

FC09-03

PSYCHOLOGICAL MORBIDITY IN AMBULANCE DRIVERS IN A CONFLICT ZONE -
EXPERIENCES FROM KASHMIR

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Ambulance drivers represent a crucial link in health care. Their role becomes more important in war, conflict and similar settings. Increased exposure to high risk situations is a norm rather than an exception in a conflict zone. Kashmir has been undergoing a low intensity conflict since last 20 years in which thousands have lost lives and many more have been injured. Violence has affected nearly everybody living in Kashmir. The present study was done to assess the difficulties faced by the ambulance crew along with the psychological impact of the conflict. A questionnaire was formulated and was administered to the ambulance drivers of the major hospitals of the valley. Damage to ambulances, Frequent arguments with Indian security forces. Bodily injuries including fractures due to being beaten by police, torture were regular occurrences for a significant number of drivers. Long working hours (80-90), disturbed sleep patterns along with night mares, Fear apprehension Somatic complaints, Anxiety were the most common symptoms. In spite of all these problems none of the drivers had sought a psychiatric consultation for their symptoms. Although a few had self started on anxiolytic drugs but no proper psychiatric treatment was instituted in any of the sufferers. Prolonged working hours, working in a high stress environment with hostile mobs on one side and non accountable security forces on another takes the toll on the mental health of these drivers.