



**VIOLENCE AGAINST PROFESSIONALS IN THE COMMUNITY
AN ES.R.C FUNDED STUDY**

RESEARCHERS:

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STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TO MANAGE VIOLENCE

- THE VIEWS OF GPs AND PROBATION OFFICERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE.

This overview on the practices and policies used or suggested for use by professionals to manage violence from the public, is collated from interviewsⁱ with Probation Officers and GPs who participated in an ESRC funded studyⁱⁱ on violence against community based professionals. While the respective organisational structures and cultures vary across these two, community-based professions, many shared concerns exist when undertaking work with the public.

The following tables present the views of professionals who have reflected upon the issue of safety in their workplaces. These professionals have commented on the respective difficulties of current organisational and professional practices and strategies to handle the risk of violence. They also offer suggestions on how these problems might be addressed. The views expressed in the tables are those of the professionals who participated in our research, and not those of the researchers.

Although all of the issues mentioned in the tables pertain to employee safety when working with the public, they are underpinned by a common theme – the need for discussion and continual appraisal of implemented safety policies and practices. Employers have an obligation to provide a safe working environment through consultation with staff; and all staff have a responsibility to adhere to the safety advice they have developed with their employers. But the effectiveness of strategies depends upon their successful implementation and regular appraisal.

In all there are three tables which cover concerns about workplace environment; service delivery; safety policies and training and safety devices.

1. Workplace Environment

Issues of Concern:	Current Problems	Suggested Action
Access and Exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The public can wander in off the street unnoticed; <input type="checkbox"/> Offices are not locked and accessible to the public. <input type="checkbox"/> Access to car parks is often unchecked. Gates are left unlocked and parking areas are poorly lit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reception areas should be secure; <input type="checkbox"/> All public entering the building must check in at reception; <input type="checkbox"/> Reception staff need support to prevent certain people entering the building; <input type="checkbox"/> All offices and corridors should not be accessible to an unaccompanied public. <input type="checkbox"/> Parking areas should be secure and fitted with adequate lighting.
Design of Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The layout of furniture and fixtures is sometimes incompatible with recommended safety advice; <input type="checkbox"/> Offices can be too small which results in professionals and clients in very close proximity – this can be problematic if professional needs to confront clients; <input type="checkbox"/> Some locations in workplace are unmonitored and are perceived as risky by staff – e.g. corridors, stairwells. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Layout of furniture and fixtures needs to be reviewed in light of safety advice; <input type="checkbox"/> Rooms used for meeting clients need to be sufficiently spacious to allow clients or professionals interact comfortably or to leave quickly, if necessary; <input type="checkbox"/> All locations in the workplace should be observable to the eye, if necessary with the use of CCTV/mirrors.
Design of Waiting Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting areas are often poorly designed, resulting in a lack of seating at busy times; <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting areas can act as flash points for public anger and frustration with staff and other clients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting areas should be spacious enough to accommodate clients and relatives; <input type="checkbox"/> If space is limited, some control needs to be exercised at reception, over who can enter and remain in the waiting area.

2. Service Delivery

Issues of Concern	Current Problems	Suggested Action
Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> New safety rules and regulations seem to be enforced on staff without consultation or consideration; <input type="checkbox"/> Some safety rules often prevent staff from working effectively or efficiently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> New safety rules and regulations need to be easy to apply and easy to adhere to without compromising the way professionals work; <input type="checkbox"/> Staff should be given advanced notice and training about new rules and regulations before their implementation.

<p>Home Visits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Risk Assessments are often inadequate to highlight potential violence on home visits; ❑ Inadequate resources are available to assist professionals should violence occur on home visits; ❑ Home visits are sometimes made on the way home from work, which means nobody at work can check the safety of the professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Before home visits are made, professionals should review the nature of their relationship with client/client family; ❑ Professional's knowledge of the region covered in home visits should be reviewed; ❑ Resources need to be available to prevent or manage violence when it arises on home visits; ❑ Support should be available to staff should violence occur on home visits; ❑ All home visits should be scheduled and logged with another member of staff.
<p>Information about Clients</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Records about clients are sometimes unavailable to professionals for first visits/encounters; ❑ Files are sometimes not updated with all the information pertaining to the client and his/her behaviour at previous meeting; ❑ Colleagues sometimes forget to pass on vital information to other staff about certain clients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Until clients' details are available, staff should pair-up when seeing all new clients; ❑ All relevant information about clients should be available to all staff who meet and deal with clients; ❑ Reminders/checks should be in place to prevent professionals forgetting to pass on information about clients to colleagues.
<p>Lone Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Lone work is often a feature of professional work. At times it is considered by professionals to be risky. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Where staff are concerned about personal safety – pairing up should be available, or alternative 'safe' locations to meet clients should be agreed with management.
<p>Pairing-Up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Pairing –up is often advised in risk management policies but seldom occurs because of a scarcity in resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Pairing-up should be sufficiently resourced particularly for home visits or when seeing a client who is unknown or one who is known to be violent.
<p>Working Outside the Main Office</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Security arrangements may be worse/better than those found in the professional's main office; ❑ Sometimes provision is not made for the safety of the professionals who need to work in other organisation's premises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Safety arrangements and policies should be developed which cover work undertaken in other buildings, or in the offices of other agencies; ❑ Such policies should indicate a common minimum standard of safety for staff, irrespective of workplace.

3. Safety Policies and Training

Issues for Concern	Current Problems	Suggested Action
Risk Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Risk assessments can be undertaken in an ad-hoc way – like after an incident has occurred; <input type="checkbox"/> Risk assessments at times are only concerned with clients risk to the public, rather than the risks faced by professionals dealing with those clients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Risk assessments should be undertaken routinely with all staff and across all teams; <input type="checkbox"/> Risk assessments should cover all aspects of the work undertaken by all staff – including off-site work;
Reporting Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Incidents are not always reported because they're not recognised as important; <input type="checkbox"/> Reporting and recording of incidents, may be seen as indicators of staff failure; <input type="checkbox"/> Reporting incidents may result in sanctions that negatively affect clients' behaviour during future contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All staff should be supported and encouraged to discuss and record all incidents; <input type="checkbox"/> The implications of the sanctions applied to violent clients need to be assessed in addition to the reporting of the incident.
Safety Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Safety Policies may/may not exist; <input type="checkbox"/> If they exist they are usually filed away and seldom read; <input type="checkbox"/> Newer staff are seldom offered training on safety policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Safety Policies should be developed and appraised/revised regularly; <input type="checkbox"/> All staff should be given training to explain safety policies – particularly new staff.
Training to Defuse Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Skills to defuse violence are sometimes taught on training courses, at other times are learned on the job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Skills on how to defuse violence should be provided for all staff and regularly updated as part of an overall safety policy; <input type="checkbox"/> Staff should be aware of flash-points when violence might occur. These should be discussed amongst all team members and to develop appropriate responses.
Training on Safety Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Training on new safety devices is usually ad-hoc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Training should be aimed at all staff together in their teams; <input type="checkbox"/> Trials to test equipment should be undertaken regularly; <input type="checkbox"/> All new equipment should be installed with consideration to the way the professionals work.
Training about Safety Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Training of this nature is usually once off with no updates – it slips from the professional's priority list. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Training on safety policies needs to be available for all the staff involved in service delivery; <input type="checkbox"/> Training needs to be

		<p>available to all staff on what actions they should take should aggression arise;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Regular training updates and testing of skills should be built into professional's schedules.
Training On Managing Clients Who Have Been Violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Training of this kind is usually once off - sometimes it is not specialist and is not updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Availability of suitable specialist training for all staff who come into contact with clients who are violent; <input type="checkbox"/> Regular training updates and testing of skills.

Safety Devices

Issue of Concern	Current Problems	Suggested Action
Alarms (Panic alarms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Panic alarms are often fixed to a static fitting (e.g. under a desk) which may not suit professional ways of working; <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile alarms can act as triggers for client aggression (accentuate feelings of mistrust); <input type="checkbox"/> Alarms when set-off are not responded to quickly or sometimes at all; <input type="checkbox"/> Alarms are seldom tested or checked; <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to alarms are seldom checked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Alarms should be installed further to discussions with staff regarding their work practices; <input type="checkbox"/> The location of alarms should be monitored regularly for suitability; <input type="checkbox"/> Alarms should be easy to reach if needed but not too obtrusive; <input type="checkbox"/> Alarms should be checked regularly to ensure they're in working order; <input type="checkbox"/> Responses to alarms should be rehearsed with all staff. These tests should be regularly undertaken at various times of the working day/week.
Alertness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Professionals can lapse into a false sense of security; <input type="checkbox"/> Time pressures often act as a barrier to the professional reading warning signs or adhering to their safety policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All professionals should expect the unexpected (Don't get complacent); <input type="checkbox"/> Safety of staff should be a priority for all staff and management in the organisation.
Mobile Phones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile phones are not always available to professionals; <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes professionals have to use their own personal mobile phones for work; <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile phones can be inefficient as a safety device. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> If a professional is mobile, he/she should be contactable and supplied with a mobile phone; <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile phones keep a link between professional and work and family. They should be supplied by organisation and in good working order.

Further information about the Violence Against Professionals in the Community study can be downloaded from our web page at:

<http://www1.rhbnc.ac.uk/sociopolitical-science/> under the heading **Research**, or by contacting: Maria O'Beirne, Research Officer on 01784-443471.

ⁱ A total of 50 interviews with GPs and Probation Officers working in the South East of England who were recruited from a large scale survey of one in three GPs and all main grade and senior Probation Officers between January 1999 and September 2000.

ⁱⁱ Details about the Violence Against Professionals in the Community study can be found on the Department web page <http://www1.rhbnc.ac.uk/sociopolitical-science/> by clicking on Research.