

Funeral Services Industry, Funeral Pyres — Rites, Rituals and Green Funerals — India and Outside India

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ABSTRACT

Birth, aging, illness, and death are unavoidable, and the provision of funeral services is an ancient industry. The needs of society and the increased population must be met, although there has been a sharp reduction in resources and deterioration in the environment, which have triggered changes in the funeral industry. Green funerals are options that enable carbon saving, by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting ecological environment. This short communication discusses common topics related to funeral services industry as well as the challenges faced by this industry particularly in India.

Keywords: Cremation, Funeral industry, Funeral homes

The funeral industry generally handles the arrangements in response to a confirmed death. The body is transported to the designated cremation site by the funeral vehicle, and the cremation is arranged after the mortuary is completed^[1,3].

Global warming and the greenhouse effect have caused abnormal weather conditions, and man-made deforestation and mass burial activities have caused serious damage to the environment and ecology (Wimbadi, R.W.; Djalante, R. 2020; Xue, Y. *et al.* 2018; Lee *et al.* 2022; Lockwood, D. 2013). Natural disasters are gradually occurring, and are already threatening people's lives, property, and activities. Land resources are being rapidly consumed due to population growth, industrialization, and modernization, and there is an urgent need to save and protect land. The survival rights of future generations must be safeguarded by ensuring the sustainable use and development of land resources. The main challenge of this problem is the lack of land available for funeral facilities.

There are many synonyms for environmentally friendly funerals, such as green funerals, natural funerals, and ecological funerals. These funerals use grass machines which allows the deceased to

naturally complete their final farewell, reducing the pollution of soil, water, and air resources. The green funeral emphasizes the use of ordinary cloth or even recycled paper to wrap the body. Due to their efficiency and eco-green awareness, these burial methods are now gaining in popularity (Uslu, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Cremation [National funeral directors association [NFDA] (2021); Bicknell, B. (2022); Funeral Director Daily (2022); Krause (2021); Bailey, M.E. (2019); Funeral Service Insider, 2020].

After a person dies, the body tissue begins to decompose and undergo a process of decay in the air. This decay phenomenon is mainly caused by the action of air and countless enzymes and bacteria, resulting in the transformation of human tissues into gases, liquids, and salts. The decomposition process of human remains buried in the ground can last for months or even years, depending on conditions

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such as temperature, humidity, and soil type. Burial bodies that can decompose quickly and safely require high-quality functional soils which put them in competition with agricultural, commercial, and construction land. Whereas in cremation, high carbon emissions and air pollution are restricted by environmental and religious groups.

In India and Nepal, more than 7 million deceased people need to be cremated each year. The cremation ceremony is deeply rooted in the core of the faith of the locals and as per their belief, this is a way for the souls of the deceased to leave their bodies, leading to the gods. Local Hindu outdoor cremation rituals require about 550 kg of firewood to be collected, mixed with cow dung, camphor, and mango bark, and burned for four to six hours.

These firewood piles consume approximately 50 to 60 million trees each year. Researchers estimate that the aerosols emitted by cremation are equivalent to 23% and 10% of the annual emissions of aerosols from fossil fuels and biomass fuels, respectively, and 53 times those of households' daily activities. Smoke from open-air burning of funeral pyres in India and Nepal is a significant regional source of carbon aerosols (Deirdre Lockwood, 2013).

In India, the amount of wood and other biofuels burned per year for funeral pyres is greatest in the Northern Indo-Gangetic Plain region (red) and in the central and western Indian states (orange). Burning wood, fossil fuels, and other kinds of organic matter releases tiny, carbon-rich particles that absorb solar radiation and help retain heat in the atmosphere.

Challenges to funeral profession

1. Losses to traditional sources of revenue: Funeral homes are facing losses in revenue per client due to increasing rates of cremation & reduced demand for embalming, public services, and merchandise. The American cremation rate was 55.9% in 2020 and is expected to reach 78.4% by 2040. The Canadian cremation rate was 74.8% in 2020 and is expected to grow to 87.9% by 2040 [Koronios, E. (2020); Ristoff, J. (2021)].

2. Staffing shortages and burn-out: Combined with rising death rates and increasing training requirements, these staffing shortages leave funeral service professionals stretched thin. This is having a

disproportionate impact on women in the profession, who show higher levels of anxiety, depression and job stress compared to men. Continuing education courses on over-commitment, stress management, and self-care evidence institutional aims to protect the well-being of funeral service professionals.

3. A need to stand out: High competition means funeral homes need to work hard to stand out. Heightened competition with low cost funeral providers, independent crematories and online retailers has negatively impacted funeral home profitability. From funeral home to funeral home, competition is largely based on reputation, price and location. Maintaining competitive pricing and a positive reputation is especially critical in communities that host more than one funeral home. In light of rising competition and revenue pressures, marketing has become more important over the past five years.

4. Increasing wage costs in a labor-intensive profession [IWC]: The funeral profession is labor-intensive, with wages making up the largest expense for the industry, absorbing about 29.5% of total revenue. Whereas capital expenses have stabilized over the past few years, wage costs have risen. In this environment, funeral home owners are finding it difficult to increase staffing levels. Dealing with an excessive number of estate-related questions takes up precious staff time. To ensure profitability, funeral homes must have effective controls on these labor-related costs [National funeral directors association [NFDA] (2021); Funeral Director Daily (2022); Krause (2021); Bailey, M.E. (2019); Koronios, E. (2020); Ristoff, J. (2021)].

5 Families requesting help FRH]: Previous literature has found that funeral professionals are prone to feeling a lack of control in their work environments, especially given their unpredictable and demanding schedules [Krause, 2021; Bailey, 2019].

6. Changing Cultural and Religious Trends [CCRT]: With an increasing emphasis on personalized and unique memorial services, many individuals are seeking alternative funeral arrangements that reflect their values, beliefs, and cultural traditions.

7. Rising Costs of Funeral Services [RCFS]: The financial burden of traditional funeral arrangements has prompted individuals to seek more affordable

and streamlined options, compelling the industry to explore innovative pricing models and cost-effective service packages that cater to a broader spectrum of financial capabilities.

8. Environmental Sustainability Concerns [ESC]:

As global awareness of environmental sustainability increases, the funeral industry faces pressure to adopt eco-friendly practices and products. There is a growing demand for environmentally conscious funeral options, such as natural burials, biodegradable caskets, and cremation services that prioritize energy efficiency and minimize carbon footprints.

9. Technological Advancements and Digital Transformation [TA]:

From online memorial platforms and virtual funeral services to digital record-keeping and remote grief counseling, technological advancements are revolutionizing the funeral experience, providing more accessible and inclusive services for individuals regardless of their geographical location or physical limitations.

10. Regulatory Compliance and Legal Challenges [RCLC]:

The funeral industry is subject to various regulatory standards and legal requirements that govern funeral practices, burial procedures, and cremation services. Compliance with these regulations ensures ethical and professional conduct of funeral service providers.

11. Consumer Education and Transparency [CET]:

Many individuals are often unaware of their rights, options, and the costs associated with funeral services, leading to misunderstandings, misconceptions, and potential exploitation.

12. Emotional Well-being and Grief Support [EWBGS]:

Providing empathetic and comprehensive grief support services, including counseling, support groups, and educational resources, is important for helping individuals navigate the grieving process and find solace and healing after the loss of a loved one.

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