

Burn injuries and women: a public health concern

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Madam, an important cause of death in developing countries of South Asia is burn injuries. According to World Health Organization, South Asia region alone, contribute over one-half of the total number of fire-related burn deaths worldwide.¹ The incidence of burn injuries in our region ranges from 112 to 518 per 100,000 cases in a year with a mortality rate of 5.6 per 100,000 cases.²

Studies in South Asia report more cases of female injuries and mortality than males.^{2,3} A recent study conducted in Civil Hospital, Karachi reports higher mortality in female patients as compared to their male counterparts. The larger %TBSA burns and increased mortality of females was found to be significantly different from males (in terms of statistics) ($p < 0.001$).⁴

Causes for such discrepancy in mortality of female patients include the traditional role of women in our society coupled with poor safety measures. The exposure to unsafe kitchen environment with poor ergonomics places females at a greater risk of suffering from burn injuries. The danger posed by makeshift houses without proper planning, such as squatter settlements cannot be underplayed in our country. However it is important to note that the blame does not rest solely with poor household infrastructure. The practices of females in most households regarding their clothing attire worn over heads (dupatta) are also an important factor in increasing burn injuries. Another factor important for increased female mortality in our society is the homicidal and

suicidal injuries sustained by the victims on suspicion of infidelity and in lieu of honour killings.⁴

Remedial measures for ensuring safety in kitchen include steps that need to be taken at individual and communal level. Mass campaign promoting safety in the kitchen workplace with counseling regarding safety, proper clothing to be worn at time of cooking and first aid measures will go a long way in reducing female mortality.⁵ The identification of dangerous kitchen workplace environment is possible by collaboration between building inspectors and agencies working to promote safer workplaces for women. In order to counter psychological stress that leads victims to commit suicide, the stigma associated with seeking psychiatrist help needs to be removed. Free counseling should be provided to individuals and married couples and their families to decrease the number of suicide cases and familial dispute cases that lead to homicide.

References

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