

#### **A-41: Time since death revisited: cooling, rigor mortis and putrefaction**

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The applicability/inapplicability of 3 traditional criteria (cooling, rigor mortis, putrefaction) for estimating "the time interval since death" ( $t_i$ ) under Sri Lankan conditions was explored. The hypothesis tested was that these traditional criteria would not provide reliable and convenient methods of estimating  $t_i$ ; so would be inapplicable (or be of very limited use) in Sri Lanka.

Hypostasis (lividity) also a traditional criterion, was not studied owing to:

- (i) difficulty of detection in darker skinned people (some Sri Lankans qualifying),
- (ii) known unreliability.

Results confirmed that the hypothesis could not be rejected. Cooling of the body ('formula method') provided totally undependable estimates of ' $t_i$ '. Rigor mortis and putrefaction were of very limited value providing only some very broad, imprecise, upper and lower limits of ' $t_i$ ' by which the time at the "moment of death" may, equally broadly and imprecisely, be estimated. Even within these limits the results were very variable, confirming unreliability.