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Medico-legal Management of Unidentified Bodies; A Comparative Study from Three Provinces in Sri Lanka



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Introduction

Management of an 'unknown/ unidentified/ unclaimed body' involves collaboration of many stakeholders. A delay in conducting an autopsy will invariably lead to accumulation of unclaimed dead bodies leading to a cascade of health, environmental and hospital management issues. [1]

Further, post-mortem artefacts due to decomposition can affect the interpretation of forensic findings thus the final medico-legal opinion leading to poor outcomes. [2, 3, 4]

Sri Lankan medico-legal investigators lack uniform operational procedure in investigating 'unknown/unidentified bodies'. Currently practiced operational procedures vary from one unit to another depending on the availability of resources and socio-cultural practices of the residents regarding disposal of the dead.

Objectives

To find out the whether there is a significant difference between the management of the dead in the western province and other provinces.

Methodology

A retrospective descriptive study was conducted using a pro-forma based on post-mortem records referred as 'unidentified' to 2 tertiary-care-hospitals in Western Province, 1 provincial-general-hospital and one district-base hospital in North Central and Central Provinces for 3 years (2013- 2015). The data were analysed using SPSS version 16 with percentages.

Results

Chart 1: Information on Living Condition

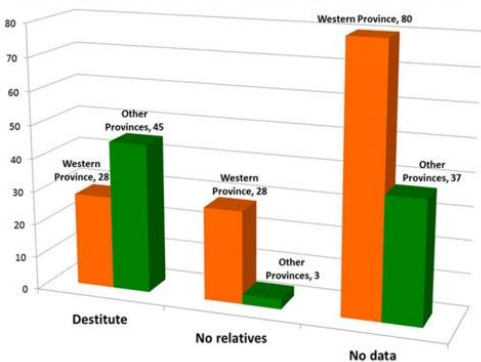


Chart 2: State of the Body

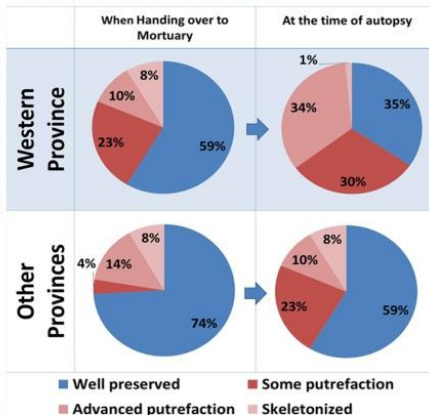


Chart 3: Cause of Death

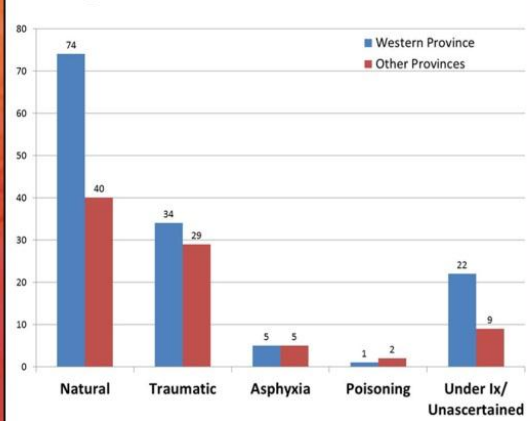


Table 1: Western Province vs Other Provinces

Variable		Western Province	Other Provinces	P value
Magistrate order	Given within 1 month	75	81	0.000
	Taken >1 month	61	4	
Post mortem	Done within 1 month	105	74	0.066
	Taken >1 month	31	11	
Condition of body at the PM	Well preserved	47	59	0.000
	Putrefaction present	87	19	
Time until disposal	Done within 1 month	48	62	0.000
	Taken >1 month	88	23	

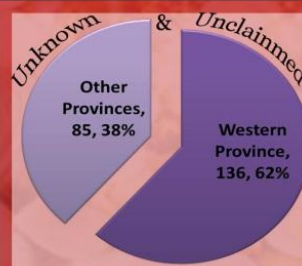


Table 2: Mean time taken for PM & Disposal

	Western Province	Other Provinces
Mean time taken to conduct PM	52 days	21 days
Mean time taken for disposal	79 days	25 days



Conclusion

Western province where the capital city of Sri Lanka situated bears a higher proportion of unknown & unclaimed deaths which could be due to its higher proportion of destitute as seen in neighbouring South Asian countries. [5-8]

This comparative study shows that there is clear difference in the management practices of unknown & unclaimed bodies in the Western compared to other provinces with a longer duration taken in Western Province to address the issue which could be due to availability of better storage facility.

This emphasises the need for a national standard operation procedure for the management of unknown & unclaimed bodies in order to optimise the current practice.

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