

No toilets or rest – female doctors strike over fear for their safety

‘Dangerous’ work settings lack changing rooms for staff. By **Gurvinder Singh**

Female medical workers in India are forced to change in doctors’ offices and feel “too traumatised” to work following the rape and killing of a doctor that has shocked the nation and caused widespread protests.

Earlier this month, the body of a postgraduate student doctor was found in a seminar room at RG Kar Medical College in Kolkata after she had reportedly gone there to rest during her shift.

A volunteer worker at the hospital has been arrested in connection with the case, being treated as rape and murder, while investigations continue.

The Indian Medical Association described the incident as a “crime of barbaric scale due to the lack of safe spaces for women”.

Thousands have taken part in marches, vigils and strikes, highlighting violence perpetrated against women in India and demanding justice, a full investigation and safer working conditions.

At a protest at the site of the incident in Kolkata, junior doctor Susmita Chakraborty told **i**: “The horrific incident has shocked us beyond limits as it is impossible to think about any such crime happening inside the hospital.

“We have odd working hours that stretch for 24 hours and even beyond. We never felt unsafe in a hospital till this gruesome murder happened.

“We work tirelessly in hospitals,

especially the government-run [ones], with bare minimum facilities to save human lives, but this is what we get in return.”

Fatima Alam, 21, a nursing student at the RG Kar facility, said: “We have no separate toilets, changing rooms [nor] rest rooms.

“We have to often change our clothes in doctors’ rooms and even in makeshift rooms with malfunctioning locks. The situation is such that one has to stand outside the gate and other girls change their clothes inside.

“We work in terrible conditions for a profession which is considered noble, but what about our safety?”

Conditions are so bad that some female doctors said they are contemplating quitting.

Dr Anasuya Goswami, 31, a doctor and former student of RG Kar, said: “We were never scared to work in the hospital, even during night hours, but this incident has changed everything. I am too traumatised to work. I am losing faith in this profession and regretting that I could have opted for something else.”

Kaavya Sreedhar, 27, a doctor in an obstetrics and gynaecology department in Delhi, told **i**: “The problem is that the government doesn’t listen unless a strong message is conveyed through strong

“We work tirelessly with bare minimum facilities to save human lives, but this is what we get in return



Medical professionals strike in protest against the rape and killing of a student doctor from Kolkata; Dr Anasuya Goswami (below) says she had never felt scared at work until the incident; nursing student Fatima Alam (bottom) says she and other female medics often have to change in doctors’ rooms, or in ones with faulty locks IDREES MOHAMMED/AFP

measures. The situation is already bad in government hospitals that are facing huge patient influx coupled with infrastructure woes.

“The situation is almost the same in all the government hospitals in the country where security measures are inadequate for us.

“Even drunkards visit the hospitals and we are vulnerable to any assaults.”

“We are not demanding anything special, but we want just basic rights, like well-lit corridors, separate washrooms and guards outside our rooms so that we are safe from any assault by the mischievous elements or even by angry patients’ relatives in case the treatment goes wrong.

“The junior doctors are becoming completely demoralised and considering [a] switch to other professions.”



Shwetarsi Mohanta, 29, a doctor who works in a sports medicine department for athletes at Safdarjung Hospital, a government-run facility in Delhi, said that she opted to work with athletes as she wanted to be less exposed to violence through her job.

“I joined sports medicine because I loved sports and also wanted to have less exposure to patients because the violence to doctors is nothing new and we have been facing such issues for a long time.

“Such incidents cause too much trauma and badly affect the mental health of the doctors.”

“The government should act immediately and formulate ways to protect us,” she added. “We live in a society where the men are conditioned to think that they are superior to us and such incidents happen.”