Violence and Aggression Risk Assessment

Aim and Learning Outcomes

The aim of this session is to provide you with the knowledge and skills to be able to identify risks associated with violence and aggression.

At the end of this module, learners will be able to:

Explain the terms risk assessment, risk factors & controls

List and explain the different types of risk assessments.

List and explain the different risk factors.

Suggest solutions to reduce the risk, and,

Suggest controls to ensure the safety of lone workers.

Risk Assessment Terms.
Understanding these terms is crucial for workplace safety and managing risks effectively. Here’s a breakdown:
Risk Assessment.
- Risk Assessment is structured process of evaluating potential dangers in a workplace or situation.
It helps determine the likelihood of harm occurring and guides safety measures to prevent incidents.
Identifying Hazards.
- This is the first step in a risk assessment.
- It involves recognizing anything that has the potential to cause harm.
Hazard.
- A hazard is anything that poses a threat to health, safety, or well-being.
- These refer to specific hazards that have the potential to injure, sicken, or damage property.
- These can range from physical dangers such as violent individuals or psychological threats such as aggression.
Risk Factors.
- These are conditions or situations that make an individual or workplace more vulnerable to hazards.
- Examples include working in confined spaces, lack of training, or exposure to aggressive behavior.
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- These are measures put in place to minimize or eliminate risks.
- These can be preventative such as safety training or reactive such as emergency response plans.
Controls.

Controls are solutions put in place to reduce the risk.
- These are practical steps taken to improve safety and lower the chance of harm.
- Examples include improved workplace

Different Types of Risk Assessments.
Risk assessments vary depending on the setting and purpose. Here are the key types:
Generic Ward or Department Risk Assessment.
- This is affecting multiple employees, patients, or visitors.
- It focuses on environmental hazards, workplace conditions, and general safety procedures.
- It helps ensure consistent safety standards across the department.
Task-Specific Risk Assessment.
- This evaluates risks associated with specific tasks or activities carried out by employees.
- Examples include handling hazardous materials, lifting heavy loads, or operating medical equipment.
- It ensures that appropriate controls and safety measures are in place for high-risk tasks.
 Individual Clinical Risk Assessment.
- This is completed for each service user upon admission or referral to assess health and safety risks related to their specific needs.
- It must be reviewed every four months or whenever the initial assessment becomes invalid due to changes in the individual’s condition.
- It helps healthcare providers tailor safety measures for patients with varying medical or mental health needs.
Dynamic Risk Assessment.
- This is performed in real time by employees when faced with unexpected risks.
- It is often used in emergency situations where hazards arise suddenly.
- It requires quick decision-making to assess the severity of risks and determine immediate actions to ensure safety.
Each type of risk assessment plays a vital role in creating a safer work environment by identifying and addressing potential hazards.

Risk Factors Associated with Violence and Aggression.
Violence and aggression in healthcare or workplace settings can arise due to various risk factors related to both service users and service providers. Understanding these factors can help reduce conflict and improve safety measures.
Service user factors include:
- Mental state: Conditions such as psychosis, anxiety, depression, or substance withdrawal can heighten aggression.
- Physical factors: Pain, hunger, fatigue, or illness can cause frustration, making an individual more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior.
- Unmet needs: When a person feels their medical, emotional, or social needs are not met, they may react with hostility or aggression.
Service provider factors include:
- Attitude: A lack of empathy, impatience, or dismissive behavior can escalate aggressive situations.
- Experience & confidence: Inexperienced or untrained staff may struggle to de-escalate conflicts, making aggressive incidents more likely.
- Training: Proper conflict resolution and aggression management training helps staff respond safely and effectively.
- Communication skills: Poor communication or unclear instructions may lead to misunderstandings and frustration, increasing aggression risks.
 Interaction factors include:
- Denial of requests: When a service user’s request—such as medication, discharge, or privileges—is denied, they may react negatively.
- Enforcing rules: Strict enforcement of policies without clear explanation or flexibility may provoke aggression.
- Removal of personal objects: Confiscating items for safety or institutional reasons can lead to feelings of loss or frustration.
Environmental factors include:
- Decor & atmosphere: Sterile, unwelcoming, or poorly maintained environments can increase distress.
- Temperature & comfort: Excessive heat, cold, poor ventilation, or discomfort can contribute to irritability and aggressive reactions.
- Noise levels: Loud or disruptive environments may overwhelm individuals, leading to stress or frustration.
- Overcrowding: Lack of personal space, privacy, or excessive demand on resources can result in heightened aggression.

Clinical Risk Factors Associated with Violence and Aggression
Several clinical risk factors can contribute to violence and aggression. These factors often involve personal history, medical conditions, environmental influences, and demographic variables.
1. History Factors
- A past history of violent or aggressive behavior can indicate a higher likelihood of future aggression.
- Non-adherence to rules or authority may contribute to confrontations and aggressive responses.
2. Clinical Factors
- Bipolar Disorder: During manic episodes, individuals may exhibit impulsive or aggressive behaviors.
- Impulse Control Disorder: Difficulty regulating emotions can lead to sudden outbursts of aggression.
- Drug or Alcohol Abuse: Substance use can impair judgment and reduce inhibitions, increasing the risk of violent behavior.
3. Contextual Factors
- Unstable or Unsupportive Family Environments: Lack of stability and emotional support can contribute to behavioral difficulties.
- Fractured Relationships: Social isolation or history of trauma can heighten frustration and aggression.
4. Gender Factors
- Males are generally more prone to physical aggression due to biological and social influences.
- Testosterone levels and social conditioning may contribute to higher rates of violent behavior in men.
5. Age Factors

- Juveniles are statistically more associated with violent crime, often due to peer influence, lack of impulse control, or exposure to violent environments.
- Young adults may also exhibit aggressive behavior due to developmental, social, or environmental pressures.

Control Measures to Manage Violence and Aggression.
Managing violence and aggression effectively requires a combination of environmental, procedural, and security measures to protect both service users and staff. Below are key control measures:
Working environment.
- Ensure layout, space, and fixtures promote safety and allow clear movement.
- Design spaces to minimize trapped areas where staff could be cornered.
- Use sturdy furniture and fittings that cannot be easily used as weapons.
Information & signage for service users.
- Provide clear guidelines and instructions to prevent confusion or frustration.
- Use easy-to-read signage that directs service users to exits, support services, and behavioral expectations.
Access & egress (safe areas & access control)
- Establish safe zones for staff retreat during aggressive incidents.
- Use controlled entry systems to restrict unauthorized access.
- Ensure exits are accessible and free from obstructions.
Security systems.
- Install CCTV, alarms, monitors, mobile phones, and radios for staff communication and incident reporting.
- Use panic buttons in high-risk areas to signal emergencies.
- Ensure security personnel are present where necessary.
Guidance & training on dealing with difficult people.
- Provide conflict resolution and de-escalation training for staff.
- Educate employees on warning signs and early intervention strategies.
- Conduct regular scenario-based training to improve preparedness.
Lone working policies & procedures.
- Implement policies for checking in and monitoring lone workers.
- Ensure backup or emergency support is available for lone employees.
- Use GPS tracking or communication devices for safety.
Emergency Plans & procedures.
- Establish clear protocols for responding to aggression or violent incidents.
- Conduct regular drills and rehearsals for emergency scenarios.
- Ensure access to emergency exits and response teams.
Incident management.
- Implement a system for reporting and reviewing incidents to improve future responses.
- Conduct debriefing sessions for staff affected by aggression.
- Analyze trends and risk factors to strengthen prevention strategies.
By combining these measures, organizations can create a safe and controlled environment, reducing the risk of violence and ensuring appropriate responses when incidents occur.

Lone Worker Risk Factors.

Lone workers who face violence and aggression may be particularly vulnerable due to several risk factors. Here's how confined spaces, age-related vulnerabilities, and language barriers contribute to these risks:
Confined Spaces.
- Limited escape routes can make it harder to avoid an aggressive individual.
- Restricted movement may prevent workers from defending themselves or accessing help quickly.
- Poor visibility or lighting can make situations more unpredictable and dangerous.
Age.

Young Workers: Often less experienced, they may not recognize warning signs of aggression or know how to de-escalate conflict.
Older Workers: Reduced physical agility may limit their ability to react quickly or escape dangerous situations.
- Disabled Workers: Mobility issues or other impairments can make it harder to defend themselves or seek assistance.
- Untrained Workers: Lack of knowledge about conflict resolution or emergency response may leave them ill-equipped to handle aggression.
Language Barriers.
- Workers who do not speak English fluently may struggle to communicate concerns or call for help in critical situations.
- Misunderstandings can escalate tensions, especially if the worker cannot fully explain policies, procedures, or concerns.
- Difficulty interpreting threats or warnings may put workers at greater risk.
To reduce these risks, employers can provide training, emergency response strategies, and accessible communication tools.

Lone Worker Safety.

Ensuring the safety of lone workers in relation to violence and aggression requires a proactive approach. Here’s how each of these measures helps to protect them:
1. Provide lone workers with a client history prior to the visit.
- Knowing a client’s background, especially any previous incidents of aggression, can help lone workers anticipate and manage risks.
- Clear information on triggers, behaviors, or support needs allows them to prepare accordingly.
2. Provide lone workers with emergency contact equipment such as mobile Phones.
- Access to a mobile phone or panic alarm ensures they can call for help if they feel threatened.
- Devices with GPS tracking enable quick response in case of emergency.
3. Inform others of their destination and expected return time.
- Sharing their itinerary ensures that colleagues or supervisors are aware of their whereabouts.
- If delays occur, others can quickly raise concerns and check on their safety.
4. Phone their fixed base or contact person) at agreed intervals.
- Regular check-ins confirm their well-being and allow for timely intervention if needed.
- Missing a scheduled call could prompt an immediate investigation into their location.
5. Action plan if the lone Worker fails to return or check in.
- A predefined response procedure ensures swift action, such as calling emergency services or visiting their last known location.
- Having an escalation protocol reduces uncertainty in urgent situations.
6. Ensure vehicles are roadworthy and maintained.
- Reliable transportation prevents workers from being stranded in unsafe areas.
- Well-maintained vehicles reduce the risk of breakdowns that could leave them vulnerable.
7. Match worker skills to client support needs.
- Assigning workers based on experience and training ensures they can handle potential conflicts.
- Providing de-escalation training helps them manage aggressive behavior effectively.
8. Allow withdrawal from visits or situations if they feel at risk.
- Empowering workers to leave unsafe environments without penalty prioritizes their safety.
- Policies should reinforce that workers are never obligated to remain in threatening situations.
9. Review building security arrangements for lone workers.
- Ensuring premises have secure entry points, alarms, and surveillance improves protection.
- Regular safety assessments identify potential hazards and allow for improvements.
Implementing these strategies can significantly reduce risks for lone workers facing aggression or violence.

3 P’s of Personal Safety.

The 3 P’s—Position, Proximity, and Posture—are key elements in managing situations involving violence and aggression. Understanding and controlling these elements can help individuals stay safe and effectively de-escalate conflicts.
Position.
This means the location of a person or object in relation to the situation.
Strategic positioning helps maintain control, ensures access to escape routes, and minimizes risk.
- Best practices for position yourself includes::
- Stand at an angle rather than directly in front of an aggressive individual to reduce vulnerability.
- Be aware of surrounding objects that could be used as barriers or weapons.
- Keep a clear path to exits in case a quick retreat is necessary.
Proximity.
-This means the physical distance between individuals in a conflict scenario.
Too much closeness can escalate tensions, while maintaining appropriate distance allows for better control.
- Best practices:for proximity include:
- Maintain a safe distance to avoid sudden physical attacks.
- Be mindful of personal space as invading it may trigger defensive reactions.
- Adjust distance based on the individual's aggression level to reduce intimidation and maintain calm communication.
Posture.
- This refers to a person’s body positioning and stance in a confrontation.
Non-verbal cues, like stance and gestures, can influence the outcome of a situation.
- Best practices for posture include:
- Keep a steady stance, having a broad stable base, with relaxed but ready posture to show confidence without provoking aggression.
- Avoid crossed arms, clenched fists, or rigid postures, as these may be seen as defensive or confrontational.
- Use steady eye contact, open palms, and calm facial expressions to signal non-hostility while maintaining authority.
Mastering the 3 P’s helps individuals remain in control, reduce risks, and improve conflict resolution skills in situations involving violence and aggression.

Summary.

Risk assessments for violence and aggression are essential for maintaining safety in various environments. Here's a concise breakdown:

Key elements of risk assessment.

Understanding Key Terms: Familiarize yourself with concepts like hazard, risk, mitigation, and control measures.

Risk Identification: Recognize different types of risk, including physical threats, verbal aggression, and psychological harm.

Risk Factors: Assess factors contributing to violence, such as environmental triggers, interpersonal conflict, and organizational policies.

Tailoring assessments to specific environments.

Workplaces (e.g., hospitals, retail, law enforcement) have different risk profiles and require tailored approaches.

Public spaces may need crowd management techniques.

Educational institutions should focus on behavioral interventions.

Implementing safety measures..

Environmental Controls: Secure physical spaces with improved lighting, surveillance, and controlled access.

Procedural controls: Develop policies for reporting incidents and handling aggression.

Security measures: Utilize trained personnel, alarms, and emergency response plans.

Training for effective respones to handle disputes before they escalate.

De-escalation techniques: Equip staff with strategies to calm aggressive individuals.

Emergency response: Conduct drills for handling crises safely.

A thorough risk assessment helps organizations anticipate threats and implement proactive solutions to protect individuals and property.