

WORK PLACE VIOLENCE: A “ZERO TOLERANCE” POLICY BRIEF

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ABSTRACT

Work place violence is escalating among Jordanian health care providers, particularly nurses and doctors. However, this issue does not receive much attention from decision makers in the health care sector. The current policy aims to draw the attention of health care decision makers about the importance of developing such policy. A “zero tolerance” policy towards violence in Jordanian hospitals should be immediately established and implemented.

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1. Introduction

Workplace violence is defined as any abuse, assaults and/ or threats, directed towards employees at work [2]. The assault can be physical, verbal and/or sexual and will lead to physical and emotional damage of persons [3].

Although there are no clear statistics about the incidence of workplace violence, some numbers are available and may reflect the seriousness of this phenomenon. A report by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2017) showed that 7.8 out of 10000 employers in health care settings were exposed to serious violence in the United States between 2002 and 2013 [2].

Of these, around 38% of health care providers were exposed to physical violence and much more exposed to verbal violence at certain stages of their career [4]. Among health care providers, nurses are at higher risk of violence and particularly those who are working with patients in emergency rooms [4]. Violence has many negative physical consequences [5-7] as well as negative psychological consequences [7-9].

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a policy that addresses violence because health care providers have the right to perform their jobs in a supportive work environment where violence is not tolerated.

This topic receives less attention from decision makers in all health care settings as there are no current regulatory policies in Jordan. The aim of this policy brief is to draw the attention of health care decision makers about the importance of developing such policy

2. Context and importance of the problem

In the recent years there has been an increase in work place violence among Jordanian health care providers, yet this issue did not receive much attention from health care decision makers.

New social and cultural changes and mass media have significantly contributed to this phenomenon [10]. Another contributing factor is the high levels of stress and anxiety nurses have to endure from their job [11]. Furthermore, nurses with fewer years of experience are at greater risk of being victims of violence [12]. Closed and overcrowded units are contributing to more abuse and violence [12, 13].

Work place violence causes many side effects. Patients are affected because they might not receive the optimal care from nurses who are victims of violence, given that they spend less time with patients and less time performing their tasks [14].

At the institutional level, abuse and violence increase the financial burden on health care facilities since victims of violence may need direct physical and psychological medical treatments [15].

As a result, a new law was passed in Jordan, which increased the punishment on those who commit violence against health care providers. Moreover, the American Nurses Association called for “zero tolerance towards violence”. In this plea, nurses are encouraged to no longer endure violence and are required to report it immediately [16].

One of the basic human rights that the law guarantees is to live in a place free of violence and free from any type of discrimination.

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Thus, a policy of “zero tolerance towards violence” should be encouraged in all Jordanian health care institutions.

3. Policy option(s)

Although the government of Jordan passed a law and increased the punishment for those who commit violence against any employee, the law needs additional amendments to focus on health care providers.

A concerning issue regarding the work place “zero tolerance towards violence” policy is that it isn’t enforced in Jordanian mental health care settings. Therefore, a collaborative effort is required to implement such an urgent policy. This policy should clearly state that violence against nurses who work in mental health care settings is strictly prohibited because of its physical, psychological, emotional, and financial consequences.

It was clear that there is a lack of research investigating the predicting factors associated with violence against nurses who work in mental health care settings. These predicting factors need to be considered when drafting the new policy.

Nurses who are exposed to violence tend to hide the abuse because they fear the stigma associated with the violence, resulting in an apathetic behavior. Therefore, the following suggestions are recommended:

- Implement the law that increases the punishment to those who commit a violent act.
- Establish a “zero tolerance” policy towards violence in all hospitals in Jordan. This policy should define violence, methods of reporting and specific responsibilities of each employee should be listed.
- Find a method to circulate the new policy among all health care providers.
- Enough preparation along with adequate staffing; better quality of care will result in a violence free work place environment.
- Create a policy that encourages excellence in service provided, eliminating or decreasing the possibility of work place violence.
- Encourage employees to implement the new policies in their everyday work in order to live in a “zero tolerance towards violence” workplace environment.
- Establish a workplace committee of front line health care providers, such as nurses and doctors who are working in mental health care settings, in order to create new strategies to prevent any form of violence.
- Produce a “violence risk assessment sheet” to identify potential behaviors or situations that may lead to violence.
- Encourage and work with the Mass media to promote the culture of zero tolerance towards any form of violence.
- Allow female nurses to work in C shifts with a male colleague; previous research identified gender as a predicting variable to violence.

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