Chapter 04

Workplace Violence Against Medical Personnel. Medico-Legal Analysis, Occupational Risks, and Institutional Response
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Field study: design, instrument, and variables

Purpose of the study

The empirical study that supports this book was aimed at examining the situations of aggression experienced by medical professionals working in public and private health institutions in Greater Buenos Aires (GBA). The research was based on the need to understand how these episodes manifest themselves in everyday practice and what factors may be associated with their occurrence.

Rather than seeking single explanations, the analysis focused on describing patterns, identifying relevant variables, and recognizing the possible consequences of these experiences. It also considers the relevance of a medico-legal interpretation that would allow the phenomenon to be placed within the corresponding regulatory and professional framework.

Guiding questions

The study was structured around a central question related to the factors involved in situations of aggression toward healthcare professionals. It explored how these events occur in different services and types of institutions, considering the specific healthcare context of 2023.

This guiding question made it possible to organize the observation of variables related to the frequency of assaults, their characteristics, the actors involved, and the repercussions perceived by professionals.

Design and methodological approach

The research was conducted via a descriptive, cross-sectional observational design. This approach allowed us to examine the variables of interest as they occur in the professional environment without experimental intervention. The choice of a descriptive design responded to the purpose of characterizing the phenomenon and documenting its expression in the context analyzed.

The cross-sectional design made it possible to collect information within a limited period, providing an analytical snapshot of the experiences reported by participants during the defined time interval.

Context and study period

The study was conducted in public and private health institutions in Greater Buenos Aires (GBA). Data collection took place between September and November 2023, in a scenario marked by organizational transformations, intensified healthcare demands, and working conditions affected by tensions inherent to the healthcare context.

This time frame is particularly relevant, as it allows us to capture perceptions and experiences at a time characterized by high demand on healthcare systems.

Universe and sample

The reference universe consisted of physicians practicing in public and private institutions in Greater Buenos Aires. From this group, a sample of twenty-four professionals, defined as units of analysis for the study, was selected.

The selection was made via non-probabilistic quota sampling, prioritizing the inclusion of participants from different institutional settings. This criterion allowed for the incorporation of diverse experiences within the operational limits of the research.

Participation criteria

Physicians belonging to the permanent staff of public and private institutions in Greater Buenos Aires who gave their consent to participate in the study were included. Similarly, only those professionals who completed the data collection instrument in its entirety were considered, thus ensuring the consistency of the information analyzed.

Cases corresponding to professionals who were on leave during the study period were excluded to preserve the homogeneity of the group in terms of active occupational exposure.

Instrument and variables analyzed

The information was obtained through a structured survey designed to explore professionals' experience in relation to situations of aggression. The instrument allowed for the collection of data related to frequency, type, context, actors involved, and perceived consequences.

The variables selected were chosen to characterize the phenomenon from a clinical, occupational, and medico-legal perspective, integrating descriptive and analytical dimensions.

Ethical aspects of the research

During the course of this research, the standards for medical research established in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013) were followed.

The surveys were anonymous and were administered after informed consent was obtained (Appendix 1), which clearly stated that the respondents' data would not be disclosed to third parties.

The results of the evaluation of the instrument used were collected in a database, which was kept by the researcher.

Techniques and procedures

The technique used in this research study consisted of data collection via a structured survey questionnaire composed of nine items, with closed questions with dichotomous or polytomous answers referring to workplace violence.

Operationalization of variables

Table 4.1. Operationalization of variables

Variable	Concept	Category
Biological sex	According to biological sex stated on ID card	Male Female
Age	According to age stated on ID card	Under 35 35 to 55 years old Over 55
Nationality	According to nationality stated on ID card	Argentina Foreign
Work environment	According to the type of institution where the respondent works	Public hospital Private clinic or sanatorium Private practice

History of aggression in the workplace	According to history of aggression in the respondent's work environment	Yes No
Type of aggression	According to the type of aggression experienced by the respondent, regardless of the frequency of each	Verbal Physical Both Other
Person who committed the assault	According to the person (aggressor) who committed the assault, regardless of the frequency of each	Patient Patient's family member Work colleagues Superiors
Action after the event	According to the respondent's actions after the event occurred	Defended themselves Reported the event at the workplace Did nothing
Support or follow-up from the institution to which they provide services	Depending on whether the respondent received support or follow-up from the institution they work for after an assault	Yes No

REFERENCES

World Medical Association. (2013). World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects. JAMA, 310(20), 2191-2194. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2013.281053