



ATTACK ON HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN INDIA BEFORE AND DURING 2020. AUTHORITIES COME OUT WITH STRICT MEASURES FOR THEIR PROTECTION

Priyanka MP

Skandhan KP*

*Corresponding Author

Prasad BS

KAHER's Sri BMK Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Belagavi, India.

Vinodini NA

Department Of Physiology, Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, Mahe Manipal.

ABSTRACT

Health professionals are the need of the hour. Their service is very essential in this pandemic period. They are assaulted either verbally or physically at many parts of the world. Here, authors try to assimilate the situation existing in India. Indian Medical Association declared to do protest for two days while doing their duties as a protest and to get attention of authorities. This had a strong impact. Prior to the proposed protest, the government came out with an order whereby, if any health professional is attacked by an individual or group of people, he or they would be punished severely by imprisonment as well as by paying fine. This pacified doctors and other health professionals. No severe cases of abuse or attacks on doctors or health professionals are not reported.

KEYWORDS : Health professionals, India, Attack, Public, Legislation

INTRODUCTION

Health profession is having a vital role in society. Doctors meet human needs in aspects of diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases. They are supported by nurses and other staff in healthcare. Coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared on March 11, 2020 by WHO (2020) as an outbreak pandemic. Public is afraid of COVID 19. This situation made doctors and other health workers on toe tip. World Medical Association council chairman, Dr. Montgomery (2020) pointed out physicians face risk when they deal with infected patients. Some of them were ended up with this infection (Mantovani 2020). Health care workers contribution is huge in this pandemic period. Health professionals are called as warriors during this period. But they face abuse and physical violence (WMA 2020).

DISCUSSION

Today health professionals face violence and are afraid on occasions to serve people in this situation. One report says 75% of doctors face violence at work (Dey 2015). Several such incidences are reported from world over since few years (Ambesh 2016; McKay et al. 2020; Tian, Du 2017; Editorial, Lancet 2014; NBC 2020; BBC 2020). In Australia, like in India violence against health professionals is increasing (Thompson 2019). A survey study conducted by American College of Emergency Physicians showed 47% of them were assaulted, 97% of the time assailant was patient himself (NBC 2020). A similar study from Beijing shows 85% of doctors experience violence in their workplace (BBC 2020). Yang Wen was working at Beijing Civil Aviation General Hospital's emergency ward on 24 December when she was attacked by a man (BBC 2020). A female doctor was stabbed to death at a Beijing hospital (BBC 2020). In India doctors live with fear of violence (Perappadan, Shajan 2017) and situation was worsening.

When COVID-19 was reported in India, a nationwide 21 days lockdown measure was declared whereby general public remained panic. They worried about getting consultation, treatments and even emergency treatments (Sakthivel et al. 2020; Editorial Lancet 2020).

In India, doctors fear for their lives in such situations including the harassment from public and law enforcement system (PTI 2020). Resident Doctors Association of All India Institute of Medical Science, New Delhi had shown to the authorities after the outbreak of COVID-19, number of attacks on doctors and other healthcare workers present (Ravi 2020).

In our country, most of the time, the violence refers to verbal abuse, vandalism and physical threat; most other forms of violence are not present (Ghosh 2018; Ambesh 2016; Anand et al. 2016). Very often, those who abused a medical person were patients themselves who were under the influence of alcohol and drug or were delirious (Ferri et al. 2016). From government hospitals and primary health centers across our country, particularly in Provinces of West Bengal and Maharashtra, violence by patient's relatives, local goons, political leaders and even by police were reported (Dailyrounds 2015; TNN 2017; Yengkhom 2017). Emergency and ICU are the most violent venues and visiting hours is the most suitable time for violence. Considering these incidences for defence of doctors, Marshalls are posted in Delhi in accident and emergency department (The Tribune 2019). Delhi state government has reportedly written to the police, requesting more security for medical staff. At places, self-defence training programmes for doctors are initiated (Jha 2017). According to Indian Medical Association minimum 500 doctors have lost their lives due to COVID 19 (Kaul 2020). One report said children of health workers have more chance to get infected with COVID 19 (Ladhani et al. 2020).

Types of violence on doctors and other health professionals included are telephonic threats, intimidation, oral/verbal abuse, physical but non-injurious assault, vandalism and arson, physical assault causing injury simple and grievous (Nagpal 2017). Several such incidences are reported from all over India and some are shown below.

1. During 21 day lockdown imposed by Government of India, doctors were attacked at several places (Altstedter 2020).
2. Reports say doctors have been spat at and chased away from homes, and that in one case patients directed abusive and vulgar language towards female nurses (Pandey V 2020).
3. A senior doctor was stabbed by patient's relative in July 2020. He was shifted to another hospital (Mumbai mirror 2020).
4. One doctor, was disheartened when her neighbors wanted her family not be allowed to live in the building, irrespective of following all safety protocols. Working situation keeping her out of her family and itself was stressful (Pandey V 2020).
5. Similarly in Surat (Province of Gujarat) one doctor was threatened by apartment residents for travelling to hospital (AFP 2020)
6. Two women resident doctors assaulted by a man in Delhi (Ravi 2020; PTI 2020)

7. After knowing the identity, two female doctors were beaten by a fruitseller (Sakthivel et al. 2020).
8. Doctors in Hyderabad hospital attacked by family of man who died due to COVID-19 (Sen 2020; Ravi 2020).
9. Reports of attacks on doctors and nurses have also come from Indore (Province of Madhya Pradesh) (NDTV 2020).
10. In New Delhi two trainee doctors were assaulted by a neighbor accusing them as spreading corona disease (The Quint 2020).
11. Few physicians and their families have also been ostracized by their neighbors because of their exposure to patients infected with COVID-19.
12. Hyderabad (Province of Andhra Pradesh) doctor was attacked by suspected covid-19 patient's son (PTT² 2020).
13. Lok Nayak Hospital is one of the dedicated hospitals for COVID-19 patients, in an incident, a doctor and other professional were manhandled by patients, due to which they had to hide inside the duty room and call the security, by then patient with the mob tried to open the door (Deshmukh 2020).
14. A doctor who was treating corona virus patient in Hyderabad's (Province of Andhra Pradesh) Gandhi Hospital was attacked (Pandey A 2020).
15. Medical personnel and police attacked by locals in Munger town (Province of Bihar) (Ältstedter et al. 2020).
16. In a case took place at Moradabad (Province of Uttar Pradesh), medical personnel were greatly injured when they were pelted with stones while their ambulance was carrying family members of a deceased COVID 19 patient, at Moradabad (DNA Web Team 2020).
17. Six times health professionals were pelted stones, misbehaved with lady doctors and nurses during their travel from Bengaluru to Indore (ABP 2020). ASHA worker on covid-19 duty attacked in Bengaluru (Province of Karnataka)
18. Burial of a neurosurgeon who died due to COVID 19 was denied by a group of people who thought this would spread the disease to the neighbourhood (PTI¹ 2020).
19. One doctor was refused to supply items from a shop. Accidentally he touched eggs kept in a crate. Agitated shop owner made him to buy the whole crate and warned him not to come again to the shop (Sakthivel et al. 2020).
Unreported cases are likely to be present from different parts of the country.

Three hundred postgraduate doctors who were treating COVID 19 patients for two days demanded safety for themselves (Pandey 46). Due to such violence act medical practitioners develop depression, insomnia, post-traumatic stress and even fear and anxiety (Nagpal 2017). Majority of health workers in this situation gone through mental disorders like anxiety, insomnia, distress and depression symptoms (Sahin et al. 2020). A nationwide survey conducted by Nair et al. (2020) identified and reported doctors face and remain under moderate to severe stress.

Nagpal (2017) identified causes of violence experienced by doctors and health professionals, which include, poor communication, poor image of doctors and the role of the media, meagre health budget and poor quality healthcare, vulnerability of small and medium healthcare establishments, lack of faith in the judicial process, mob mentality, low health literacy, cost of healthcare and lack of security.

Tele health may be opted to reduce contact with patient and this may reduce attack on doctors (Iyengar et al. 2020). Challenges faced by health professionals and its impact on public and government are reported (Gupta et al. 2020).

Possible implementation need to be done to come over this hazard (Ghosh 2018). Doctors and hospitals should do to avoid violence. Patient families, society, media, government and political parties have their roles to play to eliminate

violence in hospitals. Nagpal (2017) analysed the details of these attacks and advised doctors to follow certain measures like to be alert on duty, to get consent of patients before doing any procedure, do communicate well with patient and relatives, do remain alert throughout and do not overreach.

Police who protects law occasionally behaved contrarily. In Bharatpur in the Province of Rajasthan police allegedly slapped a doctor (Ravi 2020). Two resident doctors in Bhopal (Province of Madhya Pradesh) thrashed by policemen (Ravi 2020).

Health workers is not the only occupation facing violence. A head constable and a special Police Officer in Nuh district in the Province of Haryana while they were on the lockdown duty was attacked and beaten up by 11 people (Agrawal 2020).

Considering several incidences of attack, during this epidemic on health professionals and sanitation workers both under government and private sector, Delhi Government in its emergency cabinet meeting on April 1st, 2020 decided to compensate Rs.1 crore to the families of any one of them losses life while serving any COVID-19 (Hindu 2020). There must be an atmosphere for doctors to work fearlessly with full devotion and dedication. Indian Medical Association (IMA) made a call to doctors nationwide to observe on April 22, 2020 as 'white day' where doctors in apron would lighten candles at 9:00 pm and till that date if no development from the government to provide protection to doctors, they were to observe April 23 as 'black day'. Where they would clip a black badge while working to get attention of the government as well as public. IMA demanded the action to be taken under the epidemic act. The call for strike ended with good results.

The Union Cabinet at its meeting on April 22, 2020 approved the promulgation of an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 (PIB 2020) to protect health care service personnel and property, including their living/ working premises, from violence during epidemics. The epidemic diseases (amendment) bill 2020 will replace an ordinance issued in April by the government (PTI 2020). The punishment for such attacks will be 3 months to 5 years and the fine Rs.50,000 to Rs.2 lakhs. In severe cases, where there are grievous injuries, the punishment will be 6 months to 7 years and the fine Rs.1 lakh to Rs.5 lakhs (Iyengar et al. 2020; Mishra 2020). The investigation will be completed within 30 days and the final decision arrived at within one year (Mishra 2020).

Doctors, other health professionals and public welcomed the news. Now, health professionals work fearlessly. The authorities of the church hailed the new law to protect corona warriors and hailed them as angels (Gomes 2021).

REFERENCES

1. Pandey V.(2020). Corona virus : India doctors 'Spat at and attacked' BBC news, April 3
2. Ravi R. (2020). Abused, attacked, beaten: frontline workers are risking their lives every day in India. The Logical Indian, 19 April
3. Agrawal P. (2020). Haryana: locals attack police officials on COVID 19 lockdown duty with sticks. The Logical Indian, 15 April
4. Ghosh K. (2018). Violence against doctors: A wake up call. Indian j Med Res. 148:130-133
5. Ambesh P.(2016). Violence against doctors in the Indian subcontinent: A rising bane. Indian Heart J. 68:749-50
6. Anand T, Grover S, Kumar R, Kumar M & Ingle GK. (2016). Workplace violence against resident doctors in a tertiary care hospital in Delhi. Natl Med J India. 29:344-8
7. Ferri P, Silvestri M, Artoni C & Di Lorenzo R. (2016). Workplace violence in different settings and among various health professionals in an Italian general hospital: A cross-sectional study. Psychol Res Behav Manag. 9:263-75
8. Dailyrounds (2015). Cop Beats Up Sassoon Hospital Doctor; 450 doctors go on strike against the attack. Pune, October 16
9. TNN. (2017). Junior Doctors Take to Streets to Protest RG Kar Attack after Patient's death. The Times of India, March 25
10. Yengkhom S. (2017). Mob Assaults Doctor, Smears him with Human Excreta. Times of India, August 30
11. Tian J & Du L. (2017). Microblogging violent attacks on medical staff in China: A case study of the Longmen country people's hospital incident. BMC Health Serv Res. 17:363

12. Nagpal N. (2017). Incidents of violence against doctors in India: Can these be prevented? *Natl Med J of India* 30(2) : 97-100
13. Mantovani C. (2020). Coronavirus is the greatest global science policy failure in a generation. *The Guardian*, April 9
14. Mishra H. (2020). Upto 7 years in jail for attacking COVID warriors, Govt brings in ordinance. *India Today*, April 22
15. Ladhani SN, Andrews N, Aiano F, Baarwah F, Chowdhury ZA, Brown KE, Amirthalingam G, Ramsay M E & Waterfield T. (2020). Secondary attack rate and family clustering of SARS-CoV-2 infection in children of healthcare workers with confirmed COVID-19. Oxford University Press for the Infectious Diseases Society of America
16. Şahin MK, Aker S, Şahin G & Karabekiroglu A. (2020). Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety, Distress and Insomnia and Related Factors in Healthcare Workers During COVID-19 Pandemic in Turkey. *J Commu Health*.45:1168-1177
17. Nair A, Menon J, Rammohan A, Hakeem AR, Cherukuri SD, Reddy MS & Rela M. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Effect on the Mental Health of Doctors in India. *Asian J Med Health*. 18(11): 55-70
18. The COVID19 pandemic and its effect on the mental health of doctors in India. *Asian J Med Health*. 18(11):15-17, 2020
19. Altstedter A, Shrivastava B & Pandya D. (2020). Doctors come under attack in India as coronavirus stigma grows (Indore) *Bloomberg*, April 14
20. Gomes R. (2021). Indian church hails COVID19 law punishing assault on health workers. *Vatican News, English for Africa Programme*, January 31
21. Press Trust of India. (2020). Doctors, social workers attacked across India as country fights coronavirus. *Business Standard*, April 2
22. ABP News Bureau. (2020). From Bengaluru to Indore: Six Times Frontline Corona Warriors Faced Attack In India. *abp LIVE*, April 20
23. DNA Web Team. (2020). Health workers fighting COVID19 attacked in Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad. *DNA.com*, April 16
24. WHO. (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID19) advice for the public. January 22
25. Editorial. (2020). India under COVID19 lockdown. *Lancet* 395:1315
26. PTI Press Trust of India'. (2020). Violence mars COVID19 doctor-victim's burial, surgeon, ward boys turn undertakers. *Times of India*, April 19
27. Tribune (2019). Delhi to Appoint Marshalls in hospitals for doctor's security. *The Tribune. com*, July 8
28. Jha D. (2017). AIIMS doctors to get self-defence training, *Times of India*, May 3
29. Iyengar KP, Jain VK & Vaishya R. (2020). Current situation with doctors and healthcare workers during COVID 19 pandemic in India. Letter to the editor. *BMJ Postgrad Med J* 19 August
30. Gupta SK & Khandelwal S. (2020). "The good, bad and ugly": Challenges for the health care professionals in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Indian J Soc Psychiatry* 36:181-186
31. Editorial. (2014). Violence against doctors: Why China? Why now? What next? *Lancet* 383:1013
32. Madhivanan A, Venugopal V & Dongre AR. Letter to editor. (2020). Physical Violence Against Doctors: a content analysis from online Indian newspapers. *Indian J Community Med*. 45:108-109
33. Mckay D, Heister M, Mishori R, Catton H & Kloiber O. (2020). Attack against health care personnel must stop, especially as the world fight COVID-19: *Lancet* 10237(395): April 20
34. Kaul R. (2020). India News. At least 500 COVID doctors have lost their lives, says IMA. *Hindustan Times*, October 2
35. Yadav S. (2020). Held for Pelting Healthcare Workers with Stones in Indore. *The Hindu*, April 2
36. Mohanty D. (2020). Asha worker attacked for collecting data on COVID 19 patients in Odisha. *Hindustan Times*.
37. Radhakrishnan RK. (2020). Mob tries to prevent doctor's burial in Chennai, 20 arrested. *Frontline*.
38. Bielicki Ja, Duval X, Gobat N, Goossens H, Koopmans M, Tacconelli E & van der Werf S. (2020). Monitoring approaches for health care workers during the COVID 19 pandemic. *Lancet Infect Dis* 10:010345.
39. Greenberg N, Dochetty M, Gnanapragasam S & Wessely S. (2020). Managing mental health challenges faced by healthcare workers during COVID 19 pandemic. *BMJ* 368:m1211
40. World Health Organization. (2020). WHO calls for healthy, safe and decent working conditions for all health workers, amidst COVID-19 pandemic. April 28
41. Nagesh S & Chakraborty S. (2020). Saving the frontline health workforce amidst the COVID 19 crisis: Challenges and recommendations. *J Glob Health* 10:010345
42. The Quint. (2020). COVID 19: Man Arrested For Assaulting Safdarjung Hospital Doctors. April 9
43. Deshmukh S. (2020). Delhi: Patients Abuse, Assault Woman Doctors On Duty At Lok Nayak Hospital. *The Logical Indian*, April 16
44. NDTV. (2020). On camera, COVID 19 Health Staff Attacked, chased away in Madhya Pradesh's Indore. April 2
45. AFP. (2020). India's frontline coronavirus heroes come under attack. *The Straits Times*, March 27
46. Pandey A. (2020). Hyderabad: Doctors At Gandhi Hospital Protest, block road after kin of COVID 19 patient attacks colleague. *India Today*, July 10
47. PIB Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry Of Health and Family Welfare. (2020). Promulgation of an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 in the light of the pandemic situation of COVID 19. April 22
48. Azad Y. (2020). Protect India's brave health workers. *Hindustan Times*, April 23
49. Semple K. (2020). "Afraid to be a nurse": health workers under attack. *The New York Times*, April 27
50. The Economist. (2020). Health workers become unexpected targets during COVID-19. *The Economist*, May 11
51. Phillips JP (2016). Workplace violence against health care workers in the United States. *N Engl J Med*. 374: 1661-9.
52. Peng W, Ding G, Tang Q & Xu L. (2016). Continuing violence against medical personnel in China: A flagrant violation of Chinese law. *Biosci Trends*. 10:240-3.
53. Mackin JG. (2002). Violence against trainee pediatricians. *Arch Dis Child*. 84:106-8.
54. Press Trust of India'. (2020). Delhi: Two women doctors assaulted by man for 'spreading' COVID-19. *India Today*, April 9
55. Sen S. (2020). Doctors in Hyderabad hospital attacked by family of man who died due to coronavirus. *The Logical Indian*, April 2
56. Press Trust of India'. (2020). Doctor "Attacked" by suspected COVID-19 patient's son in Hyderabad. *NDTV*, April 15
57. Sakthivel P, Rajeshwari M, Malhotra N & Ish P. (2020). Violence against doctors: an emerging epidemic amidst COVID-19 pandemic in india (letter). *Postgradmedj*, October 10, doi:10.1136/postgradmedj-2020-138925
58. Mumbai Mirror (2020): shocking! COVID-19 patients' relatives stab doctor in Maharashtra's Latur. July 30
59. PTI'. (2020). Indian parliament passes bill to punish those attacking healthcare workers. *The economic times*, September 22
60. TNN. (2020). Huzurabad doctor attack: three panels write to DGP, see action. *Times of India*, August 30
61. WMA (World Medical Association). (2020). WMA Condemns Attacks on Healthcare Professionals. April 21
62. NBC Newyork. (2020). "Violence Towards E.R. Nurses and doctors is the 'Dirty Little Secret' of Healthcare". February 20
63. BBC news. (2019). China launches new law to protect doctors. December 29
64. Thompson G. (2019). "Rates of violence against nurses in hospitals increasing rapidly". June 11, ABC
65. Perappadan & Shajan B. (2017). "Majority of doctors in India Fear Violence, says IMA Survey". *The Hindu*, July 2
66. Dey S. (2015). Over 75% of doctors have faced violence at work, study finds. *Times of India*, May 4
67. The Hindu. (2020). Corona virus/Delhi to pay one crore ex-gratia to kin of frontline personnel. April 1