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COMPARISON OF DEATHS DUE TO LETHAL WEAPONS DURING AND AFTER CIVIL STRIFE IN SRI LANKA: A MEDICO-LEGAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Using lethal weapons is a subject of public discussion in recent years in Sri Lanka. This study was conducted to describe and compare the deaths caused by lethal weapons during and after civil strife.

Methods

Cross-sectional study was conducted on deaths caused by lethal weapons over 10 years from May 2004-May 2014. Periods before and after 19th of May 2009 were considered as "during" and "after" civil strife. Total of 3,100 Post-Mortem Reports (PMR) were perused and 198 (6.3%) deaths due to lethal weapons were found.

Results

Out of 198 deaths, 55% were during and 45% were after civil strife. Ninety percent Sinhalese, 84% males, 68% married and 61% unemployed. Deaths occurred in urban areas (5% during and 15% after civil strife), outside home (55% of during and 70% of after), by sharp weapons (59% of during and 74% of after), with multiple assaults (74% during and 57% of after), on head (40% of during and 25% of after) showed a significant association ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions

The presence of many similarities indicated that both groups learnt basis in a society that breeds violence. After civil strife, deaths had a higher chance to occur outside homes with sharp weapons due to assault on chest and neck. It is better to review the number of existing firearms and explosives and provide the permission only for those who need. Non-explosive lethal weapon use after civil strife needs to be further investigated in order to develop evidence based interventions.