

# Violence in Washington Workplaces, 1995-2000

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## Executive Summary

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This study reports the levels and trends of workplace injuries related to assaults and violence over the period from 1995 through 2000. Three sources of data on injuries resulting from violence and assault were used: the Federal government's Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) and the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, both produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). These are supplemented by data on workers' compensation claims related to assaults and violence collected by Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. The objectives of this document are to describe occupational and industrial groups at elevated risk of workplace violence and assault, to compare the State of Washington to the nation as a whole, to describe recent trends in these risks and to suggest where preventive efforts might best be targeted.

For the period as a whole, homicide was the fourth leading cause of workplace deaths in Washington State, at 8% of all fatal workplace injuries, an average of eleven such cases per year. There was a **decrease in the number of homicides** from that reported in the 1997 SHARP violence report. The circumstances of these incidents were consistent with well-known risk factors for workplace homicides: most were committed by persons unknown to the victims and most of the victims worked in retail trade, security services or transit. This is in striking contrast to the circumstances in which non-fatal workplace assaults occur. The majority of non-fatal injuries occur in a setting where the victim and attacker are in a custodial or client-caregiver relationship, such as in health care or social services.

For non-fatal injuries related to assaults and violence, the BLS Survey estimates there was an annual average of 825 violence- or assault-related injuries resulting in at least one lost workday in Washington State for the period 1995 through 1999. Workers' compensation data show that there was an average of 2,268 claims related to assaults and violence each year in Washington State from 1995 to 2000, an average of 15 such claims per 10,000 full time workers. Of this number, an average of 640 claims resulted in four or more lost work days. Over this period there was **an increase of approximately 7% in the number of all assault- or violence-related claims.**

For nonfatal injuries, workers' compensation data ranks **Social Services as the highest risk major industry, followed by Health Services.** Health Services accounted for the largest number of all work-related assault injuries. The riskiest occupations were related to health-care, social-services, security services or retail trade. Health Services and Social Services were the industry groups with the highest number of assault- or violence-

related injuries for the period, accounting for over 50% of all workers' compensation claims.

According to the BLS survey about 55% of all cases of work-related assaults occurred among workers employed by state or local government. **Assault rates were also substantially higher for state and local government workers than for those in the private sector.** In addition, **while the trend for assaults against private sector workers was declining, that for public sector workers in the state was rising,** according to the BLS Survey.

These trends are reflected in the Washington State workers' compensation claims data. **Although there was a decline from the 1992 level of 20.2 assault-related claims per 10,000 full-time equivalent workers (FTEs) to 15.1 claims by 1996, this downward trend reversed course after 1998 and the claims rate rose back to 15.1 in the year 2000.** Assault-related claims accounted for 1.5% of all State Fund claims in 2000.

Claims rates continued to fall only for Health Services and Local/Suburban Transit among the highest risk major sectors. For Social Services the trend was flat, while for Public Administration sectors the trend was rising over this period. Among the top three industries there was once again no change of rank between the 1997 report and the present report.

The top three highest risk industries showed substantial decreases in their claims rates over the period. However, this trend was not shared with the other industries in the Top Ten. **Among those showing an increase in claims rate were: Police Protection, Job Training Services, Administration of Social and Manpower Programs, General Hospitals and Individual/Family Social Services.**

Nurses' aides and orderlies, police officers, health aides, social workers and private security guards were the occupations with the greatest number of assaults, according to the BLS data. Health- and social service-related occupations accounted for approximately half of all assault-related claims over the entire period.

While progress has been made in some of the highest hazard industries within the healthcare and social services sectors, there is a troubling rising trend occurring in other industries, in particular police protection and other public service sectors. Certain occupations and industries are at higher risk because they involve the exchange of money, face-to-face transactions with the public, working alone or working at night. Other industries are at higher risk for violence because they combine the above risks with work involving an impaired or constrained population. In all these cases, there are predictable and controllable risk factors which increase the likelihood of assault. Prevention strategies, such as hazard assessment and de-escalation training, are available to address each of these risk factors in each of these work settings.