
Violence against Healthcare Workers

Workers in hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare settings face significant risks of workplace violence. Many factors contribute to this risk, including working directly with people who have a history of violence or who may be delirious or under the influence of drugs.

NIOSH classifies workplace violence into four basic types. Types II and III are the most common in the health care industry. (Types I and IV are not addressed in this policy paper.)

- **Type I:** Involves “criminal intent.” In this type of workplace violence, “individuals with criminal intent have no relationship to the business or its employees.”
- **Type II:** Involves a customer, client, or patient. In this type, an “individual has a relationship with the business and becomes violent while receiving services.”
- **Type III:** Violence involves a “worker-on-worker” relationship and includes “employees who attack or threaten another employee.”
- **Type IV:** Violence involves personal relationships. It includes “individuals who have interpersonal relationships with the intended target but no relationship to the business” (Iowa Prevention Research Center, 2001; NIOSH, 2006, 2013).

Some key points:

Individuals in healthcare face higher risks of violence -- From 2002 to 2013, the rate of serious workplace violence incidents (those requiring days off for an injured worker to recuperate) was more than four times greater in healthcare than in private industry on average. In fact, healthcare accounts for nearly as many serious violent injuries as all other industries combined. Many more assaults or threats go unreported. *Source: Occupational Safety and Health Administration website.*

Most of the violence is perpetrated by patients -- Patients are the largest source of violence in healthcare settings, but they are not the only source. About 80 percent of serious violent incidents reported in healthcare settings were caused by interactions with patients. Other incidents were caused by students (3 percent), coworkers (3 percent), or other people such as visitors (13 percent). Only 1 percent of the violence was perpetrated by inmates or criminal suspects. *Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013 data*

Incidents are physical and verbal -- 21 percent of registered nurses and nursing students reported being physically assaulted—and over 50 percent verbally abused—in a 12-month period. *Source: 2014 American Nurses Association’s Health Risk Appraisal survey of 3,765 registered nurses and nursing students*

Who is most at risk? Psychiatric aides experienced the highest rate of violent injuries that resulted in days away from work, at approximately 590 injuries per 10,000 full-time employees. This rate is more than 10 times higher than the next group, **nursing assistants**, who experienced about 55 such injuries per 10,000 full-time employees. **Registered nurses** experienced about 14 violent injuries resulting in days away from work per 10,000 full-time employees, compared with a rate of 4.2 in U.S. private industry as a whole. Surveys show that high-risk areas include emergency departments, geriatrics, and behavioral health, among others. *Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013*

What kind of violence is most common? The most common causes of violent injuries resulting in days away from work across several healthcare occupations were hitting, kicking, beating, and/or shoving. *Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013*