

Information Sheet on Work-related Violence and Aggression in Retail

What is work-related violence and aggression?

Work-related violence and aggression can be defined as any incident where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, health or wellbeing.

The purpose of this guidance document is to help retail employers manage the risks associated with work-related violence and aggression, and to implement suitable control measures, examples of which are provided below.

An aggressive or violent act can be physical or non-physical. Physical examples can include spitting, pushing, hitting, punching or attacking a person with a weapon or object. Non-physical can be verbal abuse, threats or threatening gestures towards the person.

The retail sector in Ireland employs over 200,000 people and a large number of these employees work in a public-facing role. A recent survey* carried out on behalf of the HSA has indicated an increase in incidents of violence and aggression within this sector.



How common is work-related violence and aggression in retail?

Feedback from employers and stakeholders is that violence and aggression is a challenge. Not all incidents of violence and aggression are reported to the Health and Safety Authority so it is difficult to quantify the exact scale of the problem. Below are some of the results of a recent survey carried out on behalf of the Health and Safety Authority which give an indication of the prevalence.

51%

51% of employees surveyed experience violence and aggression directed towards them or colleagues on a monthly basis.

70%

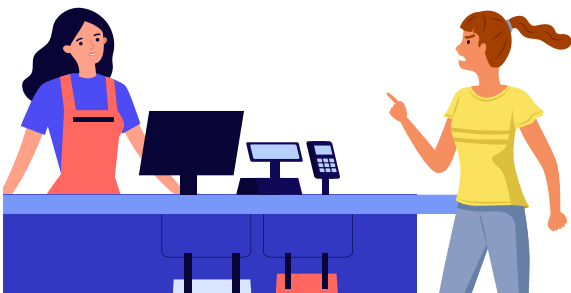
Over 70% of employees surveyed who experience violence and aggression report that their safety and wellbeing were negatively impacted.

What are the possible effects of work-related violence and aggression?

Retail staff who directly experience a violent or aggressive incident can suffer physical and/or psychological harm and/or injury. They can also experience anxiety, fear and depression or develop stress-related health problems which may lead to long-term conditions requiring sick leave.

In addition, employees who witness a violent or aggressive act can also suffer psychological effects such as reduced morale, increase in fear or anxiety and feelings of insecurity. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can also develop in severe cases.

As with all ill health, incidents of violence and aggression can also increase costs due to absenteeism, employer's liability premiums and compensation payments.



What factors affect the risk of work-related violence and aggression?

A recent survey¹ carried out on behalf of the Health and Safety Authority outlines the most common factors for violence and aggression within the retail sector. These factors can be incorporated into the risk assessment process and include the following:

- Customer displaying challenging or inappropriate behaviour
- Customer under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Customer grievance/complaint
- Theft or suspected theft
- Refusing service or access to premises
- Customer waiting times

What can retail employers do to reduce the risk?

Work-related violence and aggression is a psychosocial hazard which can be complex and influenced by many factors. As with any other hazard in the workplace, violence and aggression needs to be risk assessed and the appropriate control measures put in place.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 (the 2005 Act) places duties on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of those at work.

Employers' duties include:

- identifying the hazards in their workplace,
- assessing the risks to employees, and
- putting in place appropriate control measures to protect employees.

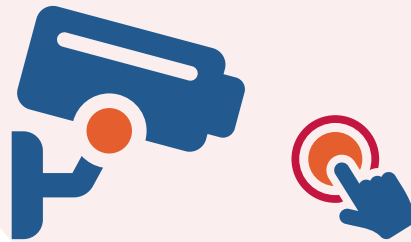
Employees duties include:

- taking reasonable care for their own safety and the safety of others at the workplace that may be affected by their acts or omissions,
- following safety procedures, and
- reporting to their employer any unsafe working conditions of which they are aware.

Below are some control measures which may assist in reducing the risks from work-related violence and aggression in a retail setting.

1. *Online (n=310) and telephone (n=200) survey conducted on behalf of the HSA, Q4 2024.

Control Measures for Workplace Violence and Aggression



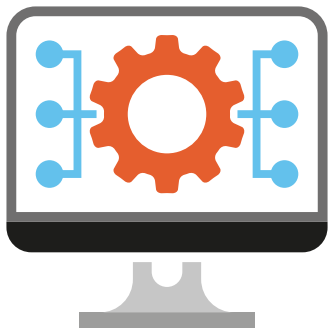
Organisational

-  Promote a positive safety culture by clearly communicating that violence and aggression are unacceptable. Ensure staff understand they will receive full support in the event of an incident, and convey to customers that any form of violence or aggression toward employees will not be tolerated.
-  Have a robust incident reporting system in place for all incidents of violence and aggression experienced by staff.
-  Provide training, information and instruction to staff around the topic of violence and aggression.
-  Inform customers or members of the public about the consequences of unacceptable behaviour through, for example, visible signage.
-  Communicate further supports available to employees who have been affected by a violent or aggressive customer, such as counselling, employee assistance programmes and support lines.

Workplace/Environmental

-  Identify and highlight places of refuge for staff, for example magnetic doors, key coded areas and authorised persons only areas.
-  Ensure the shop floor is designed so that staff can see and communicate with each other. While designing the layout of the shop floor, avoid areas where staff might become isolated with members of the public.
-  Install adequate lighting to ensure visibility in customer facing areas.
-  Install panic buttons where they are unobstructed and clearly visible, and ensure staff are aware of their location.
-  Control access to staff areas, specifically behind counters and tills.
-  Keep counters clear of tools or objects that can be used as missiles or weapons.
-  Install protective screens or barriers where necessary.
-  Ensure CCTV* is in operation and that signage informing customers about the presence of CCTV and why it is there.

* Employers and duty holders should be aware that the use of CCTV/Bodycams may be subject to GDPR and data protection legislation



Management/Systems of Work

-  Roster an experienced member of staff or manager so they are available to support other staff members.
-  Implement communication systems in order to allow staff to easily call for assistance.
-  Implement a complaints or grievance policy that customers can be directed towards to de-escalate a tense situation and alleviate risk.
-  Provide uniforms or clothing that take into account the risk of violence and aggression such as breakaway lanyards, and clip on ties.
-  Avoid lone working where possible.
-  Ensure security personnel are in place where a risk assessment deems this necessary.
-  In line with the risk assessment process, consider whether mobile panic alarms, body worn cameras* and handheld radios are necessary.
-  Train staff in cash handling procedures and consider any potential risk from customers or members of the public having visibility of cash handling duties.

Note: The above is a non-exhaustive list of control measures and not all of the above will apply to all retail outlets. Control measures should always be based on a risk assessment at the place of work.

Recording incidents of violence and aggression

A system of internal recording of all incidents of violence and aggression should be put in place. Recording of incidents will assist employers in the ongoing management of violence and aggression. The organisation should encourage an open and positive approach to reporting and follow-up of incidents.

As good practice, every employer should keep a record of all violence and aggression related incidents experienced by employees. To assist employers in the recording of incidents, the HSA has produced a template form that can be accessed using the below link.

[Guidance on Managing the Risk of Work-Related Violence and Aggression](#)

Available resources

In addition to the above, the HSA has produced a range of resources to help employers reduce the risk in relation to work-related violence and aggression. These include e-learning tools, podcast and helpful web content.

[E-Learning Course: Introduction to Managing Work-Related Violence and Aggression](#)

[HSA Podcast – Beyond Compliance](#)

[HSA Media Campaign](#)

HSA

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