Injuries to Social Workers from Client Assault

CSWE APM Presentation
February 17, 2006
Chicago, IL

Robin Ringstad, Ph.D., LCSW
Estimates of Client Violence

• 42-97% of social workers have been verbally assaulted

• 2-24% have been physically assaulted

• Many studies suggest significant underreporting.
Effects of Client Violence

- Physical injuries
  - Worst case serious injury or death
- Psychological injuries
  - Stress, role conflict, demoralization
- Work-related symptoms
  - Fear and self-doubt, decreased motivation
- Trauma symptoms
  - Fear, anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance
- Macro effects
  - Burnout, sick leave, medical and legal expenses, staff turnover
Current Study

• A national survey of client violence against social workers.
• An exploration of the extent of injuries experienced by social workers as a result of such violence.
• A consideration of the effects of client violence on NON-assaulted social workers.
Methodology

• Mailed survey to a random sample of 3,000 NASW members.
• Surveys asked about experiences with client violence and about any injuries they had experienced as a direct result of client violence.
• 1,029 useable surveys were returned (useable response rate = 34.3%)
Instrumentation

• The injury section of the questionnaire was limited to 15 possible physical and psychological/emotional injuries.

• Physical injuries were drawn from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) as the scale was being used to measure violence in the study.

• Psychological injuries included work-related and psychological injuries previously documented in studies of workplace violence with social workers (Rey, 1996).
## Respondent Characteristics

### Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>71% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>83% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>90% MSW degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Type</td>
<td>67% Direct Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Mean ± SD)</td>
<td>29-77 years, M = 55 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Experience</td>
<td>2-51 years, M = 26 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Practice Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Practice</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-patient Mental Health</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-patient Mental Health</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-patient Health</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-patient Health</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-patient Social Service</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
<td>5% or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>5% or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional System</td>
<td>5% or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

• 68% (n=699) of total respondents reported an injury they considered to be a direct result of client violence

• 15% reported a physical injury

• 66% reported a psychological or emotional injury
Physical Assault Victims

• Total victims = 311 (30% of respondents)

• 37% (n=155) reported a physical injury

• Types:
  – 26% = sprain, bruise, or cut
  – 25% = physical pain the next day
  – 12% = went to doctor
  – 3% = needed to see a doctor, but didn’t
  – 1% = other injuries
    • 2 individuals reported a broken bone and
    • 1 individual reported a head injury
All Victims (Physical, verbal, and psychological)

- Total victims = 885 (86%) of respondents
- 66% (n=680) reported psychological or emotional injury
- Most common = Fear
  - 47% = fear of clients
  - 42% = fear of client’s family or friends
  - 40% = fear of some neighborhoods or workplaces
• **Trauma and stress symptoms**
  – 39% = extreme fatigue
  – 36% = sleep problems
  – 26% = shortened attention span & difficulty concentrating
  – 26% = high anxiety or extreme nervousness
  – 16% = physical health problems
  – 11% = emotional outbursts
Significant findings…

• Physically assaulted social workers were more likely to suffer both workplace fears and trauma/stress symptoms that victims of other types of client violence.

• Males suffered more physical injuries (19% of males vs. 14% of females)

• Females suffered more fear and stress (58% of males vs. 70% of females)
Injuries to NON-Victim Social Workers

- 13% = fear of clients
- 13% = fear of neighborhoods or worksites
- 10% = fear of client’s family or friends
- 10% = extreme fatigue
- 8% = sleep problems
- 7% = short attention span or difficulty concentrating