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ABSTRACTS

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Medicolegal Investigation of Custodial Deaths & Torture in India - An Update

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During the first decade of this century, 14231 cases of custodial deaths were reported from India as per statistics provided by National Human Rights Commission. National Crime Records Bureau report says that there occurred total 1702 custodial deaths of which 195 were unnatural deaths as per latest statistics of 2014. These custodial and encounter deaths are those which not only attract lot of media intervention but also invite very close scrutiny from various quarters during further investigation.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India is the final authority to dispose off all these matters by way of awarding monetary compensation / recommending for appropriate punishment/giving clean chit after thorough investigation of the case from all angles. NHRC laid certain procedural guidelines for conduction of autopsy in these cases of alleged custodial deaths in year 1993 (amended in 1997, 2003, 2005 & 2009) which were primarily based on UN Model autopsy (Minnesota) Protocol. For investigation of custodial torture the examination was based on Istanbul protocol. In-depth analysis of about 400 such cases from all over country dealt by author at NHRC after a decade of such recommendations being made, however, presented a grim picture as far as their implementation as the actual utility is concerned. To take care of various procedural loopholes as well as to improve the overall status of medicolegal functioning in the country; the author in consultation with eminent international forensic experts made certain recommendations in 2011-12. After detail deliberations and continuous persuasion NHRC has issued revised guidelines in 2014. The 'talk' will give an insight into these revised guidelines which will effectively plug those lacunae to a great extent.

Key Words: Custodial death, medicolegal autopsy, torture, NHRC, Videography, Photography

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Can This be Suicidal Pact or Dyadic Deaths?

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Definition: In suicide pact, two or more individuals agree and plan to commit suicide. They die together, or separately, or closely timed. Suicidal pacts are common among married or romantic partners, family members, or friends. Whereas, dyadic death refers to an incident where homicide is followed by the perpetrator's suicide.

Case report: An Indian couple was found dead inside an air-conditioned room in a hotel in Sri Lanka. They had come to Sri Lanka one week prior to the incident on vacation.

The bodies were found on a bed with whitish coarse froth around the mouth. Female body was found longitudinally and the male body was found transversally on the bed. His head was on the lower limbs of the female body. The female body was neatly covered with a bed sheet up to the upper half. The scene was not disturbed and there was a half a bottle of soft drink on a table. White colour crystals were found inside a bag.

Autopsy revealed that the female was pregnant. Both bodies had bright pinkish colour hypostasis. Early putrefactive changes were identified in the female body and rigor mortis was completed in the male body. Toxicological analysis revealed cyanide compounds in both bodies, bottle of soft drink and white crystals in the bag.

Conclusions: Though the two bodies were exposed to the same environmental conditions, they showed different post mortem changes. It may be due to individual factors or different time since deaths. Therefore, based only on medical evidence, differentiation of suicidal pact from dyadic death was very difficult.