

# Patient-initiated workplace violence affects counselors, treatment and outcomes, research finds

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More than four out of five counselors who treat patients for substance abuse have experienced some form of patient-initiated workplace violence according to the first national study to examine the issue, led by Georgia State University Professor Brian E. Bride.

The study, forthcoming in the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, is the first to measure the extent of [workplace violence](#) in [substance abuse](#) treatment centers across the United States. Bride and his co-authors analyzed a large, national sample of Substance Use Disorder counselors from the National Institutes of Health-funded National Treatment Center Studies.

"We know that workplace violence disproportionately impacts health care and social service providers," said Bride, who is director of the School of Social Work in the university's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. "Our goal was to quantify its existence in [substance abuse treatment](#) centers, identify personal and institutional responses, and identify any characteristics that may put counselors at greater risk."

Bride and his co-authors found:

- More than half of the counselors personally experienced workplace violence (53 percent), while 44 percent witnessed violence directed at another colleague and 61 percent had

knowledge of such violence.

- Counselors reported that exposure to workplace violence led to an increased concern for personal safety (29 percent), affected their treatment of patients (15 percent) and impaired job performance (12 percent).
- In terms of organizational responses to patient violence, 70 percent of organizations increased training on de-escalation of violent situations and 58 percent increased security measures.

"Workplace violence has been shown to interfere with a clinician's ability to manage his or her workload," said Bride. "Additionally, these professionals suffer lower mental energy. They are less likely to participate in work decisions and more likely to offer a decreased quality of care."

While most substance abuse counselors exposed to workplace violence are those who witness or hear about violence directed at their co-workers, prior research has demonstrated that witnessing such acts can produce the same negative outcomes as being the target of a violent act, Bride said.

"Patient-initiated workplace violence clearly affects substance abuse counselors," he said. "Further research is needed to fully examine the negative impact of this violence on counselor well-being, the quality of treatment offered as a result and the organization's effectiveness in treating such patients."

Provided by Georgia State University

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