

# AGGRESSION AND SAFETY AT THE FORENSIC PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL: STAFF PERSPECTIVES

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## INTRODUCTION

- Aggressive and violent assaults in inpatient mental health settings and adequate prevention and management strategies continue to be a concern shared by staff, patients and administrators across international borders (Daffern et al., 2003; Heilbrun et al., 1995; Wright et al., 2002).
- Aggression in forensic psychiatric settings has the potential to impact negatively on the physical and mental health of staff.
- Negative outcomes include: work loss from sick leave, diminished morale, staff recruitment and retention challenges, compensation for injury, official inquiries and litigation costs (Hillbrand, Foster, & Spitz, 1996).
- Front-line nurses are most likely to be victims of inpatient aggression and violence (Binder & McNeil, 1994).
- Staff participation in research about inpatient aggression and personal health and safety is paramount in determining recommendations which will reduce inpatient aggression and increase staff safety, mental health, and wellness.

## OBJECTIVES

- To examine staff perceptions of the prevalence, severity and incidence of workplace violence.
- To solicit staff opinions regarding personal safety and professional satisfaction in British Columbia's Forensic Psychiatric Hospital.
- To examine the frequency of workplace violence-related staff injuries, need for medical attention, and WorkSafe BC compensation claims filed.

## METHOD

### Participants:

As part of a broader study on inpatient aggression, (N=527), 100 staff at the BC Forensic Psychiatric Hospital were interviewed.

Fifty-two percent of those sampled were nurses, 32% health care workers, 12% rehabilitation staff, and 4% security personnel.

### Procedures:

Participants took part in semi-structured interviews about their involvement in aggressive and violent incidents over the last year. Incident reports were also reviewed to find more detail about incidents of inpatient aggression against staff.

## RESULTS: STAFF INTERVIEWS

**"Do you feel confident that in the hospital you are effective in preventing aggressive incidents from escalating"?** (%)

98% of staff expressed overall confidence

- Very effective 42%
- Somewhat effective 56%
- Somewhat ineffective 1%
- Not effective at all 1%

**"Do you feel confident that in the hospital you are effective in containing violent incidents"?** (%)

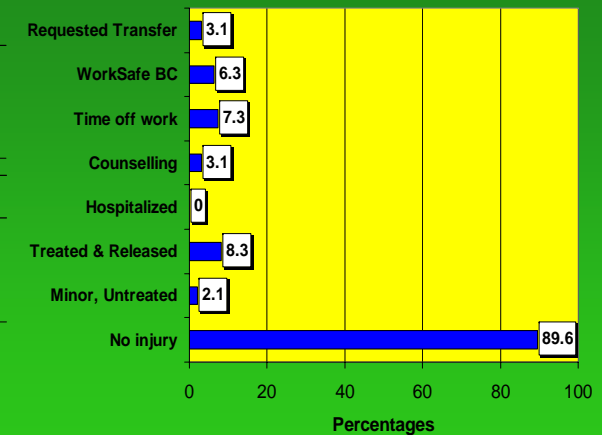
Only 38% expressed confidence.

- Very /somewhat effective 38%
- Somewhat ineffective 31%
- Not effective at all 32%

There were no significant differences in years of experience of training and:

- Frequency, number or type of aggressive/violent incidents.
- Injury/Perception of safety.
- Confidence or ability to prevent or contain violence.
- Use of verbal, physical, mechanical or medical intervention.

## CONSEQUENCES OF STAFF INJURIES



Note: Percentages do not equal 100% because of multiple responses. (Including slips and falls during incidents).

## STAFF MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

EMOTIONAL STATE DURING INCIDENT (N=96)	No.	(%)
Anger	5	5.2%
Anxiety/fearful	39	40.6%
Sad/inadequate/confused	7	7.3%
Calmness	20	20.8%
Bored	2	2.1%
Other (example: surprised, concern, shock)	23	24.0%

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite the prevalence of aggression experienced:

- 77% of staff reporting feeling safe overall.
- However, 73% of staff have felt unsafe "at some time".
- 89.6% experienced no injury.
- 98% of staff have stated that they are motivated to participate in additional aggression management training.

## IMPLICATIONS

- This study has the potential to make important contributions to the area of mental health and aggression with regard to safety and mental health of staff and patients in inpatient forensic settings.
  - Based on findings, new risk assessment tools, measures, and protocols are being researched and implemented at FPH.
  - Training in how to cope after witnessing and/or after being victimized is considered an area of great importance for FPH.
  - Increased collaboration between all staff has been recognized as key to creating safe work environments and decreasing incidents in which patients become aggressive and/or violent.
  - Training in advanced aggression management techniques has been implemented for all front-line staff.
- Findings from this study have and will continue to inform FPH on staff safety and emotional well-being.