

# Managing Risks to Case Managers



*Those dedicated to providing services to vulnerable populations need to attend as well to themselves.*

*Atlantic City*

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“Our commitment is to our clients – we need to be selfless.”

“My agency requires that I use my own car to transport clients.”

“Maybe your fears are really about biases against your clients.”

“My client bit me.”

“I had to have HIV testing after the client assaulted me.”

“My client spit in my eye.”

“Just be calm. If you are not calm, it’s your own fault if something happens.”



## *The facts...*

Were *you* ever physically threatened by a client?

Were *you* ever physically assaulted by a client?

Were *you* ever verbally abused by a client?

Were *you* ever sexually harassed?



## *The facts...*

Ever physically threatened by a client = 22.8%

Ever physically assaulted by a client = 3.3%

Ever verbally abused by a client = 49.3%

Ever sexually harassed = 8.4%

(public, nonprofit; n=941; Jayaratne, S., D., Croxton, T.A., & Mattison, D., 2004)



SETTING	PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED					
	PT	PA	TLS	S	VA	SH
Community mental health ( $n = 191$ )	25.3	3.0	11.6	0.5	47.5	6.1
Corrections ( $n = 23$ )	25.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	50.0	12.5
Family service ( $n = 107$ )	13.1	2.8	14.0	0.0	32.7	3.7
Health ( $n = 271$ )	16.2	1.8	14.4	0.4	46.8	4.0
Institutional mental health ( $n = 102$ )	33.0	11.3	19.8	1.9	59.4	14.2
Protective services ( $n = 39$ )	38.5	2.6	35.9	5.1	67.7	15.4
School social work ( $n = 174$ )	21.0	5.0	12.7	1.1	45.3	3.9
Substance abuse ( $n = 34$ )	10.0	0.0	10.0	2.5	45.0	7.5
Public, nonprofit (average; $n = 941$ )	22.8	3.3	15.1	1.4	49.3	8.4
Private practice (average; $n = 507$ )	9.0	1.6	4.5	0.6	25.0	2.5

Note. PT = physically threatened; PA = physically assaulted; TLS = threat of lawsuit; S = sued; VA = verbally abused; SH = sexually harassed. This table includes workers in specific public and nonprofit settings ( $n = 941$ ) and private practitioners ( $n = 507$ ), not all respondents. All comparisons between the averages of workers in private and agency practice are significant at  $p < .001$  or better in chi-square analyses with one exception: personally experienced being sued by a client. Except for sample sizes, all numbers in the table are percentages.





## *The facts...*

Some risk must be accepted, but other professions acknowledge and address risks more effectively. For example, **police and fire fighters**, are trained in safe practices and, as a result, are better equipped to manage risks. Workers face some risks as well yet are sometimes inadequately prepared to address them.

Those who are the least informed about worker safety may be behaving in ways that are incautious and reckless, placing themselves – and you – **in jeopardy unnecessarily**.



## *The facts...*

Violence is a **low base-rate** phenomenon, “meaning that in the range of all possible human behaviors, violence is a comparatively rare event” (Newhill, 2003, p. 89).

However, risks are **common across a career** span - likely over 50%.

Why should workers be subjected to unmanaged and often unnecessary risk?

## *Definition of Violence*

Intentional physical attack, threats, property damage

Aggressive behavior which produces damaging or hurtful outcomes, physical or emotional.

Can include:

- Threats of harm

- Verbal abuse

- Property damage

- Punching, kicking, slapping, spitting, strangulation

- Following or stalking

- Use of a weapon



## *What happens to the victims?*

1. actual physical harm
2. indirect physical responses
3. fear
4. blaming/shaming/scolding message
5. retreat to administrative role
6. learn

## *Violence against workers: who, when, and where?*

1. universal (rural, suburban, urban)
2. male and female can be violent
3. males and females as targets
4. best predictors of violence:

history of violence

lethal training

gang involvement

substance abuse

antisocial personality disorder

command hallucinations

## *Why are some workers vulnerable?*

1. Violent society
2. Exposure to troubled people
3. Social inequities and injustices
4. Breakdown of family life
5. Vague policy guidelines
6. Authority to control client liberty
7. False promises
8. Home visits
9. Worker variables (are we culturally competent?)

## Cities of 75,000 to 99,000 population (134 cities)

### 2013 Data (Quitno Press)

Lowest Crime Rate		Highest Crime Rate	
1	Fishers, IN	1	<b>Camden, NJ</b>
2	Johns Creek, GA	2	Gary, IN
3	O'Fallon, MO	3	<b>Trenton, NJ</b>
4	Carmel, IN	4	Compton, CA
5	Newton, MA	5	Lawrence, MA
6	Mission Viejo, CA	6	Macon, GA
7	Ramapo, NY	7	<b>Reading, PA</b>
8	Clarkstown, NY	8	Brockton, MA
9	Colonie, NY	9	Miami Beach, FL
10	Arlington Heights, IL	10	Albany, GA

# **Tri-State Consortium Survey, 1998**

**Lyter & Martin**

Agencies (n=200) in Delaware Valley (including Eastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware)

Finding: only 18% had formal policies



# **Prevention and Intervention Strategies**

Verbal De-escalation Techniques

Home Visits: Strategies for Workers

Home Visits: Strategies for Supervisors

Home Visits: Strategies for Agency Action

# **Verbal De-Escalation Techniques**

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NASW-MA Chapter

<http://www.naswma.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=520>

# Strategies For Workers Making Home Visits

## *Visit preparation.*

1. Prepare a thorough assessment prior to the visit, including a client cultural profile.
2. Prepare the client and structure the visit schedule and parameters.
3. Know the community.
4. Choose appropriate attire.
5. Travel in pairs.
6. Use technology and equipment that enhance safety.
7. Use reliable transportation.
8. Know the travel route and avoid being rushed.
9. Observe carefully before entering a home.

## *Visit management.*

1. Conduct oneself in a confident, courteous, and assertive manner.
2. Show respect for clients and their "turf."
3. Remain alert and observe carefully.
4. Avoid kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms.

## *Crisis management.*

1. Retreat when there is potential danger.
2. Respond to warning signs with attempts to neutralize and defuse.
3. If an incident occurs, observe details, report the incident, and receive care.
4. Provide an opportunity for debriefing and support following an incident.

# Strategies for Supervisors

1. Discuss with supervisees the items suggested above for workers making home visits.
2. Make certain that workers have ample time to prepare for a safe home visit.
3. Present an open environment for discussion of fears, concerns, and preparation tips.
4. Provide opportunities for supervisees to discuss reactions to home visits.
5. Inform the agency of the needs/concerns identified by workers for the conduct of safe home visits. Examples include the need for cell phones, safe vehicles, escorts, additional training.
6. Remind the agency of its responsibilities in providing on-going safety training for all employees.
7. In the event of an assault or a threat, make certain the worker has sufficient opportunity to discuss the incident and knowledge about how to file an incident report. Arrange or facilitate follow-up care for any supervisee involved in a safety incident.
8. Arrange a debriefing about all home visitations upon return to office, in order to remain aware of patterns that should be addressed and that might pose a risk. Provide in-depth opportunity for debriefing for all incidents involving threats to safety.

# Strategies for Agency Action

1. Develop an agency safety plan that includes home visitation emergency contacts and procedures. Post the plan in a high visibility spot within the agency and within agency manuals.
2. Educate ALL agency employees about the policies and practices contained in the agency safety plan.
3. Make a commitment that employees receive thorough and appropriate training upon employment, as well as throughout their tenure with the agency. This should include
  - non-violent crisis intervention training,
  - personal safety techniques, self-defense training,
  - de-escalation techniques, and
  - risk assessment.
4. Ask for and respect feedback and input from all employees including workers and supervisors.



# **Your Own Safety Inventory**

What is your agency's policy on safety?

Formal?

Informal?

How much knowledge do you have about safe practices?

## **Safety for workers has improved due to:**

1. better agency policies and practices
2. training of workers
3. client history assessment
4. use of incident reports

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# Be safe...



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