Workplace violence and aggression guideline

Purpose

Workplace violence and aggression occurs when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted at the workplace or while they're working. This includes whilst working from home. It can cause both physical and psychological harm, making it a risk to health and safety. Ahpra is committed to managing the risk of workplace violence and aggression between workers and other people, including visitors, members of the public, healthcare practitioners and family members, within the workplace.

Refer to the Ahpra Workplace sexual, sex and gender-based harassment policy for information around sexual and gender-based harassment.

The purpose of these guidelines is to:

- outline the potential sources and types of workplace violence and aggression
- highlight the roles potentially at higher risk of violence and aggression
- identify control measures
- outline responsibilities for managing, implementing and monitoring control measures
- outline requirements around reporting, investigation and monitoring of workplace violence and aggression; and
- outline the support available to workers affected by violence and aggression.

Guideline

Responsibilities

All workers have a responsibility to report incidents of violence and aggression.

Responding to violent and aggressive situations

Where there is an immediate threat to the safety of a worker or visitor, contact the police by calling **000**.

For physical injuries first aid will be provided by the First Aid Officer or an ambulance will be called, where required.

Where a duress alarm is activated the Duress alarm procedure will be implemented.

All violent and aggressive incidents are reported to the worker's manager immediately and via the Health, safety and incident management system, Log It as soon as possible. This ensures that management are aware of the incident and can provide suitable support at the time. This may include a break from work or a change in duties. In addition, EAP will be offered as external support.

Review and monitoring of violent and aggressive incidents

All reported incidents will be reviewed through Log It by the responsible manager. The aim of the review process is to identify the root cause and determine whether the current control measures in place are adequate and to determine if any additional control measures are required.

Ongoing monitoring of violent and aggressive incidents is undertaken monthly and quarterly and any trends or lessons learned are reported to the National and Local HSW Committees for discussion and action.

Sources and types of workplace violence and aggression

Violent and aggressive behaviours can come from a range of sources including:

- **External** violence and aggression from family members, members of the public, health practitioners or from other tenants or contractors at an Ahpra location.
- **Internal** violence and aggression from other workers including supervisors, managers and board or committee members.

Violence and aggression can be:

- physical (e.g., biting, scratching, hitting, kicking, pushing, grabbing, throwing objects or intentionally coughing or spitting on someone),
- psychological (e.g., isolation from others, intimidation, control, stalking, humiliation and defamation),
- verbal (face-to-face aggression or via telephone or online platform such as Teams/Zoom),
- written (physical letter, email or text) or online (including via social media platforms)
- one off or repeated incidents, and / or
- lower-level behaviours such as name-calling through to more serious acts like physical assault, including criminal offences.

Acts such as assault, stalking and obscene or threatening communications (e.g. phone calls, letters, emails, text messages and posts on social media) may be offences under criminal law and should be referred to the Police as well as being managed under applicable WHS laws.

Family and domestic violence may also present a safety risk in the workplace, whether the workplace is an Ahpra office or the worker's home through the following behaviours by the perpetrator (this list is not exhaustive):

- employee being contacted at work by telephone or email
- presenting at the workplace
- stalking the employee (this could include stalking via mobile or internet technologies, or proxy stalking)
- behaving aggressively towards other workers
- waiting for the employee in the car park or at reception area
- inflicting visible or painful injuries or damaging equipment required for work
- controlling the employee's income; and / or
- the threat of any of the above.

Roles at higher risk of being exposed to violence and aggression within Ahpra

For some workers, due to the nature of their work, there is a potential increased risk of violence and aggression (this list is not exhaustive). The following Teams/individuals have been identified:

- Customer Service Team (CST) (first contact for anyone contacting Ahpra via telephone or online);
- Notifications Team (particularly frontline workers taking calls from members of the public/notifiers/practitioners);
- Compliance Team (managing health practitioner compliance with restrictions);
- Investigations Team (investigating complaints against health practitioners);
- Legal Team
- Chief Executive Officer
- Teams that deal with external stakeholders such as contractors, couriers etc e.g., the Property Team and the Information and Decision Enablement Team (Records Management).

Family and domestic violence (FDV)

Workers who have disclosed that they are at risk of FDV will be supported in line with the Family and domestic violence policy and guidelines. Where the risk of violence or aggression extends into the workplace, including if working from home, then appropriate control measures will be identified, as required.

Risk management approach to managing workplace violence and aggression:

Ahpra is committed to eliminating or minimising the risk of workplace violence and aggression so far as is reasonably practicable through a risk management approach involving:

- identifying the hazards
- assessing the associated risks
- implementing control measures to eliminate or minimise risks, and
- regularly reviewing control measures to ensure they remain effective.

Workers, HSW Committee members and Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) will be consulted with as part of this approach.

Threat Assessment framework

The Threat Assessment framework provides a coordinated approach to assessing and managing threats and risks emerging from threats from external parties, through systematic identification and analysis. It supports the response and management of the organisation to these threats. Threats can be broad in nature and involve a wide range of stakeholders. The Risk and Resilience team can be contacted for further information.

Control measures

Physical and personal security is taken very seriously at Ahpra and it is a key control measure. To limit unplanned interactions which could result in violent or aggressive situations, all Ahpra offices are kept secure through:

- Ahpra's Office Security Policy
- Securing access to Ahpra offices using an Ahpra security ID access card
- Maintaining strict procedures for visitor access
- live surveillance cameras in accordance with the Duress Alarm Procedure (with monitoring screens in the secure back-office areas); and
- duress alarms available in the Ahpra reception areas and meeting rooms used for interviews and meetings with external individuals.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic Ahpra offices were closed to the public and most interactions with notifiers and health practitioners were undertaken remotely. This greatly reduced the risk of face-to-face violence and aggression within the office environment. Whilst workers have returned to the office post-pandemic, many of the offices remain closed to the public thus eliminating or greatly reducing the risk to workers through this mechanism. Where members of the public do attend the office, it occurs much less frequently than pre-Covid times thereby reducing the risk.

Where an increased risk of violence or aggression or an event or incident with the potential to affect the security or safety of workers is identified in the area surrounding an Ahpra office then the office closure procedure may be implemented, if required. The decision will be risk-based and will involve the Risk and Resilience team and key stakeholders, including the police where appropriate. Use of the Whispir system to communicate with workers is used to ensure that workers know that they are not to attend the office and instead are required to work from home.

Alternatively additional control measures will be identified and implemented to mitigate against the risk, for example, additional security guards on site, liaison with police, additional precautions taken by staff when entering or leaving the building.

Work-design and procedural control measures are also in place where a risk of violence and/or aggression has been identified. These may include the following (the list is not exhaustive):

- procedures to deal with aggressive behaviours over the telephone including being able to end the call or escalate to team leaders/management;
- system to flag notifiers and/or health practitioners who have exhibited violent and/or aggressive behaviours in the past or who may be liable to become violent and/or aggressive. Where a risk is identified face-to-face interactions with these individuals are avoided;
- risk management assessment (Behavioural threat assessment) undertaken by Risk & Resilience where specific risk to individuals identified and appropriate measures identified may include:
  - Employee(s) to work from home for a period of time;
  - Employee to be accompanied for court appearances with transport provided to and from court and attendance only at required time;
- where appropriate two workers to undertake face-to-face interviews;
- workers receive briefing around personal security within interview rooms, including sitting close to the exit door, wearing mobile duress alarm and security pass and leaving the area to go to a place of safety (the back office) if they feel uncomfortable at any time.
- workers encouraged to avoid face to face interactions and contact their manager immediately if they have safety concerns raised during initial telephone contact e.g. with a visitor/contractor/courier
- assessment of risks completed as part of the procedures around the execution of a warrant. Where appropriate police assistance will be sought
- cab charges or safe transport options when workers are required to work late, for example, board services
- where a risk of FDV is identified the employee may work from the office rather than at home, if safer to do so.

Remote working measures include:

- Ensuring all employees routinely turn their camera on during online meetings to ensure managers and colleagues can see that they are safe,
- Regular contact with employees,
- Avoiding lone travel to unfamiliar locations or situations.

Online safety measures include:

- Keeping personal social media accounts private,
- Keeping passwords and access to computer equipment secure.

Training

Training is provided to workers identified as being at risk of exposure to violence and/or aggression. Training may include the following:

- De-escalation techniques i.e., how to recognise, avoid or diffuse potentially violent/aggressive situations.

Investigation and monitoring of violent and aggressive incidents

All reported incidents will be investigated through Log It by the responsible manager. The aim of the investigation process is to identify the root cause and determine whether the current control measures in place are adequate and to determine if any additional control measures are required.

Ongoing monitoring of violent and aggressive incidents is undertaken monthly and quarterly and any trends or lessons learned are reported to the National and Local HSW Committees for discussion and action.

Related documents

- Workplace violence and aggression policy
- Family and domestic violence policy – under development
- Family and domestic violence guidelines – under development
- Supporting an employee who discloses Family or Domestic Violence

- [Interim framework for family violence notifications](#)
- [Health safety and wellbeing policy HSW014](#)
- [Ahpra Enterprise Agreement 2022 – 2025](#)
- [Definitions – people policies and procedures PC002](#)
- [Flexible working policy PC012](#)
- [Ahpra Office Security Policy](#)
- [Supporting an Employee who discloses family or domestic violence](#)
- Respect @ Ahpra Framework and associated policies
- Duress alarms procedure

Relevant legislation

- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (ACT)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)
- Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 (NT)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (Tas)
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2020 (WA)
- https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/hazards/workplace-violence-and-aggression

Term	Definition
Family and domestic Violence (SafeWork Australia definition)	Family or domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship, or between family members. This violence may include (but is not limited to): • physical, emotional or psychological abuse • assault • sexual assault or other sexually abusive behaviour • stalking • threats • coercion • repeated derogatory taunts • intentionally damaging or destroying property • intentionally causing death or injury to an animal • economic abuse such as unreasonably denying financial autonomy or unreasonably withholding the financial support needed to meet reasonable living expenses • controlling or dominating another family member and causing them to feel fear for their safety or wellbeing, or for the safety and wellbeing of another person • behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear, witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of family violence • preventing a person from making or keeping connections with their family, friends or culture, and • unlawfully depriving someone of their liberty.
Family member	A family member means: • a spouse, de facto partner, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of the employee; or • a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of a spouse or de facto partner of the employee; or

	• a person related to the employee according to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kinship rules; or • chosen family for LGBTIQA+ community
Reasonably practicable	That which is, or was at a particular time, reasonably able to be done to ensure health and safety, taking into account and weighing up all relevant matters including: • the likelihood of the hazard or risk concerned occurring; and • the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or the risk, and • what the person concerned knows, or ought reasonably to know about the hazard or risk, and about the ways to eliminate or minimise the risk; and • the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk; and after assessing the extent of the risk and the available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, the cost associated with the available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, including whether the cost is grossly disproportionate to the risk.
Visitor	A person who is not a worker who is attending an Ahpra workplace for any purpose.
Worker	A person who carries out work for Ahpra, including: National Executive; employees; contractors and agency staff; volunteers; interns; work experience staff; and statutory appointees (board, committee and panel members).
Workplace	Any place or location where a worker conducts work on behalf of Ahpra including an Ahpra controlled office, field-work locations and the work-from- home environment.
Workplace violence and aggression	Workplace violence and aggression can be any incident where a person is abused, threatened or assaulted at the workplace or while they are carrying out work. For example, violence or aggression may happen: • at a worker's usual workplace; • where a worker is working remotely, including if the person's workplace is their home; • in a place where the worker is undertaking work at a different location (such as a client's home), or • when a worker is engaging in a work-related activity (such as a work-related corporate event of if you host a work-related social activity like a Christmas party).

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