

Doctors subjects of patients' verbal, physical aggression

September 17 2012



New research shows that younger and hospital-based doctors are more vulnerable to workplace aggression.

More than 70 per cent of doctors faced verbal or written aggression and almost a third confronted physical aggression in the workplace over a 12-month period, according to new research.

In a study published today in the [Medical Journal of Australia](#), Monash University researchers undertook an Australian-first survey of more than 9400 clinical [medical practitioners](#) to determine the prevalence of aggression directed towards them by patients, patients' families and

carers, co-workers and others external to the workplace.

Danny Hills and Associate Professor Catherine Joyce from the University's Department of Epidemiology and [Preventive Medicine](#), and Emeritus Professor John Humphreys from the School of Rural Health, surveyed [general practitioners](#) (GPs) and GP registrars, specialists, hospital non-specialists and specialists-in-training between March 2010 and June 2011.

Mr Hills, a doctoral scholar, said data analysis clearly revealed that certain groups were more vulnerable to aggression.

"We found that younger and hospital-based clinicians were more likely to have experienced aggression," Mr Hills said.

"Hospitalised patients are likely to be suffering more severe conditions, and consequently be highly distressed, compared to those visiting GPs, so that finding is not surprising."

"Younger [doctors](#) will necessarily be less experienced in aggression minimisation strategies compared with more senior clinicians. They may also be afforded a lower professional status and associated levels of respect."

Results indicated that GPs who had gained their qualifications overseas were also more likely to have been subject to aggression from patients.

Previous research suggested that cultural or communication issues may play a role in aggression directed towards international medical graduates. The researchers urged further research into this phenomenon due to the importance of these doctors to the Australian health system.

Mr Hills said workplace aggression had important implications both on

the individual level for doctors, and more broadly for the medical workforce.

"Previous research has found that clinicians who were exposed to aggression reported lowered confidence or enthusiasm for their work, and an increase in medical errors," Mr Hills said.

"Ultimately, if this workplace [aggression](#) is not appropriately addressed, especially in the cases of international graduates and younger clinicians, it may contribute to difficulties in recruiting and retaining doctors."

Provided by Monash University

Citation: Doctors subjects of patients' verbal, physical aggression (2012, September 17) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-09-doctors-subjects-patients-physical-aggression.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.