

VIOLENCE IN MEDICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

Aim: To systematize and analyze the collected information regarding manifestations of aggression and violence in various forms against medical specialists in hospital facilities in the territory of Stara Zagora.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: The present study is based on an anonymous survey. **RESULTS:** Under certain circumstances, some people who have not shown previous manifestations may exhibit aggressive or unacceptable behavior that is contrary to current norms. In health care provision, it is important to show equality, preserving the dignity of the patient and their personal space.

CONCLUSION: The study shows that the workers in the medical facilities in the territory of Stara Zagora city, the teams for emergency medical assistance and for home visits are exposed to a high risk of acts of aggression, both from the patients and from their relatives.

Keywords: *verbal aggression, physical aggression, medical practice, workplace violence*

Introduction

Reports of abused, threatened, harassed and manipulated doctors and medical staff have become more frequent in the Bulgarian Medical Union. Health care staff often see verbal or physical abuse as 'part of the job', so they can often be misled into accepting the patient's behavior as justified by associating it with their illness or mental health.

More than 75% of doctors face violence during their practice. Cases of violence against medical professionals have been registered in a large number of countries. The problem is not only in our country, but is a global phenomenon, as the number of cases of violence against doctors and other medical personnel is increasing in the world. Almost half of violent incidents occur in the intensive care unit. There are regular reports of doctors being abused, threatened, harassed, manipulated and even killed. The World Health Organization is preparing a global action plan to combat this violence.

Numerous studies have been published in the modern literature, as the largest amount originating from China. Severe aggression against doctors is also observed in Turkey.

A study of violence against general practitioners (GPs) in Birmingham found that 63% had experienced abuse or violence in the previous year, with 0.5% experiencing serious injury (1). In 2015, a German study reported that almost 50% of German GPs had encountered patients with aggressive behavior, with 10% of them experiencing physical harm as well as serious property damage (2). Another study in the Republic of Ireland among doctors found that over 60% had been the target of aggression from patients or their relatives over a 1-year period, and nearly 20% reported for relatively frequent verbal aggression (3). According to a survey conducted in China among 202 doctors, 87% of the surveyed doctors believe that there is a growing trend of violence against them. Patients often resort to aggression if they are not satisfied with health care (4).

Survey conducted from 01.03.2003 to 15.04.2003. at the Pamukkale University Hospital and the Social Insurance Foundation Hospital, includes a group of 79 health workers from the emergency departments of 3 hospitals in the city of Denizli. Data were collected from a questionnaire. The results indicated that 88.6% of the participants were verbally abused, and 49.4% of them were subjected or witnessed physical aggression in the previous year. A relatively large number of persons (36.1%) who experienced violence reported that they developed psychological problems after the incident (5). According to the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), 7 out of 10 emergency physicians believe that aggression in

emergency rooms is increasing. About 80% of these doctors admit that these events have also affected patients. Over 50% report that patients were physically harmed. In addition, 47% of physicians reveal they had personally been physically assaulted at work (6).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), between 8% and 38% of healthcare workers experienced physical aggression at work in 2019. The World Health Organization is preparing a global action plan to prevent this violence among medical professionals.

Material and methods

The survey was conducted in the period March - June 2022 through an anonymous survey, including 10 questions. A total of 400 medical specialists were surveyed - doctors, nurses, midwives and other medical personnel working at UMBAL "Prof. Dr. St. Kirkovich AD Stara Zagora, NIAMED Medical Center Stara Zagora, BEROE Medical Center Stara Zagora, Trakia Hospital Stara Zagora and Center for Mental Health - Stara Zagora Ltd. The questions are related to the medical speciality of the respondents, their age and gender. In addition, the questions specify the type of the aggression, whether it is verbal or physical, whether it is from the patient or relatives, and also what is the frequency of the aggression. The result analysis is based on the collected information.

Results

Our results show that 42% of the medical professionals who have been subjected to physical violence and assault, as 58% of survey participants responded negatively to the question of physical aggression. We observe that most of our respondents love their profession (71%) and this would not make them give up the "white coat", and 29% of them would change their profession.

On the question of whether the problem of aggression against doctors is deepening, we have 88% who answer positively, and only 12% trust the authorities in the improvement and optimization of the health system and the national strategy, and are optimistic (Fig. 1.).

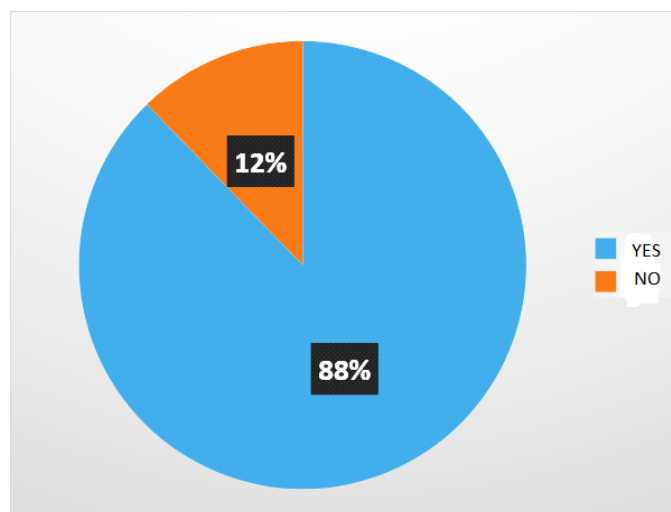


Fig.1. Aggravation of the problem of aggression against medics.

Only 14% of respondents rely on law enforcement officers to ensure their safety, and a fairly high percentage (86%) responded that they do not trust them for their safety (Fig.2.).

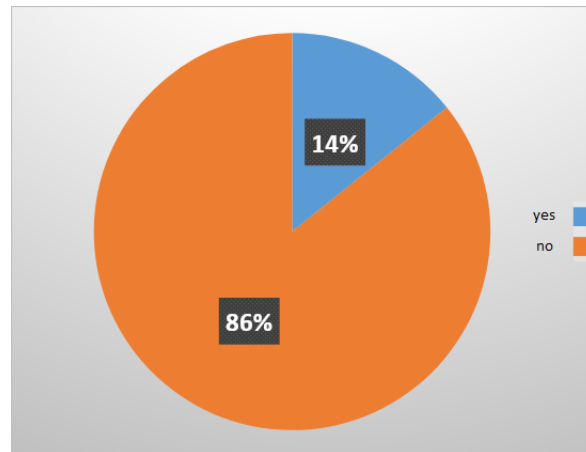


Fig.2. Protection by those in authority in the performance of official duties.

In the survey, 81% of the respondents answered that they were the object of verbal aggression (Fig. 3.), and 58% of the respondents replied that they were the object of physical aggression (Fig. 4.).

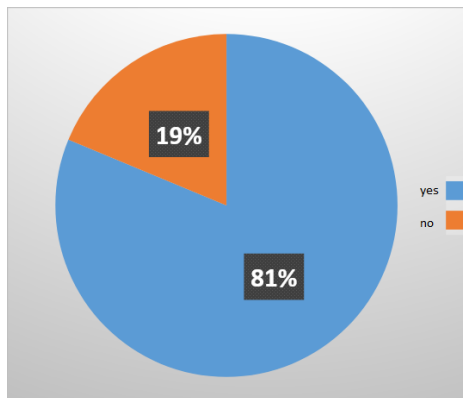


Fig.3. Medical staff exposed to verbal aggression

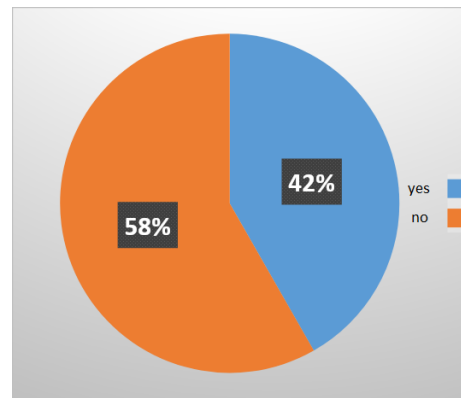


Fig.4. Medical staff subjected to physical aggression

The results of our study show that the aggression is from both the patient and their relatives, as 74% of the respondents were exposed to aggression from the patient, and only 26% did not find themselves in such an unpleasant situation (Fig 5.).

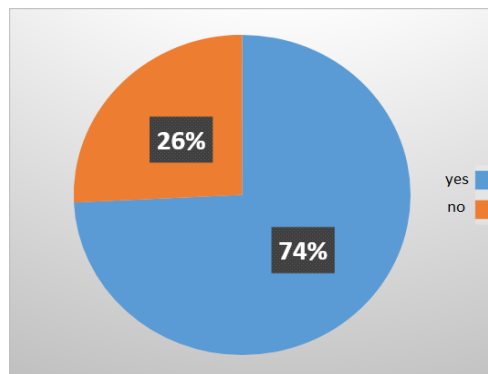


Fig.5. Medical staff subjected to aggression by patients

Most of the respondents, 76%, were subjected to violence by the patient's relatives, and only 24% answered negatively (Fig. 6). The result indicated a higher percentage of aggression on patient's relatives side.

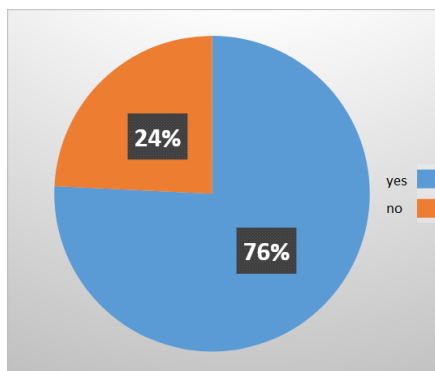


Fig. 6. Medical staff subjected to aggression by patients' relatives

Discussion

A similar survey was also conducted in China, regarding serious cases of hospital violence from 2011 to 2020 in the China Online Judiciary System (CJOS). A review of 341 cases of hospital violence in China found that 62.17% of the incidents were caused by relatives due to the death of the patient. In this study, a total of 72 people were surveyed, from different hospitals, including 16 doctors, 22 nurses, 24 managers and 10 security guards.

The survey results in China showed that 11.14% of cases were due to outpatient disputes. The aggressors were mostly male (80.3%) and had a middle school education or less (86.5%), as 76.1% of the aggressors being family members of the patients. Most of them are over 35 years old (55.55%) and have a bachelor's degree (54.17%). Over the past 10 years, the incidence of severe hospital violence in China has remained high. This is why workplace violence in Chinese hospitals has been the focus of many studies. Health workers hope that measures will be taken in terms of legislation, security and dispute resolution capacity (7).

According to a survey conducted in several emergency departments in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, 20.9% of respondents said they had been physically assaulted and 32.3% had been attacked with a weapon. The respondents were aged between 20–39 years with approximately equal gender distribution. The majority are doctors, followed by nurses and other medical staff. Most of them (75.6%) reported that they were subjected to verbal aggression and were harassed by patients or their relatives. Staff responses regarding their side's action varied with the most common response being "told the person to stop" (22%) (8).

A study from India found that almost half of 151 doctors reported experiencing violence during their job in the last 12 months. The cases were reported by departments of obstetrics and gynecology, surgery and others, and in most cases the aggressors were patients or their relatives. Most (87.3%) of the registered cases are of verbal aggression. Cases of physical aggression were 8.6% (9). For comparison, in our study 81% were subjected to verbal aggression.

Until the end of the 20th century, the medical profession was considered noble and prestigious, but nowadays it has come under the purview of commerce and patients are considered consumers.

The flaws in the structure of our healthcare system are the main reason for the increase cases of verbal and physical aggression in healthcare facilities. Doctors are an easy target for aggressive patients and their relatives. Illness and fear are the basis of aggression on the part of patients. Difficult and emotional circumstances, in addition to an extremely stressful environment are major triggers. The frequency of aggressive behaviors is increasing, and this is also the result of the commercialization of medicine, poor government investment, social media, high medical costs, as well as the lack of trust in doctors. The hospital environment

creates a high level of stress for patients, their families and the staff of the institution. Patients are at their worst state, feeling terrible, sick, scared and vulnerable. Their relatives are also scared and stressed. Violent incidents are most prevalent in intensive care units.

Health care workers are among the most exposed to workplace violence. Patients are becoming more aggressive in their demands and are much more likely to resort to aggression if they are dissatisfied with the healthcare. The poor quality of medical services and the increased awareness of average patients lead to an increase in physical and verbal aggression against health professionals.

Conclusion

The study shows that the workers in the medical facilities in the territory of Stara Zagora city, the teams for emergency medical assistance and for home visits are exposed to a high risk of acts of aggression, both from the patients and from their relatives.

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