



**ONTARIO NURSES'
ASSOCIATION**

TIP SHEET

Workplace Violence Risks and Risk Assessments for Community Health-Care Workers

Background

All health-care workers are exposed to workplace violence, but the unique nature of health-care services delivered in a client's residence by community health-care workers puts them at higher risk, especially when this work is often done alone.

There are a number of factors that put community health-care workers at risk of workplace violence:

1. The Community

The community itself is a risk. Certain neighborhoods have higher rates of crime and community health-care workers can experience violence from an external perpetrator with no relationship to the worker or client.

2. Working Alone

Community health-care workers work alone while travelling to and from a client's residence as well as within the client's residence.

3. Providing Care to Clients

The clients themselves can be a risk to community health-care workers, especially if they have cognitive impairment or a history of aggressive behaviours or violence.

4. Working with the Public

Family members, friends or even other health-care providers can be present in the client's residence with the health-care provider. Their history of violence may not have been assessed or is unknown.

Workplace Violence Risk Assessments

The purpose of a workplace violence risk assessment is to proactively assess the risks for workplace violence that may arise from the nature of the workplace and the type of work or the conditions of work.

They must consider the client's history of violence and include an assessment of the client's residence as well as the geographical region around the residence prior to the initial visit. It must also consider other persons who may be present in the residence as well as the presence of pets.

Things can change so violence risk reassessments should be done whenever there has been an incident of workplace violence, increase in violence in the community where the client resides, or a change in the client's residence.

The goal of the reassessment is to identify gaps or new hazards that may have arisen and to implement controls to address the risk of violence.

Employer & Supervisor Duties

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* outlines a number of requirements for employers and supervisors to ensure that community health-care workers are protected from injury or illness related to workplace violence when performing their work.

- Ensure that a risk assessment for workplace violence is done for each client and includes all factors in the community and client's residence where the worker will be working (i.e., parking, lighting, type of building, etc.). Where possible, this should be done in person before the worker conducts a home visit (*OHS*A sec 32.0.3).
- Have a written policy and program for workplace violence which is available to all workers and reviewed annually (*OHS*A sec 32.0.1 and 32.0.2).
- Based on the workplace violence risk assessment, employers are required to put controls in place to address the risks of workplace violence (*OHS*A sec 32.0.2(2)(a)).
- Provide a method for workers to report incidents or complaints of workplace violence. The employer must outline how they will investigate these incidents or complaints (*OHS*A sec 32.0.2(2)(d)(e)).
- A comprehensive working alone policy should be developed for workers that includes a check-in system and a reliable means for summoning immediate assistance (i.e., a personal safety response system that allows real-time monitoring and means for summoning immediate assistance) (*OHS*A sec 32.0.2(2)).
- During the intake process, ensure the client's history of violence is assessed and details are readily available to workers. In the case that the client is being referred from a hospital, details about the hospital's behavioural risk assessment (or similar assessment for aggressive or violent behaviours) should be included. Details about family members or persons within the client's residence should be included in this assessment and noted in the client's medical records (*OHS*A sec 32.0.5(3)).
- Ensure all workers are trained on the workplace violence policy and program as well as any other relevant measures and procedures related to workplace violence. This should include training on advanced de-escalation skills (*OHS*A sec 32.0.5(1)).
- Employers and supervisors take every precaution reasonable in the circumstance to protect workers with respect to workplace violence (*OHS*A sec 32.0.5(2)).

Worker Duties

In response to the requirements of employers and supervisors, workers also have duties and responsibilities related to workplace violence.

- Complete the required training on the employer's workplace violence program and all relevant policies.
- Review the workplace violence risk assessment and the client's chart to note any risks of violence prior to the client visit. If the client, or anyone in the residence, exhibits aggressive or violent behaviours, verbal and/or physical, alert your immediate supervisor and update the client's chart so other workers are aware.
- Report concerns or incidents of workplace violence as per the employer's measures and procedures.
- If you feel that the work is unsafe or that the situation could result in physical injury from workplace violence, remove yourself from the situation and alert your supervisor immediately, letting them know you are refusing unsafe work.

Some helpful tips include:

- Be aware of what you are wearing:
 - Wear comfortable clothes.
 - Avoid wearing expensive items.
 - Avoid earrings or accessories that can be grabbed or pulled.
- Be aware of your surroundings:
 - Park in well-lit areas.
 - Be alert when walking and avoid wearing headphones.
 - Enter the residence through a front entrance, avoiding rear or secluded entrances.
- When in the client's residence:
 - Note early signs of agitation.
 - Wherever and whenever possible, maintain a safe distance between yourself and the client or other persons in the residence.
 - Wherever possible, always try to position yourself between the exit and the client and close to the exit.

Joint Health and Safety Committee Tips

- Ensure risk assessments are completed and updated as necessary. If possible, be involved in the risk assessments.
- Review workplace violence incident reports and corrective actions taken to ensure they are appropriate and effective.
- Review violence training materials and records. Identify any and all obstacles to worker training and re-training.
- Develop a workplace violence subcommittee to focus on specific elements of the workplace violence program.
- Develop written recommendations to the employer to address the hazard of workplace violence and any gaps in the workplace violence policy and program.
- Investigate any work refusals.

Contact your Bargaining Unit President or Labour Relations Officer with any questions.

Resources

Public Services Health and Safety Association

1. Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit for Home Care
<https://www.pshsa.ca/resource/violence-prevention-for-home-care/>
2. Assessing Violence in the Community: A Handbook for the Workplace
<https://workplace-violence.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/vdvmnaen0417-assessing-violence-in-the-community-a-handbook-for-the-workplace-v2-3-05-01-20171-1.pdf>