VIOLENCE AT WORK

A guide to risk prevention

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UNISON

Organising for Health & Safety

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INTRODUCTION

This guide produced for safety representatives' and stewards' deals only with violence from non-employees, e.g. clients or other members of the public. Separate UNISON guidance is available on bullying and harassment. (See further information).

Violence at work is a major occupational hazard for many UNISON members. It is the most life threatening risk that members can face and the most likely to lead to injury. Physical attacks are the most serious form of violence, but verbal abuse and threats are much more common and can have long term health effects.

A recent TUC survey of safety representatives' shows that 28% of safety representatives identified violence in the top five hazards faced by their members. And up to 32% identified lone working as a major hazard.

Additional results from service groups also show that lone working and violence is a major concern for members in virtually all sectors, but particularly so for members in local government, the health care sector, education, the utilities, and the voluntary sector.

Violence at work is not acceptable and should not be seen as part of the contract of employment, simply put down to bad luck, incompetence or the result of individual personalities. It is work related, arising directly out of member's jobs and the circumstances in which they have to work.

Some employer's see violence as inevitable, unpredictable and therefore uncontrollable. This means that employees are somehow expected to cope with violence by using their experience and professional training to identify when they are at risk and then determine how to deal with the risk.

The risk of work-related violence is often foreseeable, e.g. where previous incidents have occurred. It can therefore be assessed, minimised or prevented and employers have clear legal duties to do this. In short, employers must make an assessment of the risks, remove those risks, and only where it is not possible to eliminate them, introduce comprehensive strategies to control them.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE AT WORK?

In order to address the problem of violence at work it is important to have a clear understanding of what it is. This is an essential step in the investigation, management and prevention of work-related violence.

Any definition must include incidents leading to death, major injury (requiring medical assistance), and minor injury (requiring first aid or no medical aid). But it is equally important to include threats and verbal abuse even if no physical injury occurs.

It is also important to remember that work-related violence is not limited to the actual workplace and can take place in the community, to and from work, in isolated areas or even at the home of the worker.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), recognises this aspect and has defined violence at work as "any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances *relating* to their work".

The HSE's guidance to enforcement officers explains this further by stating that "the definition includes violence to employees at work by members of the public, whether inside the workplace or elsewhere when the violence arises out of the employees' work activity." This might include violence to teaching staff from pupils, to healthcare staff from patients, or to staff working in the community, or who work alone.

The following definitions are also used by some organisations:

■ The application of force, severe threat or serious abuse by members of the public towards people arising out of the course of their work whether or not they are on duty. This includes severe verbal abuse or threat where this is judged likely to turn into actual violence; serious or persistent harassment (including racial or sexual harassment); threat with a weapon; major or minor injuries; fatalities. (DSS, 'Violence to Staff: Report of DSS Advisory Committee on Violence to Staff, 1988).

■ Behaviour which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically and emotionally, on people. (Association of Directors of Social Services, 'Guidelines and Recommendations to Employers on Violence against Employees in the Personal Social Services', 1987).

Threats and Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse and threats should also be included in the definition as they can lead to physical violence and will contribute to the levels of stress experienced by members. According to the HSE, "physical attacks are obviously dangerous, but serious or persistent verbal abuse or threats can also damage employees health through anxiety or stress". Repeated verbal abuse can also lead to depression, reduced morale and increased sickness absence.

WHO IS AT RISK?

The problem of violence to staff is widespread and those working with the public are at greatest risk. This accounts for a large number of UNISON members. For example, those working in social and health care, community and residential work, enforcement, housing, education, and a range of other areas where UNISON is involved are all likely to be at risk of abuse, threatening behaviour or assaults. Much of the violence is because these members work with client groups where they might be at a higher risk, for example drug abusers, the mentally ill, etc. In other cases it is because the member deals with money or property that is likely to be of value to thieves.

However, it is not only the jobs people are asked to do that have the potential to cause work-related violence. Other factors include how these jobs are done and the circumstances in which they are carried out. The risk of violence may be increased, for example, where jobs involve working alone, in client's homes, in physically isolated units or at hours when few other employees are around.

And women and black and ethnic workers may suffer an even higher risk of violence at work.

According to a HSE survey, 8% of women reported being physically attacked by a member of the public in the course of their work, rising to more than one in ten 25-35 year olds. And nearly 1 in 5 women workers had been threatened with physical violence. In both cases the rates for women were up to 30% higher than for men.

Black and Asian workers may be at an even greater risk of violence. This is because black women are far more likely than white women to be involved in the health sector and twice as many Pakistani and Bangladeshi women work in sales compared to women in general.

Black and Asian women may also be the victims of racial violence. For example, a recent government report found a high level of racial harassment in the NHS with racial abuse from patients and members of the public common. The report found that most incidents were not recorded. When they were reported managers were often embarrassed or uninterested.

These statistics led the HSE to commission an analysis of the British Crime Survey (BCS). The results, "Violence at Work: Findings from the British Crime Survey", were published in October 1999 and reported that there were 1.2 million incidents of physical assaults and threats at work in 1997. The BCS indicates that some occupations may be more at risk than others, for example, the police, social workers, bar staff, security guards, transport workers and health care professionals.

Guidance produced by the HSE identifies the following list of risk factors and circumstances that can lead to violence at work.

Risk Factors: Jobs
- handling money
- handling drugs or having access to them
- providing care to people who are ill, distressed, afraid, in a panic or on medication
- relating to people who have a great deal of anger, resentment or feelings of failure
- dealing with people who have unrealistically high expectations of what the organisation can offer and who are seeking quick easy solutions to very long term and complex problems
- dealing with the friends and families of clients who may be concerned or feel inadequate in relation to the large organisation from which they are seeking help
- working with people who have used violence to express themselves or achieve their needs
- exercising power to restrict the freedom of individuals
- enforcing legislation.

Risk Factors: Circumstances in which work is done
- working alone, in clients' homes, in physically isolated units, or at hours when few other employees are around
- following procedures which do not provide much information to clients about what is happening

- working in units which do not have a human image - often crowded, busy, uncomfortable and lacking in essentials for the public such as refreshments, telephones and children's toys
- working under pressure created by increased workloads, staff shortages, and the absence of alternative support for the client.

Combined risks

By looking at the jobs people do and the context in which they work it is possible to identify the potential for violence. But, while for the purpose of making an assessment it is essential to separate out individual causes of risk, it is equally important to recognise that these risk factors rarely appear in isolation and often work together to influence the risk of violence. More often staff face a series of combined risk factors, such as working under pressure with distressed, demanding clients, in isolation from colleagues and other support. On top of these they may experience sexism and or racism.

In workplaces or work areas where incidences of violence is common there is a tendency to accept it as part of the job. This is a dangerous tendency, both in the sense that it ignores a problem with potentially very serious consequences for individuals and the organisation, and also because the tendency to dismiss the problem frequently comes from managers or others who are least likely to suffer directly from the problem. Staff have a right to be safe and healthy at work and this should not be undermined by those who believe preventative measures and procedures are too much trouble, too costly or that some level of violence is acceptable.

EMPLOYERS LEGAL DUTIES

There are no specific laws relating to violence at work, but the general duty set out in the **Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA)** to protect the health and safety of employees, applies to risks from violence, just as it does to other risks at work.

In addition, **the Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations** require employers to assess health and safety risks in order to identify measures needed to reduce them. Where the risk of violence is identified, it must be eliminated or reduced to the lowest level possible. Employers must also:

- establish procedures to be followed in the event of serious or imminent danger
- provide information and training on health and safety risks identified and the control measures in place.

Under the **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR)**, employers must report all incidents involving physical violence on employees that result in death, major injury or absence from work for three or more days. Unfortunately, RIDDOR does not cover threats, and verbal abuse or absences resulting from these. The duty under RIDDOR is separate from the duty to *record* all accidents in an accident book.

Safety representatives have extensive legal rights, which can be used to tackle violence at work. These are set out in the **Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations** (usually referred to as the "Brown Book") and include the right to:

- investigate potential hazards and dangerous occurrences
- inspect the workplace

- take up members complaints
- receive information from the employer
- inspect health and safety documents
- have paid time off to carry out their functions.

Employers must also consult safety reps in good time about their arrangements for health and safety including the introduction of any new measures affecting employees and the development and provision of any health and safety training.

ASSESSING THE RISK

The first step in tackling the issue of violence at work is to find out what the problem is. The causes can be varied and may be the result of a number of factors. Employers must carry out a risk assessment. This is not necessarily complex, but it must be systematic if it is to achieve its aims. The purpose of carrying out a risk assessment is to identify the:

- extent and nature of the risks
- factors which contribute to the risks
- changes necessary to eliminate or control the risks.

Under the MHSW Regulations, employers must assess health and safety risks to identify what steps they need to take to reduce them. The risk of violence must be assessed in the same way as for any other hazard. Where the assessment shows a possibility of violence occurring, employers must take action to remove or minimise that risk.

Staff who carry out assessments should be competent, have the training, time, resources and decision-making authority do the task effectively.

In their guidance, the HSE suggest the following five-step approach to assessing the risk of violence.

Step one – Look for hazards

Employers should ensure that the factors that can cause or contribute to the risk of violence are taken into account. They can identify these by talking to local managers, employees and safety representatives, who will know what exactly is happening in the workplace, rather than what is supposed to happen. It cannot be assumed that measures in place are being faithfully followed for a number of reasons. For example, staff may have found problems using the system in place because it is cumbersome, awkward or unsuitable for the task being carried out.

CASE STUDY 1

Rent collectors in the north-east were issued with personal alarms following a number of violent incidents. After several months it was found that staff had deemed the alarms a nuisance as they often went off independently so were not being used. No consultation or monitoring system was in place to identify problems found by staff using the alarms.

And just because an employer is unaware of any violent incidents it does not mean that there is not a problem. The HSE has found that incidents regarded as isolated upon further investigation often reveal that violence was under-reported and affected a wider range of jobs than at first thought.

Investigations into work-related deaths from violence (usually described as one-off, totally unexpected and something which could not have been avoided) reveal a history of other injuries, threats, and circumstances which clearly show a potential risk.

Equally important is the system in place for encouraging staff to report incidents. Records of incidents, including threats and verbal abuse are a useful way of monitoring the levels of violence. But staff will not report incidents unless they are confident about how their report will be received by management. Many have the fear and some the experience, that involvement in a violent incident will be seen as their failure. Others may be distressed by the experience and believe that reporting it will add to that distress, particularly where no clear preventative action takes place.

And in some workplaces the system for recording incidents may differ from one department to the next, or may be collected in several different ways. For example, a privatised day care centre in the South West, has developed a recording technique which is not detectable by the Local Authority (LA). This means that the LA figures on violence only shows those which have occurred on premises owned and run by them.

CASE STUDY 2

A group of home care workers were concerned when a client's son who was mentally ill started displaying threatening behaviour towards them when they visited. On reporting this to management they were told that it must be something that they were doing wrong and that they should look for other work if they felt that they couldn't cope!

For these reasons, the reporting and recording of violent incidences should be established as part of an overall strategy that can be seen to be tackling this serious work-related risk. And it is important that all workers are included particularly those who work in other employers premises.

The HSE suggests that the following information is gathered as a minimum:

- an account of what happened
- the circumstances in which the incident took place
- details of the victim, the assailant and any witnesses
- details of the location of the incident
- the outcome, including working time lost to both the individual affected and to the organisation as a whole.

Surveys

Surveys are a useful way to gain information on the potential for work-related violence. Employers can use these to find out if staff feel threatened or under stress because of violence at work. Staff should be kept informed of any survey results as this will help to demonstrate that the problem is being taken seriously.

A copy of a survey is set out at the end of this guide.

Step two – Who might be harmed and how

It is important to identify which groups of workers are likely to be most at risk of work-related violence, for example, according to the HSE, staff who work directly with the public face a higher

risk of violence. This would apply to a large percentage of UNISON members. It is important not to overlook staff such as new or young workers, those who are not in the workplace all of the time, for example, cleaners or maintenance workers, those who work late evenings or early mornings, lone workers, those who work in other employers premises and voluntary staff. Where possible, systems should be developed to identify potentially violent clients in advance so that the risks from them can be minimised.

Step three – Evaluate the risks

Existing preventative measures and current ways of working should be checked to determine if they are still adequate. For example, is it necessary for staff to work alone? A combination of factors is often the cause of work-related violence. Some of the factors which employers can influence include:

■ the type and level of training, information and support provided

■ the working environment

■ the design of the job.

The HSE suggests that employers should question how staff are asked to work, the circumstances in which they work and the system in place for sharing information about clients.

Step four - Record the findings

The main findings of the risk assessment should be recorded. They should include:

■ the hazards identified

■ potential assailants

■ high risk areas and/or times

■ the workers exposed

■ any existing preventative measures in place

■ an evaluation of the remaining risks

■ any additional measures needed

■ the person responsible for implementing control measures

■ the date by which things will be done.

A written record provides a useful working document for managers and staff.

Step five – Review and revise the assessment

The risk assessment should be checked regularly to ensure that it remains valid and reflects the current work situation.   The HSE believes that this process works best if it is part of the day to day management of health and safety. If incidents occur or the job or circumstances change then the risk assessment should be reviewed to consider what additional measures are needed.

DEVELOPING A POLICY

It is in employer's interests to develop policies to prevent violence at work, not only because health and safety law requires this but also because of the costs of failing to do so. The cost of violence can include:

■ increased absenteeism because employees are hurt or afraid

■ the loss of investment in training and of experience with more staff leaving

■ the cost of legal compensation

■ bad publicity

■ low morale.

Developing a policy on the management and prevention of violence will help employers avoid these costs. However, these should not be developed in isolation without proper consultation with employees. Staff work better if they feel that they have been party to decisions, and they have the invaluable experience of the job and the risks. In addition, employers are legally required to consult UNISON safety representatives on matters of health and safety.

A policy can also demonstrate to staff that employers are committed to preventing violence and are not prepared to wait until an incident occurs to introduce measures.

The overall aim of the policy is the prevention of violence to employees, and should be wide enough to ensure that all groups of workers are included.   At a minimum the following points should be included in a policy:

■ a definition of work-related violence

■ a statement from the employer that makes it clear that all violence to staff is unacceptable, and whatever the reason, will not be seen as an employees failure or an inevitable part of the job

■ methods for assessing the risks

■ arrangements to achieve safe working methods and workplaces (this should include safe systems of work for staff who work alone, or who carry out home visits)

■ arrangements for consultation and communication with staff

■ the reporting and recording procedures

■ the responsibilities of managers, supervisors and staff

■ training for management and employees

■ the action to be taken if a violent incident occurs

■ support for employees such as counselling

■ the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the policy.

But developing a policy is a first step and it must be implemented to be effective.   Many UNISON safety representatives' can point to existing policies on preventing work-related violence where no action is taken to implement them. The policy must be implemented, monitored and reviewed to ensure that it is achieving its aim to reduce or minimise violence to staff.

Once agreed the policy must be bought to the attention of staff. Employers can do this by circulating a copy to all staff, holding staff meetings, and including it in induction and health and safety courses.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

If the risk assessment is systematic and rigorous it will have clarified the factors in each job which pose a risk of violence and highlighted many issues that will need to be questioned or changed if the level of risk is to be reduced.   It will also have made clear which groups are most at risk.

Any changes must be considered in a systematic way to ensure effectiveness as there are no across the board solutions which will be effective in every situation where the risk of violence exists. A solution, which works in one context, may fail in another.

The employer's legal duty to provide safe systems of work (working practices), safe workplaces, safe working environments, and information, instruction and training to employees can provide a framework for devising preventive measures.

Safe Systems of Work

The following points can be used when safe systems of work are developed or changed:

■ why is the job done in a particular way? Is it because it has always been done that way? Has the working method just developed over time or has it been shown that it is the only way to do the job well? When decisions are taken about working methods, is any consideration given to the risk of violence? Can the way a job is done be changed to reduce the risk of violence, for example, is it necessary to have one person working alone with a client/might two be more effective?

■ do team discussions about clients needs also consider the health and safety of staff?

■ are clients given information about procedures, timing, and why some things can only be done in a specific way so that the employees are not held responsible?

■ is the risk of violence considered when determining: staffing levels, staffing rotas, and the length or time individuals work directly with the public?

■ unpredictable and unremitting workloads can lead to fatigue and a diminished ability both to identify early and to cope subsequently with violent situations

■ there should be sufficient flexibility in the provision of staff to adjust levels to meet actual needs

■ individuals should not be left isolated for long periods nor should junior or inexperienced staff have to cope alone, especially in situations of potential violence.

Job Design

The design of jobs should be examined to ensure that they do not have built in risk factors that can increase the likelihood of violence occurring.

Relevant questions include:

■ is the use of cash avoided wherever possible?

■ are the credentials of clients and the arrangements for meeting away from the workplace checked?

■ what arrangements exist to prevent/reduce violence to lone workers?

■ are arrangements in place for staff to keep in touch when they are away from the workplace?

■ is a system in place to warn staff about aggressive or violent clients?

■ do employees know what to do if they are involved in a violent incident?

■ is counselling and support available for those involved in a violent incident and for their colleagues?

The Working Environment

The working environment can play a crucial role in the prevention of work-related violence.   The seating, lighting, facilities available and the level of information offered while waiting may affect behaviour. Some staff do not work from a fixed workplace and may be at a higher risk for this reason. It is essential that this is also taken into account when the working environment is assessed. Relevant questions that the safety representatives can ask include:

■ can public waiting areas be changed to reduce tension levels through: lighting, decoration, making them smaller and less impersonal, the number and arrangement of seats available, access to refreshments and telephones, and the provision of children's play areas, etc?

■ can the system for seeing people be changed so that people do not feel that they are part of a large crowd waiting too long and for very different services?

■ do interviewing rooms offer staff a means of easy retreat as well as offering privacy to the client?

■ are any offices or work areas sited away from the main part of the unit, leaving staff to work alone but still accessible to a member of the public?

■ is there a policy on home visits/does it need to be re-assessed, especially with regard to visits made late at night/in isolated areas? are only essential home visits conducted?

■ can members of the public wander about the workplace unnoticed and unchecked?

■ are any premises or parts of premises more isolated at particular times of the day or night?

■ are areas between buildings and car parks well lit at night?

■ have employees been provided with an alarm/switch on their desks or in their rooms to enable them to summon help? Are these maintained and has a procedure been established to ensure that help is always forthcoming? Employees must be encouraged to use the alarms whenever they feel unsure or uncomfortable and this must not be taken as a sign of weakness.

Training

Training is not a substitute for safe systems of work, but it is an essential part of any strategy developed to reduce work-related violence. Any training offered must be appropriate for the risk and the particular circumstance, yet many employers offer the same type of training to all staff regardless of the effectiveness of doing so. For example, ambulance staff responding to emergencies may face pushes, punches, and kicks but are less likely to face close up holding. Therefore training should focus on diffusion and positioning to prevent injuries. The approach is different for staff working in mental health where there is a closer interaction with clients. Here staff may need additional training in breakaway techniques and management of violent clients. They may also need to practice team based approaches for emergency situations, eg when colleagues may be threatened or held hostage by a client.

Training in the prevention and management of violence should be provided to all workers where a risk of violence has been identified, and should also be included in health and safety induction and refresher training courses.

A training needs assessment should be carried out to identify appropriate training, but at the very

least workers should be trained to recognise the warning signs of aggression so that they can either avoid or cope with it. They should understand any system set up for their protection and should be provided with any information they might need to identify clients with a history of violence. Relevant questions include:

■ have all staff who come into contact with members of the public in their jobs been given training?

■ are other staff who may have to help in the management of a potential or actual violent situation been given specific training?

■ are all staff clear about what to do if an incident occurs?

■ is specific training provided for those who work alone?

■ is the training regularly reviewed?

Home Visits

Some UNISON members visit clients at home as part of their job and many are concerned about the risk of violence. Before any home visits are made the risk of violence should be assessed and procedures developed to protect staff. The area where visits take place should also be assessed. In general employers should consider:

■ avoiding the need for home visits as far as possible

■ improving the information gathering and sharing about patients, clients or their family members with a history of violence

■ procedures to identify non-essential home visits, and visits that should not be carried out in the evening, at night, or by a lone worker

■ systems for keeping in contact with colleagues.

UNISON and the HSE have produced detailed guidance on lone working. (See further information).

No Single Solutions

There are no easy solutions or short cuts to preventing or reducing violence at work. But often when the risk of violence is raised, the discussion turns to the idea of personal alarms, panic buttons, mobile phones, and self-defence training. These can be useful but they are not a replacement for a well-planned systematic approach and can only be part of it. In addition they focus on the individual by passing the responsibility for dealing with the risk to the worker. Personal alarms do not prevent violence but can be useful as they may enable help to arrive more quickly. They can however give staff a false sense of security and are no replacement for a safe system of work.

And whilst training is an important part of any prevention strategy, self-defence training can create its own risks as it can mean different things to different people. While some may see it as assertiveness or inter-personal skills training, others will see self-defence training as a physical way of dealing with an assailant. This is unacceptable because this type of training is only effective if regularly practiced and it passes all the responsibility for dealing with the risk to the worker.

Where the work involves dealing with potentially violent clients, for example in social care or mental health, and the risk assessments identify the cause of the risk; control and restraint training can be offered that includes methods of diffusion and/or breakaway techniques.

Mobile phones are useful as they can ensure that lone workers can maintain contact with their base. But as some phones don't work well in some areas they are not always reliable. It is worth remembering that they may also create an additional risk as the user can potentially be attacked for the phone.

Name badges

Many employees are now required to wear name badges whilst at work. This has caused concern to some UNISON members who believe that they be more vulnerable to work-related violence and abuse from the public - at work and at their home. For example some clients have used the electoral register to identify the home address of members; other members have been called to the phone at work and have been subjected to abusive and sexist language.

To ensure such risks are identified, the use of name badges should be assessed as part of any risk assessment for work related violence. If the assessment shows a risk of violence from the use of name badges then alternative arrangements should be considered. This could include the use of first names only or a work or 'made-up' name rather than the employee's own name.

SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES CHECKLIST

Introduction

Safety representatives can use the following negotiators checklist to help tackle the risk of violence at work.

Recognising the problem

- does the employer agree that there is a violence problem?
- does the employer recognise that it is a health and safety issue rather than a security problem?
- is the employer aware of, and acting upon the guidance provided in HSE and HSC publications? (see further information).
- has the employer consulted with safety representatives on how this guidance applies in the workplace?

Monitoring the problem – Risk assessment Step 1

- has the employer introduced a reporting form system specifically for violent incidents?
- do employees, including agency staff and part-timers know about the scheme?
- are staff encouraged to report all violent incidents including incidents of verbal abuse and threats?
- are supplies of report forms readily available to staff?
- are the results of monitoring used to check the effectiveness of the employer's policy?

Deciding what to do – Risk assessment Step 2

- does the employer consult with safety reps to seek possible solutions to the problem?
- as part of the consultation, are the returns from the report form system reviewed and classified?
- has the employer consulted any outside experts (such as a security consultant, the local police crime prevention officer, or victim support etc.)?
- if so were safety representatives involved in the discussion?

Preventive measures

- are all preventive measures based upon local risk assessment?

Not all the measures below will be appropriate in all situations. There may be others that should be considered also.

- is there anything that can be done to increase physical security of car parks, grounds, etc, to restrict access to buildings, and provide refuges for staff?
- are panic buttons fitted? if so, do they work? is there a reliable procedure for responding to them quickly?
- are personal attack alarms provided? is it clear that they are not in themselves a complete solution to the problem of violence?

- are specialist security staff employed? if so, are they properly trained and vetted? if not, who is responsible for security matters, such as dealing with intruders? are they given specialist training?
- is there a policy or procedure for home visits?
- is there a system for passing on information about potential incidents, or about clients, including new clients and for new staff?
- has attention been given to rooms or areas used by the public/clients to make sure they are suitable, do not create tension, or leave staff trapped if an incident arises?
- have measures been taken to prevent staff working in isolated buildings, offices or other work areas on or off site?
- have arrangements been made for lone workers and staff working in the community?
- does the employer take account of the risk of violence when setting staffing levels, altering working hours or shifts?
- are all staff, including part-timers, given training in the procedures for dealing with violence?
- is that training suitable and appropriate?
- does it make clear that staff should not put themselves at risk to protect cash or property?
- does the employer make sure that junior or inexperienced staff are not left to cope alone?
- does the employer have a 'client/patient care' programme? if so, does it avoid a one-sided 'client is always right' approach?
- does the employer give sympathetic support to staff who encounter awkward, aggressive or abusive clients?
- if name badges are worn has the risk of violence been taken into account?
- where the risk assessment shows this is necessary are forenames or work names only used on the badges?
- are there detailed procedures for dealing with cash handling and banking?
- does the employer provide sympathetic support to victims of violence (for example access to counselling, time off to recover, awareness of psychological effects, etc.)?

Implementing the policy

- does the employer include procedures for dealing with violence in their written safety policy?
- does responsibility for implementing the violence policy lie with a named senior manager?
- are all safety reps provided with a copy?
- is the policy regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with safety reps?
- are safety reps checking that the policy works and is being followed properly?

VIOLENCE TO STAFF SURVEY

Safety representatives can adapt and use the following survey to help them identify incidences of work-related violence.

UNISON VIOLENCE TO STAFF SURVEY

Your UNISON Branch is concerned about the number of violent incidents to our members. Violence includes threats, verbal abuse and harassment as well as actual attacks and injury to staff by clients and members of the public. To gain more information about the risks of violence your UNISON Branch is conducting a confidential survey. UNISON does not accept that you should put up with violence at work as part of your job. It is not the individual's fault when it happens. Work related violence can be prevented and controlled, and your employer has legal duties to ensure your safety.

To help us raise the issue of violence with your employer we need more evidence of the extent and causes of violence against staff. **Please complete this confidential questionnaire and return it to your UNISON representative.** Please help us to help you.

1   Where do you work?

2   What is your job?

3   Are you worried about violence in your job?   YES ❑   NO ❑

4a   In the last year have you suffered any of the following in relation to your work?
     (If more than once, state how many times)

     Major injury – requiring medical assistance   ❑

     Minor injury – requiring first aid   ❑

     Threatened with a weapon   ❑

     Threats or verbal abuse   ❑

     Racial harassment   ❑

     Sexual harassment   ❑

4b   Describe details of incident (s) – when, where, whom, and what happened?

5   Do you think your Manager takes your concerns about violence seriously?
     YES ❑   NO ❑

6   Do you know if there is a policy for dealing with violence at work?   YES ❑   NO ❑

7   Have you been given training on how to deal with violent situations?   YES ❑   NO ❑

8   Have you been told how to report incidents, involving:

     Actual injuries   YES ❑   NO ❑

     Verbal threats or abuse   YES ❑   NO ❑

     Racial and/or sexual harassment   YES ❑   NO ❑

9   Are you aware of any measures that management have taken to deal with violence (for example, changes in staffing, the working environment, lighting, security arrangements, etc)?

10a If you have suffered violence at work, did your employer give you any help, for example, counselling, or paid time off work, etc? YES ❑   NO ❑

10b What help were you given?

10c Were you satisfied with the help given? YES ❑   NO ❑

10d If not, what more could have been done to help you?

11   In more general terms what could be done to prevent violence to staff and improve the help given to staff following a violent incident?

12   Is there any more information or advice relating to violence at work that you would like to share?

Thank you for your co-operation.

Please return this form to your UNISON representative.

FURTHER INFORMATION

UNISON Publications

The following publications are available from the Communications Department, at UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ. Please quote the stock number.

Work – it's a risky business. A guide to risk assessment.   Stock no. 1351.

The health and safety six pack. A guide to the six pack set of regulations. Stock no. 1660.

Stress at work.   Guidance for safety representatives.   Stock no. 848.

Bullying at work. Guidance for safety representatives.   Stock no. 1281.

HSE Publications

Free single copies of the following are available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, C010 6FS. Tel: 01787 881165. Web site: www.hse.gov.uk/hsehome.htm

Violence at work: A guide for employers   (INDG68 (rev)).

Working alone in safety   (INDG73).

Homeworking Guidance for employers and employees on health and safety   (INDG226).

5 Steps to Risk Assessments A guide to risk assessment requirements.   (IND163).

The publications below are also available from HSE Books, but they are priced items. You should try to get your employer to buy these, rather than using branch funds to do so.

Violence in the education sector. Education Services Advisory Committee.   ISBN 0 7176 0683 X

Violence and Aggression to staff in health services: Guidance to assessment and management. Health Services Advisory Committee.   ISBN 0 7176 1466 2

Work-related violence: Case studies. Managing the risk in smaller businesses. ISBN 0 7176 2358 0

Other Information

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust provides information and training on personal safety and reducing violence in the workplace. They can be contacted at 14 East Sheen Avenue, London, SW14 8AS. Tel: 020 8392 1839. Web site: suzylamplugh.org

Advice

If you have any specific health and safety queries, your UNISON branch health and safety officer or branch secretary may be able to help. If they are unable to answer the query, they may pass the request to the Regional Office or to the Health and Safety Unit at head office. UNISON's Health and Safety Unit is at: 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ

Tel: 020 7551 1156 Fax: 020 7551 1766

E-mail: healthandsafety@unison.co.uk

Your comments

UNISON welcomes comments on this booklet from branch health and safety officers and safety representatives. Either write or email to the Health and Safety Unit at the address above.

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