

Assessment of Interpersonal Communication Skills Among Emergency Medical Professionals in Pune, India

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Abstract

Introduction: Effective interpersonal communication is one of the most important skills for healthcare providers to master, in order to deliver high quality patient care. Doctors need to communicate with a wide range of people including peers, administration staff, patients, their family members and caregivers. Of course, the most significant is doctor-patient communication as it forms the foundation of the healthcare delivery system.

Poor inter-personal communication skills can jeopardize the patient care process and hence it is expected that healthcare professionals undergo formal training both as part of their medical curriculum and on the job Continued Medical Education. Studies have shown that effective interpersonal communication skills help improve overall healthcare outcomes especially while managing difficult encounters and breaking bad news.

Designing training programs with contemporary relevance requires regular needs assessment. It is essential to evaluate the baseline levels of inter-personal communication skills amongst practicing professionals to devise appropriate training strategies.

Objective: To assess inter-personal communication skills among Emergency Medical Professionals in Pune.

Methodology: The study was conducted among 140 Emergency Medical Professionals (EMPs) employed in various hospitals in the city of Pune, India. A questionnaire tool designed in 2019 by Piyush Ranjan *et al* was utilized to assess inter-personal communication skills among Emergency Medical Professionals.

The tool was administered through online mode. The respondents were given one-day deadline to revert with responses. Any queries pertaining to the questionnaire were clarified during data collection. 131 respondents reverted with completely filled questionnaire.

Conclusion: It relies on self-assessment to assess interpersonal communication skills and has a limited sample size. Yet, the study is an eye-opener to the incidents of conflicts in emergency healthcare settings and the barriers that prevent a healthy doctor patient relationship.

Keywords: *Inter-personal communication skills, emergency medical professionals, conflicts, doctor-patient relationship*

Introduction

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Effective interpersonal communication is one of the most important skills for healthcare providers to master, in order to deliver high quality patient care.¹ Doctors need to communicate with a wide range of

people including peers, administration staff, patients, their family members and caregivers. Of course, the most significant is doctor-patient communication as it forms the foundation of the healthcare delivery system. It includes the process of history taking, explaining a diagnosis or prognosis, giving instruction for treatments, and counseling.²

Poor inter-personal communication skills can jeopardize the patient care process and hence it is expected that healthcare professionals undergo formal training both as part of their medical curriculum and on the job Continued Medical Education. Studies have shown that effective interpersonal communication skills help improve overall healthcare outcomes especially while managing difficult encounters and breaking bad news.^{3,4,5}

In the everchanging healthcare environment, interprofessional and doctor patient relationships are rapidly evolving. This apart Emergency Medicine is a challenging branch of Medicine where healthcare professionals are highly stressed and their burnout rates are high.^{6,7}

In such scenarios, effective inter-personal communication skills are an important tool to ensure the delivery of quality healthcare. Lack of empathy in communication is the key reason behind increasing incidence of conflict and violence in healthcare settings.⁸

Designing training programs with contemporary relevance requires regular needs assessment. It is essential to evaluate the baseline levels of inter-personal communication skills amongst practicing professionals to devise appropriate training strategies.⁹ Self-assessment of communication skills by healthcare professionals yields valuable information which can be utilized to improve the skillset during on the job training.

Objective

To assess inter-personal communication skills among Emergency Medical Professionals in Pune

Methodology

The study was conducted among 140 Emergency Medical Professionals (EMPs) employed in various hospitals in the city of Pune, India. A questionnaire tool designed in 2019 by Piyush Ranjan *et al* was utilized to assess inter-personal communication skills among Emergency Medical Professionals.¹⁰

The questionnaire consisted of forty-one items divided into three sections. Section A devoted (four items) to doctor-patient conflicts. Section B focused on (twenty-nine items) self-assessment of communication skills in different scenarios like dealing patient in IPD, OPD and breaking bad news. This section is further divided into four domains, covering important aspects such as components of communication, dealing with patients in outpatient and intensive-care settings, breaking bad news, and communication with colleagues. Section C (eight items) pertained to barriers in practicing good inter-personal communication skills. The reliability of the questionnaire is found to be high (Cronbach α : 0.497, 0.885 and 0.771 for sections A, B and C, respectively).

Section A of the questionnaire required a numerical response whereas items in Section B and C require response on a five-point Likert scale. Informed consent was taken during administration of the questionnaire.

All forty-one items were required to be mandatorily filled. The tool was administered through online mode. The respondents were given one-day deadline to revert with responses. Any queries pertaining to the questionnaire were clarified during data collection. 131 respondents reverted with completely filled questionnaire. The data was tabulated and statistically analyzed with the help of SPSS version 23.

Result

Table 1: Demographic Data

Participants	131
Age	
21 to 25 years	55 (42 %)
25 to 30 years	66 (50.44%)
Above 30 years	10 (7.6 %)
Sex	
Female	101 (77.1%)
Male	30 (22.9%)
Qualification	
BHMS	57 (43.5%)
BAMS	54 (41.2%)
BUMS	14 (10.7%)
BNYS	3 (2.3%)
Others	3 (2.4%)
Work Experience	
Below 1 year	64 (48.9%)
1 to 3 years	50 (38.2%)
3 to 6 years	7 (5.3%)
More than 6 years	10 (7.6 %)

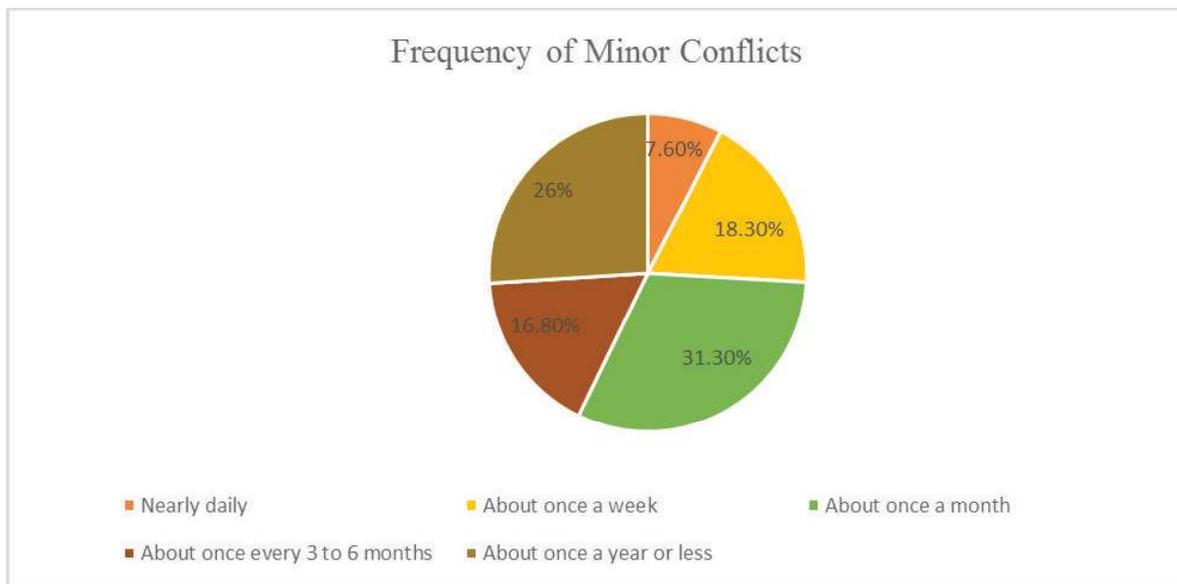


Figure 1: Frequency of Minor Conflicts

As seen in Fig.1 majority EMS professionals encountered minor conflicts very frequently.

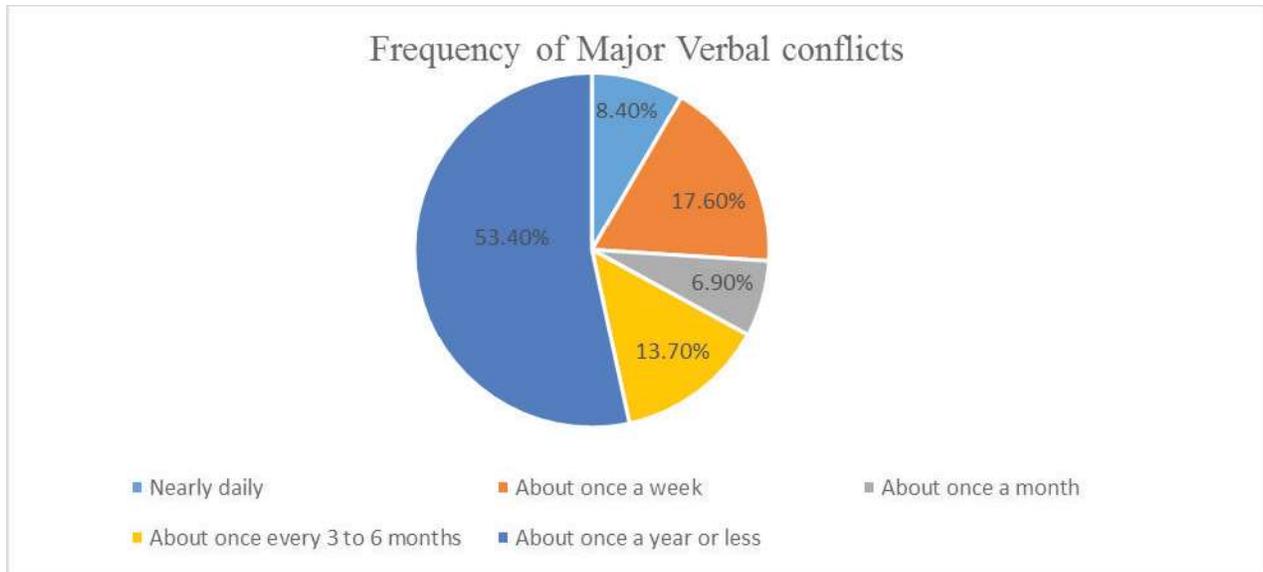


Figure 2: Frequency of Major Verbal Conflicts

As seen in Fig. 2, nearly 8 % of EMS professionals face major verbal conflicts nearly daily. Another 17 % of them faced it once a week. as many as 13.7 %of EMS professionals were victims of major conflicts once in 3 to 6 months while another 53.4 % of EMS professionals had experienced it atleast once during their career.

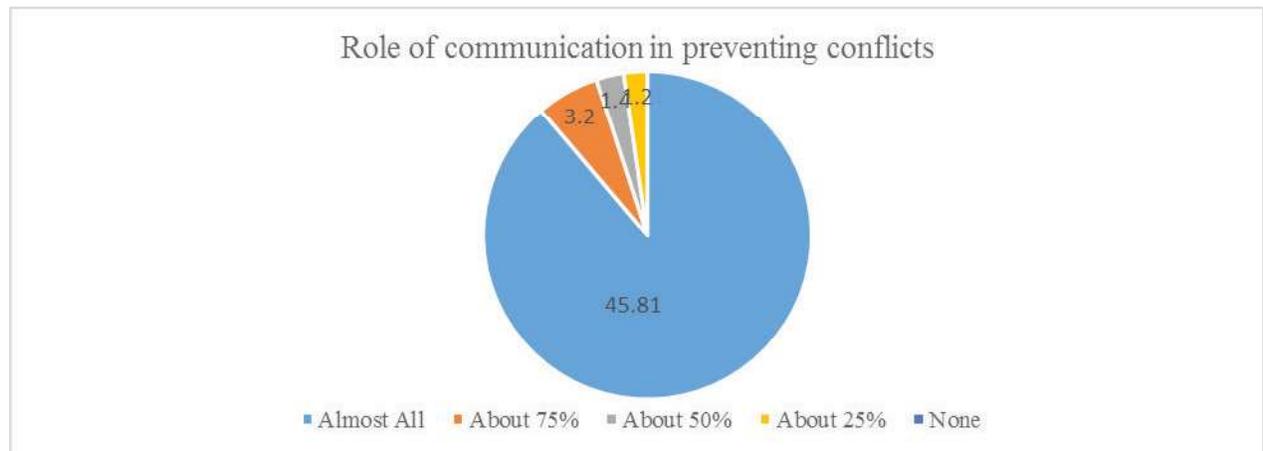


Figure 3: Role of communication in preventing conflicts

As depicted in Fig 3. most EMP’s felt that effective communication can be extremely helpful in preventing conflicts.

Table 2

	Range	Total Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Section B	(90, 145)	28.21	12.49
Section C	(11, 40)	26.92	5.82

As seen in Table 2 the respondents scored themselves high on various aspects of doctor patient communication. But they also identified vital barriers that hamper effective communication.

Discussion

Conflict occurs as a result of poor communication. The increasing incidences of minor and major conflicts including physical violence in healthcare settings is extremely disturbing and demoralizes the healthcare professionals. Emergency Medical professionals work in high stress environment and in many cases the patients are already critical and might deteriorate further. This exposes them to greater frequency of conflict with the patient caregivers. Hence, effective communication among this cadre is extremely significant to ensure smooth workflow and healthy doctor patient relationship.

The results demonstrate the high frequency of conflicts encountered by EMS professionals as part of their job. This is inspite of the fact that most EMS professionals scored high on the self-assessment scale of doctor patient communication. This points to the fact that most EMS professionals tend to suffer from a relative bias in terms of their communication skills. This is further reiterated by the high score obtained in the barriers scale of the questionnaire. The disparity in the scores in the two scales could also be because although EMS professionals follow all communication etiquettes yet there are many environmental barriers that are not always under their control. This could include language barriers, paucity of time, infrastructure deficits like lack of proper place or overcrowding, long working hours and lack of subject knowledge required for comprehensive communication.

The results justify the need for improving the insight of EMS professionals with regard to their communication skills as well as searching for possible solutions to overcome the barriers. All aspects of inter-personal communication should be covered thoroughly during the course of medical education. This should be reinforced during the professional career by way of interactive workshops utilizing the tools like case studies, roleplay and standardized patient encounter. Self-assessment should be supplemented with peer assessment and debriefing sessions to ensure more accurate evaluation of the skillset.

Conclusion

The study has a few limitations. It relies on self-assessment to assess interpersonal communication skills and has a limited sample size. Yet, the study is an eyeopener to the incidents of conflicts in emergency healthcare settings and the barriers that prevent a healthy doctor patient relationship.

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