

### Violence at work

Violence at work is any incident where a person is intentionally abused, threatened, or assaulted at their work, and which endangers their safety, health, well-being, or work performance. It covers insults, threats (with or without weapons), or physical or psychological aggression exerted by people from inside or outside the organisation against a person at work. There may be a racial or sexual dimension to the violence. Violence to staff is an occupational safety and health issue and should be dealt with at the organisational level. It is not an individual's problem.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report that the number of violent incidents at work has declined over the last decade, with the incident rate remaining stable over the last four years. Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that in 2012/13:

- *The risk of being a victim of actual or threatened violence at work in 2012/13 is similar to the last few years with an estimated 1.4 per cent of working adults the victims of one or more violent incidents at work (CESW).*
- *In the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2012/13 323,000 adults of working age in employment experienced work related violence including threats and physical assault.*
- *There were an estimated 649,000 incidents of violence at work according to the 2012/13 CESW, comprising 332,000 assaults and 317,000 threats. This compares to an estimated 643,000 incidents in 2011/12, an increase of 1%. This change is not statistically significant.*
- *The 2012/13 CESW found that 1.2% of women and 1.6% of men were victims of violence at work once or more during the year prior to their interview.*
- *It is estimated that 60% of victims reported one incident of work related violence whilst 16% experienced two incidents of work related violence and 24% experienced three or more incidents in 2012/13*
- *Strangers were the offenders in 60% of cases of workplace violence. Among incidents where the offender was known, the offenders were most likely to be clients or a member of the public known through work.*
- *Victims of actual or threatened violence at work said that the offender was under the influence of alcohol in 38% of incidents, and that the offender was under the influence of drugs in 26% of incidents*
- *The survey found 51% of assaults at work resulted in injury, with minor bruising or black eye accounting for the majority of the injuries recorded*
- *In 2012/13 (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR) reported 3,697 over 7 days injuries for acts of violence in the workplace*

In education, the potential for violence is also always a risk where public meets provider in any setting and there is no reason to suppose that tertiary education is any different.

For example, the NASUWT's Big Question survey in 2013 found that 85% of school-teachers had suffered verbal abuse from a pupil, 14% had been physically assaulted and 22% had received threats of physical assault. Over a third (36%) had been verbally abused by a parent or carer, 4% had been threatened with physical assault by a parent or carer and 0.4% had been physically assaulted. NASUWT believe that much workplace violence against teachers is not reported.

There are complex relationships between staff and students, and a whole raft of student expectations that come with the marketisation and commodification of education. There is already some evidence of an increase in student complaints that the grades awarded by lecturers and exam boards are not good enough.

UCU takes the prevailing view that employers adopt a "zero tolerance" approach, as in the health service and the following points are used to assist in the development of policies at your college or university:

- Employer policies on workplace violence should be the strongest possible in this respect, and both staff and students should understand what is acceptable behaviour, and what procedures are in place for them to raise what they define as problems. Staff and students should also understand clearly the consequences of violent behaviour.
- All employers should include the potential for violence against staff as an ever-present hazard, and risk-assess it accordingly.
- The precautionary measures that are adopted to ensure staff safety need to be carefully considered – there are many actions that can be taken, from draconian security measures involving constant security surveillance and monitoring, heavy security staff presence and restricted access to buildings and the campus, to relative benign measures such as occasional identity card checks and other low-key measures.
- Staff training in techniques to defuse potentially risky confrontations can be useful, but should be in support other measures, not the primary control method.
- There needs to be clear procedures in place to enable staff to raise concerns before incidents occur, and a reporting procedure when an incident does occur. Joint union/management monitoring and review needs to be part of the policy and procedures.

### **Further sources of information**

- The sector-specific HSE guidance document "Violence in the Education Sector" was withdrawn in 2014. See <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf> for HSE's general violence at work leaflet that emphasises the risk assessment approach, and the importance of involving union safety representatives. For HSE guidance on the risks of lone working see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>.

The HSE site at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm> has other limited sources.

- At EU level there is a framework agreement between public and private sector employers and the trade unions on preventing violence and harassment at work, published by HSE. See <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/preventing-workplace-harassment.pdf> for guidance. See also the EU Agency for Safety & Health at Work factsheet on violence in the education sector at <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/factsheets/47>

- The TUC Hazards at Work Manual has a useful chapter on workplace violence at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues-34>

UCU has prepared a draft questionnaire below. Use this as part of a workplace inspection to find out what or if there is a problem that needs to be addressed. You can modify it to meet your specific needs; please send [healthandsafety@ucu.org.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@ucu.org.uk) a copy if you do.

## Violence at Work Survey

**Instructions:** Delete as appropriate

UCU is concerned about violent incidents to our members and staff in the college or university. Violence includes threats, verbal abuse and harassment as well as actual attacks and injury to staff by clients and members of the public. It's **not** part of our job to put up with violence; it **is** the employer's duty to identify the risks and take appropriate action to ensure staff safety at work.

To try to find out more about the occurrence and causes of violent incidents and the risks to members of staff, UCU is conducting a confidential survey. We will use the information we collect to raise the issue with management to see what we can do to improve the situation.

Please help us develop our knowledge by completing this confidential questionnaire and return it to your UCU representative. It should only take a few minutes. If you want to speak to one of the Branch safety reps, contact details are listed at the end of this questionnaire.

1. Which site do you work at? .....

2. Which department or school? .....

3. How worried or concerned are you about violence in the college/university? (Circle one below 1 = not at all; 5 = very concerned)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. Have you suffered violence in relation to your work in the last year? (Circle Yes or No. If more than once, please state how many times)

- |  |     |    |                |
|--|-----|----|----------------|
| a) Injury requiring medical assistance | Yes | No | How often..... |
| b) Minor injury – requiring first aid  | Yes | No | How often..... |
| c) Threatened with a weapon            | Yes | No | How often..... |
| d) Verbal threats or abuse             | Yes | No | How often..... |
| e) Racial harassment                   | Yes | No | How often..... |
| f) Sexual harassment                   | Yes | No | How often..... |

5. Please give brief details of any incident – when, where, and what happened?

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6. Did you report the incident(s)                      Yes                      No                      Don't recall

7. If Yes, Who to?.....

8. If not, why not?.....

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9. What, if any, action resulted to prevent a recurrence?.....

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10. Did you get any help to recover after the event? If so, what was it? .....

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11. Was it useful/did it help you recover? Yes No

12. Have you witnessed a violent incident against another person Yes No

13. Can you briefly describe details of any incident you witnessed – who was involved and what happened?

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14. Are you aware of any college/university policy or procedure on violence? Yes No

15. Have you been told to report violent incidents and how to do that? Yes No

16. Are you aware of any procedure for investigating violent incidents? Yes No

17. Are you aware of any measures that management have taken to deal with violence such as changes in staffing, security arrangements, etc? Yes No

If Yes, can you give brief details? .....

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18. Have you been given training on how to deal with violent situations? Yes No

19. Do you think management take concerns about violence seriously? Yes No

20. What do you think can be done to deal with incidents of violence in the college/university? If you have any suggestions, please note them below.

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Thank you for helping with this survey. Please return forms to (*insert name here*). We'll let everyone know what we find out and what we intend to take up with management if that is necessary. If you want to discuss this further with one of our safety reps, contact details are listed below.

UCU Safety Rep Building location e-mail address Telephone No:

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