

Violence against physicians in Barcelona, Spain. Post-incident and gender-based violence management

138

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Introduction. The scientific community is concerned about the problem of violence in the health professions. These are violent situations that put health professionals at risk and can have a detrimental effect on the safety and health of individuals and the health system as a whole, and require a comprehensive approach. Estimating the scale of the problem is complex because the vast majority of these incidents go unreported.

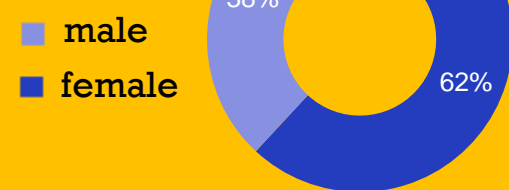
In the fight against attacks on health workers, a distinction can be made between 1) standardised, complete and responsive recording of all incidents, 2) prevention of incidents before they occur, 3) training of professionals in appropriate protective measures to minimise the harmful effects of incidents, and 4) post-incident management or response to violence against health workers.

In 2003, the College of Physicians of Barcelona launched a programme for the prevention of violence against doctors and produced a manual for the prevention and management of cases of violence in the exercise of their profession. In 2004, a legal defence policy was established for doctors who have been assaulted in the course of their professional activities.

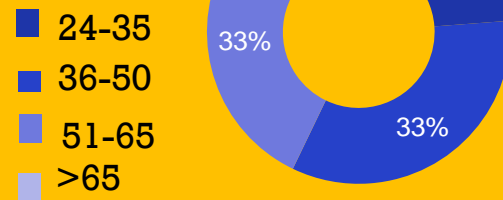
However, the definitive response to this helplessness was the creation of the Violence against Physicians Unit (VAPU) in 2010, with the aim of providing its members with a specific tool for post-incident management. Since then, the functions and services offered by the VAPU have included personal, legal and security advice and support for doctors who have been the victims of aggression, cooperation with institutions to effectively combat violence, coordination with work centres, the development of recommendations for professionals and centres, and the analysis of incidents, risk situations and the evolution of the problem.

Data from the VAPU. In 2021 and 2022, the VAPU dealt with 118 doctors. A survey (2023, 17.79% response rate) revealed the characteristics of the attacked doctor, the aggression suffered and the assessment of the VAPU.

Victim's gender



Victim's age



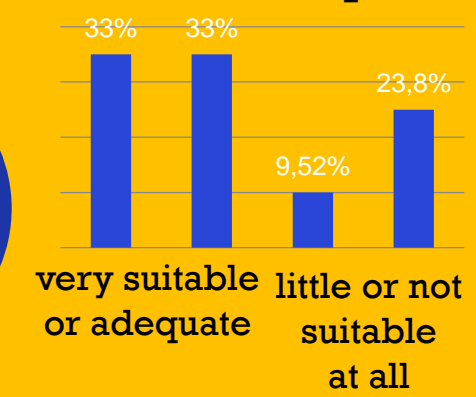
Aggression suffered



Place of aggression



Post-incident response



The post-incident response did not adequately meet the survey respondents' expectations in up to 33% of cases. This apparent inconsistency is not due to a perception of poor VAPU service, but rather to doctors' perception of an inadequate legal response to attacks on doctors. This perception is also supported by the College of Physicians.



Finally, it is considered that the current reality of violence against doctors requires the availability of new post-incident resources, among which the resources for attention to gender violence stand out. Professionals are used to playing an important role in helping in cases of gender-based violence, but not when they are victims themselves. For this reason, the College of Physicians of Barcelona created the **Comprehensive Care Unit for Gender Violence** in 2021, in addition to the existing community mechanisms.

The support offered by the **Comprehensive Care Unit for Gender Violence** to women doctors includes:

- 1 **Legal counselling:** accompaniment prior to the legalisation of the situation. Expert lawyers provide information on the possibilities available to women, stressing the importance of filing a complaint against the aggressor (it should be borne in mind that, with the complaint, the system automatically grants the victim of male violence the right to free legal aid).
- 2 **Psychological care:** through the network of professionals of Fundació Galatea.
- 3 **Social care:** through the College of Physicians of Barcelona's Social Protection Programme (PPS).

Conclusion Professional Colleges are essential for the protection of their members, being especially important the post-incident management of assaults, with personal support to the victim to guarantee her full accompaniment and protection, as well as effective counselling to take the most appropriate decision regarding the actions to be taken in relation to the aggression suffered. Nowadays, it is also necessary to support women doctors in relation to gender-based violence.



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