Long term consequences of physical violence at work.
Results from a follow up study with victims who consulted the Violence Medical Unit of the Lausanne University Hospital from 2007-2010.

J. De Puy, N. Romain-Glassey, M. Gut, P. Wild

AVA Minneapolis
19.4.2013
Welcome and debriefing

Clinical examination

Assault and battery report

Photograph of wounds

Referral within the medico-social network
Workplace-related violence

- Workplace-related violence: during or because of work

- Public health problem
  - Frequent (4% of active population in CH)
  - Serious
  - Impacts workplaces and communities
  - Prevention is possible

- Research project with support of the Swiss accident insurance Suva
Objectives and organization of the study

1. Describe the population of victims
2. Describe the situations of violence
3. Identify local resources for prevention
4. Identify needs for improvement

- 2 institutions
- Health at work + violence prevention
- Multidisciplinary team: medical doctors, sociologists, biostatistician, nurses
Mixed methods
qualitative & quantitative

- **Population**
  - Patients who consulted VMU 2007 to 2010 for workplace-related violence

- **Data**
  - Medical files and Epidata database, battery and assault reports (N=196 files, 185 patients)
  - Telephone interviews with patients (N=86) average 2.5 years after the violent event
  - Interviews with resource-persons (N=9)
Characteristics of workplace-related violence victims

- Ca. 1 out of 10 consultations during the period considered
- 2 out of 3 workplace violence victims were male, 1 female
- Non-Swiss workers overrepresented (54%) compared to total active population in the canton (1/3)
46% have been victims of violence previously.
Occupation

- 72.4% wage-earners and 10.81% self-employed
- 91.9% services industry
- 81.1% contact with the public

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population of victims</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private security</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail business</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police force</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40.6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
External vs internal violence (n=196)

- **External violence 72.5%**
- **Internal violence 26.5%**
  - colleague 70.4%
  - superior 24.0%
  - subordinate 5.6%

Men n=137

- Ext 78.1%
- Int 20.4%
- Ext + Int 1.5%

Women n=59

- Int 40.7%
- Ext 59.3%
Place and time

- **Workplace 90.8%**
  - 9.2% « another place »

- **Evening or night work 47.1%**

![Bar chart showing distribution of working hours]
Perpetrators of workplace violence

Male victims
n=137

- M: 91.2%
- F: 4.4%
- M+F: 4.4%

83% acted alone

Female victims
n=59

- M: 54.2%
- F: 42.4%
- M+F: 3.4%
Consequences of workplace violence – components of the severity score

1. Physical long term effects

2. Psychological long term effects

3. Impact on employment: diminished work time, job lost or quit because of the assault

Each item evaluated (0-1-2-3) according to severity of consequences

Score = Σ values of these 3 variables
Values of the severity score

- Maximum recorded = 10/12
- 56% of victims report long term consequences
Possible predictors → severity of consequences

1. Internal violence
2. No other employee present
3. Self-employed
4. Death threats
5. Pre-existing health condition
6. Seriousness of initial symptoms of psychological distress
   \[ p < 0.001 \]
7. Seriousness of initial injuries
8. Previous violent victimization
Possible risk factors → seriousness of consequences

Perception of a lack or inadequate response from

1. employer
   \[ p < 0.05 \]
2. colleagues
3. friends and family
Qualitative results: exemplary situations

Theme 1: Inadequate response from employer

- Clerk (construction equipment sales) assaulted by a colleague

«The boss was not there when I was attacked. He was very angry to hear about it, he lectured us both but did not take a stand. He considered not inviting us to the Christmas dinner (...) For several months, the boss did not know how to handle this guy. He bought a screen so we did not have to see each other. 4 months later, he fired him (after he was convicted for the assault)». 
Qualitative results : exemplary situations

Theme 1 : Adequate response from the employer

➢ Nurse in a psychiatric clinic, assaulted by a patient

« The boss called several times to find out how I was doing, he was very understanding. Same with the nursing staff (...) I felt a good support (...) Also in the process of filing a complaint ». 
Qualitative results: exemplary situations

Theme 5: biopsychosocial consequences

- Mechanic assaulted by a driver when transporting goods

« I was morally down for almost a year, nowadays I never get out of the vehicle if there is a problem. I consider there is still 30% of me that remains damaged. »
Qualitative results: exemplary situations

Theme 5: biopsychosocial consequences

- Ticket inspector assaulted by passengers
  «I am just a little outraged».

- Taxi driver assaulted by a client
  «It’s over, I don’t want to dwell on it... It has affected me very much». 
Prevention resources in Switzerland

- Absence of a coordinated prevention network
- Variations in existence and forms of organization policies
  - Some large institutions in the public sector and in « at risk » services are better equipped (e.g., hospitals, public transportation)
Recommandations

- Large dissemination of prevention messages:
  - Workplace violence = unlawful + not acceptable
  - Risk for employees, teams, organizations: health, security, financial, quality of work
  - Consequences of workplace violence events = underestimated
  - Support from employers contributes greatly to victims’ recovery
Implications for health care professionals

After a workplace violence event

- **Risk of serious long term consequences**, even in the absence of severe initial injuries
- **Signs of initial psychological distress** need to be evaluated and addressed
Implications for employers

After a workplace violence event

- Organize immediate medical care, assault and battery report
- Provide moral and practical support
- Refer to specialized services for victims
- Facilitate return to work
- Take measures to prevent future aggressions
Thank you for your attention!