



Centre Universitaire Romand  
de Médecine Légale

Institut universitaire romand de Santé au Travail

## **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.

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AVA Minneapolis  
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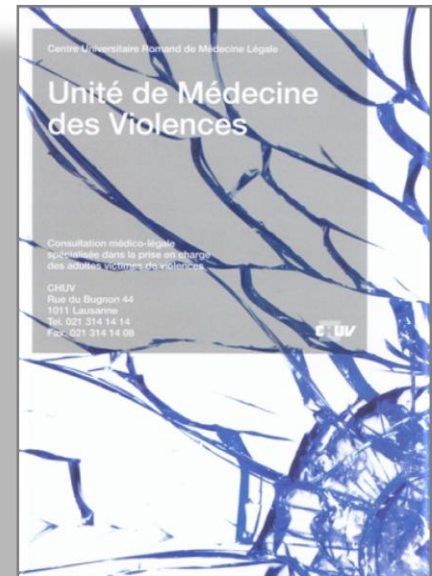


# University Center of Legal Medicine

## Violence Medical Unit (2006)

### *Medico-legal consultation for victims of interpersonal violence*

- Welcome and debriefing



- Clinical examination

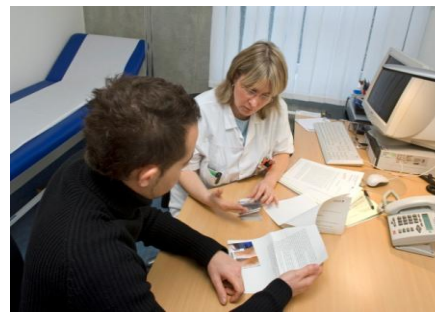


**Assault and battery report**



**Photograph of wounds**

- Referral within the medico-social network



# Workplace-related violence

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■ **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

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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

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### ■ 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

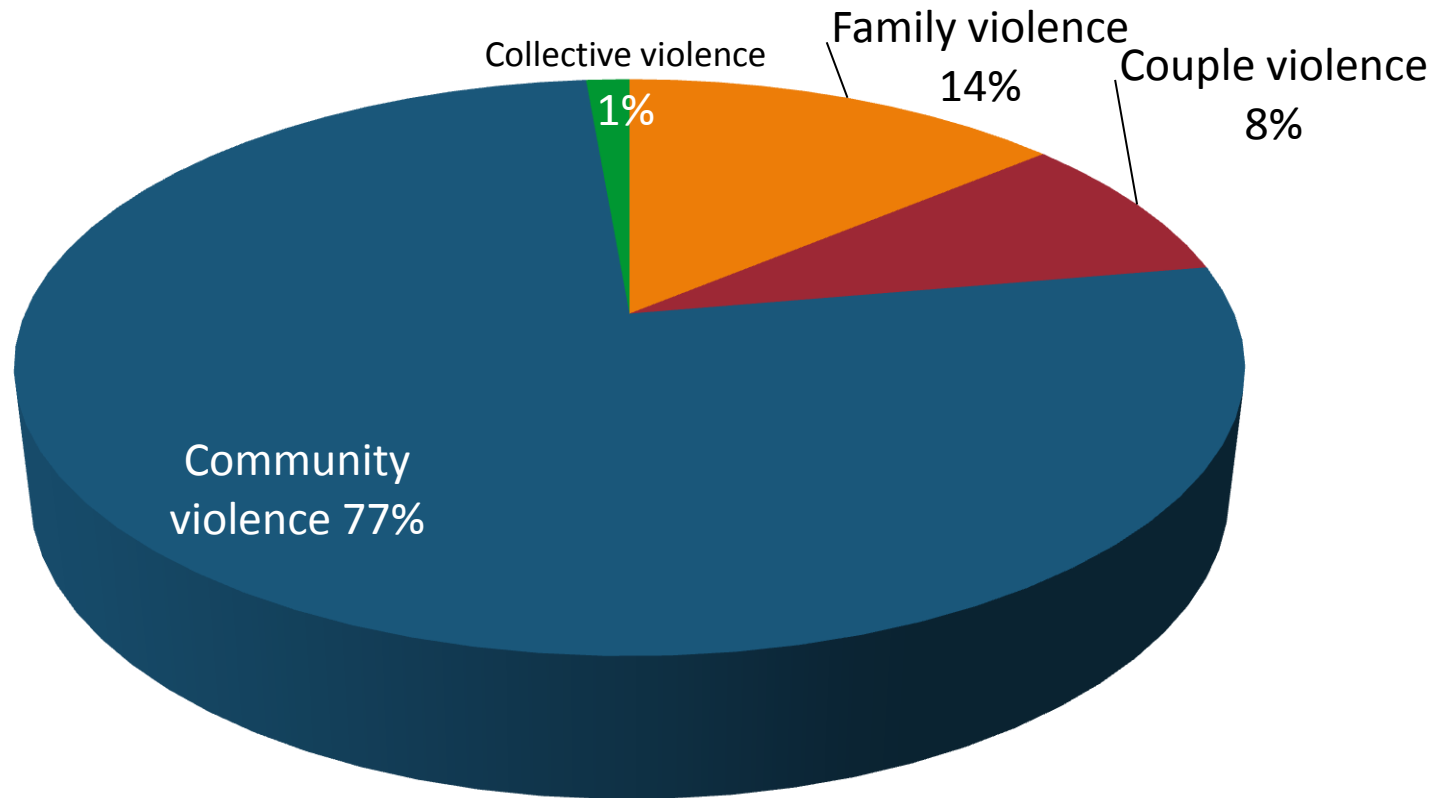
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- Ca. 1 out of 10 consultations during the period considered
- 2 out of 3 workplace violence victims were male, 1 female
- Non-Swiss workers overrepresented (54%) compared to total active population in the canton (1/3)

# Previous violence victimization

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46% have been victims of violence previously



# Occupation

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

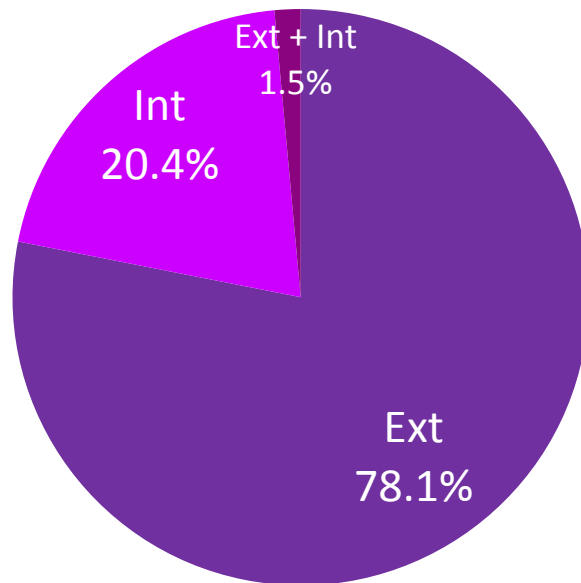
Population of victims	%
Private security	14.6
Retail business	10.8
Police force	7.6
Transportation	7.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>40.6</b>



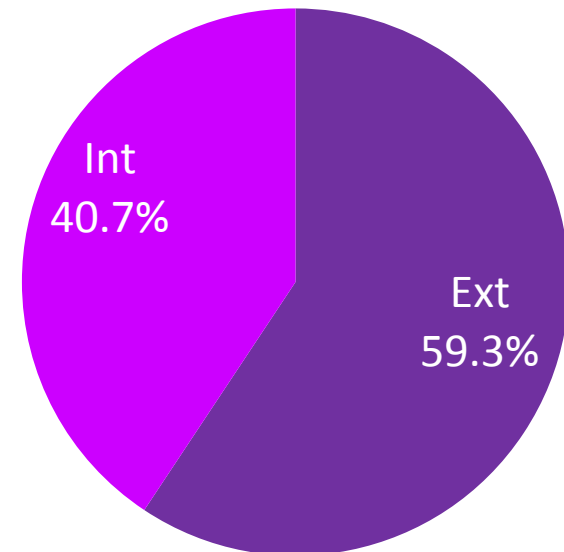
# External vs internal violence (n=196)

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

**Men n=137**



**Women n=59**

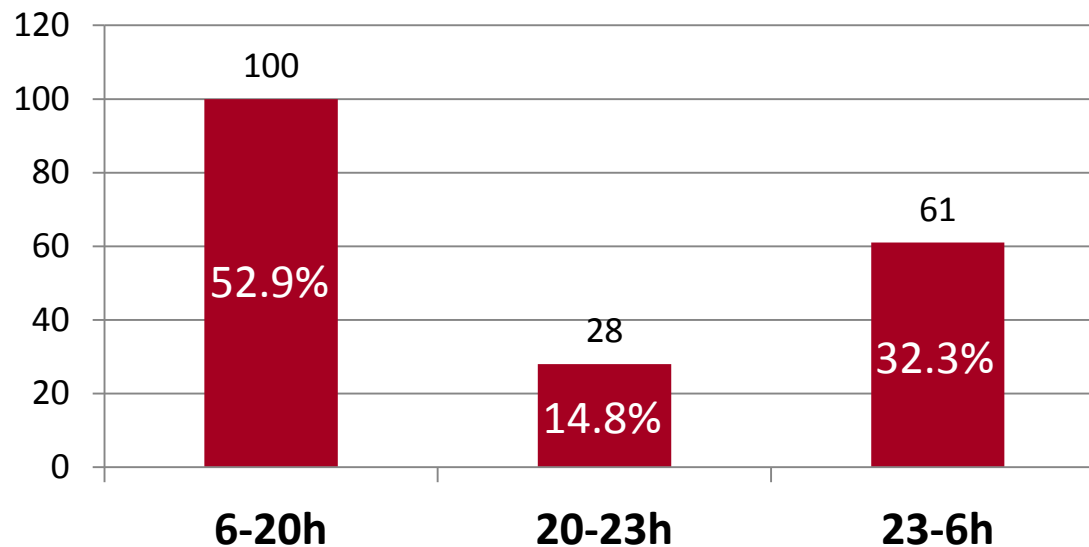


# Place and time

■ **Workplace 90.8%**

➤ 9.2% « another place »

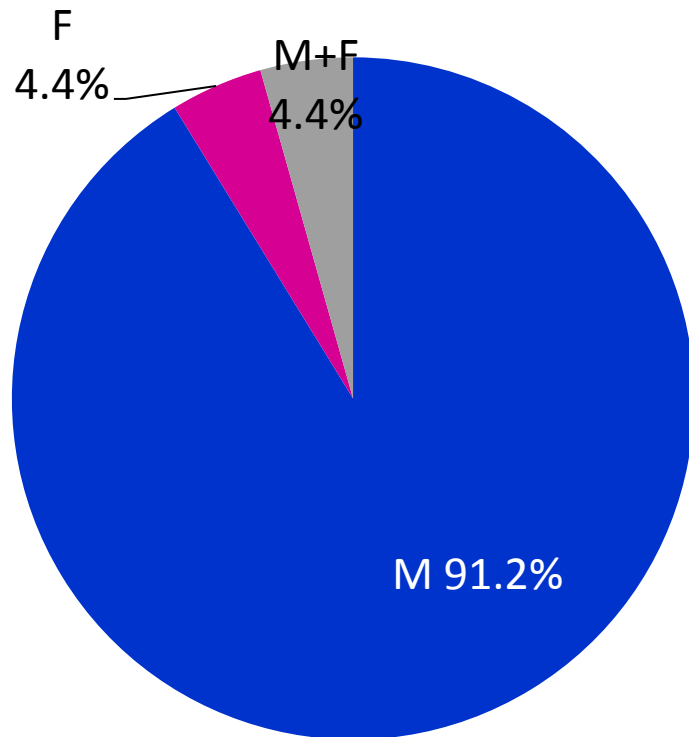
■ **Evening or night work 47.1%**



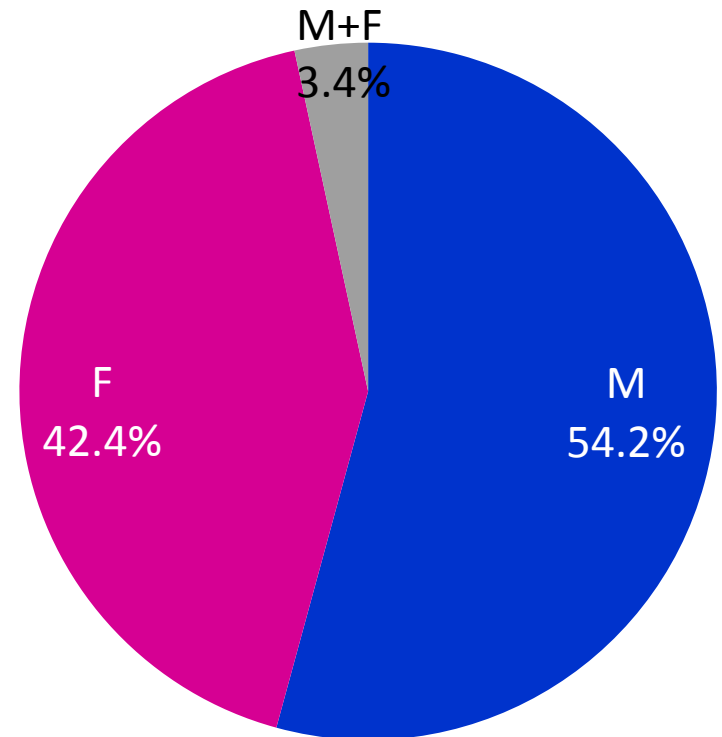
# Perpetrators of workplace violence

83% acted alone

**Male victims  
n=137**



**Female victims  
n=59**



# Consequences of workplace violence – components of the severity score

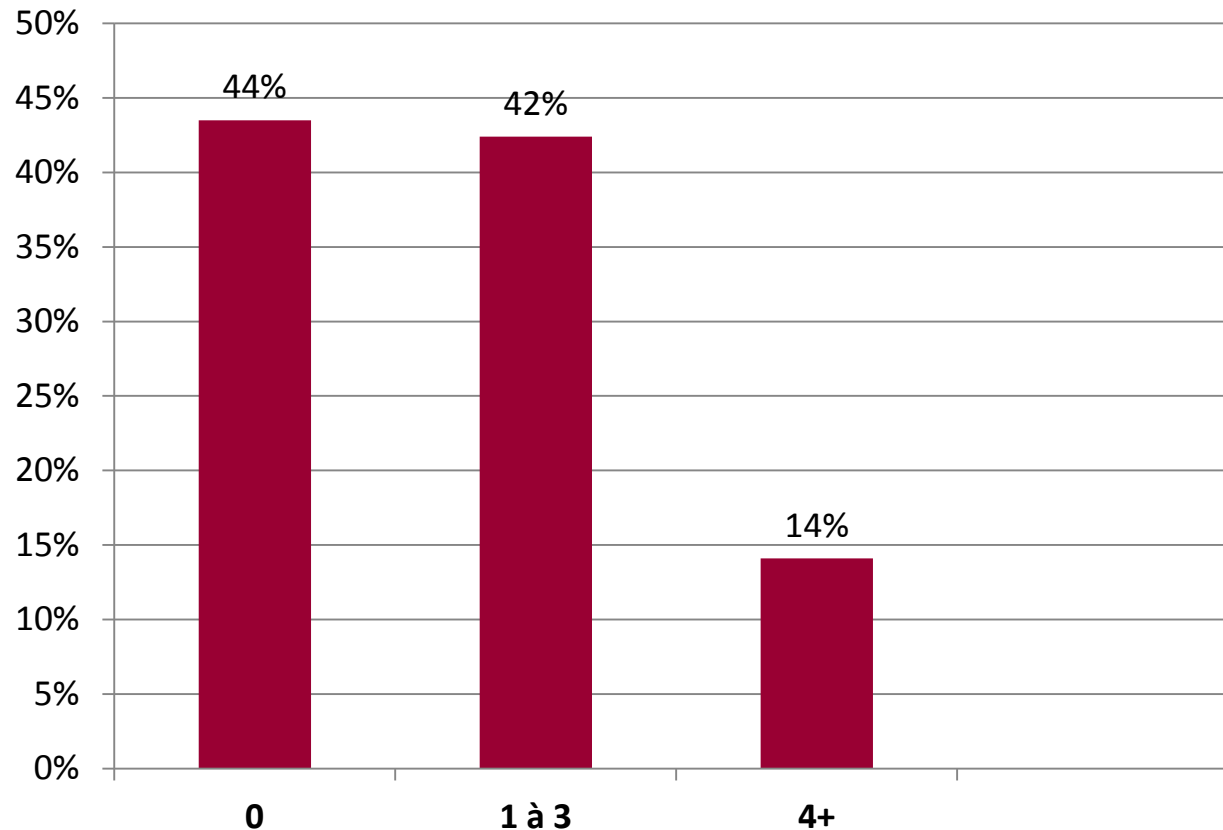
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1. Physical long term effects
2. Psychological long term effects
3. Impact on employment : diminished work time, job lost or quit because of the assault

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

Score =  $\sum$  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

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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



## Perception of a lack or inadequate response from

1. employer

$p < 0.05$

2. colleagues

3. friends and family

# Qualitative results : exemplary situations

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## 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

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- 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 (eg hospitals, public transportation)



# Recommendations

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- 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

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## 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

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## 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

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# Thank you for your attention !