

# Awareness of MBBS Students on Effects of Workplace Violence and Conflict Management in Hospital Scenario

Divya Reddy Pannala<sup>1</sup>, S.M. Krishna Sagar<sup>2</sup>, Hemantha Rao Amara<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine RVM Institute of Medical Sciences, Siddipet,

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine, Mahavir Institute of Medical Sciences, Vikarabad,

<sup>3</sup>Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine, RVM Institute of Medical Sciences, Siddipet

## Abstract

According to World Health Organisation, healthcare workers are four times more prone to injuries due to workplace violence compared to other professions. An ongoing study by the Indian Medical Association inferred that about 75% of doctors have faced violence at work, where many of the cases were reported from Emergency wards and Intensive Care Units and the patient's relatives were the prime offenders. Poor doctor-patient communication and weak conflict resolution skills are some of the preventable reasons for violence on doctors. A questionnaire-based study was conducted on MBBS students to assess the effects of violence on doctors and their level of preparedness in dealing with violent situations. Majority of the students were not taught precautionary measures or methods of managing conflicts and thus are not properly equipped in tackling workplace violence. By improving their manner of conduct towards the patients in likely incidents of violence and training them in managing conflicts, such acts shall be curbed effectively.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Violence, MBBS Students, Protective Laws, Effects of Violence, Conflict Management

## Introduction

Workplace violence against healthcare workers is known as violence in healthcare settings, it refers to the violent acts that are directed towards doctors, nurses or other healthcare staff at work or on duty.<sup>1</sup> Rise in violence against doctors is a global phenomenon. Doctors in both developing as well as developed countries are plagued by this issue alike. In Australia, a survey showed that in the last three years, there has been a 48% increase in assaults whereas, in China about 85% of doctors had experienced violence in their workplace and in America a 2018 survey showed that out of, 47% of the emergency physicians had been assaulted.<sup>2</sup> 60% of General Physicians in

England and about 50% of doctors in Germany were confronted with aggressive behaviour, with 10% of them experiencing critical to violent attacks, such as criminal damage to property and/or physical assault. Nowadays, it has become a fashion for patient attenders to resort to unruly forms of violence against doctors and it has become a common phenomenon across all the States of India. Herd mentality along with political influence are main causes behind mobs attacking doctors with some time lapse after the inciting incident, indicating that these may be planned strikes and not merely random acts committed in the heat of the moment.<sup>3</sup> Exorbitant costs of treatment at private hospitals combined with poorly maintained government hospitals are causing more dissatisfaction among people and the constant portrayal of doctors in bad light by media have added to the discontent.

According to a study conducted in China, every additional article on violence against doctors lead to 0.6% decrease in students enrolling in medical courses.<sup>4</sup> Studies show that doctors exposed to violent

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### Corresponding Author:

**Dr. S.M. Krishna Sagar**

Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine,  
Mahavir Institute of Medical Sciences, Vikarabad.

Email id: krisrocks.37@gmail.com

Mobile number: 9966780329

incidents suffered from depression, reliving experience or flashbacks and insomnia.<sup>5,6</sup> Poor doctor-patient communication and weak conflict resolution skills are some of the preventable reasons for violence on doctors. Hence, there is a need to improve communication between the patient and doctor and impart required training skills to the medical students to handle workplace violence. The main objective of this study is to assess MBBS students on the effects of violence on doctors and their level of preparedness in dealing with violent situations.

**Methodology**

This was a cross sectional prospective study done

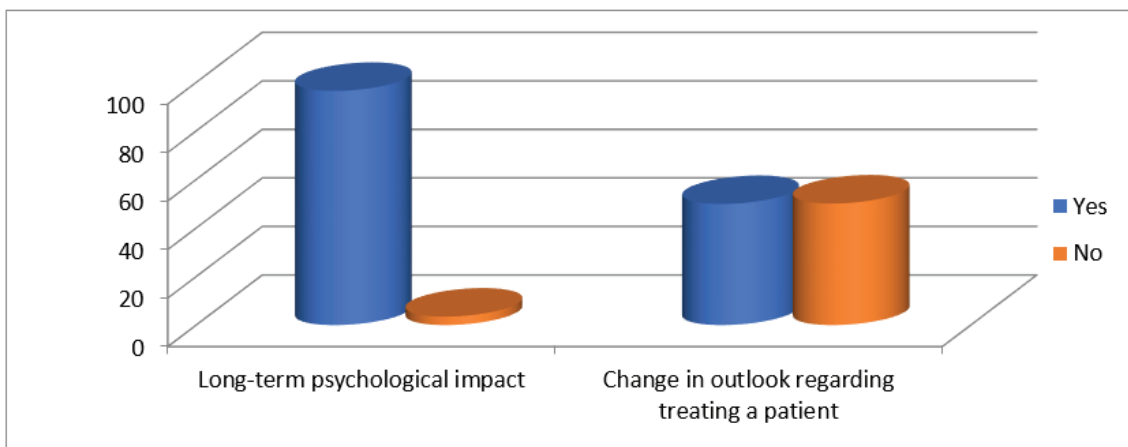
over a period of 2 months from May to June 2020. Questionnaire (dichotomous and multiple-choice questionnaire) was distributed through online survey administration application by using google forms which were forwarded to the students from all medical colleges across the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Depending upon the effective response in completing the forms within the given time period of two months, 405 MBBS undergraduate students belonging to three academic years i.e 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year MBBS, were included in this study. The data was analysed in *IBM SPSS Statistics* software and expressed as numbers and percentages and presented in the form of text, tables and figures.

**Results**

**Table -1: Awareness on violence**

Variables		Frequency	%
About rise in violent incidents on doctors	Yes	404	99.8
	No	1	0.2
Awareness prior to joining MBBS course	Yes	198	48.9
	No	207	51.1

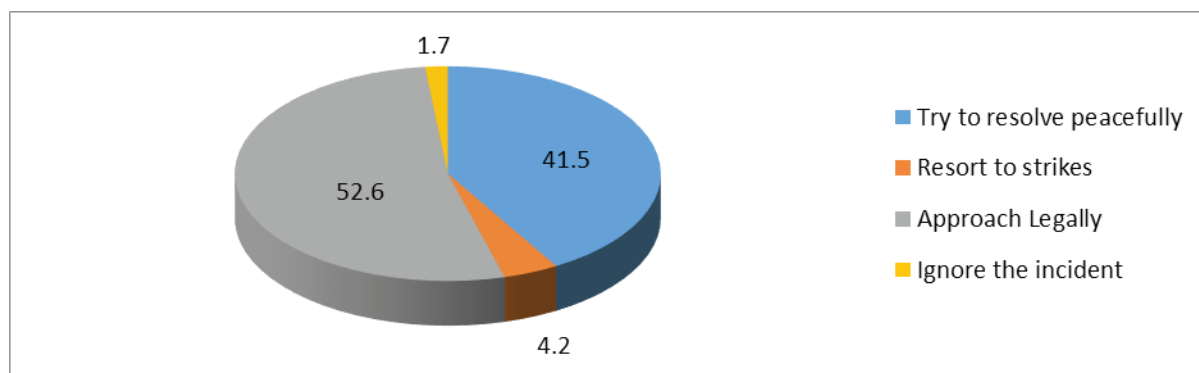
In spite of the continuous rise in violence on doctors, 282 (69.6%) of the participants would recommend others to join MBBS while, 123 (30.4%) of them would not. 326 (80.4%) of the students consider that specialities dealing with emergencies are more prone to violence, 23 (5.7%) consider all clinical branches to be at risk and 52 (12.9%) of them consider all doctors are at risk irrespective of their speciality. 1 % of them did not know the answer to the question posed. Considering certain specialities to be more vulnerable to violence, 323 (79.8%) would not avoid choosing these specialities in their future career but, 82 (20.2%) would avoid them. With the incidence of violence more in government hospitals, 133 (32.8%) participants would not opt for government service in future but, 272 (67.2%) would not be deterred by this.



**Fig 1: Effects of Violence on Doctors (in %)**

**Table 2: Level of Preparedness**

Variables		Frequency	%
Training in managing violent incidents	Yes	80	19.8
	No	325	80.2
Precautionary Measures	Yes	96	23.7
	No	309	76.3
Audio-visual recordings in patient counselling rooms as evidence of violence	Yes	346	85.4
	No	5	1.2
	Don't Know	54	13.3
Awareness of any National and State Laws protecting doctors	Yes	166	41
	No	239	59



**Fig 2: Reaction to violent incidents (in %)**

### Discussion

A survey conducted by the Indian Medical Association showed that about 75% of doctors have faced violence at work in the last 5 years. 48.8% of such incidents were reported from Emergency wards and Intensive Care Units. In 68.33% of these cases; patient’s relatives were the prime offenders.<sup>7</sup> 99.8% students were aware of the rise in incidence of violence on doctors. But, only 51.1% of them were aware of these incidents before joining MBBS. This is due to lack of awareness on the issue in public despite the continuous rise in violent incidents against doctors in the last decade. 30.4% of them would not advice others to consider

MBBS as a career option. According to The Economic Survey 2019-2020, as of January 2020, there is one doctor for every 1456 people in the country which is less than the WHO recommendation of 1 doctor for every 1000 population.<sup>8</sup> To meet this goal, India would need 5 lakh more doctors. If the growing violence on doctors deters young generation to not consider medicine as their profession, this would lead to severe shortage of doctors.

80.4% consider doctors specialised in Emergency Medicine, General Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics & Gynaecology and Anaesthesia (specialities dealing with emergencies) to be most vulnerable for attacks. 5.7% of

the participants consider all clinical specialities are at risk of violence. 12.9% say irrespective of their speciality, all doctors including junior residents are at high risk of facing violence. A study of occurrence of violence in various departments, in a Tertiary Care Hospital of South Delhi revealed that, 59.6% of respondents experienced violence in Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology followed by the medical departments (including General Medicine, Psychiatry, Paediatrics, Dermatology, Physical medicine and Rehabilitation) and surgical departments. Other departments like Casualty, Radiology, Forensic medicine and Pathology reported incidents of violence too. 9 20.2% of the participants in the current study said they would not choose specialities which are more prone to violent attacks.

The average cost of treatment at private hospitals is almost five times more than in government hospitals and as about 85% of Indians from rural areas and 82% of urban residents are not insured under any public health scheme, due to which the government institutes are overburdened.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, anxiety due to long waiting periods, poor infrastructure, unhygienic and crowded conditions are some of the reasons for increased incidents of violence in the primary health centres and government hospitals.<sup>11</sup> Considering this, 67.2% of the students were not deterred by this issue but, 32.8% of them responded that they do not want to join government service. In the current scenario, majority of Indian doctors, about 9 lakh are involved in private hospitals as opposed to just about 1 lakh doctors employed in the government hospitals.<sup>12</sup> If students do not join government service in future, this would add to the burden of already understaffed government setups.

In study conducted by M.A. Zaid et al, in Kuwait, 86% of 87 doctors exposed to violent incidents reported one or more of the symptoms consisting of stress, depression, insomnia, reliving violent experiences. The duration of symptoms was longer in doctors exposed to verbal insults or threats of imminent violence coupled with single act of violence.<sup>5</sup> In a study conducted by Gohil RK et al, 50% of participants who faced violence felt fearful, frustrated and 25% developed recurrent headaches following the events.<sup>6</sup> 96.5% of the participants think that such incidents will have a long-term psychological impact. 49.9% of the students consider that increasing violence on doctors will change their outlook while

treating a patient. Doctors are becoming cautious and reluctant to take up serious and grave cases, which in turn compromises healthcare defeating the purpose of the healthcare delivery system.<sup>13</sup> If the doctors are exposed to continuous violence, many of them might start practicing defensive medicine, thus focusing on saving themselves rather than treating a patient.<sup>14</sup> The survey conducted by Indian Medical Association found that, fear of violence was the main source of stress for as many as 46.3% of the doctors surveyed, followed by fear of being sued which was 24.2%. About 62.8% of the doctors were not able to treat their patients without any fear of violence.<sup>13</sup> In the study by Kumar M et al, 75.8% of the doctors interviewed admitted that any kind of workplace violence affected their state of mind which in turn had an impact on their studies, duties and also personal life.<sup>9</sup>

Majority of the students i.e. 80.2% were not aware of any methods to tackle workplace violence. In Kumar et al study, majority of participants believed that the violent incidents could have been prevented and they were not aware of any violence prevention policy at their workplace.<sup>9</sup> Only 6.4% of the respondents had received some kind of training for recognizing and preventing workplace violence of which all of them were from the Department of Psychiatry where conflict management is a part of their curriculum and denied attending any special training program.<sup>9</sup> Medicos should be taught to identify early indicators of violent behaviour such as staring and eye contact, tone and volume of voice, anxiety, mumbling and pacing (STAMP) and methods that help can resolve conflicts.<sup>14</sup> 76.3% of the students say that they were not taught measures that can be taken to prevent violent incidents. The legal importance of communication, consent and proper medical documentation are discussed in forensic medicine, but only in theory. It would be beneficial to include these topics in their practical curriculum and assessing them by conducting live simulations as a recent study in the British Journal of Medicine (BMJ) showed that Indian doctors of public sector spend less than two minutes seeing a patient. In contrast, Swedish doctors spend as much as 22.5 minutes per patient and in the USA, each patient gets 21 minutes of a doctor's time.<sup>10</sup>

When faced with a violent situation, 52.6% of the participants said they would approach legally whereas, 41.5% said they would try to resolve the issue peacefully. Study by Kumar M et al, only 14.6% agreed that the head of the unit took notice of the incidence and approached the concerned authorities regarding the matter and in none of the cases police enquiry was initiated.<sup>9</sup> Punishments are not uniform all over India. Without any separate provision on violence against doctors in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or Criminal Procedural Code (Cr.PC), filing a complaint becomes a hassle, as the police are unaware of the section under which the accused should be booked. So, students themselves should always be well-versed with all the protective laws to approach legally and maintain a copy of it. When approaching legally, proper evidences must be presented in the court to prove that violence has occurred. Photographs of the incident, Audio-Video recordings, copy of medical records, written and signed statements from witnesses can be used as evidences. 85.4% of the participants consider Audio-Visual recordings as proofs of violence, but 13.3% do not know if these can be used as evidence of violence in courts. Protection of Medicare Service Persons (MPA) and Medicare Service Institutions Acts were passed in 19 states across India. This act was passed in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in 2008.<sup>15</sup> Even so, 59% of the participants were unaware of them.

### Conclusion

With a continuing rise in workplace violence against healthcare professionals, a doctor must be well prepared in taking protective measures personally and be able to tackle these untoward incidents. Poor doctor-patient relationship is due to lack of emphasis on communication skills in medical education. The current study shows that medicos are grossly underprepared in handling patient discontent and aggression which may turn chaotic leading to violent incidents. MBBS students should be taught in college to maintain their calm and be responsible during such times without compromising the quality of patient care. Enhancing communication skills and developing strategies to resolve conflicts are crucial to avert unpleasant scenarios. By taking adequate precautionary measures in such likely incidents of violence, improving their manner of conduct towards the patients and substantially training them in managing

conflicts, such acts shall be curbed effectively. This can be achieved by introducing this topic in Forensic Medicine curriculum, so that students may have a better knowledge and awareness on various protective laws for doctors. Clinical aspects of Forensic Medicine should be included in the Compulsory Rotatory Internship so that students can practice handling medicolegal cases and also get trained in tackling such violent incidents efficiently.

**Ethical Clearance:** Taken

**Conflict of Interest:** Nil

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