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Introduction

The WHO and the Violence Prevention Alliance define violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” The types of violence examined in this study include physical, sexual, verbal and racial as the most commonly reported manifestations of violence in the workplace.

Objective

To obtain the most recent statistics on violent acts perpetrated against mental health care workers in acute psychiatric units in the Republic of Ireland. To capture the experiences and attitudes of staff to the reporting of this violence.

Methods

The State Claims Agency (SCA) were contacted to obtain the most up to date figures on violence against mental health care workers. An electronic survey based on the WHO’s validated questionnaire on violence was then disseminated to all acute psychiatric units within the Republic Of Ireland.

Results

According to the SCA there were 6,690 episodes of violence against staff in the Mental Health Division in 2018 and 2019. Regarding the online survey, 91% of 67 respondents reported verbal abuse, 31.3% recorded physical assault, 14.9% had suffered sexual violence and a further 13.4% experienced racial harassment in a 24-month period (Figure 1). A staggering 4.5% of these reported that violence occurred daily

- Physical violence, Verbal abuse
- Racial Harrassment, Verbal abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Physical violence

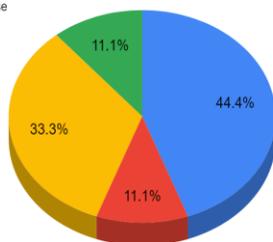


Figure 1 Types and amounts of violence experienced by staff in a 24 month period

One in five people who had been the victim of violence in the workplace, took no action at all, and of those who did, more than half of respondents felt that there were no consequences to the aggressor. 90.5% of 63 people said they would report violence in the workplace again. Of those who said they would not, 90% felt that it was pointless, again citing the lack of consequences to the aggressor



Discussion

It is clear from the response to the survey that there is a high degree of non-reporting of violence with an apparent sense of futility amongst staff; more than half feeling that violent incidents were preventable in the first instance and 70% feeling that reported incidents were not properly investigated. It is not unreasonable to speculate that the recorded figure of 6,690 violent incidents from the SCA likely falls short of the reality as this figure represents the collation of the official NIMS forms that are filled in by staff regarding violent incidents.

Conclusion

Further work is needed in the prevention of workplace violence as well as improvements in reporting and investigating of incidents when they do occur.