



Organizational Practices & Workplace Culture Associated with Injury Risk

Background:

- Hospital non-physician patient-care workers experience higher injury rates at the workplace compared to other industries such as construction and manufacturing. Among all injuries, musculoskeletal are the most prevalent and partly attributed to job tasks. Work culture, supervisor support and title are also associated with musculoskeletal injuries.
- Verbal abuse—in the form of abusive language, swearing, harassment, or ridicule—is frequent in health care settings, and associated with increased risk for musculoskeletal disorders.

Research Conducted:

- Linking self-reported data from patient-care workers' surveys to injury records from employers, one study examined the relationship between rates of occupational musculoskeletal injury and organizational factors, psychosocial factors (involving both psychological and social aspects) & structural factors.
- A second study examined the relationship between reports of verbal abuse and occupational injuries.

Results:

- Lower people-oriented culture, lower supervisor support and job title were associated with higher rates of musculoskeletal injury. Patient care assistants experienced more musculoskeletal injuries than nurses.
- Being yelled at, experiencing hostile or offensive gestures and being sworn at were associated with a higher risk of all types of injury; the effect is stronger in musculoskeletal injuries. Verbal abuse by patients or patient families was related to injury risk more than verbal abuse from coworkers, supervisors or physicians.

Why this is important:

- While efforts to prevent injury usually focus on physical aspects of the workplace, attention should also be paid to the psychosocial work environment, organizational practices and verbal abuse, especially regarding musculoskeletal injury which is more prevalent in patient-care workers.

Implications:

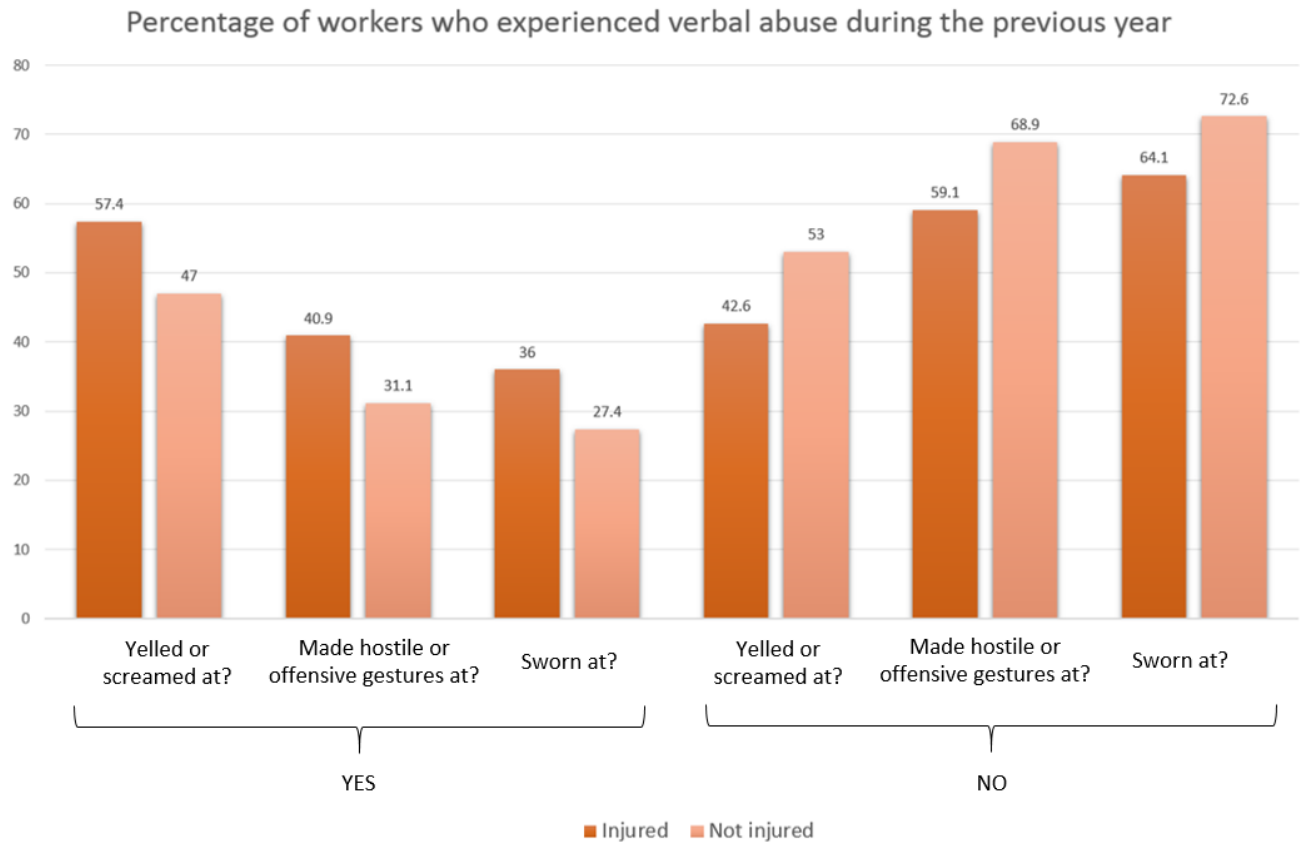
- At the organizational level, efforts to prevent injury and promote health must begin with a culture and climate that supports workers and protects against abuse.
- Workers' training could include informative discussions on abuse, and procedures for reporting and investigating incidents of workplace abuse in an anonymous manner should be created.

Summary based on the following papers:

Sabbath EL, Hurtado DA, Okechukwu CA, Tamers SL, Nelson C, Kim SS, Wagner G, Sorenson G. Occupational injury among hospital patient-care workers: what is the association with workplace verbal abuse? Am J Ind Med. 2014 Feb;57(2):222-32.doi: 10.1002/ajim.22271.

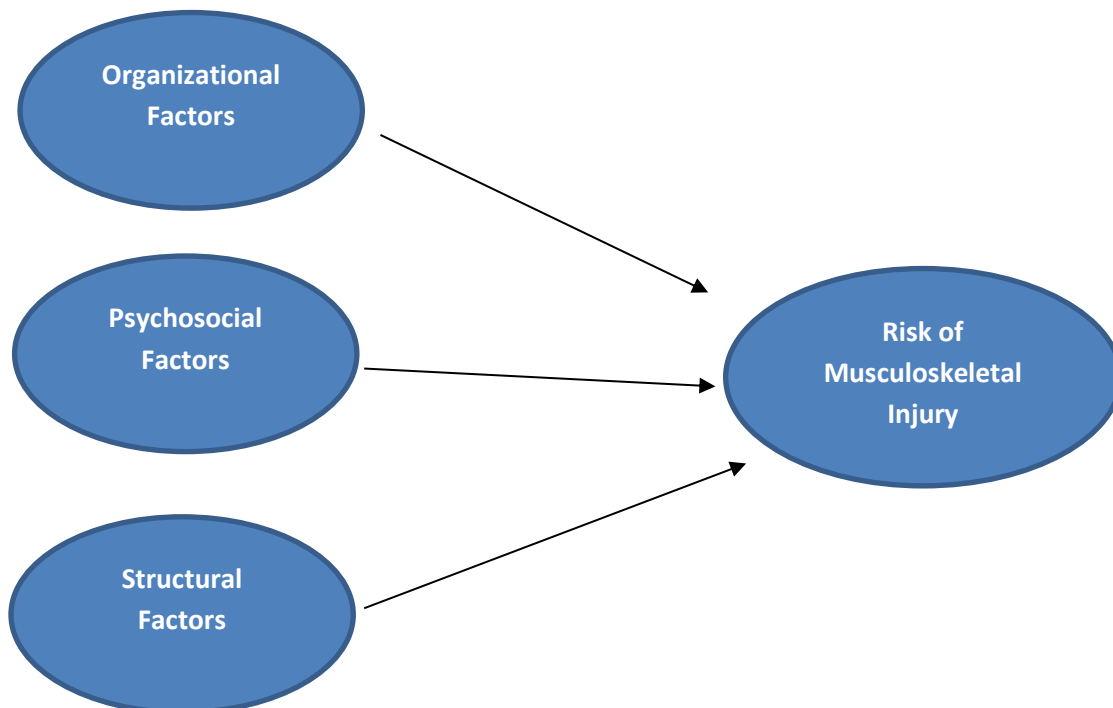
Reme SE, Shaw WS, Boden LI, Tveito TH, O'Day ET, Dennerlein JT, Sorensen G. Worker assessments of organizational practices and psychosocial work environment are associated with musculoskeletal injuries in hospital patient care workers. Am J Ind Med. 2014 Jul;57(7):810-8. doi: 10.1002/ajim.22319.

For more information, please see the Center's website: centerforworkhealth.sph.harvard.edu.



Sabbath et al. (2014)

Aspects of the Work Environment that Influence Risk of Musculoskeletal Injuries



Reme et al. (2014)