**Roadside police atrocities towards doctors in India during COVID-19 pandemic: emergence of a new problem for the warriors.**

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**Abstract**

Violence and harassment of the medical professionals, vandalization of the hospital property by the public are rampant in the Indian scenario. However, harassment from the guardians of law and order i.e. police has never been an issue in the Indian health care system. But such cases of misconduct by the police towards the medical professionals have emerged with the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic. In this article we have presented some cases of such behaviour from the police towards the doctors in this pandemic.

**Introduction**

Violence against medical professionals in the hospitals by the patients and their attendants is an age old problem and has been on a rise in India. This viral epidemic of violence against doctors can range from a simple verbal abuse to an assault resulting in a grievous hurt. It is reported around 75 % of the doctors in India have encountered some form of violence at their work place. (1) Even in developed countries like USA, China and others, doctors have not been spared. (2, 3)

**Attributes of Government and society towards COVID-19 warriors**

Since the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the world, there has been an economic crisis as well as health care recession throughout the world. (4) Health care professionals have been under both physical as well mental stresses. Considering the psychological impact of the pandemic it is right to say ‘every clinician is also a patient’. (5) Working in this harsh time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health care workers have been celebrated in many countries as heroes and labelled as front-line warriors. But at the same time acts of violence against them as they travel to and fro from health care facilities have been reported worldwide. (6)In India, all the nationals from children to elderly and common people to VIPs came out on their balconies and terraces of their homes in the evening on 22nd of April 2020, to applaud the front line fighters against COVID-19 by clapping, ringing bells and beating utensils. (7) On 3rd May 2020 all the three services of Indian defence system carried series of activities including showering of flower petals over many hospitals across India by the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force choppers to thank and salute the front line corona warriors. (8) Despite all these efforts in India, there have been reports of health care workers being beaten, stoned, threatened and evicted from their homes by the general public. (6) Following these incidents across the country during COVID-19 pandemic, the cabinet in India approved an ordinance making acts of violence against doctors a cognisable non-bailable offence punishable with prison terms of up to seven years. (9)

**Harassment of COVID-19 warriors by the police**

A novel type of harassment and violence against doctors that has surfaced during this pandemic has been from the police. And ironically, both have been considered as the front line warriors against the pandemic in India. In March 2020, police stopped a doctor and her colleague on their way to night shift hospital duty in Telangana. They were slapped, abused, phone snatched and taken to police station by the policemen. (10) On 29 March 2020, an oncologist from Kolkata was asked to come to police station where he was asked to write apology for misleading people through his social media post where he had expressed his concern over lack of protection gears for doctors serving at the time of COVID-19 in his state. His phone was snatched and was questioned for more than 16 hours. (11) In May 2020, two similar episodes, back to back, were reported from Jammu and Kashmir. In one of the episodes that took place on 25 March 2020, a senior interventional cardiologist from tertiary care centre, while on his way to hospital to attend emergency duty was harassed and intercepted by a police constable. Later on he was taken to adjacent police station where he was thrashed and his phone was snatched. He was not even permitted to talk to his family and his colleagues, though he was the on-call consultant cardiologist for any cardiac emergency, not only at his hospital but also for other associated hospitals of the medical college. (12) Next day on 26 March 2020, Chief Medical Officer of district Bandipora, was on his way to COVID-19 sampling site in his official vehicle when he was stopped and not allowed to go by the police constables at a checkpoint despite of his polite request to let him go. It was only after the warrior came out of his vehicle, shouted at the police and alleged them of the harassment of the doctors and called the higher officials in the administration and police, he was allowed to go. (13)

**Conclusion and required future action**

Police brutality towards health care workers is not a cure for coronavirus pandemic and this new challenge for the doctors needs to be addressed. The medical associations and fraternity needs to protest against these atrocities legally. The higher authorities of the police department and of the health department need to co-ordinate and also conduct joint workshops and programmes that may bring harmony. Last but not the least; the police department should have accountability for their action. It is a high time the Government of India should take these crimes of police department committed against health care workers into consideration, otherwise it will be too late and things will go out of control.

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