

Impact of workplace violence on employees

In 2011, 24% of Dutch employees experienced violence from people outside their working environment while at work while 16% experienced violence from colleagues. Although these figures are stable, they have a definite impact on workers' health and job satisfaction, creating an increased perception of the risk of violence. A new study also shows that groups at risk from external violence differ significantly from those at risk of violence from colleagues.

Background

Workplace violence refers to incidents where workers are abused, threatened or assaulted, either by people from outside the working environment, or from within. Workplace violence may have severe negative consequences for the workers affected, for their co-workers and their families, as well as for the organisations they work in and for society as a whole.

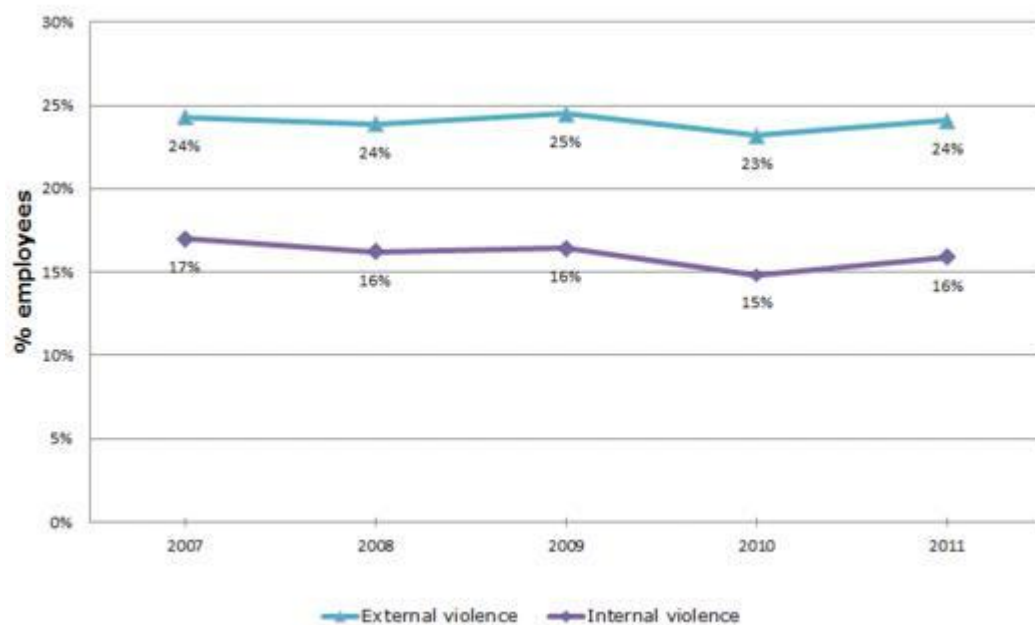
In the Netherlands workplace violence, especially in public sector areas like health care, education and law enforcement, has attracted widespread attention in the media. In recent years several measures have been taken to cut the risk to workers, including covenants between social partners and government programmes.

Overall impact of workplace violence

The [Netherlands Working Conditions Survey 2005–2011](#) (Nationale Enquête Arbeidsomstandigheden – NEA) shows that in 2011 24% of workers in the Netherlands were exposed at least once to some form of external violence from people such as customers, clients, students and passengers, and a further 16% were exposed to internal violence from colleagues or supervisors. A study, [Aggression at Work \(in Dutch, 601Kb PDF\)](#), suggests that exposure to violence leads to increased absence from work, health problems, decreasing satisfaction with work and an increasing eagerness to change jobs.

Between 2007 and 2011, figures for external violence were stable, and for internal violence the trend was slightly downwards (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trends in external and internal violence between 2007 and 2011



Source: NEA 2011

At-risk groups

Different risk groups were identified for external and internal violence.

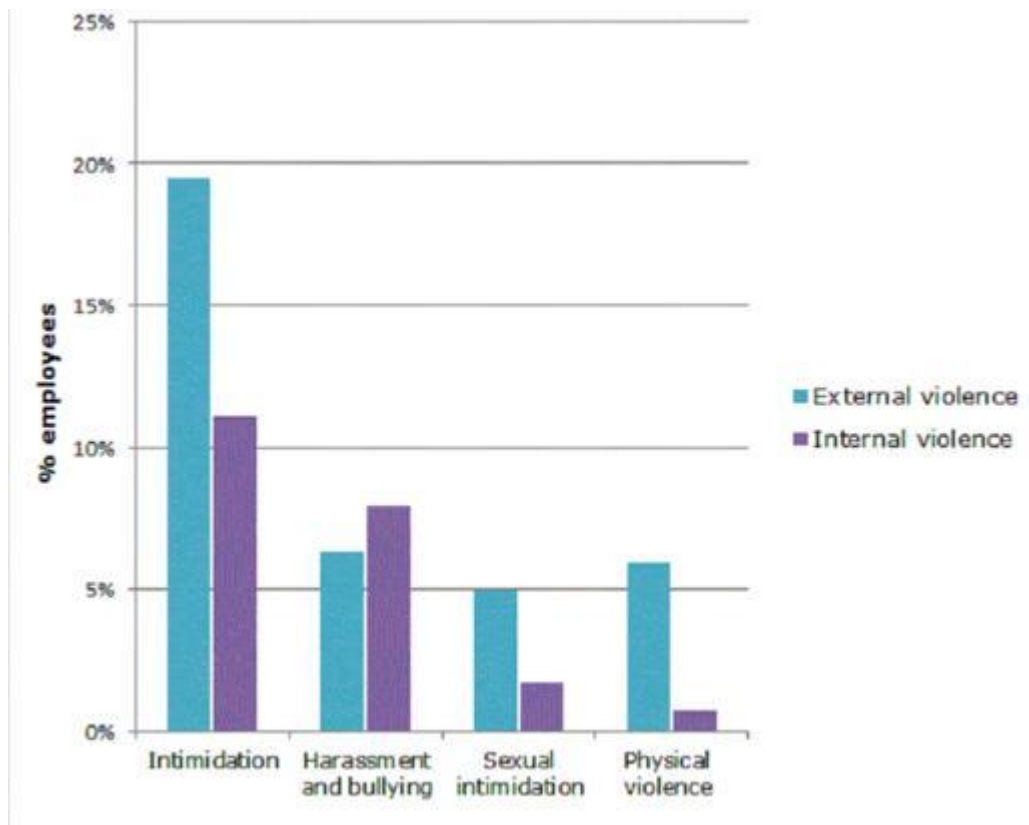
Those at risk of external violence (from people such as customers, clients, students, passengers) include the following groups:

- Police and law enforcement workers, health sector employees, and people working in secondary education, department stores and supermarkets;
- Women, younger employees and employees with medium-level education;
- Part-timers, employees working during the night, and employees with more regular customer contact.

Those at risk of internal violence (from colleagues or supervisors) include the following groups:

- Workers in the manufacturing sector, car sales and repair, enforcement officers, the postal services and telecommunication;
- Men, middle-aged employees, immigrants;
- Employees working in sheltered workplaces.

Figure 2: The prevalence of different types of external and internal violence



Source: NEA 2011

Types of violence

The most prominent type of external violence is intimidation (reported by 19% of Dutch employees), followed by harassment and bullying (7%), physical violence (6%) and sexual intimidation (5%). Intimidation is also reported to be the most frequently experienced type of internal violence (11%), followed by harassment and bullying (8%), sexual intimidation (2%) and physical violence (1%).

Risk perception and the need for protective measures

While levels of workplace violence have remained steady over recent years, an increasing number of employees are reporting that they perceive workplace violence as a risk, rising from 1 in 4 employees in 2005 to 1 in 3 in 2010. One explanation for this rise could be higher levels of media attention to the phenomenon.

More employees working in the public sector, such as in schools, hospitals and the police, report that they perceive themselves to be at risk of workplace violence than do employees in the private sector (in 2010, 62% and 22% respectively). By contrast, the Netherlands Employers Work Survey ([WEA](#)) shows that only a few Dutch employers perceive workplace violence to be a significant risk, with a slight increase from 6.3% of employers reporting this in 2008 to 7% in 2010.

However, the research shows that employees' perception of their need for protective measures is relatively stable. In 2011, 8% of employees said they wanted more protection against external violence and 5% wanted extra measures against internal violence.

References

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