Attacks on Health Care in Emergency Settings: What is the Extent of the Problem, Based on Open Source Data from 2014 to 2015?

Rudi Coninx, Erin Kenney, Erin Downey
1. WHO Health Emergencies Programme, World Health Organization, Geneva/Switzerland
2. WHO, Geneva/Switzerland
3. Congresses, World Association for Disaster Emergency Medicine, Washington DC/DC/United States of America

Conclusion: Attacks on health care in emergency settings are a general problem, depriving people from the health care services they badly need. General perception is that the frequency of attacks on health care workers is increasing.

Methods: Review of data from open sources on individual attacks on health care, that reportedly took place in countries with emergencies from January 2014 to December 2015.

Results: Over the two-year period, we found reports of 594 attacks on health care that resulted in 959 deaths and 1,561 injuries in 19 countries with emergencies. Sixty-three percent of the attacks were against health care facilities, and 26% were against health care workers. Sixty-two percent of the attacks were reported to have intentionally targeted health care, and 1,561 injuries in 19 countries with emergencies. Sixty-three percent of 594 attacks on health care that resulted in 959 deaths

Conclusion: Attacks on health care remains an important problem. The study highlights the need for standard definitions and classifications to enable a comparison of information from multiple sources, in order to better understand the full extent and nature of the problem. The lack of information on the impact of attacks on health service delivery and the health of affected populations, is a significant knowledge gap and should be a priority for information collection moving forward, if we want to make evidence based policy recommendations. The findings underscore the need for intensified action from a broad spectrum of actors, to ensure that health care is provided universally during emergencies to all those who need it, unhindered by any form of violence or obstruction.