



Editorial Commentary

A Call for Justice and Systemic Change: Safeguarding Women in Medicine: Solicitation by Women in Cardiology and Related Sciences

Sarita Rao¹, Shibba Chhabra², Sujatha Vippera³, Jyotsna Maddury⁴

¹Department of Cardiology, Apollo Hospitals, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, ²Department of Cardiology, Dayanand Medical College, Ludhiana, Punjab,

³Department of Cardiology, Indus Hospitals, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, ⁴Department of Cardiology, Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

***Corresponding author:**

Dr. Jyotsna Maddury,
Professor and Head (Retd.),
Department of Cardiology,
Nizam's Institute of Medical
Sciences, Hyderabad,
Telangana, India.

janaswamyjyotsna@gmail.com

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Civilization is the lamb's skin in which barbarism masquerades – Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The recent tragic and heinous crime committed against a young woman, a promising physician in Kolkata has shocked the medical fraternity and the nation at large. The incident, where a dedicated medical professional was brutally raped and murdered while on duty, serves as a grim reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by women in the health-care sector, a field where they dedicate their lives to saving others.

This atrocity is not an isolated event. The rise in violence against women, especially those in demanding professions such as medicine, is alarming. The sanctity of hospitals, where compassion and care should be the utmost priorities, has been tarnished by such acts of barbarism. It is an affront not only to the values of the medical profession but also to the fundamental principles of humanity.

The medical profession has witnessed several instances of violence against women doctors. Just recently, there have been reports of harassment, assaults, and now, a brutal murder. The rise in crimes against women, including female doctors, in India is deeply concerning. It is a pain that in this land where women are regarded as goddesses, the statistics report “683,000 forcible rapes occurring each year, equaling to 56,916 every month, 1871 every day, 78 an hour, and 13/min.”^[1] Khan reports one rape every 20 min in India.^[2] According to the National Crime Records Bureau and the National Commission for Women, there were over 28,000 complaints of crimes against women in 2023.^[3]

These incidents are not mere statistics but represent the shattered lives of women who have been targeted while serving the community. The perpetrators of such crimes often escape with minimal consequences, sending a dangerous message that such actions are tolerable within our society.

URGENT NEED FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The medical profession has not been immune to these issues, with recent high-profile cases of violence against women doctors highlighting the need for urgent action to improve safety in health-care environments. It is the need of the hour for the responsible officials in government and

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administrative bodies of medical universities and colleges across the country should implement stringent measures ensuring a safe and secure environment for female students, residents, senior residents, as well as nursing staff and paramedical female employees. The lack of dedicated security measures and the prevalence of workplace harassment pose significant risks, necessitating stricter enforcement of safety protocols and legal consequences for offenders.

The time has come for a systemic overhaul to protect women in the medical profession. It is imperative that the government, health-care institutions, and society at large take stringent and comprehensive measures to ensure the safety of all health-care professionals, especially women.

1. Strict security measures: Hospitals and medical colleges must enforce strict security protocols. Enhanced Security with 24/7 surveillance by the security personnel with immediate access to inform their patrolling group in all key areas and installing surveillance cameras with controlled access to sensitive areas like in dormitories, wards, doctors duty rooms, seminar rooms, libraries, and other common areas.
2. Dedicated facilities for women: Separate and secure restrooms, washrooms, and rest areas for women must be made mandatory in all health-care facilities. These spaces should be monitored and regularly inspected to ensure that they meet safety standards.
3. Women safety applications: The development and mandatory implementation of a safety application for women health-care professionals is crucial. An voice recognition application recognizes distress words like “help” and instantly sends an alert containing the time, location, name, and photograph of the person in distress to the security team allowing for prompt action.^[4]
4. Stringent legal action: The legal system must take swift and decisive action against the perpetrators of crimes against women in health care. There should be no leniency in cases of sexual assault, and the punishment should be severe enough to act as a deterrent to others.
5. Implementation of training programs: A key focus should be on self-defense training programs, which equip women with the skills and confidence to protect themselves in potentially dangerous situations. These initiatives not only strengthen individual safety but also foster a culture of mutual support and resilience among women.

If immediate action for the protection of female doctors is not implemented, it may discourage that many young aspirers of medical professions may not select medical profession.

A CALL TO ACTION

In words of William Shakespeare, “What’s done cannot be undone.” No punishment what so ever can undo the unpardonable crime the brutal murder of this young doctor

is a clarion call for the entire nation. It is not enough to mourn her loss; we must channel our grief into action. As editorial board members of the Indian Journal of Cardiovascular Diseases in Women (IJCDW), official journal of Women in Cardiology and Related Sciences, we strongly urge the medical community to stand in solidarity with the family of the victim and to advocate for the implementation of safety measures that protect all women in the health-care profession. We should honor her with the same respect we give to our soldiers. Just as we revere soldiers who sacrifice their lives defending our nation, this young doctor was equally dedicated, serving her country through her medical profession even at the time of her tragic death. Her commitment and sacrifice deserve the highest recognition and respect, paralleling that of our brave soldiers.

We must also press for a change in societal attitudes toward women, ensuring that respect, dignity, and safety are upheld in all spheres of life. The loss of this promising young doctor is not just a tragedy for her family and friends but a loss for the entire health-care community. As we mourn, we must also ensure that her death is not in vain and that it sparks the much-needed changes to protect the lives of those who dedicate themselves to the service of others.

Let us remember her as a beacon of hope and a symbol of the fight for justice and equality for women in all professions. The medical community must unite in demanding that such a tragedy never occurs again.

As we grapple with this heartbreaking event, it is essential that we transform our sorrow and anger into a movement for change. The government, health-care institutions, and society must collectively take responsibility for ensuring that women in medicine can work in environments free from fear and violence. Only then can we truly honor the memory of those who have lost their lives in service to others.

The IJCDW stands with the family, friends, and colleagues of the deceased doctor, and we pledge our continued advocacy for safer working conditions for all women in health care. This is not just a fight for justice; it is a fight for the soul of our society.

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