur outdoors in this study may be linked to the motive of the crime. In the majority of cases, the motive in revenge whereas in other studies the motive in arguments which usually occur between spouses and other close relatives inside the house. Amongst female victims, however, homicide usually occurred in their own home. Since most of the women were killed at home by their close family relations, an effort to recognize and break the cycle of domestic violence would probably have a more favourable impact, as reported by others¹⁹.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the corpse was found at the location of the crime. This figure is similar to that reported by Kleemann et al.¹¹ In only 14.7% of cases was the body disposed of by the offender in other places such as burying it in ground, throwing it into the river or hiding the body behind a bush. This finding indicates that the prime concern of the majority of assailants is to escape from the scene after carrying out the crime. When a body is recovered from a hidden place with certain injuries, it often suggests homicide.

Conclusion

It was observed that a great difference exists between male and female victims in relations to the method of killing, the location of the crime, the motive and the relationship with the offender. Females are usually the homicidal victims of their close relatives, with arguments being the most common reason for

their death, whereas with males, acquaintances and strangers were the most common assailants and the main reason was revenge. Therefore, investigation of the scene of death, knowledge of the circumstances of death and the victim's past history are important factors in solving homicide cases.

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