

Title: American Medical Women's Association Position Paper on Sexual and Physical Violence Against Women in Healthcare

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Position statement: The American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) advocates for zero tolerance of sexual and physical violence against women physicians and others in healthcare.

Background: On August 9th 2024, a 31-year-old junior physician (whose name is protected) was found to be raped and murdered while training at the RG Kar Hospital in Kolkata, India.¹ This case has reignited the conversation surrounding violence towards women, especially in the context of a professional work environment. This event reminds us of the brutal rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, a physiotherapy student in New Delhi, India in 2012.¹¹ Since this event, India has seen a rise in reported rape cases from 25,000 in 2012 to 31,000 in 2024; however, these numbers do not account for the occurrences that do not get reported out of fear of continued violence.¹

Because of these growing levels of violence, it is critical to discuss how this may affect women in the medical field. Findings by Dyrbye et al. showed that female physicians face more frequent mistreatment and discrimination than their male counterparts, and women of color face more than their white peers.⁴ This information is further supported by a cumulative literature review by Caruso et al. (2022) that showed that physicians experienced workplace violence within the past year across multiple countries: American (47%), German (91%), Indian (84%), and Turkish (83%).² These findings exemplify the need for global reform to mitigate violence directed towards physicians and other healthcare professionals. Sari et al. (2023) analyzed workplace violence specifically related to women in healthcare at a tertiary hospital in Turkey: 79.6% reported verbal workplace violence and 20.4% were exposed to physical workplace violence.³ Despite these reportedly high rates of workplace violence, female physicians were significantly less likely than their male counterparts to report incidences of violence in the workplace due to stigmas and fears of retaliation.²

Violence towards women physicians is not limited to the workplace. 1 in 4 physicians experiencing intimate partner violence, disproportionately affecting female practitioners.⁵ Intimate partner violence (IPV)/domestic violence (DV) includes all physical, sexual, and psychological abuse within a domestic relationship, including but not limited to spouses, significant others, and partners. Doctors such as Samantha Banton-Woolery, Gwendoline Amsrala, and Marsha Certain each were victims of IPV/DV. Many more women physicians chose not come forward or may not have the same coverage that these cases have received.^{6,7,8}

AMWA has taken a strong stance on advocating for IPV/DV victims through position statements and the Domestic Violence Prevention Working Group which promotes advocacy and education surrounding acknowledgement, prevention, and support for victims, including fellow physicians.^{9,10} These advocacy and educational opportunities include an annual DV Awareness Webinar, biweekly DV Prevention Committee meetings, advocacy for standardizing IPV recognition and prevention training for healthcare students and providers, as well as empowerment and support for healthcare workers who have been victims of DV.

Women physicians are subject to increased hostility, physical violence, and sexual violence both at home and in professional environments on a global scale. AMWA stands in support of women in medicine internationally and were outraged by the violent rape and murder of the 31-year-old Junior Doctor in Kolkata, India.

¹ Kumar, R. (2024, August 26). *The rape and murder of a female doctor in India sets off an outcry over women's safety*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2024/08/26/g-s1-18366/rape-murder-doctor-india-sexual-violence-protests>

² Caruso R, Toffanin T, Folesani F, Biancosino B, Romagnolo F, Riba MB, McFarland D, Palagini L, Belvederi Murri M, Zerbinati L, Grassi L. Violence Against Physicians in the Workplace: Trends, Causes, Consequences, and Strategies for Intervention. *Curr Psychiatry Rep*. 2022 Dec;24(12):911-924. doi: 10.1007/s11920-022-01398-1. Epub 2022 Nov 29. PMID: 36445636; PMCID: PMC9707179.

³ Sari H, Yildiz İ, Çağla Baloğlu S, Özel M, Tekalp R. The frequency of workplace violence against healthcare workers and affecting factors. PLoS One. 2023 Jul 28;18(7):e0289363. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0289363. PMID: 37506128; PMCID: PMC10381052.

⁴ Doyle JP, Frank E, Saltzman LE, McMahon PM, Fielding BD. Domestic violence and sexual abuse in women physicians: associated medical, psychiatric, and professional difficulties. J Womens Health Gend Based Med. 1999 Sep;8(7):955-65. doi: 10.1089/jwh.1.1999.8.955. PMID: 10534298.

⁵ Reibling ET, Distelberg B, Gupthill M, Hernandez BC. Intimate Partner Violence Experienced by Physicians. J Prim Care Community Health. 2020 Jan-Dec;11:2150132720965077. doi: 10.1177/2150132720965077. PMID: 33078671; PMCID: PMC7594214.

⁶ Lambe, J. (2024, June 3). *Husband “upset” over wife spending the night out drinking is sentenced for her murder*. Law & Crime. <https://lawandcrime.com/crime/upset-husband-who-stabbed-wife-to-death-because-she-stayed-out-drinking-with-friends-learns-his-fate/>

⁷ Walter, M. (2024, April 19). *Cardiologist killed in apparent murder-suicide*. Cardiovascular Business. <https://cardiovascularbusiness.com/topics/healthcare-management/leadership/cardiologist-killed-apparent-murder-suicide>

⁸ Bowles, T. (2024, June 17). *Samantha Woolery killed: Family, friends mourn her loss | 11alive.com*. 11 Alive. <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/community/more-than-a-number/samantha-woolery-killed-family-friends-mourn-loss/85-1e5d1fde-dd0d-481d-8867-63b0a6703c8c>

⁹ *Domestic Violence Prevention Working Group Page*. American Medical Women’s Association. (2024, August 14). <https://www.amwa-doc.org/domestic-violence-prevention/>

¹⁰ AMWA. (2018). Position Paper on Principles of Domestic Violence. American Medical Women’s Association.

¹¹ Times of India. (2024). *What is Nirbhaya Case?: What is Nirbhaya Case full story?: India News - Times of India*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-is-nirbhaya-case/articleshow/72868430.cms>