

**Violence Against Social Work Professionals:
A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis**

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Review question / Objective This review aims to find evidence of the prevalence of Work Place Violence in social workers and associated variables at the international level.

Condition being studied Work Place Violence in social workers.

METHODS

Participant or population Social Workers.

Intervention It is not applicable.

Comparator It is not applicable.

Study designs to be included This systematic review with meta-analysis was carried out according to the methodological guidelines and

suggestions expressed in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement (Page et al., 2021).

Eligibility criteria Two blinded authors (AVA and AML) independently reviewed the titles and abstracts of all the records retrieved from the databases selected. A study was examined in detail if at least one of the authors selected it based on its title or abstract. A third author (FCS) expert in this field intervened when there were discrepancies or reasonable doubts about the relevance of a study. A study was included if it met the following Inclusion Criteria (I.C): I.C.1: Primary research studies published in scientific journals; I.C.2: Studies whose samples were comprised of social workers, or other professionals if they included social workers and presented data disaggregated by professional profile; I.C.3: Studies on the prevalence of various forms of violence committed by social workers in

workplaces. The Exclusion Criteria (E.C.) proposed were as follows: E.C.1: Studies that analyzed violence exclusively towards other professionals, or without presenting violence data disaggregated by professional profile; E.C.2: Studies whose analysis did not focus on specifically measuring the prevalence of client violence, or those presenting quantitative data not suitable for meta-analysis; E.C.3: Different studies that used the same database in multiple publications (in these cases the most recent publication was selected, or that which presented the most complete data); and E.C.4: Validation/analysis studies of the psychometric properties of instruments.

Information sources The literature search focused on peer-reviewed scientific journal publications presenting estimates of the prevalence of violence directed at Social Work professionals in various areas of professional practice. This research included articles published from January 1990 until January 2024 in the following databases: Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, Social Work Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, APA PsycInfo, and PubMed (MEDLINE).

Additional studies were identified by examining other data sources, such as conference abstracts and minutes, expert papers, reference lists of related works previously published in Google Scholar (inserting background titles and using the “cited by” and “related articles” functions) and ResearchGate. Finally, the reference lists of the studies included were also examined for additional literature.

Main outcome(s) This review reveals a number of worrisome trends, a high prevalence of both non-physical and physical violence directed at social workers being of note. In addition, significant disparities in the prevalence of violence between different work contexts and countries have been identified, as well as the influence of the methodological quality of the studies on the estimates reported. These findings underscore the urgent need for more robust policies, safety measures, and research approaches to effectively address this important public health and occupational safety issue.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis The studies eligible for inclusion in this review were assessed for methodological quality using the JBI-Qualitative Critical appraisal tool for prevalence studies.

Strategy of data synthesis The prevalence rates of WPV against social workers were pooled with a random-effects meta-analysis, assuming

heterogeneity between studies, by accounting for both within-study and between-study variance.

Subgroup analysis Countries and period of time.

Sensitivity analysis In order to assess the robustness of the meta-analysis, we conducted two sensitivity analyses (non-physical and physical violence) by excluding the studies one by one in each step and then generating meta-analysis results based on the remaining studies (see supplementary table S10).

Country(ies) involved Spain (Huelva University).

Keywords PRISMA; workplace violence; non-physical violence; physical violence; social workers.

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