

International Scientific Conference

# HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES 20 YEARS LATER

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## HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES – 20 YEARS LATER

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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

# HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES – 20 YEARS LATER

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MENTAL HEALTH OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL IN ARMED  
CONFLICTS – INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND LABOUR  
LAW PERSPECTIVE

Anđelija Stevanović\*, Sanja Zlatanović\*\*

## MENTAL HEALTH OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL IN ARMED CONFLICTS – INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND LABOUR LAW PERSPECTIVE

Medical personnel operating in armed conflicts face severe and multidimensional risks that extend beyond physical danger. Exposure to violence, mass casualties, resource shortages, ethical dilemmas, and prolonged professional stress significantly affect the psychological well-being of healthcare workers. Despite the growing global recognition of mental health as an essential component of public health, the legal protection of the mental health of medical personnel in conflict settings remains insufficiently addressed within the existing international humanitarian and labour law frameworks.

International humanitarian law (IHL) establishes a comprehensive regime aimed at ensuring respect and protection for medical personnel during armed conflicts. The Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, and customary international humanitarian law prohibit attacks against medical personnel and facilities, guarantee the provision of medical care to the wounded and sick, and prohibit punishment of healthcare workers for performing their professional duties. These norms reflect the fundamental humanitarian objective of safeguarding access to medical care during hostilities. However, the primary focus of the IHL protection remains the preservation of the functional role and neutrality of medical services, rather than the working conditions and psychological well-being of medical personnel as individuals and workers.

The authors will examine the extent to which the mental health of medical personnel in armed conflicts is addressed through the combined application of international humanitarian law and international labour law. The study analyses the normative scope of IHL rules concerning the protection of medical personnel and identifies

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their limitations in addressing occupational stress, burnout, moral injury, and long-term psychological consequences resulting from exposure to armed violence. As well as, the problem of the practical challenges of implementation of the existing rules of IHL regarding protection of medical personnel. In parallel, the paper explores relevant international labour standards related to occupational safety and health, including obligations concerning psychosocial risks, safe working environments, and employer responsibilities towards workers operating in high-risk and emergency contexts.

By analysing the interaction between these two legal regimes, the paper argues that the protection of medical personnel in armed conflicts remains fragmented and insufficiently coordinated in practice. While IHL provides essential guarantees of safety and professional independence, labour law offers normative tools capable of addressing working conditions and psychosocial risks, but lacks effective application in conflict environments.

The paper recommends that stronger integration between international humanitarian and labour law is necessary to ensure comprehensive protection of medical personnel. It advocates for enhanced normative coordination, and the development of standards that explicitly address mental health risks faced by healthcare workers in contemporary armed conflicts.

**Keywords:** International humanitarian law, Labour law, Mental health protection, Armed conflict, Medical personnel



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