



VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

- 1. What is violence and aggression?**
- 2. Examples of violence and aggression**
- 3. Impacts on workers and organisations**
- 4. Risk Management**
- 5. Control Measures**

WHAT IS VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION?

Violence and aggression are specific psychosocial hazards characterised by intentional and hostile behaviours that can cause harm or injury to workers, and encompass any occurrence in which an individual is subjected to abuse, threats, or physical assault within the context of their work or as a result of their work-related activities.

Violence refers to acts or threats of physical harm, such as physical assault, fighting, or the use of weapons, directed towards individuals in the workplace. It can involve both internal (between co-workers) and external (from clients, customers, or the public) sources.

Aggression encompasses a broader range of hostile behaviours that can be physical, verbal, or non-verbal in nature. This includes acts like yelling, shouting, intimidation, bullying, harassment, or the display of aggressive body language.

These psychosocial hazards of violence and aggression can occur in various work settings and industries. They pose significant risks to the physical and psychological well-being of workers, potentially leading to physical injuries, emotional distress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health issues.

EXAMPLES OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

- Yelling, swearing, insulting comments
- Throwing objects
- Making verbal threats
- Any form of indecent physical contact
- Biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, or kicking
- Punching, pushing, shoving, tripping, or grabbing
- Engaging in aggravated assault.
- Threatening someone with a weapon.



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The types of violent (and traumatic) events can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace. Some of examples include:

- robbery
- physical and verbal assault from customers, clients or patients
- witnessing or experiencing stressful events including death, grief, suicide, accident or injury
- ongoing bullying
- severe weather events and natural disasters, such as bushfires and floods
- workplace accidents, injuries or deaths
- downsizing or mass redundancies
- terrorism.

IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

The impacts of violence and aggression on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider include:

ON WORKERS

Physical injuries: Workers may sustain various physical injuries, i.e., bruises, cuts, fractures, or more severe injuries resulting from physical assaults or attacks.

Emotional and psychological trauma: Experiencing violence or aggression can lead to significant emotional and psychological distress. Workers may develop symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health issues.

Stress, fear and reduced job satisfaction: The fear and stress caused by violence and aggression can negatively affect job satisfaction and overall well-being. Workers may feel unsafe, constantly on edge, and experience a decline in their morale and motivation.

Interpersonal conflicts: Violence and aggression can create a hostile work environment, leading to strained relationships, conflicts between co-workers, and decreased collaboration and teamwork.

Long-term health consequences: The physical and psychological impacts of violence and aggression can have long-term consequences on the health and well-being of workers. Chronic stress, anxiety disorders, and other mental health issues may persist even after the initial incidents.

ON ORGANISATIONS

Decreased employee morale and job satisfaction: Workplace violence and aggression create an atmosphere of fear, stress, and insecurity among employees. This can lead to decreased morale and job satisfaction, resulting in reduced productivity and engagement.

Increased absenteeism and turnover: Employees who experience or witness workplace violence may be more likely to take time off work or even leave the organization. High levels of absenteeism and turnover can disrupt work processes, increase recruitment and training costs, and affect overall organizational stability.

Negative impact on organisational culture: Incidents of workplace violence can damage the organisational culture by eroding trust, creating a hostile work environment, and fostering a sense of insecurity. This can negatively affect teamwork, collaboration, and employee relations.

Decline in productivity and efficiency: Workplace violence can disrupt work routines, impair concentration, and decrease overall productivity.



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Employees who feel unsafe or are dealing with the emotional aftermath of violence may struggle to focus on their work, leading to decreased efficiency.

Increase in workers compensation claims: Workplace violence can result in physical injuries and psychological trauma, leading to an increase in workers compensation claims and increased costs for the organisation.

Damage to reputation: Incidents of workplace violence can damage an organization's reputation, both internally and externally. Negative publicity, loss of trust from employees and stakeholders, and a tarnished employer brand can have long-lasting consequences.

Legal and financial implications: Organisations may face legal consequences, such as lawsuits and regulatory penalties, if they fail to adequately address workplace violence. These legal and financial implications can be costly and harm the organisation's financial stability.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [***How to manage work health and safety risks***](#). For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [***Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice***](#).

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Violence and Aggression include:



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- **Risk assessment:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment of potential risks and vulnerabilities related to workplace violence and aggression. Identify high-risk areas, job roles, and tasks.
- **Policies and procedures:** Develop and implement clear policies and procedures that explicitly address workplace violence and aggression. These should include prevention, reporting, and response protocols.
- **Training and education:** Provide regular training sessions to employees at all levels to raise awareness about workplace violence, its forms, and its impact. Educate employees on prevention strategies, early warning signs, and appropriate response mechanisms.
- **Communication and reporting:** Establish a culture of open communication and encourage employees to report any incidents, threats, or concerns related to workplace violence. Ensure confidential and anonymous reporting mechanisms are in place.
- **Support systems:** Establish support systems for employees who have experienced workplace violence.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.



CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.

Physical security measures: Implement security measures such as access control systems, video surveillance, alarm systems, and well-lit premises to deter potential acts of violence and aggression.

Workplace design: Design the physical layout of the workplace to enhance safety and security, considering factors like visibility, escape routes, and secure areas.

Personal protective equipment (PPE): Provide appropriate PPE, such as panic buttons, personal alarms, or wearable devices, to employees who may be at higher risk of workplace violence.

De-escalation and conflict resolution training: Train employees in de-escalation techniques and conflict resolution strategies to defuse potentially volatile situations and prevent escalation into violence.

Security personnel and measures: Deploy trained security personnel or establish partnerships with security services to provide a visible presence and rapid response to incidents.

Work schedule and staffing: Consider the impact of workload, overtime, and staffing levels on the potential for workplace violence. Ensure sufficient staffing to manage high-risk situations effectively.

Zero-tolerance policy: Clearly communicate a zero-tolerance policy for workplace violence and aggression. Enforce disciplinary measures for offenders to deter such behaviour.

Incident response and emergency preparedness: Develop and practice emergency response plans specific to workplace violence incidents. Establish clear protocols for reporting, assessing, and managing incidents effectively.

Collaboration with external entities: Establish partnerships with law enforcement agencies, local authorities, and community resources to address workplace violence and aggression effectively.

DO

DO NOT



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Ensure that staff understand the “zero tolerance policy” and know that their safety is the organisations top priority. They should know that they can disconnect an abusive phone call or end and interaction with an aggressive customer at any time.

Implement radio systems and distress buttons for workers to request the presence other people immediately.

Ensure adequate staffing – long waits and hold times may lead to customer frustration which they may take out on workers.

Establish a systematic approach to mitigate the risk of workplace violence and trauma.

Engage in consultation with individuals who may be exposed to violence or trauma in the workplace.

Assign specific roles to all individuals in the event of a violent incident, such as providing support to the affected worker, contacting the police, or managing public redirection.

Conduct research to identify and implement appropriate controls, including personal alarms, barriers at counters, and mirrors that compel offenders to reflect on their actions.

Collaborate with workers to develop policies for safe interactions in enclosed areas, such as placing worker desks near doors and installing emergency alarms on desks.

Promptly reach out to any worker affected by violence or trauma to assess their well-being and encourage them to seek medical evaluation.

Provide support services for workers experiencing violence or trauma.

Require field workers to operate individually even in situations where there is a potential for violence or trauma.

Fail to engage in consultations with the workers responsible for carrying out the tasks.

Disregard the potential risks of violence and trauma to the workers.

Place the expectation on workers to handle and manage difficult situations without adequate assistance or support from management.