

# Violence at the workplace



Danish experiences with the prevention of violence  
in the social and health care sectors



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Prevention of Violence in the  
Social and Health Care Sectors

Social Development Centre SUS  
2007

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# Preface

Being exposed to biting, scratching, kicking and pinching is to many people part of their working lives. Violence and aggression are well-known everyday occurrences, especially to social and health care workers.

Which is why the prevention of violence has become an increasingly important issue in Denmark in recent years. Both at work and within professional organizations. Over the last 10-15 years a number of surveys and researches into this field have been carried out, to develop strategies for reducing violence and tools to cope with violence if and when it arises. The possibility of violence cannot be eliminated altogether. Preventive measures have been carried out through the national project Violence as a Form of Expression, financed by grants from public funds to prevent and cope with violence.

The increased focus on violence as a problem within the working environment, has led to more openness on issues of violence. It is now acceptable to admit that you are exposed to violence and aggression on the job. Evaluation reports from workplaces show that social and health care workers now see violence in a different light and that their ability to cope has changed considerably.

Fortunately, experience also shows that there are good possibilities of reducing violence. And at the same time the psychological working environment is often improved by an increased focus on preventing violence. The development of professional and pedagogical methods is a basic prerequisite for many of the workplaces that have successfully prevented violence. Methods include for example adapted pedagogies, new ways of communicating with users, clients or patients and new ways of treatment.

The conclusion seems to be that workplaces achieve the best results if they apply the following concrete preventive measures simultaneously: a policy on violence, registration and analysis of violent occurrences, an efficient crisis plan, ongoing supervision, and a modified physical framework.

This booklet contains Danish experiences in preventing and coping with violence and aggression at workplaces in Denmark, within the social and health care sectors. The emphasis is on professional, pedagogical and practical methods.

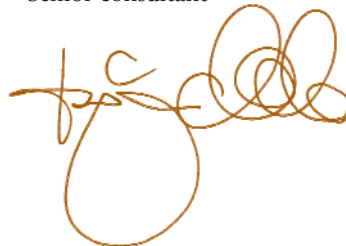
We hope it will provide inspiration.

Per Holm  
Managing director



Social Development Centre SUS

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Senior consultant



# Violence at the workplace

## Definitions of violence

Some workplaces have their own definition of violence. Generally, it is the individual employee's own definition of violence or aggression that is applied.

### The Danish National Working

**Environment Authority** distinguishes between physical and psychological violence. Physical violence is for example: hitting, kicking, biting, strangulation attempts and knife stabbing. Psychological violence includes verbal threats, insults, and aggressive behaviour. This violence may be directed against the employee, against his or her family or against other close friends or associates.

**The European Commission** defines violence as occurrences where people are exposed to insults, threats or physical attacks in connection with their work. The assaults occur in circumstances involving a direct or indirect threat to these persons' safety, well-being or health. Some international definitions of violence also include bullying and sexual harassment.

## 8 per cent exposed on job

8 per cent of all Danish wage earners, corresponding to between 200,000 and 240,000 employees are exposed to violence on the job each year. This level is on the whole constant in recent years. Social and health care workers and social educators and trainers are particularly exposed. Source: Survey on the psychological working environment from the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, 2005 (In Danish).

There has been more focus on work-related violence in recent years, both within the EU<sup>1</sup> and internationally.

More than every fourth occurrence of violence in Denmark is job-related. This means that the risk of being exposed to violence is greater on the job than at the pub. 8 per cent of Danish wage earners have been exposed to violence or aggression on the job within the last year. This applies especially to public servants, and some jobs carry a higher risk than others. Social and health care workers and educators and trainers are the most likely groups to experience violence from users, clients, or patients.

Violence and aggression is not only unpleasant to the people exposed. They may also have serious consequences for individual job satisfaction and health, as well as for the whole workplace. This is why workplaces and professional organizations are focusing increasingly on violence as a working environment problem.

## Prevention of violence in Denmark

Denmark has a long tradition of violence and aggression prevention in workplaces, especially within the social and health care sectors. Since 1992 the national project of Violence as a Form of Expression has attempted to restrict violence and its adverse effects. This project has been focusing on finding the causes of violence and on developing strategies for preventing and minimizing violence. Characteristic of this effort has been the unique cooperation between governmental ministries, counties, professional organizations, user organizations and a large number of workplaces, locally and regionally.

When the Structural Reform<sup>2</sup> came into force on the 1st. of January 2007, Violence as a Form of

Professionals most likely to be exposed to violence	Percentage exposed to violence
Social educators in residential care units	32
Nursing staff in hospitals	32
Nursing staff in nursing homes	20
Home help staff	15
Social and health care workers, taking care of the chronically ill	15
Nurses	15
Policemen and prison staff	10
Primary and secondary school teachers	8
Staff in activity centres and day care units	8
Carers	7

Expression was also reorganized. The Danish Parliament has allocated 20 million Danish kroner (2.7 million Euro) to continue the project until 2009. The overall objective is to prevent violence and the harmful effects of violence in municipal and regional workplaces and to reduce the number of incidents involving violence and aggression.

For the third time government has allocated funds on the Budget to prevent violence in the workplaces. In 1999, the government allocated a special grant to Project Violence as a Form of Expression. These funds were allocated to initiate research projects in residential care units and health care units which were particularly exposed, i.e. projects concerning among others, people with intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disorders, and dementia. Furthermore, the prevention of violence should be incorporated into existing professional training courses in social education and in nursing schools.

These initiatives were followed up by Project PARIS (psychological working environment in workplaces exposed to violence), which was also government funded. The aim was to focus on the prevention of violence and to disseminate experiences to enterprises, sectors and trades.

The common basis was – and still is – the concept that people who particularly need care and support are not especially violent but that violence is a form of expression. When communication fails and you do not feel that you are listened to and understood, often the only language left is violence. This is why it is important to understand the cause of the violence and acquire tools and develop methods to prevent it. And this is why much of the focus in workplaces must be on studies of ones own practice and professional skills.

### Experiences

The constant focus on this issue has resulted in many local and regional research projects and initiatives and much valuable experience has been gained, in preventing and coping with violence and aggression in workplaces in Denmark.

And reports from workplaces and statistics<sup>3</sup> of reported violent incidents seem to indicate that prevention does make a difference. There are good possibilities of minimizing violence and aggression. At the same time a dedicated effort to prevent violence often leads to other important benefits like an improved psychological working environment.<sup>4</sup>

The many initiatives over the last few years have also meant that there is now an increased openness when it comes to problems with violence. It is now acceptable to talk about the fact that you may be exposed to violence on the job. And that you are not expected to put up with violence as an occupational risk. Most workplaces today see violence as a problem within the working environment and the solution, as a common responsibility.

### Initiatives

The many violence preventive measures in workplaces have especially been focusing on:

- New professional and pedagogical methods
- New communication strategies
- Policy on violence
- Crisis plans and crisis assistance plans
- Methods for registration and analysis of occurrences of violence
- Training courses in the handling of conflicts and violence prevention
- Training of resourceful employees especially in the workplaces

1 Surveys from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions show that approx. 10 per cent of the work force in the EU has been exposed to violence or aggression on the job.

2 On the 1st. of January 2007, a new administrative structure was introduced in Denmark. The 14 counties were reduced to 5 regions, and the number of municipalities was reduced from 272 to 98. The administration of most social care units was transferred from the former counties to the municipalities. Project Violence as a Form of Expression continues as a national project with regional and municipal workplaces as its target group.

3 The effort to prevent violence has been particularly intensive in residential care units for people with intellectual disabilities and in institutions for the elderly. In these types of institutions the number of job related incidents of violence reported to the National Working Environment Authority has dropped significantly since the end of the 1990s – compared to other areas which have not had the same focus on preventive work.

4 The National Working Environment Authority has initiated an evaluation of experiences from the roughly 70 projects, which have received public funds for the prevention of violence on the job. The projects include workplaces in many sectors. This evaluation is carried out by the consultants Bymusen and the report will be published on [www.vold-som-udtryksform.dk](http://www.vold-som-udtryksform.dk) during the spring of 2007. The report will contain an abstract in English.

# Cooperation and job satisfaction

## Violence and the working environment

Both Danish and international surveys show that there is a distinct connection between the psychological working environment and occurrences of violence on the job. But it can be hard to say what is the cause and effect. Factors, which are particularly important for the occurrence of violence, are:

- Quantitative demands, that is time pressure, high work speed, overtime
- High decision demands, that is the job requires you to make quick or complicated decisions
- Learning requirements, that is if the work demands knowledge and skills you do not possess
- Conflicts of role, that is if you have to perform tasks without the necessary resources, or if you have to do things that you feel should be done in a different way
- Lack of predictability on the job, uncertainty, anxiety and apprehension in the workplace, for example in connection with reorganization or restructuring.

Source: Christiansen, J.M.: Violence on the job – with a special emphasis on the workplaces of public servants and staff, CASA, 2005. (In Danish).

Violence and the working environment are closely related. Violence has a negative effect on both individual employees' job satisfaction and the organization as a whole. And a poor psychological working environment is of importance for the occurrence of violence.

This is why staff cooperation and job satisfaction are important factors in the prevention of violence. Employees must focus on how to support each other on the job. It is important to have common values and common professional strategies, so that effort made by the staff create maximum development and confidence in the users. This goal may be achieved by among other things, ongoing discussions on pedagogies, guidelines and procedures.

### Management support

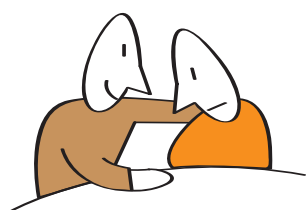
Preventing and coping with violence and aggression is a task which can only be undertaken as a joint effort from the staff and the management. A distinct, visible and enthusiastic management, which supports the staff and involves employees in the decision-making process, is a prerequisite for a good working relationship – and for sound pedagogical solutions.

It must be clear what management and staff expect from each other and which requirements, responsibilities and rights go with the job. And job rules must be known to all. Management must be prepared to prioritise time and resources for professional development, supervision etc.

### Staff must be involved

It is essential that all the employees are taking part in an ongoing dialogue on violence prevention and feel responsible for creating good working and living conditions for both the staff and the users. Often staff has a different view of everyday occurrences than management. And often, staff have ideas for development, which may be adapted to existing procedures.

Staff involvement is also important for the realization of decisions to work on violence prevention. Staff loyalty is necessary to achieve this goal. And involvement in the decision-making process increases loyalty.





## Bo-Grindsted, Grindsted

### Sharing good stories

The basis of work at Bo-Grindsted is an appreciative approach. Briefly, to study positive experiences and learn from them. Bo-Grindsted is a residential care unit for adults with considerable permanent physical and mental disabilities. There are 31 residents, each in his/her own flat.

For a number of years the residential care unit has solved special problems in connection with residents displaying violent behaviour. One experience is that sometimes violent behaviour affects the psychological working environment to such an extent, that the staff feels insecure and negative. And so Bo-Grindsted has been particularly focusing on the working environment, using two approaches: appreciative inquiry and storytelling.

Appreciative inquiry or approach is based on what is working and valued in the organization. Focusing on possibilities and resources and not on problems and deficiencies. Instead of focusing on residents' unacceptable behaviour for example, the staff tries to concentrate on successes and positive experiences. This applies to both residents and fellow staff. Similarly, the staff uses storytelling to create a general picture of which approaches work and why.

In practice, each unit has a notebook where the staff writes down "good stories" as they occur, insignificant and important occurrences. Often the incidents recorded will be nice, sweet, funny, and entertaining. Each staff meeting begins with a staff member telling the others a good story. Afterwards fellow staff members have the possibility to ask questions based on an appreciative approach. Staff members take turns storytelling. At regular intervals Bo-Grindsted organizes story-telling days for all the staff and all units.

### Violence and aggression damage your health

Violence and aggression can damage your body and soul. Both Danish and foreign surveys show that employees who are exposed to aggression, violence and harassment on the job suffer to a higher degree, from a number of psychological symptoms like irritability, frustration, anger, anxiety, depression, sadness, tiredness, poor health etc. A recent Danish PhD study (by Wieclaw et al.) shows that work-related aggression and violence are also connected with serious psychiatric illnesses. The project looked into the connection between choice of job and the risk of being hospitalised or receiving outpatient treatment for depression, anxiety or a stress-related illness (mainly post-traumatic stress reaction (PTSD) and strain reactions).

The project concludes that social and health care workers and educators – who are particularly exposed to violence – run a higher risk of developing psychiatric illnesses.

The project was carried out by Department of Occupational Medicine at the Hospital of Århus in cooperation with The National Centre for Register-based Research, University of Aarhus and The National Research Centre for the Working Environment.

Høgh, Annie: Aggression at work. Bullying, nasty teasing and violence. Prevalence, mediating factors and consequences.

PhD study, The National Research Centre for the Working Environment, 2005.

Wieclaw, J. et al.: Work-related violence and threats and the risk of depression and stress-related disorders. *J Epidemiology/Community Health* 2006; 60:771-775.

# Professional and pedagogical methods

If violence and aggression are seen as a common problem, the solution of which is everybody's responsibility, this leads to an increased focusing on professional and pedagogical methods as a means of prevention. Often, it is for example a question of using other strategies of communication.

It is essential that the staff have common values and common attitudes towards working methods. Developing professional methods is both a question of planning and performing tasks and of ongoing evaluation, adjustment and further development of methods.

Concrete tools may be for example keeping a journal; registering or evaluating agreed courses of action or observing users and staff by video recording everyday occurrences and "difficult situations".

## Individually adapted approach

It is important to see working methods in relation to users' reactions. To try to understand how users understand situations and consequently their reactions.

Staff must adapt approaches and working methods to the individual. And it is important to know the user's life story and to observe his or her behaviour. Often, it may be necessary to try a number of pedagogical approaches on different users. For some, a specific approach may have a negative effect. Whereas it may work with others.

## The Nursing Home Lindegården, Herning:

### The Marte Meo approach

The Nursing Home Lindegården in Herning uses the Marte Meo approach professionally and pedagogically, as an integral part of daily care. 60 of the approx. 100 residents are suffering from dementia or dementia-like symptoms and this may give rise to conflicts and violence in the home.

Marte Meo means "on one's own strength". It is a way of communication developed in the Netherlands. Based on video recordings it was originally used for intervention or counselling in relation to parents having problems in their interaction with their children. Research into dementia shows that this approach may also be applied in the care of the elderly to support, advance and stimulate the resources of the person suffering from dementia.

Lindegården uses the Marte Meo approach as a concrete tool to stimulate the interaction between the person suffering from dementia and the helper. Staff records everyday situations with the residents and the helper. Afterwards the recordings are analysed, focusing on the positive situations and conclusions are drawn. The purpose is to increase the staff's ability to support and stimulate residents' resources by raising staff's awareness of the interaction and by analysing the behaviour of the resident.

All the staff at Lindegården has been offered an introduction course to the Marte Meo approach. Some have taken further courses or received actual training as Marte Meo therapists.

Video recordings focusing on resources and positive situations have become a working tool used in everyday life for professional development. The staff feel better prepared to tackle conflicts and violence. And the number of violent incidents has dropped.









# Policy on violence

A policy on violence may contribute to creating visibility, homogeneity and continuity in the efforts to prevent violence and aggression.

There are many good reasons to lay down a policy on violence:

- It signals a common will to cope with violence and aggression
- It can improve the working environment by creating greater openness in connection with violence and aggression
- It contains the common goals of the workplace to prevent violence and aggression
- It can make existing routines more visible and contribute to their adjustment
- It can ensure the registration of all violent and threatening incidents
- It can reveal new demands for tools to tackle violence and aggression

- It is a kind of safety net for the staff. It brings a greater sense of security to the interaction with clients, users and patients
- It shows which tasks and responsibilities the management and staff have, in relation to violence and aggression.

A policy on violence – and a possible set of guidelines – typically contains the definition of violence and aggression of the workplace – and courses of action to prevent and minimize violence. It may also contain a description of how to follow up when violence occurs (see also p. 13) and a description of areas of responsibility for management and staff.

Some municipalities and large residential care units have an overall policy on violence for the social and health care sectors and encourage individual workplaces to formulate their own policy within the existing framework.

## Policy on violence

- We consider violence and aggression to be a common problem
- We are open when it comes to violence and aggression
- We prevent violence and aggression
- We register violence and aggression
- We can count on each other's backing
- We can count on management's backing.

### Definitions of violence

- Physical violence: striking, kicking, pushing, biting etc.
- Psychological violence: verbal and non-verbal aggression, including bullying, harassment or derogatory remarks. Reactions to constant risk of exposure to violence and aggression and reactions to witnessing violence and aggression.

### Goals

- To prevent and reduce the number of violent or threatening incidents on the job
- To ensure a good psychological working environment
- To ensure that all the staff knows how to prevent, cope with and register violence and aggression
- To ensure the staff immediate crisis assistance and the possibility to overcome violent incidents
- To ensure that trainees and new colleagues are informed of the policy adapted by the workplace to prevent and cope with violence
- To ensure that all the staff receive adequate in-service training
- To involve users in the efforts to prevent violence.

### Plan of action

Once a year management and staff prepare a plan of action to prevent violence. This includes a plan for the pedagogical work, training schemes, crisis assistance plan and the registration and analysis of violent occurrences and aggression. The plan of action is constantly being revised.

# Crisis plan

It is important to have a crisis plan for a course of action if a member of the staff is exposed to violence or aggression. Often this plan is part of the policy on violence.

A crisis plan is a sort of safety net for employees. You are assured that you will be taken care of if you are exposed to a violent incident. The crisis plan can also ensure a follow-up to a violent occurrence – both in relation to the employee exposed to the incident and in relation to reporting the incident to the relevant authorities.

The crisis plan must include a description of the course of action if a colleague is exposed to violence and aggression and what another staff member in the same situation can expect. Typically the plan contains:

- A list of the colleagues the employee trusts and wants assistance from in case of a critical situation
- A list of the people to contact in case of violence (family and friends)
- Guidelines for psychological first aid in critical situations and advice on support to the colleague who has been exposed to violence
- A description of the course of action to be taken for follow-up on the incident, for example by registering and reporting the violent incident, psychological assistance, talks with the management and colleagues, or other initiatives. And who is responsible for which elements of the crisis assistance plan.

The crisis plan should be adjusted at regular intervals so that it is realistic.



## Crisis plan

1. A colleague, possibly the person who has been exposed to violence, calls in his or her contact person. A list of people to be contacted for the colleague in question, is kept in the “violence file” at the manager’s office.
2. When the contact person arrives he or she will take charge of the said colleague exposed to violence and provide psychological first aid.

Basic rules for psychological first aid:

*It is important to*

- Listen and understand
- Ask questions about the situation
- Show concern and care
- Listen to the needs of the person exposed to violence
- Accept all the feelings.

*Avoid to*

- Chatter away, control the conversation
- Tell of own experiences
- Make light of the situation
- Analyse and explain
- Show embarrassment at the display of feelings
- Leave the person exposed to violence alone
- Blame or criticise the person exposed to violence.

3. His or her immediate superior is informed of the violent incident at once. He or she sees to it that the Safety Committee and top management are informed – within 24 hours.
4. If necessary, the immediate superior calls in a relief for the person exposed to violence.
5. The contact person, the person exposed to violence and possibly the immediate superior assess the need for medical or psychological assistance. If several colleagues were involved in the incident the need for debriefing is also considered. In this case the immediate superior organizes a debriefing, which should take place after 24 hours at the earliest and 72 hours at the latest after the incident.
6. As soon as possible – within the first 24 hours – the person exposed to violence fills in the registration form for violence and aggression. The form is handed in to his or her immediate superior who is responsible for passing it on to the Safety Committee.
7. The immediate superior ensures follow-up, for example by talks with the manager.
8. The Safety Committee assesses each incident and reports incidents to relevant authorities: police, The Danish Working Environment Authority, and possibly The National Board of Industrial Injuries. The Safety Committee considers the need for initiatives to prevent similar situations.







# Registration and analysis

In order to make violence visible and improve preventive measures, it is important to register all occurrences of aggressive and violent behaviour at work.

A concrete tool is a registration form, which provides information on where and when a violent occurrence has taken place, the nature of the violent behaviour, the kind of harm inflicted, who was involved and if colleagues were present etc. The person involved may also describe his or her reaction to the violence: physical or psychological consequences, which follow-up and treatment were planned. And later on, it is important to write down whether the occurrence was reported to The Danish Working Environment Authority, the National Board of Industrial Injuries) or the police<sup>5</sup>. This way all relevant information is available in one registration form.

## Agerbækhuse, Roskilde:

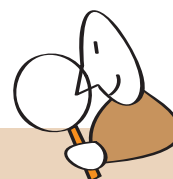
### Many years' successful work

Agerbækhuse is a residential care unit for adults with intellectual disabilities and no expressive language. For 15 years Agerbækhuse has been focusing on violence prevention through the implementation of a number of preventive measures. The Residential care unit has screened the occurrence of violence a number of times, made violence analyses, worked with development plans, formulated a policy on violence and introduced psychological peer first aid. The preventive measures are part of the pedagogical practice, of welcoming of the new colleagues and generally of the ethics and basic values of the residential care unit. In recent years Agerbækhuse has worked intensely on the involvement of users.

The effect of the efforts has been measured and results are good. From 1991 to 2004 the number of violent incidents directed against the staff was gradually reduced by approx. 30 per cent. Staff's use of force with residents has also decreased considerably, retention of staff at the residential care unit has improved and the residents' total medicine consumption has fallen.

Christiansen, J.M.: Violence against staff at Agerbækhuse – today and more than 10 years ago CASA, 2004. (In Danish).

<sup>5</sup> All occurrences of violence which result in absence due to sickness of more than one day, must be reported to The Danish Working Environment Authority as an occupational accident. All assumed and ascertained work-related disorders must also be reported to the National Board of Industrial Injuries. When a damage claim is filed with an insurance company, the occurrence must also be reported to the police.



## Registration of physical and psychological violence

To be filled in by the injured person and the Safety Committee

<b>Position and name of the injured person</b>										
Employed at the workplace for how many years										
<b>Name of aggressor</b>										
When did the violent incident take place?										
Date/year/time of day										
<b>Where did the incident take place?</b>										
In which situation did the incident occur?	Assistance in everyday tasks Refusal of wishes/demands Comfort/care Conflict solving between users Other situations, which									
<b>Description of the violent behaviour</b>	Verbal threats Physical or object-based threats Physical bodily violence (for example pinching, scratching, biting, kicking hitting by hand) Physical object-based violence (for example furniture, cutlery)									
<b>Describe the incident</b>	What happened before the incident Who was involved Who witnessed the incident How did it happen What happened afterwards Were you alone when the incident happened? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Was there a possibility of consulting a colleague? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No									
<b>What was your immediate reaction?</b>	Unaffected – (please circle number) – in shock 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10									
<b>Describe your feelings after the incident</b>	(anxious, powerless, angry, insecure, irritable, tense, tired, indifferent...) Did you suffer physical injuries? (Broken limbs, sprains, bent ribs...) Did you go home because of the incident? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Did you feel the need to go home, but could not? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Were you on sick leave because of the incident? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes <input type="checkbox"/> at least 1 day <input type="checkbox"/> more than 3 days (please cross out)									
<b>Ensuing precautions?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Medical attention <input type="checkbox"/> Internal supervision <input type="checkbox"/> Talks with superior/colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological attention <input type="checkbox"/> Other precautions, which									
<b>Has a follow-up been planned?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, who is responsible for the follow-up?									
<b>The incident has been reported</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> To The Danish Working Environment Authority <input type="checkbox"/> To the National Board of Industrial Injuries (insurance) <input type="checkbox"/> To the police <input type="checkbox"/> As use of force									
<b>Preventive proposal from the safety committee</b>										
Filled in by										
Name/position/date										

Workplaces may use the registration forms to get an idea of whether the number of violent incidents is growing or falling, whether particular jobs or particular times of day involve a higher risk and thus acquire a violence preventive tool.

Analysis of aggression and violent behaviour may be done in different ways. In some workplaces, violence and aggression is a fixed item on the agenda at staff meetings or Safety Committee<sup>6</sup> meetings. In other workplaces, the incident is discussed by all staff as quickly as possible. In many workplaces, problems with aggression and violence are also part of the statutory screening of enterprises (please see below).

## Registration creates visibility

To some working staff it may be difficult to get used to registering all violent incidents, if they have always accepted that aggressive and violent behaviour are part of their working conditions. But it is important to do so – because it can contribute to changing workplace attitudes and culture and make visible a problem that may have been overlooked before.

- It signals to both the staff and the users that aggression and violent behaviour are not to be tolerated
- It can be the beginning of work on the incident
- It can raise awareness in relation to small incidents occurring again and again
- It can reveal the need for in-service training.

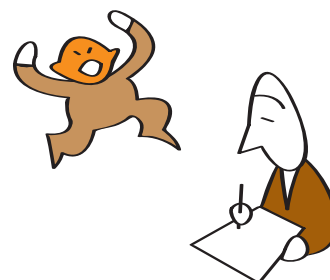
## Violence prevention as part of health and safety conditions in the workplace

All workplaces in Denmark must prepare a written review of the health and safety conditions of the workplace, a so-called "APV". It contains a screening and description of the working environment problems of the workplace and a plan of action to cope with the problems.

The APV must be revised every three years or in special circumstances when there is a change in work procedures or processes which has influence on the working environment.

The APV is an internal tool for identification and screening of all working environmental elements of the workplace, including psychological circumstances like stress, influence, bullying, harassment and violence.

The APV must be prepared by the employer and the Safety Committee or staff jointly.



<sup>6</sup> All workplaces with more than 10 employees must have a Safety Committee.

# Training and supervision

Training is a good way to give employees a common understanding of how to cope with aggression and violent behaviour.

Initial or in-service training can be given on special feature-days or courses developed especially for the workplace in question. Or on feature-days, conferences or courses outside the workplace.

Some workplaces choose to train especially resourceful employees, net workers or “violence instructors” who are given the task of maintaining focus on violence prevention and are to train and support colleagues.

Education and training themes for staff may be:

- *Basic course in violence and reactions:* what releases violence, aggression, psychological reactions to violence, stress as a result of violence, understanding and coping with conflicts.
- *Strategies to overcome violent incidents:* for example psychological first aid and debriefing, or courses in psychophysical training, among others, training in breaking free and restraining.
- *Communication* – dialogue and body language as a means of conflict solving
- *Professional up grading* – for example courses in developmental psychology or neuropsychological, understanding disability, dementia or autism. Or courses in developing treatment plans or documentation and evaluation.
- *Organizational development* – for example courses in teamwork, communication and staff cooperation etc.

## Peer counselling and supervision

There are other ways of developing professional skills than training and education, for example by talks and discussions among colleagues or with an external supervisor.

Peer counselling or supervision is a tool to develop existing work procedures and strategies. A group of colleagues may for example discuss the circumstances leading up to a concrete incident of violence and aggression. Try to clarify what caused the incident and discuss the need for amending existing work routines or other initiatives to avoid similar conflicts in future.

It may be an immediate superior in the workplace who provides supervision or it may be a person from outside the workplace – for example a professional, specializing in the handling of conflicts.

Supervision at work is extremely important in relation to psychological strains connected with the working environment and can be a means to prevent for example burnout and stress. Supervision is therefore an integral part of the work plan and practice of the workplace.

## The Emergency Ward at the Hospital of Horsens:

### Courses in conflict management

All kinds of people with all kinds of acute problems come to the emergency ward of the hospital of Horsens. Some patients and their families and friends are drug addicts, psychotic or in a crisis situation and staff may be met with violence and aggression. Some years ago the emergency ward decided to make a special effort to create a safer work environment.

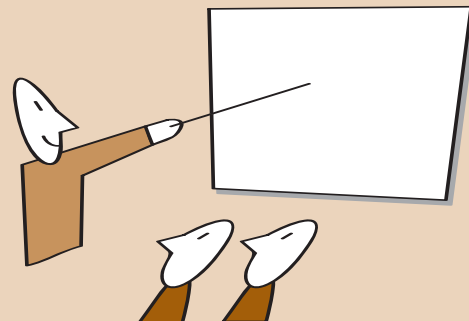
The first step was to send the whole emergency ward staff and the hospital porters on a three-day course in conflict management. The course was developed in cooperation with Crecea BST (nationwide private consultancy company providing advice, analysis, measurement of exposure, solutions and process aid within occupational health and safety) and training was supervised by a psychologist from Crecea BST. The course is now held twice a year so that new staff in the ward is prepared for conflict management.

Staff is trained in conflict management, communication, body language and behaviour. The course is based on a non-violent communication model as a tool in conflict management. It builds on the assumption that behind aggression and anger, there is a person with feelings and needs which have not been identified. Examples from practice are discussed and the staff train in conflict management through role-plays.

Over the last couple of years the course has been offered to all hospital departments. In addition, a supplementary mini-course in communication and conflict management has been developed for all the staff in the medical ward. Here the whole staff attends the mini-course and selected staff also the three-day-course, so that they are able to function as key persons for the violence preventive work in the ward.

A total of 250 staff have participated in the mini-course and approx. 150 key persons and “front staff” with close patient contact from different wards have participated in the three-day course.

This training has been important in increasing the general focus on communication and several conflicts have been nipped in the bud in the emergency ward or other wards. The staff is on the whole pleased to acquire a tool, to manage conflicts with patients. And this seems to work both ways. The hospital of Horsens scores high in nation-wide surveys of patient satisfaction.



# Technical and physical framework

Technical solutions are tangible initiatives in violence prevention. Assault alarms, escape routes, secure doors, surveillance cameras and intercom systems can create a greater sense of safety and security for the staff. But it is important to maintain the right balance of, on the one hand safety at work and on the other hand, a reasonable level of control and surveillance for the interaction and communication with the users.

Also, physical framework has influence on the

occurrence of violence and aggression. If the users, clients or patients feel under stress or cornered, it may contribute to releasing violent incidents. Roomy, light, and airy premises usually lead to a better working environment.

Maintenance, pleasant surroundings, paint and decorations may have great influence on the general well being. Just as shabby premises and furniture are depressive and may contribute to creating frustrations.

## The Men's Home in Copenhagen:

### New framework for interaction

The Men's Home in Copenhagen is a residential care unit and activity centre for the homeless and drug abusers.

The Men's Home tries to meet users and residents on an equal basis and this attitude is also reflected in the physical framework. In recent years the staff has changed room activities among other things, to create more meeting places, so that interaction is not just about problems and treatment but also includes common meals, social interaction, reading newspapers etc.

An extensive rebuilding designed and planned by an architect and two artists has taken place. The entrance hall has been rebuilt so that it has become lighter and friendlier. The reception desk has been removed because it signalled distance between the users and staff. Residents have now got their own mailboxes, keys to their rooms etc.

The common rooms have also been redecorated. The lounge is now a sort of a café with robust relaxing chairs. The walls have been repainted in bright colours and instead of small tables; there are now large movable common tables.

The interview room looks like a caravan, to create a different platform for dialogue. The idea is for the homeless to make associations to their everyday lives. Many homeless people dream about living in a caravan. Similarly, the observation room (dormitory) is like a compartment on a train – also to many homeless people a well-known sleeping place.

Everywhere solid and stable materials like massive wood, terrazzo and copper have been used to create a safe haven in the users' otherwise unstable and chaotic lives.



# User influence

User influence is of extreme importance in the prevention of violence and aggression. The way staff and users communicate is for example vital. And the staff's attitude towards users. Are rules for example, adopted on the basis of staff norms and not on users' norms? And do staff and users have the same view on "a good life"?

Having a say in decisions about their own everyday lives raises the quality of life for the users. And it is easier for staff to target their work if they have a sound understanding of users and their way of seeing their everyday lives.

Generally speaking, it is important to consider the users in the violence preventive work. Many users live and work in the same violent residential and service environments as the staff. The staff returns to their homes from work each day, often users do not have this possibility.

Also, the users are exposed to – or witnesses to – violence and they also need care and support, once the damage is done. This is why it is important for the workplace to have a crisis plan for users and for staff. And it can be a good idea to record violence against the users systematically, as it is important to register violence against the staff.

## Residential Care Unit of Bramstrup, Fyn:



### Policy on residents' violence and aggression creates a safe environment

"Residential Care Unit of Bramstrup must be a safe home with a good atmosphere, where everyone is heard and may express his or her opinions at house meetings, also on conflicts". This quotation is from the Residential Care Unit of Bramstrup Policy on residents' violence and aggression.

Residential Care Unit of Bramstrup is a temporary socio-psychiatric residential care unit. Residents are young people over 18 who need socio-pedagogical support. There is room for 24 young people with widely differing backgrounds.

A couple of years ago there were two or three violent incidents in the unit and these gave rise to the wish to introduce a policy on violence and aggression from the residents, in order to create a safe and secure environment. This policy came into existence in a process where the young people were divided into groups, and each group contributed its input to the policy. Each group had a member of staff to chair the meetings and act as a rapporteur. All proposals were written on big posters and at the end, a member of staff and a small group of residents summarized the many ideas and the policy on violence was approved by all.

Residents' policy contains:

- A definition of violence
- The purpose of the policy on violence
- What are we to do to avoid violence
- What am I to do, if a violent incident occurs
- What are educators, or night-duty staff to do, to stop verbal and physical fights, harassment etc.

The policy adopted means, the young people know that violence and aggression are not to be tolerated and that you are expected to behave decently. Both residents and the staff refer to the policy and a good many residents feel that Residential Care Unit of Bramstrup has become a safer place to live in.

# Violence prevention as part of education and training

In Denmark violence prevention does not only take place in workplaces, but also in institutions and schools of training and education within the social and health care sectors.

As part of project Violence as a Means of Communication (2000-2002) educational and training colleges received a special allocation. The purpose was to raise students' awareness to the risk of being exposed to violence in their future workplaces and during trainee periods<sup>7</sup>. The 23 projects, which were started initially, focused on integrating the prevention of violence into both education and training and during the trainee-periods. Since then more educational establishments have accepted the challenge.

The projects concerned – and still concern – especially

- Developing curricula and teaching plans
- Updating, developing and testing new concepts in the educational course, new teaching materials and methods

- Organizing courses and feature-days for students, teachers and students' counsellors
- Developing procedures for cooperation between educational and training institutions and trainee workplaces

The students' response in general is, that they definitely need the educational and training facilities to cover violence and aggression risks and their prevention. "I have become more aware of my own limits and body signals". "I have become more self-assured and know that something can be done if I am exposed to violence", are typical statements.

And this seems to prove that the initial projects have left their mark. In the coming departmental order on the social education training course, which will come into force on August the 1st. 2007, part of the curriculum will be prevention of conflicts and violence which is something quite new.

<sup>7</sup> A nation-wide questionnaire-based survey (from Social Development Centre SUS, 2002) among students of social education, nursing and within the social and health care sectors in Denmark, shows that two out of three students have been exposed to violence or aggression during their trainee-periods.

## Skovtofte Social Educators' Training College:

### Lessons in bodily violation

Skovtofte Social Educators' Training College has for a number of years been teaching students about bodily violation in an untraditional way, to prepare them for the risk of being exposed to violence and aggression in their future workplaces.

The teaching focuses on students' bodies. The students develop their bodily skills and become body conscious through a number of concrete exercises in a playful teaching atmosphere. The use of video recordings is part of the teaching, to raise students' awareness of their own patterns of reaction in connection with bodily violations.

The training college has developed a training module which other training colleges can download from the college website, as well as adapt and further develop, to suit their own needs. There is also a DVD and a booklet for teachers and educators. Project results have been disseminated in conferences etc. both in Denmark and abroad. The project is described in a number of articles, which have been translated into English.

[www.skovtofte.dk](http://www.skovtofte.dk)

# Additional information

**The Danish Ministry of Employment**  
[www.bm.dk](http://www.bm.dk)

**The Danish Working Environment Authority**  
[www.arbejdstilsynet.dk](http://www.arbejdstilsynet.dk)

**The National Research Centre  
for the Working Environment**  
[www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk](http://www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk)

**The Working Environment Information  
Centre**  
[www.arbejdsmiljoviden.dk](http://www.arbejdsmiljoviden.dk)

**Project Violence as a Form of Expression**  
[www.vold-som-udtryksform.dk](http://www.vold-som-udtryksform.dk)

From the website you can download

- An outline of the working environment system in Denmark
- A brief outline of essential national violence preventive initiatives in Denmark: Violence as a Form of Expression (1992-2006 and 2006-2009), Violence as a means of Communication (2000-2002) and Project PARIS (2002-2004)

For further information on the national project Violence as a Form of Expression please contact:

**Social Development Centre SUS**  
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DK-1364 Copenhagen K  
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Fax: +45 3393 5450  
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[www.sus.dk](http://www.sus.dk)



# 5 pieces of good advice

– to workplaces interested in preventing violence

## 1. Management must lead

Management must be clear and enthusiastic and support staff. And generally take the lead in the efforts to prevent violence. There must be a clear distribution of responsibility between the management and staff.

## 2. Staff must feel ownership of the violence prevention efforts

The whole staff must be informed of the idea and purpose of the preventive measures. If the staff does not feel ownership of the efforts, they may not be prioritised in a busy workday. Initial and ongoing information of the staff is essential.

## 3. Time is essential

There must be sufficient time to discuss and reflect on the experiences and thoughts gained during the project. And time to summarize the learning-taking place.

## 4. Be realistic

It is important to match ambition with resources, enthusiasm and time.

## 5. Ongoing adjustment

For long-term projects: Make it possible to make minor adjustments during the project.