

Workplace violence: trends and risk groups in Europe

Incidence rates of physical violence in Europe have increased in the past decade, but little is known about the causes. It has been suggested that the growth of the service sector (leading to more interactions with clients) and the intensification of work (more time pressure, less control, more use of information technology) could be partly responsible for this increase.

AIM

The present study aimed to identify and analyse trends in the prevalence of third-party workplace violence in 15 EU-member states during the period 1995-2005, as well as to identify factors that may ‘explain’ these trends.

We assessed to what extent the increased tendency of violence in Europe can be explained by structural changes in the nature of work itself (i.e. changes in client contact, time pressure, job control & ICT use).

Three specific hypotheses were tested:

1. Increased interaction with the public partly accounts for the increase in workplace violence
2. Increased time pressure partly accounts for the increase in workplace violence, and especially so in jobs with high levels of client contact
3. There is a moderating effect of client contact on the relation between ICT use and the risk of workplace violence

METHOD

Three cross-sectional waves (1995, 2000 and 2005; EU-15 only: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) of the European Working Conditions Survey were used, involving 58,520 workers. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the respondent’s household. Average response rates ranged from 48% (2005) to 60% (1995). Logistic regression analyses were performed to investigate associations between work characteristics and violence prevalence.

Table 1. Distribution of main study variables

		1995	2000	2005	n	Total
		%	%	%		%
Workplace violence	% yes	3.4%	4.3%	4.6%	2,427	4.2%
Client contact	% high	61.1%	55.0%	56.3%	33,308	57.1%
Time pressure	% high	42.4%	43.3%	46.8%	25,516	44.3%
ICT use	% high	28.0%	30.6%	38.5%	19,068	32.7%
Control	% low	27.0%	29.3%	31.2%	16,843	29.3%
N		15,988	21,703	20,382	58,520	100%

RESULTS

Workplace violence increased significantly during the study interval. Although violence was clearly related to specific characteristics of the labour market (gender, age, sector etc) and work environment (client contact frequency, time pressure, control and ICT use), changes in the labour market composition and work environment could not account for the increase in violence. Indeed, the tendency towards higher violence rates across time became more, rather than less pronounced after controlling for these factors. Finally, violence seems an emerging risk in jobs characterized by high levels of ICT use.

CONCLUSION

Our results point to an overall general increasing trend in workplace (physical) violence, highlighting the importance of violence as an emerging risk in the workplace. The results suggest that the nature (and perhaps quality) of client contact is changing, leading to higher violence risks. Better indicators for the quality of client care are needed to further study this hypothesis.



REFERENCES

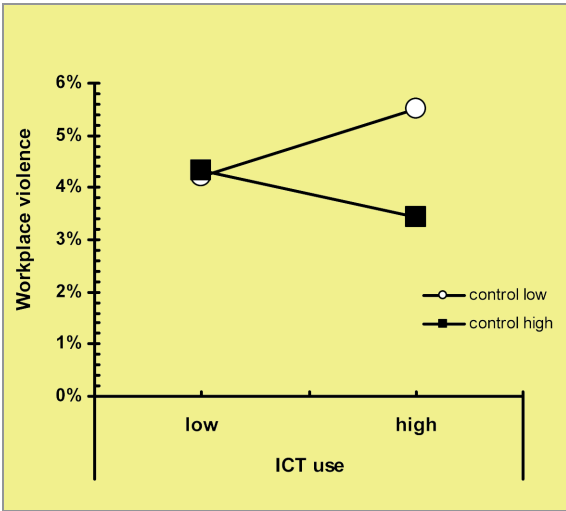
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Table 2. Associations between time, socio-demographic characteristics, work characteristics & exposure to workplace violence

Variables	Reference category	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		OR	OR	OR
Wave/Time		1.17	1.25	1.21
Country Cluster 1: Anglo-Saxon	Country cluster 4: Southern		4.64	4.71
Country Cluster 2: Continental			2.06	2.07
Country Cluster 3: Nordic			3.06	3.11
Female	Male		0.76	0.76
Age <30	≥ 45		1.20	1.20
Age 30-44			1.33	1.34
Fixed-term	Permanent		0.73	0.72
Temporary agency / other			0.69	0.69
Self-employed			(0.90)	(0.90)
Working hours < 36	36-40		(0.92)	(0.92)
Working hours ≥ 41			1.19	1.19
Agriculture	Manufacturing		(0.89)	(0.85)
Construction			(0.76)	(0.77)
Wholesale & retail trade			2.19	2.23
Hotels & restaurants			3.51	3.68
Transportation & communication			2.35	2.40
Financial & business activities			(1.34)	(1.35)
Public administration			5.73	5.87
Healthcare, education & other services			4.21	4.24
Client contact (high)	Low		2.86	2.81
Time pressure (high)			1.26	1.24
ICT use (high)			0.71	0.60
Control (high)			0.76	0.68
ICT use × Time				1.31
ICT use × Control				0.68
Time pressure × ICT use × Time				0.70
All other 2-way & 3-way interactions				NS
R ² (Nagelkerke)		.002	.131	.136
ΔR ² (Nagelkerke)			.129	.005

Note All odds ratios (ORs) and ΔR²s are significant at p < .01 or better, unless presented in brackets

Figure 1. Violence as a function of ICT use and job control



Note Centered interaction terms (cf. Aiken & West, 1991)

Figure 2. Violence as function of ICT use, time pressure and time

