



The Plight of Auxiliary Nurses

By Saryubala M. Jani

A close look at the plight of Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs) serving in the villages would reveal horrible tales. They bury their harrowing experiences in their sobbing hearts because they find no sympathy from a "man's world" and no initiative from the callous authorities. They shun to publicise their problems in the name of the traditional modesty of the Indian women. They do not wish to disclose many things because they are scared of their own lives. If there are some bravados among them their lives will be threatened and even the police would be mere onlookers.

The ANMs in the villages are looked upon as "public women" by the villagers as well as the staff of the health centres. It seems that almost every man is after them to seduce or molest them. Many cases of rapes have been reported. But this has only increased the wrath of the people involved and the authorities are known for their inaction. The ANMs are absolutely left to their mercy.

Mr. Dileep Ranpura in his book in Gujarathi entitled "*Atam Vinze Pankh*" has exposed the sad plight of the ANMs in the villages. This book should be an eye-opener to the authorities and the society to save these innocent girls.

The young ANMs are posted for the propagation of the family planning programme although they are not trained for the same. They have to accept any assignment anywhere because it is their bread-winner. They are deployed in the villages without protection, security and bare living facilities. They walk to the villages where transport is not available. They cross the jungles alone chanting "mantras" and leaving everything to God. Some-time ago an ANM was chased by two Adivasis in the Danta Taluka of the Banaskantha District. She ran for her life as a mad woman only to be fainted on the outskirts of the village from where some people rescued her. In another case an ANM was made to stay overnight for family planning work at the house of a Sarpanch where she was raped.

There is more danger when the ANMs are taken in UNICEF vans. Many a time the ANM is the only woman with the drivers or other menial staff of the health centres. Many cases of rapes have been reported in the jungle on such occasions.

The ANM's are trained at government expense and in return they have to sign a one-year bond. When they get their first posting to a village they face the real situation. They curse the day they took the decision to join the ANM school. They wanted to become nurses and join the profession of Florence Nightingale which they thought was the noblest. They somehow continue in service because they are not able to repay the bond money and resign after one year. Some of them accept the unacceptable way of life forced by circumstances. Some others prefer to work under stress and strain because they have

to support a family. This is how the unfortunate "victims" of the society live the most tragic lives.

I believe that the family planning work is not the responsibility of the ANMs. In the guise of trying to understand the various methods of family planning the villagers behave in the most "horrid fashion" in their behaviour and in the manner of putting questions. The poor ANMs are a helpless lot and they have not been successful family planning workers.

I believe that only men trained in family planning be posted in the villages. They will be able to live in a village and persuade the villagers to accept family planning methods. They will not have the problems of the women as explained above. Further why to waste the two-year training of the ANMs in midwifery and general nursing by utilising them for family planning propaganda!

Can anybody save the "unfortunate" ANMs?

Open Forum is meant to encourage free and frank discussion and comments by nurses on matters of professional interest. Opinion in this column will be published anonymously, if so desired, but the name, address and qualification and position of the author must be made known to the Editor (not for publication).

Readers' participation only can make this column a forum for exchange of views.

Please send your contribution to the Editor, The Nursing Journal of India, L-16, Green Park, New Delhi-16.