

Violence and Harassment in the Workplace – Worker Safety

What is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is any violence that happens in or is related to the workplace, and can range from bullying, harassment, threats and intimidation to physical or sexual assault.

In anti-violence programs, workplace violence may be committed by:

- Clients attending the workplace to access support services
- Clients' abusive partners, ex-partners, family members or gang members
- Someone that the worker knows outside of the workplace who comes into the workplace (e.g., a worker's own abusive partner or ex-partner)
- Co-workers or supervisors (often referred to as workplace harassment and/or bullying).

Workplace violence can have serious and lasting physical and psychological consequences, not just on the impacted worker, but also on co-workers.

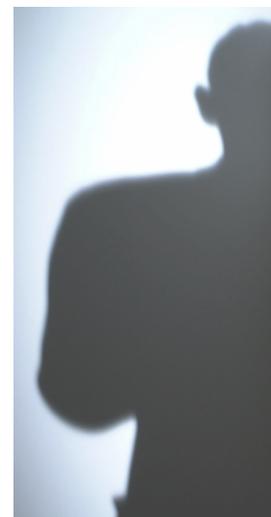
Anti-violence workers face complex issues that are particular to this sector and may influence how workplace violence affects them. These include:

- Generally stressful working conditions
- Vulnerability to violence by clients
- Risk of violence by clients' partners, ex-partners other family members or gang members
- Reluctance to address violence by workers' own partners or ex-partners
- The difficulty of acknowledging workplace bullying in the helping professions.

Seventy percent of anti-violence workers surveyed by EVA BC in 2010 had experienced some form of workplace violence.

Examples of workplace violence, abuse and harassment reported by BC anti-violence workers included:

- Clients' partner or ex-partner and/or his family members assaulting or grabbing workers
- Vandalizing of an anti-violence office
- A worker receiving threats of harm to herself, family, pets and farm animals
- A worker receiving unwanted "gifts", including dead flowers and raw meat
- Repeated phone calls or emails from clients' ex-partners, family members or gang members
- Clients' ex-partners watching workers' homes, and/or following them or their children
- Clients' ex-partners spreading rumours about workers online and in the community
- Clients verbally assaulting workers
- Intimidation and threats of violence by gang members affiliated with clients' partners.
- A client's partner setting fire to a worker's car.



Lateral violence is sometimes referred to as horizontal violence. Horizontal violence can be present in all organizations where there are relationships of unequal power. When workers at any level of an organization or sector are experiencing oppression, they may resort to abusing their peers instead of confronting the real source of their oppression, which may well be the larger system. Lateral violence is more likely to occur in workplaces with inadequate managerial or organizational systems.

Workplace Violence in Anti-Violence Programs: Strategies to Increase Worker Safety EVA BC 2013

– Employer Responsibilities –

Under the [Workers Compensation Act](#), employers have a legal responsibility to create and to maintain a safe and healthy workplace. They are required to have clear workplace violence policies, and to revisit them annually.

Common workplace safety measures include:

- Clear guidelines and protocols for staff working alone (e.g., set alarms, need prior permission, time limit).
- Providing cell phones for staff who work out of the office or in isolated environments.
- Installing one or more security panic buttons.
- Regularly discussing issues of worker and workplace safety as a staff and/or agency.
- Adopting a “no home visits” policy, or ensuring that other staff are aware of all home visits and conduct risk assessments before home visits.
- Taking special precautions and conducting staff risk assessments when working with dangerous clients or clients with dangerous partners.
- Adopting a protocol that requires workers to inform co-workers of their whereabouts.
- Limiting client access to a specific area of the building, and limiting access to and views of offices.
- Establishing clear guidelines and protocols for staff leaving the building on their own.
- Requesting assistance from a sheriff for potentially unsafe court accompaniments.
- Making arrangements with police to accompany high risk clients to office.
- Regular safety drills.
- Installing security cameras.
- Staff training in risk identification and de-escalation techniques.
- Being aware of suspicious mail and deliveries.



Photo by pippalou at morguefile.com

– Worker Responsibilities –

Anti-violence workers are responsible for ensuring they have adequate self-awareness, knowledge and self-care practices to enable them to identify, respond to and recover from the impacts of working in this field, including workplace violence.

All employees need to be responsible for fulfilling the intention of policies aimed at preventing and eliminating violence in the work environment. Workers should:

- Attend information and training programs, and regular safety meetings
- Be aware of and follow all safety and security policies and procedures
- Report all incidents, even minor ones
- Promote awareness of the risks of workplace and other violence
- Support colleagues impacted by violence
- Seek support and counselling if needed.

Additional Resources:

Workplace Violence in Anti-Violence Programs: Strategies to Increase Worker Safety EVA BC
<http://endingviolence.org/publications/workplace-violence-in-anti-violence-programs-strategies-to-increase-worker-safety-january-2013/>

Domestic Violence in the Workplace Resource Toolkit WorkSafe BC
<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/hazards-exposures/violence/domestic-violence/resource-toolkit>

How to Set Up Security Measures at Work to Protect Victims of Domestic Violence CREVAWC
<http://makeitourbusiness.ca/blog/how-set-security-measures-work-protect-victims-domestic-violence>

Difficult Clients: Dealing with Responsive Behaviours Charity Village free webinar
<https://charityvillage.com/cms/active-learning/webinars/past-webinars/recorded-webinar-difficult-clients-dealing-with-responsive-behaviours>