

1 **Title:** Mexican Medical Students Protest During Covid-19 Pandemic  
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6 **Discussion Points:**

- 7 1. What is the role of Social Service in Mexico, is it necessary?
- 8 2. Can Medical students take advantage of it in academics, care or research?
- 9 3. Is it a form of labor exploitation?
- 10 4. Is it a way to make up for the lack of medical care personnel?
- 11 5. What is the correct way to protest during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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13 **Publisher's Disclosure:** *This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication.*

14 *As a service to our readers and authors we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript*

15 *will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final citable*

16 *form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content,*

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## 1 THE EXPERIENCE.

### 2 The protest

3 On Saturday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, a protest of about 200 medical students, medical interns, social service physicians  
 4 (SSF) and graduated physicians was carried out on the outskirts of the city hall of Monterrey Nuevo León - 2<sup>nd</sup>  
 5 biggest metropolitan area of Mexico - on the *Explanada de los Héroes* (Esplanade of the Heroes). The protest  
 6 was organized by senior medical students and coauthors of this manuscript: Patricio García-Espinosa and  
 7 Gabriela Torres-Hernández, together with other senior students. It was organized through social media  
 8 networks (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) where, a week before the protest, through these channels,  
 9 instructions were given to maintain a distance of 1.5 meters across the length and width. On the day of the  
 10 protest, marks were placed along the esplanade. The use of surgical uniform was requested, in order to make  
 11 identification easier, while the use of facemask and face shield was mandatory. The use of posters was also  
 12 requested, while the use of umbrellas and rugs was only suggested due to the terrain and varying weather  
 13 conditions. The time from the protest was from 12.00 p.m. to 03.00 p.m. (Figure 1 and 2), because at that time  
 14 the Secretary of Health provides daily update lectures on COVID-19 for the general population. The protest was  
 15 covered by local media and featured participation of 4 organizers in the news conference, where the request  
 16 was presented to the general population (Figure 3). For those who were unable to attend, support was asked  
 17 from their homes, by using the custom profile photo frame on Facebook with the hashtag (#) of the protest; the  
 18 # used was *#SinSeguridadNoHayServicio* which can be translated as “without security there is no service”. The  
 19 protest occurred with everyone seated, except for the minute of silence dedicated to the SSF and medical  
 20 interns who have lost their lives by doing their job.

### 21 Background

22 In the last days of January 2021, the SSF Mariana Sánchez of 24 years old was killed while doing her job in a  
 23 remote community of Chiapas, a state in southern Mexico known for being one of the poorest states in the  
 24 country.<sup>1</sup> The assassination of Mariana was announced after she reported that she suffered from sexual assault  
 25 during her service, instead of providing the necessary support, they only told her to take 30 days off and come  
 26 back to work after that.<sup>2</sup> This occurred few days after the death of Jorge López, 23-year old medical intern, due  
 27 COVID-19 was announced.<sup>3</sup> The deaths of these young physicians has showed the exploitation of medical  
 28 health care workers in Mexico, generating protest throughout the country, from medical students and physicians  
 29 in general.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>

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 32 The process of obtaining a medical degree normally lasts for 7 years, divided into 5 years of basic studies, 1  
 33 year of rotating undergraduate internships, and 1 year of social services which are normally carried out in  
 34 hospitals and clinics of the health secretary. The interns have a payment of less than 2000 pesos (approximately  
 35 100 U.S. dollars on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and less than the minimum Mexican salary) while doing shifts of up to  
 36 60 hours a week. SSF, on the other hand, have a payment of less than 4000 pesos (approximately 200 U.S.  
 37 dollars on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021) with shifts of up to 40 hours a week.<sup>8,9</sup> The failures of the Mexican social service  
 38 have been well documented previously by Nigenda, G.<sup>8</sup> He exposed that there is a need for social service  
 39 reform, and that the SSF need to be recognized as workers, and not as students. Insecurity and precarious  
 40 working conditions have also been documented by reporters of the most important Mexican newspapers.<sup>10</sup>  
 41 However, social service still to this day remain the same.

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## **Solutions and mid-term solutions**

In the Mexican Official Standard (NOM-009-SSA3-2013) it is established that the organizations responsible for the SSF are the schools and universities, on which the centers where they are being sent to, depend (rural and urban locations and hospitals). Excluding them as formally recognized workers under contract as established by the Mexican federal labor law.<sup>10,11</sup>

The solutions seem clear, and lies in the very foundation of medical social service in Mexico, which was originally organized as part of a scheme to provide outpatient services to rural and poor populations.<sup>12</sup>

We recommend the following:

- A reform of social service from the grassroots level.
- The Mexican health system must be able to hire personnel who are permanent in rural areas; or
- They must recognize SSF as formal workers and put them under the protection of a contract that adheres to the benefits which the law requires workers to have.
- To be treated as human beings, not as heroic figures or martyrs.

Mid-term solutions:

- keeping them only in rural areas that can guarantee safety.
- Consider them for vaccination before teachers as planned by federal government or not being forced to serve in COVID-19 areas.

We found this problem due to the idea imposed by the federal and state governments, where physicians must put vocation before integrity and that this allows them to do everything a worker does, but without the benefits of being a worker.<sup>8,12</sup> (Figure 4 and 5)

## **Conclusions**

There have been many ways to raise the voice of fellow doctors during these events, asking for justice and better conditions for social service physicians. We decided to make a sit-in because it was the easiest way to have controlled protests due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that in events like these, any way is valid for the voices to be heard about a system that should have reformed years ago, and that show the conditions of labor exploitation in Mexico. We are proud to see the union of Mexican students throughout the country and to belong to the so-called *Generación del Cambio* (Generation of change). A signed petition sheet was delivered to the authorities, in addition to conducting an online survey with suggestions to improve social service, and on the day of the protest, a box filled with these suggestions was also delivered. For now, the secretary of health, Manuel de la O has promised that he will seek to comply with our requests.<sup>13</sup>



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Accepted, In-press

1 **FIGURES AND TABLES.**

2 **Figure 1.** Medical Students in Front of the Monterrey City Hall (side view).



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1 **Figure 2.** Medical Students in Front of the Monterrey City Hall (rear view).



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1 **Figure 3.** Event Organizers at the COVID-19 press conference.  
2 *Patricio García-Espinosa, Daniela Capitán, Dr. Manuel de la O Cavazos (Secretary of Health), Gabriela Torres-*  
3 *Hernández, Daniel Bustamante from left to right.*



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1 **Figure 4.** Protest Request

2 *A medical student with a sign that says "All the obligations of a worker without any of the rights"*

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1 **Figure 5.** Protest Request.

2 *“Justice for Mariana”*



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