

complete suspensions. Education related stress was identified as a major risk factor in 39%. 25% had used a coir rope as the ligature material. 69% were having a ligature mark rising to an inverted 'V'. Classic signs were observed in 47% and the presence of classic signs was significantly associated with partial suspension (p=0.000). Internal injuries were observed in 34% and the majority was fractures. Internal injuries had no significant association to the degree of suspension (P=0.11).

Conclusions

The findings vary and may be found in many combinations sometimes with exceptions to the generally accepted. Awareness of these combinations and the exceptions are of crucial importance in coming to a conclusion in a suspected case of hanging so as to avoid any erroneous opinion.

Key words: hanging, ligature material, ligature mark, classic signs, internal injuries, fractures

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A re-visit to the medico-legal management of 'unknown/unidentified' and unclaimed bodies; a preliminary study form four medico-legal units in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Management of an 'unknown/unidentified' and 'unclaimed' body poses a challenge to a medico-legal unit and it is a test of its capability. The process involves collaboration of many stakeholders; a defect in coordination at one step can lead to a cascade of events which could be detrimental to the system by creating health and environmental hazards and incapacitating establishment of justice.

Objectives

The aim of the study was to find out extent of the problem of 'unidentified' cases referred to medico-legal investigation and its related problems.

Methods

A retrospective descriptive study was conducted on post-mortem records of deceased referred as 'unidentified' to 2 tertiary care hospitals, one provincial-general-hospital and one district-base hospital during 2015. Data was extracted using a pro-forma designed to fulfill study objectives.

Results

59 post-mortems records on 'unidentified' bodies were pursued; of them 2 were skeletal remains. 22(37%) of them were destitute/ had no relatives while 23(39%) were victims of either road traffic or other accidents. Although an order for autopsy had been obtained within one week in 43(73%) cases, more than 3 weeks had taken to perform a post-mortem in a majority (n=34, 58%). The mean time taken to conduct an autopsy was 68 days while 95 days for burial. The cause of death was ascertained in a majority (52,98%) i.e 26(43%)-natural, 25(42%)-traumatic, 03(5%)-asphyxia/drowning, 02(3%)-under investigation, 03(5%)-unascertained while 3 had been specifically identified. Although steps had been taken for general identification such as sex, age, height, there were gaps. Odontology was performed in 11 cases while DNA obtained in 24 cases.

Conclusion

The time interval from autopsy of an 'unidentified/unknown body' to its burial pauses many issues from refrigeration to justice. A comprehensive study is needed to understand the depth of the problem to develop standard operational procedures in the management of the unknown/unidentified and unclaimed bodies in Sri Lanka.

Key words: *Unknown/ Unidentified/ Unclaimed bodies, Morgue management, Specific identification*
