

It's **not** part
of the job



Violence at work report

Health & Safety Conference

October 2024

UNISON
Scotland

Introduction

Since 2006, UNISON Scotland has carried out an annual survey of violence towards public sector workers. Following a pause during the pandemic years (2020, 2021) the survey recommenced in 2022. This, third 'post pandemic' report, shows that violence at work remains a real problem in our public services.

This survey cannot of course give a complete picture of the incidence of violence experienced by workers delivering public services. When services are transferred from the public to either the third or private sector then the transparency and accountability which Freedom of Information can provide is no longer available. It is long past time for this discrepancy to be ended. The Scottish Government can extend existing FoI coverage simply by using Section 5 powers in the existing Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act. However, it has dragged its heels on doing so since the report of the Scottish Parliament's post legislative scrutiny committee in 2019 and has recently announced the establishment of a working group to look at the matter anew.

Reports from some sectors have often been less detailed than others and that remains the case in this year's survey. We rely heavily on public service organisations working with us to provide information in a usable form.

The disregard shown by some employers towards fulfilling their legal responsibilities under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 is worrying. Failure to respond to our request is more than a breach of the law; it is an indication that employers do not hold or gather information about assaults on their staff.

It is apparent from this year's responses that public bodies lack a shared understanding of GDPR. Where there are small numbers some organisations refuse to disclose either the total number of incidents, or breakdown by incident type, job role or sex on the grounds that individuals may be identifiable, while other organisations are willing to disclose. The threshold for this also varies between public bodies.

Methodology

The survey is carried out via a Freedom of Information (FoI) request sent to all local authorities and health boards in Scotland, as well as to employers in other public sector areas in which UNISON organises which are subject to the Freedom of Information legislation. In 2024 Registered Social Landlords (housing associations) were included in the survey for the third year since the extension of FoI legislation to this sector.

The FoI request asks for details on the number of assaults on workers during the past year, broken down by job title or department and nature of assault. The exact questions are set out in Appendix 1. In 2024, for the first time, we requested a breakdown for male/female staff (sex), and for racial abuse and sexual harassment/violence as distinct categories.

2024 Findings

Headlines:

- The survey registered a total of 65,875 incidents of violence (180 per day) against public service staff in the year to 31 March 2024.
- The total number of violent incidents was 20% higher than in 2023, with an additional 11,191 violent incidents reported. One contributing factor is that Scotland's largest health board submitted a response in 2024 but not in the previous year.
- Six in ten of all incidents in 2024 (61%) involve violence against local authority staff.
- Violent incidents against local authority staff rose by 14% year on year.
- Schools and nurseries once again account for the majority of all violent incidents reported by councils with most of these involving education support staff such as pupil support assistants.¹
- Health boards account for a quarter of all violent incidents (16,793 or 25%) reported in 2024. This compares with a total of 10,984 recorded incidents in 2023. This increase is partially due to NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde responding in 2024 but not in 2023.

Violence is not part of the job

Employers and Scottish government need to take speedy and strong action to ensure that staff are safe at work. Public bodies must also meet their legal obligations under Freedom of Information Act. It is not acceptable to avoid scrutiny by delaying or not responding to requests for information – particularly in areas as important as violence against public service staff.

Employers must:

- ensure that staff report all the incidents of violence they experience at work. Reporting systems must be fit for purpose.
- collate this information and use it to design and implement policies and procedures to protect staff.
- ensure that data on protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010) is collected and collated in order to ensure that they are meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and take action to protect staff from abuse related to those protected characteristics.

The Scottish Government must:

- ensure bodies delivering public services are both recording incidents and protecting staff from violence.

The Information Commissioner should:

- remind bodies of their legal obligations
- investigate the number of late or non-responses to FOI requests.

1. Data relates to 27 councils able to provide a breakdown by service or job role.

2024 Overview – total number of violent incidents reported by sector

	Total number of violent incidents reported 1 April 2021- 31 March 2024	% share of all incidents reported 1 April 2021- 31 March 2024
Local Government	40,306	61%
NHS Territorial Health Boards	16,793	25%
NHS Special Health Boards	1,585	2%
Fire and Rescue*	-	-
Police Scotland	5,565	8%
Scottish Government	4	0%
Scottish Water	6	0%
NDFBs	38	0%
Leisure Trusts	169	0%
Universities	43	0%
FE Colleges	70	0%
Housing Associations	1,296	2%
TOTAL	65,875	100%

* no response

Reasons for year-on-year change

The total number of violent incidents reported increased by 20% in 2024 (+11,191) compared with 2023. A rise in the number of incidents recorded by territorial health boards accounts for most of this (+ 52% or 5,809) and the single biggest factor is that Scotland’s largest board, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, responded in 2024 but not in 2023.

This is the third year that housing associations have taken part in the survey following the extension of FoI legislation to Registered Social Landlords. The response rate from housing associations improved for a second year and the total number of recorded incidents rose by 78% (+569). As in previous years, the other main reasons relate to either non-responses or discrepancies in year-on-year responses from individual organisations and these are noted in the sections below.

Change in number of violent incidents reported, by sector, 2019-2024

	2024	2023	2022	2019	Change 2023-2024
Local Government	40,306	35,470	22,507	20,867	14%
NHS Territorial Health Boards	16,793	10,984	17,557	14,410	52%
NHS Special Health Boards	1,585	1,340	832	438	18%
Fire and Rescue*	-	80	76	61	-
Police Scotland	5,565	5,822	117	1,685	-4%
Scottish Government	4	-	-	-	-
Scottish Water	6	3	8	*	100%
NDPBs	38	19	30	30	100%
Leisure Trusts	169	120	80	238	41%
Universities	43	65	38	13	-34%
FE Colleges	70	54	19	49	29%
Housing Associations	1,296	727	489	*	78%
TOTAL	65,875	54,684	41,753	37,662	20%

Note: no response in 2024.

Violence at Work: a Women’s Issue?

As most public service workers are female it can be assumed that most violence at work incidents in public services involve female staff. However in 2024, for the first time, we investigated this by asking for a breakdown of incident numbers by sex in our FOI request.

This is a matter of best practice given the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in s.149 of the 2010 Equality Act. Listed public authorities have an obligation to assess the equality impact of any policies and procedures they put in place or decisions that they take. Recording practices that enable a breakdown by sex allow authorities to identify whether male or female employees are at greater risk of sexual and/or racial harassment/assault at work and in which occupational contexts.

The responses indicate that this data is either not being recorded as part of incident reporting or where it is being recorded, is not being routinely collated and reported on centrally. Some respondents referred to gender instead of sex, suggesting a lack of knowledge of the protected characteristics and Public Sector Equality Duty obligations.

Four sectors account for most incidents of violence and we present the picture for each of these in turn.

Local authorities

We discovered that sex is not recorded on incident reporting forms in almost half of all local authorities (n=14).¹ A number of councils explained in writing that their incident reporting form does not collect information on the protected characteristic of sex. For example, Inverclyde Council explained that this “is not an essential requirement when recording incidents and is therefore not available.”

Fourteen councils record sex on their incident reporting forms.² A further two councils do record sex but can only provide a partial breakdown (Western Isles and Scottish Borders). In East Lothian Council sex is not recorded on the incident reporting form for education staff, but is included in the incident reporting form used for all other council staff (although it is referred to as gender).

Health Boards

Just two of Scotland's 14 territorial health boards (Orkney and Shetland) could provide a breakdown by males/females. Every other health board either did not respond to this question (6 NHS boards) or explained in writing that they do not collect this information (NHS Lothian for example) or do not centrally collate it for reporting purposes (6 NHS boards). Special NHS Boards explained that they do not hold this information in their recording systems. The State Hospital which accounts for the majority of violent incidents in Special Health Boards did not answer this question.

"The NHS Tayside Datix system does not hold information on whether incidents involve male or female staff."

"This is not a mandatory field within our system and is not always completed at the recording stage, therefore any data provided would not be accurate. In addition to this, gender breakdown within certain job families may also report low numbers which could allow those individuals to be easily identified." (NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde)

Police Scotland

Police Scotland recorded a total of 5,565 violent incidents in 2024 but said that the sex of individuals involved in these incidents is only recorded when the incident is reported under RIDDOR, presumably as a requirement of the RIDDOR Regulations. Therefore, a breakdown is only available for the 33 RIDDOR incidents, which involved 9 female and 24 male staff.

Housing Associations

Violent incidents were reported involving 740 females and 368 males. From the responses it is apparent that not all housing associations include sex as a field in their incident reporting. One housing association responded that they could not provide a breakdown because the small numbers carried a risk of identifying individuals.

Racial abuse and sexual harassment/assault

In 2024, for the first time, our FOI request asked about the number of incidents of sexual harassment/assault or racial harassment/assault of staff. Given the wider social and political context today it is especially important to look at this.

Local authorities

1. Just four councils provided data for incidents of racial abuse/harassment.
2. Just five councils provided data for sexual harassment/assault.

As most councils did not explain why they had not provided this data we do not know if they simply overlooked the request, or whether they do not include racial or sexual harassment/abuse/assault as distinct categories in their incident reporting forms.

It is notable that several of the councils which do record racial and sexual harassment/abuse, also provide categories in their incident reporting form to record disability harassment and religious harassment.

Health Boards

Six territorial health boards provided information which confirmed that racial harassment/abuse and sexual harassment/abuse are discrete categories in their incident recording systems. These are Ayrshire & Arran, Grampian, Lanarkshire, Tayside, Greater Glasgow & Clyde and Orkney.

Housing Associations

Scotland's 158 housing associations reported a total of 1,296 violent incidents in 2024 but few appear to have specific recording categories for racial and sexual harassment/abuse. They reported:

- one incident involving racist language.
- 5 incidents of sexual harassment/abuse.

There are issues here about reporting systems failing to capture these incidents, but also about staff being encouraged and supported to report these specific types of violence. Our 2023 survey of black members of UNISON found that 4 in 10 had direct personal experience of racism or race discrimination in the workplace in the previous year but the level of reporting appeared to be low.

Local Government

Most reports of threats and violence at work in Scotland are towards local authority workers. In our 2024 survey, a total of 40,306 incidents were reported to UNISON, a 14% increase on 2023. All 32 councils provided figures. Incidents of physical violence form the largest category (n=25,400 or 63% of total incidents) followed by verbal abuse (n=5,200 or 13%).

Compared to last year, the annual number of reported incidents increased in 20 councils and fell in eleven. Year-on-year change cannot be reported in one council (West Lothian) which did not respond to the FOI request in 2023.

Most incidents (77%) take place in education establishments. After education, social care & social work staff continue to experience the highest incidence of violence at work.

As in previous years, there are unexplained discrepancies in the numbers of recorded incidents.

- Moray Council recorded a total of 24 incidents this year compared with 2,787 last year.
- Perth & Kinross Council recorded 10 incidents this year compared with 1,583 last year.
- Midlothian Council recorded a total of 789 incidents in 2023, but fewer than 5 in 2024 (and so unable to disclose the exact figure).

It remains the case that areas with a similar population size can register very different levels of reported violence and threats. This may be because of different reporting systems or changes in how incidents are categorised.

- As a single incident can involve more than one member of staff, the totals for numbers of staff can vary from the total number of incidents.
- Because a single incident can fall into multiple categories – for example it may involve physical assault, spitting, and verbal abuse - the breakdown of incidents by type does not necessarily equal the total number of incidents.

In many councils, total incidents by staff and total incidents by incident type match up. In others, e.g. Renfrewshire Council, the total number of staff affected is 1,112 but the breakdown of incidents by type totals 2,735.

Local Authorities

Local authority	Total 2024	Total 2023	Change 2023 - 24
Aberdeen City Council	947	1,024	-8%
Aberdeenshire Council	1,067	828	29%
Angus Council	471	546	-14%
Argyll and Bute Council	109	142	-23%
City of Edinburgh Council	3,767	2,984	26%
Clackmannanshire Council	668	542	23%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	380	313	21%
Dumfries and Galloway Council	1,610	1,346	20%
Dundee City Council	96	57	68%
East Ayrshire Council	1,685	1,109	52%
East Dunbartonshire Council	584	362	61%
East Lothian Council	952	1,001	-5%
East Renfrewshire Council	1,078	908	100%
Falkirk Council	1,441	910	58%
Fife Council	7,202	3,746	92%
Glasgow City Council	7,144	5,733	25%
Highland Council	39	25	56%
Inverclyde Council	404	314	29%
Midlothian Council*	5>	789	-
Moray Council	24	2,787	-99%
North Ayrshire Council	1,229	1,297	-5%
North Lanarkshire Council	1,644	1,066	54%
Orkney Islands Council	43	133	-68%
Perth and Kinross Council	10	1,583	-99%
Renfrewshire Council	1,112	715	56%
Scottish Borders Council	985	1,082	-9%
Shetland Islands Council	1,106	656	69%
South Ayrshire Council	827	132	527%
South Lanarkshire Council	1,883	1,677	12%
Stirling Council	954	727	31%
West Dunbartonshire Council	845	936	-9.7
West Lothian Council	2,124	-	-
TOTAL	40,306	35,470	14%

Breakdown by incident type and by job role

Each year we highlight the problem that there is no consistent classification system in use for recording incidents of violence against staff. Some councils have developed very detailed categories and sub-categories. Others continue to use basic categories of physical violence, verbal abuse and threats of violence.

Our FOI request asks for the total number of violent incidents on staff broken down by job title/category and incident type. This year four councils were unable to provide a breakdown by incident type: Angus, Fife, Moray and South Ayrshire. Angus could only provide a breakdown by type of incident for a small minority of records. Moray could not provide one because it had only 24 recorded incidents in total. South Ayrshire only provided a breakdown by incident type for its education establishments. Fife said it would exceed the cost limit to provide a breakdown.

Violence towards staff in educational establishments

In 2024, schools and nurseries together account for 77% of all violent incidents reported by councils.³ A majority of violent incidents have been recorded in education for as long as UNISON has conducted its annual survey and addressing this has been a priority campaign for UNISON over the past year. Only Moray and Perth & Kinross Councils recorded no incidents in education establishments in 2024.

In general, most violent incidents in schools and nurseries are experienced by education support staff.⁴ In 2024, 55% of all violent incidents involved support staff, and 45% teaching staff.⁵ In Glasgow, for example, half of all incidents involved support staff, with Support for Learning staff comprising the majority. Falkirk Council was one of the very few to provide a breakdown by job role and incident type. Support for Learning staff were involved in 42% of all violent incidents in 2024 (n=601) and of these incidents, 94% involved physical violence and 6% verbal threats.

Some local authorities provided context for their figures. For example, East Lothian Council explained, “in the vast majority of cases (in education) injuries recorded were of a minor nature or there was no apparent injury. Many of these incidents especially in primary school apply to our youngest year groups where children are learning to control their emotions and behaviours.”

Currently it is difficult to establish the exact extent of violence within schools because of issues with the reporting and recording of incidents. As in 2023, some of the main issues are:

Non-reporting: UNISON is aware that a substantial number of incidents are not reported by education staff. This is for many reasons, including, a general misunderstanding that violent incidents are ‘part of the job’, a feeling that it is pointless to make reports as previous reports have been ignored or not satisfactorily addressed, or there is no awareness that violent incidents should be reported or how to report them.

Non-recording of reported incidents: UNISON also believes that there are instances where our members report violent incidents but find their report goes no further than a managers desk, due to factors such as, management time restraints, a local dismissal of the event or a lack of clear understanding of the procedure for reporting upwards. Non-recording may, potentially, also reflect managers’ concerns about a high record of reported incidents at their premises/establishment.

“Invisibility” of Recording Categories: councils do not always categorise reported incidents in a way that allows violent incidents in educational establishments to be identified. In this year’s survey many councils were unable to provide a breakdown of recorded incidents by department/service, or by job role. The resultant ‘lumping together’ of reported incidents makes the true extent of violence in schools unclear.

In this year’s survey we found some councils were unable to provide information on the number of violent incidents in educational establishments or could provide only partial information. In some cases this is because service and/or job role information is not recorded, or only partially recorded when incidents are reported.

NHS Territorial Health Boards

NHS Board	Total 2024	Total 2023
NHS Ayrshire and Arran	1,184	1,380
NHS Borders	528	331
NHS Dumfries and Galloway	209	89
NHS Fife	1,536	1,441
NHS Forth Valley	1,600	-
NHS Grampian	2,314	3,795
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – check	4,884	-
NHS Highland	1,603	1,328
NHS Lanarkshire	980	942
NHS Lothian	1,608	1,446
NHS Orkney	41	23
NHS Shetland	17	36
NHS Tayside	105	107
NHS Western Isles	184	66
TOTAL	16,793	10,984

Health boards reported a total of 16,793 violent incidents against staff in 2024, compared with 10,984 incidents in 2023. This is a year-on-year increase of 52% (+5,809). However, 84% of this increase is explained by Scotland's largest health board, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which responded to the FOI request in 2024 but not in 2023. Similarly, NHS Forth Valley responded in 2024 but not in 2023. In 2024, there was a 100% response rate from territorial health boards.

NHS Special Health Boards

Special Health Boards reported a total of 1,585 violent incidents in 2024. The State Hospital accounts for 60% of all incidents. The 333 violent incidents recorded by Scottish Ambulance Service staff and the 278 incidents recorded by NHS 24 account for 21% and 18% of the total respectively. Of eight special health boards only one, NHS National Services, did not provide a response.

NHS special health boards	Total 2024	Total 2023
NHS Education for Scotland	0	0
NHS Public Health Scotland	0	0
Golden Jubilee	27	-
NHS 24	278	208
Scotland Ambulance	333	276
State Hospital	947	854*
NHS National Services	-	1
Healthcare Improvement Scotland	0	1
TOTAL	1,585	1,340*

Fire and Rescue

Fire and Rescue	Total 2024	Total 2023
	-	80

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service did not respond to the FOI request or reminders this year.

Police Scotland

Police Scotland	Total 2024	Total 2023
	5,565	5,822

Of the 5,565 violent incidents reported by Police Scotland in 2024, approximately 98% involved police officers and 2% police support staff. (Officer 5,439 Police Staff 122 Special Constable 4). There were 4,469 assaults and 1,096 near misses. A large range of types of injury were recorded as assaults, including two sexual assaults. There was no recording of racial incidents.

Scottish Government

Scottish Government	Total 2024	Total 2023	Total 2022
	4	3	8

The four incidents of violence in 2024 were experienced by two female and two male staff. Two of these incidents were physical in nature, one involved threatening behaviour and one, abusive language.

Scottish Water

Scottish Water	Total 2024	Total 2023
	6	3

The 6 incidents of violence recorded in 2024 were all towards male workers.

NDPBs

NDPB	Total 2024	Total 2023
Highlands & Islands Enterprise	0	0
Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority	10	6
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration	1	1
Scottish Enterprise	-	0
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	9	0
Scottish Qualifications Authority	0	0
Scottish Social Services Council	2	0
Skills Development Scotland	6	5
Care Inspectorate	9	7
SIC	1	0
TOTAL	38	19

Leisure Trusts

Leisure Trust	Total 2024	Total 2023
Highland Council	11	7
South Lanarkshire	10	10
Perth & Kinross	10	4
East Dunbartonshire	9	0
Angus	19	9
Scottish borders	0	2
East Renfrewshire	11	0
Dundee	13	21
East Ayrshire	15	30
Argyll & Bute	-	0
Glasgow Life	71	37
TOTAL	169	120

Threats and Assaults on Housing Association staff

This is the third year that our Violence at Work report includes Scottish housing associations. There are 158 housing associations in Scotland.² Some of these are managed by a housing group, the largest of these being the Wheatley Group. Where this is the case, a response was submitted on behalf of all the organisations within the group. Some housing associations have care homes within their group and data for these is also reported in the group figures.

Of the 158 housing associations, 15 (or 9.5%) did not respond at all. Five had changed their FOI emails and so weren't included. One had an FOI email request link on their website that repeatedly bounced back.

One Registered Social Landlord, Places for People, refused our request, stating that “the information you have requested does not fall within the scope of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (Designation of Persons as Scottish Public Authorities) Order 2019 (the Order).” We asked for an official review of their response, to which they responded insisting that our request does fall outside of the scope of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (Designation of Persons as Scottish Public Authorities) Order 2019 (the Order). However, they did provide the data.

One housing association, Castlehill, responded that “This information is not currently recorded” which could imply they are not recording incidents.

Of the responses received (with some housing groups submitting one response on behalf of all organisations within their group), 96 housing associations (70%) reported incidents of violence against staff, including verbal, physical, and threatening behavior. Meanwhile, 38 reported no incidents of violence.

A total of 1,296 violent incidents were reported against housing association staff in 2024. This is an increase of 78% (+569) compared with 2023, when a total of 727 incidents was recorded. Some housing associations responded to the FOI survey for the first time this year and this is responsible in part for the increase.

Staff subject to violent incidents reported here work in a very wide range of job roles with housing officers, support workers and customer service advisors cited most frequently. A minority of incidents involved physical violence - with or without injury - but details of these incidents were not provided. Some housing associations were unable to give a precise breakdown of the job title of staff involved and the nature of the violent incident. Recording practices are inconsistent across the sector.

Verbal abuse was the most common type of incident recorded. This often involved threatening language or behaviour. The responses described aggression, shouting, insults and foul language used towards staff both on the phone, online or in person. Examples of incidents involving threatening behaviour include situations where the police were called and dog attacks.

Two housing associations reported violent incidents in 2024 under the RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations.

2. The Wheatley Group provided a response on behalf of all the organisations within the Group. the following HA are part of the Wheatley Housing Group Limited and they responded as a group: Wheatley Homes Glasgow, Wheatley Homes South, Wheatley Homes East, Loretto Housing, Wheatley Care, Lowther Homes, However, a breakdown by each organisation was not provided. Wheatley Group reported a total of 257 incidents across its constituency.

Housing Associations (respondents reporting incidents are listed)

Housing Association	Total 2024	Total 2023
Aberay	7	5
Albyn	9	19
Almond	2	2
Angus	1	
Ark	207	0
Ayrshire	4	
Berwickshire	3	1
Bield	8	9
Blackwood	16	40
Blairmuir	2	2
Blue Triangle	185	57
Cadder	6	
Calm	9	6
Caledonia & Cordale	16	4
Clyde Valley	1	
Cunninghame	2	2
Elder Park	1	
File	11	3
Forth	2	
Glen	1	
Glen Oaks	13	4
Hanover(Arkler)	38	49
Harbour	2	
Hillcrest	117	50
Kingdom	33	29
Laggstone	12	29
Link group	5	13
Linstone	7	4
Lochalsh & Skye	1	3
Loreburn	33	33
Manor Estates	2	2
Molendinar Park	2	
Ng Homes	11	2
Ochil View	20	17
Paragon	2	
Partick	2	2
Places for People	1	
Prospect Community	5	2
Provanhill	3	
Queens Cross	35	20
Riverchyle	8	
Riverside	14	10
Rosehill	5	
Rutherglen & Cambuslang	-	4
Sanctuary	6	
Scottish Borders	83	61
Scottish Veterans Residences	10	
Shetleston	7	
Shire	3	
Trust	59	
Viewpoint		1
Waverley	-	3
Wellhouse	4	4
Wheatley Housing Group* the following HA are part of the Wheatley Housing Group Limited and they responded as a group: Cube, GHA, DGHP, Barony, Dunedin Canmore, Loretto Housing, Wheatley Care, West Lothian Housing Partnership, Lowther Homes, Wheatley Solutions, Wheatley Foundation and City Building (Glasgow)	257	206
Williamshurgh	1	
Yorkhill	2	3
Total	1,296	727

Universities

Universities	Total 2024
Aberdeen	*
Abertay	0
Dundee	0
Napier	*
Edinburgh	11
Glasgow Caledonian	0
Glasgow School of Art	0
Glasgow	16
Heriot Watt	*
Queen Margaret	0
Robert Gordon	0
Royal Conservatoire	0
St Andrews	8
Stirling	0
Strathclyde	7
UHI	0
West of Scotland	0
SRUC	1
TOTAL	43

*= nondisclosure - fewer than 5 incidents

Further Education

FE College	Total 2024
Ayrshire College	5
Borders College	4
City of Glasgow College	2
Dumfries & Galloway College	-
Dundee & Angus College	4
Edinburgh College	2
Fife College	3
Forth Valley College	7
Glasgow Clyde College	10
Glasgow Kelvin College	13
Inverness College UHI	0
Lewis Castle College UHI	-
Moray College UHI	5
Newbattle Abbey College	1
New College Lanarkshire	8
North East Scotland	0
Orkney College UHI	-
Perth College UHI	0
Sabhal Mor Ostralg UHI	-
Shetland College UHI	-
South Lanarkshire	0
West College	1
UHI North, West & Hebrides	4
West Lothian College	1
TOTAL	70

*= nondisclosure - fewer than 5 incidents

Conclusion

This survey shows that violence at work is a real and continuing problem for workers in public services. Fourteen years on from the publication of the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives Guidelines on tackling workplace violence, our public services are still seeing a rate of 180 violent incidents every single day. However, what our survey can't show is the real level of violence experienced by staff. The problem of violence at work is likely to be even more serious than these recorded figures indicate.

An inability or unwillingness to provide data (in defiance of legal requirements) is in and of itself a sign that an employer is failing to take the issue of violence seriously. When a problem is not being monitored then it is not being prioritised or tackled. Alongside this, all too common, indifference is a deplorable lack of consistency in gathering information, not just across public services but even amongst employers in the same sector.

This year's report seeks to gauge whether female or black workers are disproportionately victims of violence at work. Our attempts to do so show that this is not a priority amongst many employers; almost half of all councils cannot provide data broken down by sex for example. In the NHS some Health Boards were frank that they do not collect this data as their standard incident recording system (DATIX) does not record sex of victims, other sectors are similarly poor in keeping track.

A very small number of incidents of racist abuse or harassment were reported in this year's survey. However, the level of non-response means we cannot be confident that employers' reporting systems are capturing this type of violence. These findings raise issues as to the bodies involved being in breach of the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010. This is a situation that is neither adequate or acceptable.

There is a need for accurate and reliable systems for the reporting of violence against public service workers. Inconsistencies abound. To the extent that it is difficult gauge whether difference in reported violence represent the reality of the situation or are the result of poor practice in recording by employers.

It is well past time for the issue of violence against workers to become a focus for those who run and are responsible for our public services. The term 'reform' is one that staff who have spent a decade dealing with increasing workloads and declining wages are familiar with – it is time that overused word is applied to their safety at work.

We need action by employers and stronger legislation, regulation and oversight by government. As we are getting tired of saying: action is needed to end the aggro – it really isn't part of the job.

Appendix 1

VAW FOI questions 2024:

The following questions were asked of organisations as part of a Freedom of Information request: For the time period 31st March 2022 to 31st March 2024 (or your nearest 12-month period) please provide the following:

1. total number of violent incidents on your staff broken down by job title/category of worker
2. a breakdown of the nature of the violent incident e.g., verbal, physical, threatening behaviour
3. how many violent incidents have been reported under RIDDOR Regulations, with a breakdown by job title/category of worker

Please could you break this information down into incidents involving female staff / male staff. Violent incidents can include verbal abuse or threats including face to face; online and via telephone; physical attacks; threatening behaviour; racial abuse and sexual harassment/violence.

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