

Abstract

Professional, ethical approaches and humanitarian forensics are in the infancy stage in India. Forensic professionals in this context feel that there is an urgent need to raise awareness of this issue. With the support of the HHRRC Grant, the presenters conducted a few capacity-building training programs where collaborators learned how to mitigate ethical issues relating to cadavers from a humanitarian forensics lens. The programs helped spread the roots of humanitarian forensics and an ethical approach to dealing with cadavers.

Introduction

Cadaver-based case studies and research publications add value to the scientific community and the medicolegal process. However, cadaveric research is controversial in India, as regulations are either not established or violated if they are established. There is a lack of specific ethical guidelines for cadaveric research. The ethical guidelines commonly followed in the Indian context are The Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR's) National Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical and Health Research Involving Human Participants, 2017. For cadaver-based research, the ICMR guidelines generically provide norms for biological samples, biobanking, and biorepositories, including the organs and tissues procured from living or deceased human participants.

In the absence of specified guidelines in the context of cadaver-based research, there is an urgent need to train researchers, medicolegal personnel, and first responders interacting with the deceased. With the support of the 2023 HHRRC Grant, we provided a training and dissemination program to relevant collaborators.

This program provided a platform for collaborators to learn how to mitigate ethical issues relating to cadavers from a humanitarian forensic lens. Evaluation is important in education and training, as it helps ensure sessions meet needs and goals. An impact evaluation study was conducted to check the participants' knowledge and perception before and after the training program. We present the work completed during these workshops and the results of a pre- and post-training assessment. This study was approved by Yenepoya Ethics Committee-1, protocol no. YEC-1/2023/231.

Objectives

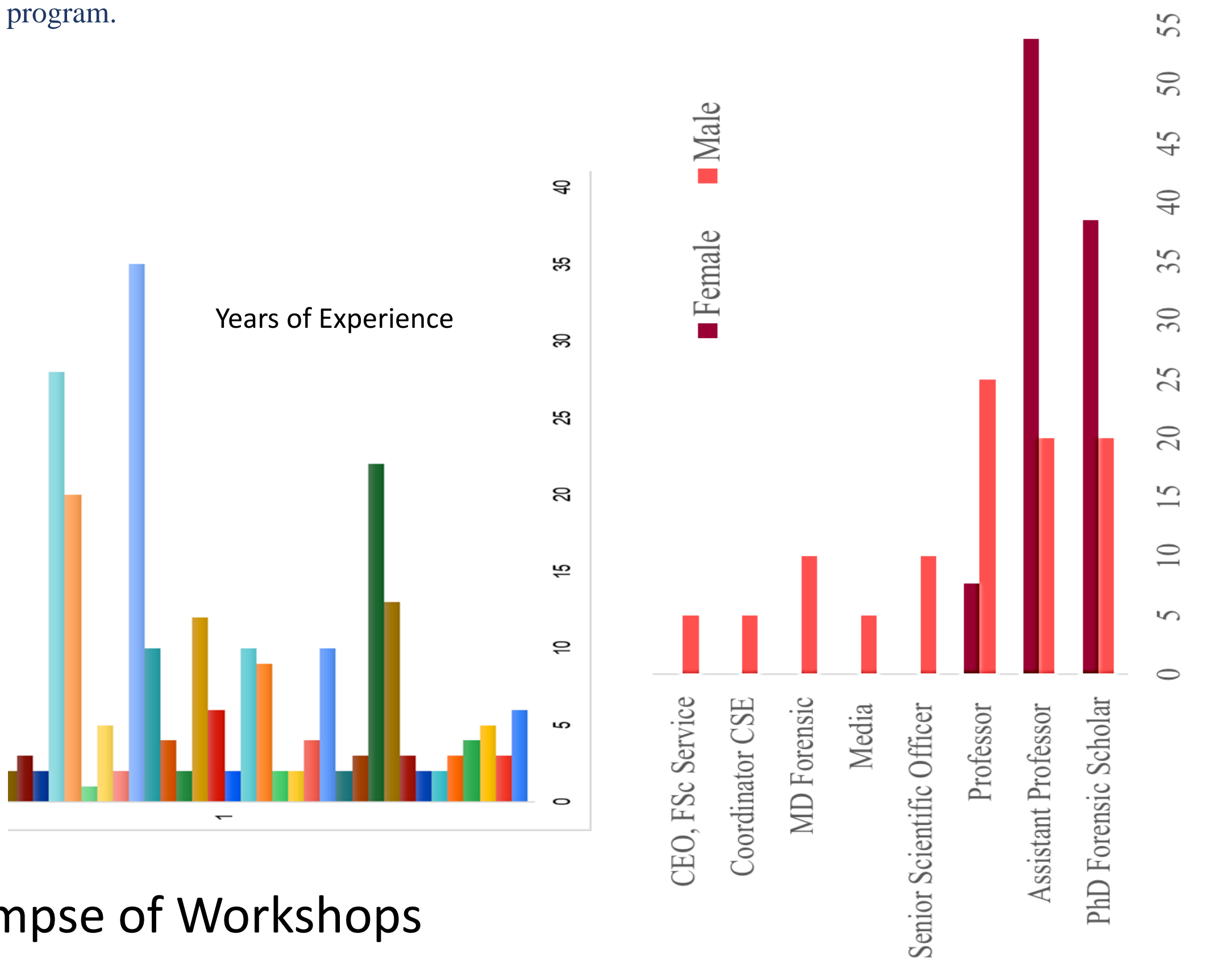
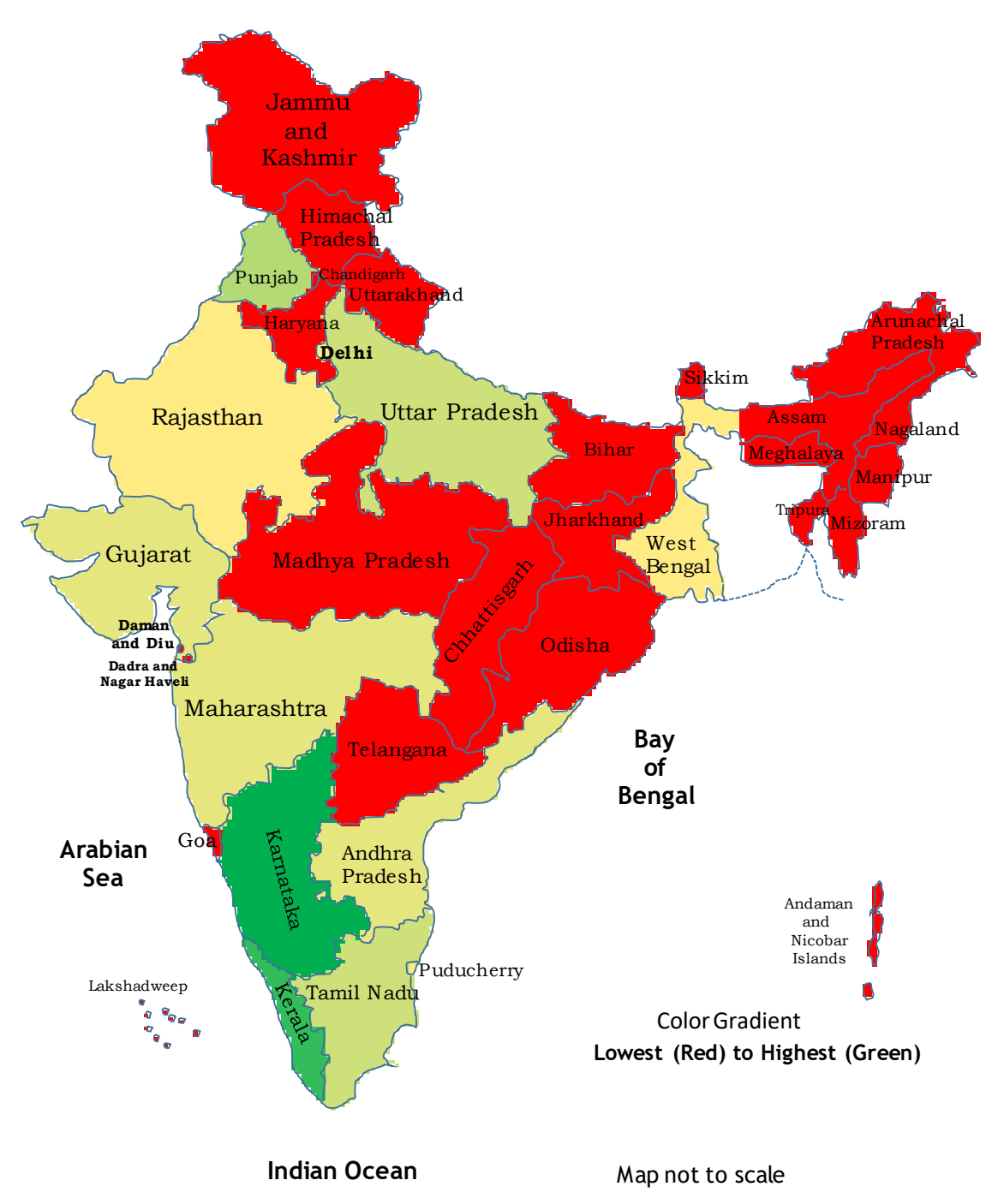
- To provide training to medicolegal personnel, researchers, and media personnel with the aim of preserving the dignity of the deceased in the Indian context
- To assess the impact of this training program in terms of participants' knowledge and perception before and after the training program

The Capacity Building Workshops

86 applications from across India were received among which 50 were short-listed based on their educational/professional qualifications and a letter of intent. A few dropped out due to personal emergencies. 40 (20+20, two batches) attended the workshops. The geographical and educational backgrounds are depicted in the results section for the selected participants. Two international students, one from Nigeria and one from Iraq, also participated in the workshops.

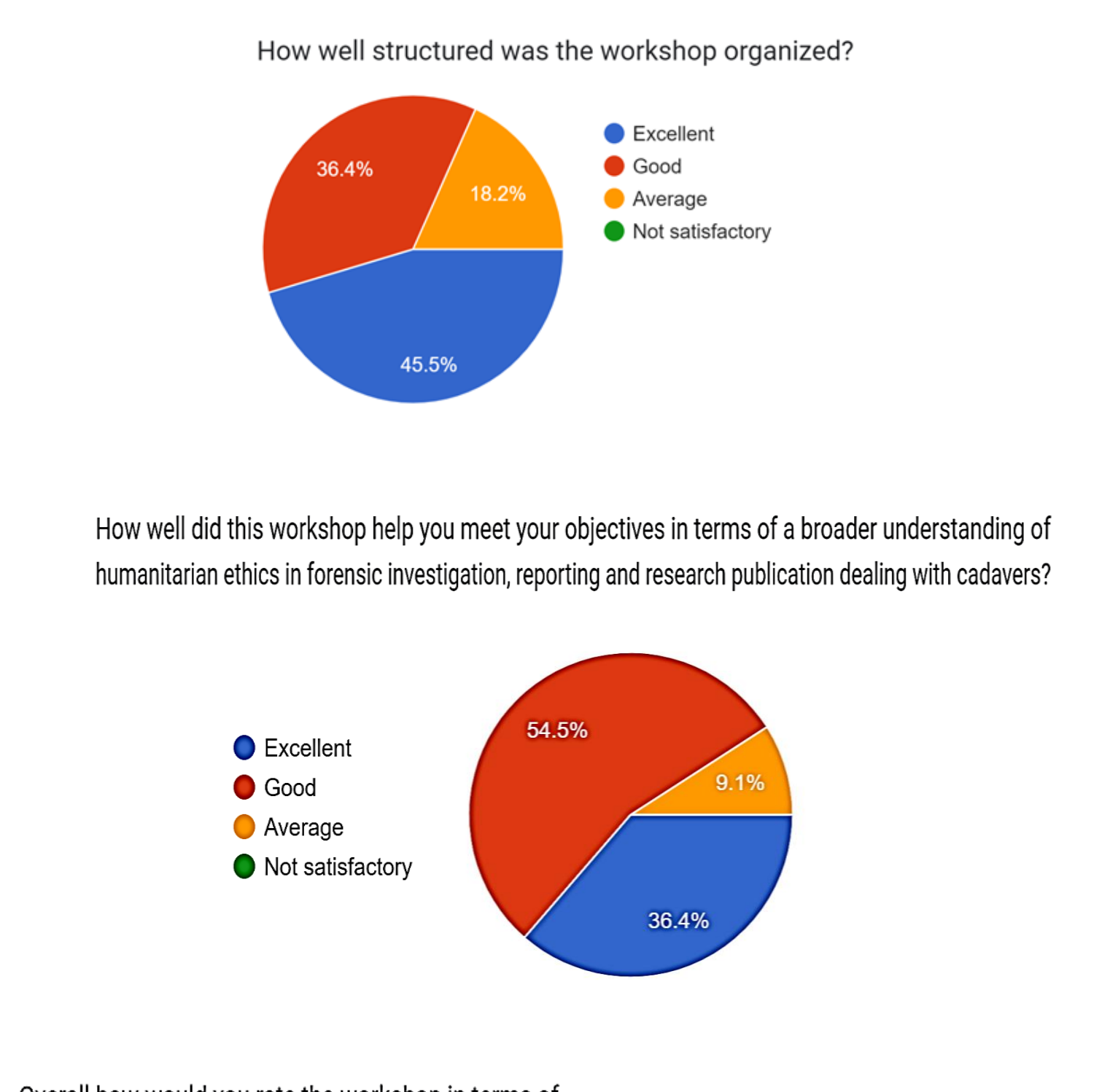
Results

Geographical location of the participants, their educational background, and years of experience are depicted below. Glimpses into the two workshops can be seen in the photographs below. Lectures, interactive discussion, sharing of experiential learnings, and case studies were a few components that were used for the capacity-building program.



Impact Assessment of Workshops

Participant feedback was taken at the end of each workshop. Overall, the participants were satisfied with the training and gave positive feedback. A subset of the feedback is shown in the below diagrams.



Impact Assessment by Comparing Pre- and Post-Evaluations

The questionnaire (distributed via Google Forms) consisted of questions related to ethical, legal, constitutional, and other important aspects related to preserving the dignity of the deceased and cadaveric research. The pre- and post-evaluation was completed and some of the findings are shown below.



Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that any capacity building program for forensic researchers and professionals on dealing with the deceased in research and publications has been conducted in India. The program attracted forensic professionals and many young researchers. During the program, participants learned about the constitutional and legislative rights of the deceased in the Indian context, ethical issues of the deceased during a disaster, and ethical issues on research pertaining to the deceased by renowned bioethicists and forensic experts. During the interactive learning, collaborators learned how to mitigate ethical issues relating to cadavers. In the end, all participants shared how they spread their knowledge to other learners and practitioners.

Future Projection – Indian Context

In the Indian scenario, it was found that there is an urgent need to develop a framework and standard operating procedures (SOPs) at the regional and national levels until a specific guideline is introduced in the context of ethical guidelines for cadaver-based research. We are in the process of preparing the SOP and ethical framework. We also proposed collaboration with ethicists, humanitarian professionals, and forensic experts working in the same research domain in other countries to share their expertise in building this framework.

Acknowledgements

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