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# EXPERT TALK WITH MRS. SHEEBA GRACE

Ms. Adheena Shibu

I feel extremely lucky to have had the opportunity to interact with a working forensic scientist- Mrs. Sheeba Grace, Jr. Analyst Scientist, Forensic Science Laboratory, Puducherry and get a closer view of industrial experience in the field. The fact that ma'am had been working in the FSL for the past 8+ years and the fact that she has handled a variety of cases as a scene of crime officer, a reporting officer, and as an expert witness in the court of law led to an irreplaceable exchange of thoughts, views, and opinions. She started her career by completing her post-graduation studies in Forensic Science at Osmania University, Hyderabad, and was able to secure a job as a Jr. Analyst scientist at the FSL, Puducherry, where she had worked for more than 8 years. As a student of Forensic Science, I personally felt this expert talk was truly worthwhile as ma'am answered each of my questions with both clarity and honesty.



1. How would you rate the experience working in the FSL, and how far do you think the Forensic Science curriculum needs to be updated to fit today's scenario?

After working in the FSL at Puducherry, my experience in the FSL has been an exciting, interesting, and challenging journey. It has had its ups and downs and I have learned many new things both professionally and personally during this time here. When I say I learnt professionally, I also mean to say that the curriculum taught to Forensic Science graduates needs a radical change. Theory and practice are highly varied. In practice, the curriculum must be revamped in such a way that students are exposed to the practice and are ready for the work environment at the FSLs.

2. As a female forensic scientist, what are the challenges you face?

As a female forensic scientist, cases involving crime against women and children have a personal attachment. Whenever I am faced with a case involving crimes of such nature, I take it as a challenge to give my best to provide justice to the victim. Workplace challenges for women in this field is also something that needs to be spoken about. Crime scene visits involve a personal appearance in the crime at any time of the day. Protection for women scientists must be taken seriously.

3. In your experience, how much has the recent criminal amendment for rape and the POCSO Act, 2012, helped curb the sexual offences against women and children?

Certainly, it has had an effect. We are seeing the numbers affected by the amendments and the POCSO Act. But still, some states and UTs can go a long way in using the provisions of both to enhance justice and protection to women and children. Even stricter laws, policing, and awareness are needed on this front.

4. What would be your suggestions to improve better access for women and children to a safer world?

Awareness is the key. There are various programs, welfare schemes, security institutions, and legal remedies that the government is providing. But the awareness is lacking. The stereotyping of genders both at home and school must also undergo a change. In my opinion, I would suggest schools which are now having special training to teach sex education and self-defence for children. We need to educate our children, so that we can prepare for a better tomorrow and bring an end to these vicious crimes.

5. What does the future outlook for Forensic Science look like in your opinion?

Forensic Science is an umbrella of all sciences, and the future lacks no promise. In fact, in our country, the upcoming reforms in Police and Justice departments paint a highly positive outlook for our science. Many universities are running courses on Forensic Science, and now by qualifying for the written exam of FACTS, FSLs give the opportunity to work for

a minimum year limit. Research in Forensic Science is slowly making its way through qualifying UGC JRF. We are looking forward to seeing installations of more FSLs at the state and district levels. Also, the private forensic sector is gaining momentum, and we are expecting the regulation bill for private detectives to come into force soon. This can be a game-changer in our field and will open up employment to many.

6. Which were your three most prominent success stories in your supervision?

If I must choose 3 cases during my years here at the FSL –

- A case where a minor girl of age 6 years was sexually assaulted by a male aged 60 years whose parents complained immediately. After investigation, the clothing of both the minor child and the accused was sent for examination to FSL through court. In this case, getting a positive for semen was key, and when we could get that result in such a small speck of stain we could enable justice to the victim.
- In a case of double murder, where 2 rowdies were killed by a rival gang, there was widespread law and order issues. We had to help quickly to gather and analyse evidence to ensure there was no rioting. Our service, in that case, was highly appreciated.
- In another case, a homeless man was found dead with a smashed head, beyond recognition. We knew a heavy blunt object was used but did not know what it was. We had to examine the crushed skull, pick up the stone pieces in the skull and preserve them. Later a blood-stained stone was found some distance away which we could compare and get a positive match, the perpetrator was also nabbed.

7. What are your suggestions and opinions for the upcoming forensic scientists among us?

Know that you are in the right place. You have all come here with an ambition to be good crime solvers. Keep up the dream. Work hard.

Keep a positive mindset. Along with your studies, read a lot of current happenings, review cases that happen around us, and learn from web resources. Make use of your time as a student. Wish you all good luck in your pursuits in Forensic Science, and thank you for this opportunity to be of help.

Myth - Murderers are driven to kill because they were sexually assaulted as children.

Fact - Many kill as a result of rejection and abandonment in childhood.

Myth - Evidence can be collected from the crime scene using whatever method and the evidence will still reveal a lot of things.

Fact - Evidence collection is a very crucial process which has to be followed properly. If the evidence is not properly collected using the standard method, it will not be considered by the court and it leads to unnecessary wastage