



The 130th Annual Meeting of APHA

5127.O: Wednesday, November 13, 2002 - 12:48 PM

Abstract #49563

A focus group assessment of work organization risk factors for workplace violence in mental health

Kathleen M. McPhaul, RN, MPH, School of Nursing, University of Maryland, 655 Lombard Street, Room 665, Baltimore, MD 21201, 4107064907, mcphaul@son.umaryland.edu and **Jane Lipscomb, RN, PhD**, Department of Behavioral and Community Nursing, University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Nursing, 655 W. Lombard St, Baltimore, MD 21201.

Work organization in mental health care and its impact on workplace violence is currently being examined in a public psychiatric hospital system. During the past decade, the inpatient census in the system's facilities has declined by two-thirds and the workforce has been reduced by half. Some inpatient facilities have been closed or consolidated, and more patients are now being served in community settings. The current patient population is increasingly male, younger, dually diagnosed with mental illness and chemical abuse, and a history of criminal incarceration. These changes have contributed to a climate where an aging workforce is being forced to adapt to a more difficult and potentially more violent clientele. Focus groups were convened, in part, to inform the development of staff survey. Sixty direct care staff participated in one of eight focus groups conducted across four intervention sites. Organization of work risk factors for workplace violence were identified during the focus groups and categorized using the OSHA Violence Prevention Guidelines elements as a framework. Findings mirror generic healthcare issues such as equal commitment to worker safety and health and patient/client safety. Specific to workplace violence are calls for consistent post assault services such as medical and psychological counseling and debriefing. Staff want zero-tolerance for workplace violence and communication of this policy to managers, supervisors, co-workers, clients, patients and visitors. Training, legal assistance, and staffing during high risk activities were also discussed. Detailed analysis of the focus group findings and the methodological issues surrounding their use will be presented.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the changes in work organization occurring nationally in mental health.
- Discuss the work organization factors enumerated via focus groups in a study of workplace violence in mental health.
- Identify four elements of the OSHA violence prevention framework.
- Discuss the advantages and limitations of focus group methodology.

Keywords: Workplace Safety, Violence Prevention

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

I do not have any significant financial interest/arrangement or affiliation with any organization/institution whose products or services are being discussed in this session.

[Work Organization in Health Care Part 1: Impact on Health](#)

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