

Patient aggression towards health care professionals

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To estimate the frequency of aggressive behaviors in health care institutions, and determine their influence on emotional reactions of medical workers.

Materials and methods: The study involved 201 health care professionals from the regions of Lower Silesia and Opole in Poland. The authors employed the exposure to patient aggression inventory, based on the questionnaires of Merez and Nowicka & Kolasa; this inventory divides patient aggression towards medical workers into seven different forms.

Results: In over 90% of cases, health care professionals fell victim to patient aggression in a workplace. It mostly took forms of verbal aggression, a raised voice and shouting. A physical attack was reported by 45.6% of the surveyed; it resulted in physical injuries in 27.9% of psychiatric hospital workers and 24.7% of general hospital workers. As a reaction to patients' verbal

aggression, medical workers usually calmly explained that such behavior was improper. Violence and aggressive behaviors of patients evoked workers' anger, fear, a feeling of resignation and the loss of their sense of safety. In most cases victims of patient aggression either coped with the problem themselves or asked their co-workers and superiors for help.

Conclusions: Aggressive behaviors of patients arouse in medical staff, mostly anger. Medical workers usually cope with patient aggression themselves; nurses more often than other health care professionals ask their superiors and co-workers for help. It is necessary to conduct further research into the problem of patient aggression towards medical staff so that actions ensuring safety for workers can be taken.

Key words: Health care professionals, workplace aggression, psychiatric hospital
