



MWIA CASE STUDIES

VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Case 1: Woman in Afghanistan

Objective

- To show how professional women (for example doctors and teachers) in Afghanistan, and their families, can be targeted because they work with victims of abuse.

Narrative Case

Dr. C. works as a gynaecologist in Afghanistan, providing healthcare to women suffering from abuse, including rape and domestic violence.

Her problems began when she was working in a clinic carrying out abortions on girls who had become pregnant after being raped by a male relative. These girls had to have an abortion or face being killed by their relatives or members of their community (an “honour” killing). Dr C. received threatening letters and phone calls from the Taliban, warning that she and her family would be killed because of her work.

Two years later, one evening she heard an explosion and rushed outside. Her children had been playing in the front yard. Her 11-year-old son was lying on the ground, very badly wounded.

He required medical treatment for almost a year, moving from hospital to hospital. Fortunately he was admitted to an army hospital at an American airbase. After surgery, he was left disabled with one leg shorter than the other. The incident affected him badly. He became mentally ill. He is now bullied at school and can no longer fulfil his lifelong dream of becoming a footballer. He is always tired and depressed. But sometimes he says with a smile: “Mum, it is good that I became the victim of a Taliban attack, otherwise I would have been without my mum now and you would have been the victim.”

Six months later, her 22-year old brother was killed in a grenade attack in front of her house. The threats to her family were reported to the government, but nobody listened. Dr C. realised that further incidents

were inevitable. She decided that her family had to move. She has now stopped doing abortions and keeps a low profile at work. Nobody knows her address. She is doing her best to make victims of violence aware of their human rights. Dr. C says:

When they listen to my story of how I have lost my brother and how my son became disabled as a result of my struggle for women’s human rights they get more courage to stand up and defend their rights.

The situation here is very bad for women. Women have problems going out to work and girls are prevented from going to school. There are too many cases of violence against women. I have witnessed 30 to 50 cases in a month. When I tell [the women] to report their case to the police they refuse because their family would be ashamed of them and would treat them very badly. They don’t go to the police and they tolerate the violence and harassment.

We have to help our people, particularly women, they need us and we have to serve the country and the people. I can’t sit at home and do nothing; this is not in my nature.

Though I understand and have witnessed that there is great danger to my life in every step as a woman human rights advocate, I also understand that we cannot reach our goals and make a difference without accepting this risk to our own lives. Therefore my final goal is that all Afghan women become united to defend their human rights and know that a woman must be treated by men or her husband as a wife, as a mother and as a human.

Learning Points

1. In some countries such as Afghanistan, violence against women and girls is accepted as part of the culture. Honour killings are not uncommon, and women can be stoned to death because of 'adultery' (the women are actually victims of sexual violence and are then blamed).
2. Education and empowerment of women, and education of men and boys that violence against women is wrong, are important first steps.
3. There must be a change in the culture towards gender equality - the government must take responsibility, and police must take action to protect women when violence is uncovered.
4. Professionals who deal with victims of violence must be listened to and protected.