

## Workplace Violence Prevention

# Safe Staffing is a Key Measure

Nurses face high rates of workplace violence, predominantly from patients.

- » RN injury rates from workplace violence are nearly five times higher than for U.S. workers overall and increased by 30 percent in 2020.
- » Workplace violence contributes to anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, moral distress, burnout, and turnover for nurses.

**Workplace violence is significantly more likely to happen when units are short-staffed and when nurses have heavy workloads:**

- » Odds of violence were more than twice as high on units with worse staffing levels compared to units with higher staffing levels.<sup>1,2</sup>
- » Odds of workplace violence were 1.5 times higher for nurses reporting high levels of time pressure.<sup>3</sup>
- » Researchers found that heavy workload, compromised standards, and interruptions—which are directly related to short staffing—were connected to increased workplace violence. They concluded, “Heavy workload may be one of the root causes of patient/family violence towards nurses. Employers and policymakers must implement system-level specific strategies that alleviate nurse workload factors at multiple levels.”<sup>4</sup>

**Interventions that improved staffing as part of a comprehensive workplace violence prevention plan led to reduced violence rates.<sup>5</sup>**

**NNU is advocating for safe staffing and workplace violence protections for nurses and other health care workers:**

- » The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. 1176/H.R. 2663) would require OSHA to promulgate a standard that would require health care employers to develop and implement prevention plans to reduce workplace violence incidents and would provide for enforcement.
- » The Nurse Staffing Standards for Hospital Patient Safety and Quality Care Act (S. 1113/H.R. 2530) would set mandated, minimum registered nurse-to-patient staffing ratios for hospitals and provide for enforcement.



## Key Facts

- » Nurses face high and growing rates of workplace violence.
- » Workplace violence is significantly more likely to occur when nurses are short staffed.
- » When employers improve staffing, as part of a comprehensive workplace violence prevention plan, rates of workplace violence decrease.
- » NNU is advocating for safe staffing and workplace violence protections for nurses.

**To learn more, visit:**  
[nationalnursesunited.org](https://nationalnursesunited.org)

- 1 • Lee, S.S., S.G. Gerberich, et al., “Work-related assault injuries among nurses,” *Epidemiology*, 1999, 10(6): 685-91.
- 2 • Shields, M. and K. Wilkins, “Factors related to on-the-job abuse of nurses by patients,” *Health Reports*, 2009, 20(2): 7.
- 3 • Estryn-Behar, M., B. van der Heijden, et al., “Violence risks in nursing--results from the European ‘NEXT’ Study,” *Occup Med*, 2008, 58(2): 107-14.
- 4 • Havaei, F. and M. MacPhee, “The impact of heavy nurse workload and patient/family complaints on workplace violence: An application of human factors framework,” *NursingOpen*, 2020, 7(3): 731-41.
- 5 • Magnavita, N., 2011, “Violence prevention in a small-scale psychiatric unit: program planning and evaluation,” *Int J Occup Environ Health*, 17(4): 336-44.

**OUR PATIENTS. OUR UNION. OUR VOICE.**

