

ABSTRACT

To what extent has violence contributed to stress among public health workers and its effect on the delivery of public health care in Jamaica

Rodney McClead Toppin

Public health care workers are particularly vulnerable and exposed to high levels of workplace violence and stress imbedded in volatile communities and work environments. These factors can impact negatively on the health status of these individuals and on health care delivery in general.

The incidence of violence against community public health care workers in Jamaica or in developing countries has not been well studied. The aim of this study was to assess the impact of societal violence on the delivery of public health care, by looking at the impact/effects on public health workers at six health centres. The study specifically examined the prevalence, types, nature and effects of violence; identified causes, signs and sources of stress, coping skills and general responses and attitudes to violence amongst health care workers who delivered health care to clients both at the health centre and in their homes/communities.

Method: A stratified random sample of 95 public health workers participated in the study yielding a response rate of 73%. A 30-item

questionnaire was self administered during the study. In-depth interviews were also conducted at all six health centres and from the categories of staff identified, to obtain qualitative data to support and supplement findings.

Results: Psychological violence (verbal abuse/threats 87%) was more prevalent than physical abuse amongst health care workers. Most health care workers 85% identified patients or their relatives as the most likely source of this violence.

Violence against health-care workers was found to occur on average 25% daily/weekly for those who did home visits and 39% for those who worked only in the health centers. 86% of health-care workers identified finances and personal relationships as their main sources of stress outside of work. Violence was a source of stress at work for both visiting (15%) and non visiting workers (25%) respectively.

Conclusions: There is a high prevalence of violence against health-care workers in the form of verbal abuse/threats, which contributes significantly to their source of stress at work. Interventions are needed to reduce stressors in the work environment of health care workers, so as to make health-care delivery more effective.

Key words: Rodney Toppin, Violence, Stress, Public Health Workers, Jamaica, Health Care Delivery