

Outreach Community and Home Care Risk Factors for Workplace Injury and Illness

To consider workplace injury and illness risk factors we will explore a definition of a risk marker and a conceptual framework for workplace risk factors. A risk marker, or risk indicator, may be defined as an attribute that is associated with an increased probability of occurrence of a disease or other specified outcome and that can be used as an indicator of this increased risk. A risk marker is not necessarily a causal factor and may also be considered a risk factor.⁽¹⁾ Important emphasis is placed on this distinction: risk factors may not cause the injury or illness but are associated with factors that bring about increased injury and illness.

A framework for examining risk factors can assist employers and employees establishing workplace health and safety programs. In looking at workplace violence a broad-based framework identifies and integrates **workplace, individual worker/person and environmental/situational** factors.⁽¹⁾ These factors are interrelated and prevention efforts should address each of these three factors to be effective. Similar to these groupings a recent article on home care injury prevention through risk factor reduction identified the following areas for assessment and intervention: **workplace/exposures, lifestyle, and environment.**²

Participants of the Outreach, community and home care workers conference worked together in small groups to identify the following factors in the risk factor areas above:

Environment:

Unclean/infested homes or buildings, Unsanitary Conditions
Infected washrooms/shelters
Illegal activities in homes or buildings
Community violence, Gang fights/violence, Assaults
Contagious diseases, Illness: viruses, TB/airborne illnesses, Unhealthy children/mom
Cluttered environment/Falls in the home from toys/outside on stairs/ice
Dangerous pets/animals in home/community, Dog fleas on couch
Weather

¹ Levin, Pamela F., Hewitt, Jeanne, & Misner, Susan T.: Assault In the Emergency Department: Emergency Nurses. Final Report submitted to Emergency Nurses Foundation. August 1997.

² Jarrell, Rhonda Berlin: Home Care Workers: Injury Prevention Through Risk Factor Reduction. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene*. State of the Art Reviews 12(4):10-12 (1997).

Workplace:

Long work days/rushing and neglecting safety
Inadequate resources for prevention or equipment
Exposure to unknown infections/illnesses/disease, Sanitary conditions
Working with students instead of with a professional
Isolation/Location
Lack of Supervisor Support
Toxic exposures
Physical violence/Aggressive Clients/Mental Illness issues

Person:

Bad habits
Mind set of workers: "It won't happen to me"
Physical health
Gender, gender, gender/Race
Stress and strain/Caring for children
Lack of rest
Not properly identified as a health worker
Risk factors can be identified and controlled. See fact sheets on specific hazards.

Goal:

Participants will generate and prioritize worker injury and illness risk factors in home care, community and outreach settings.

Task:

In a large group ask participants for a definition of risk factors.

The facilitator will then present the following categories of risk factors: **environmental, workplace and personal**. The facilitator will have a piece of flip chart paper with one category of risk on each piece posted on the wall.

Participants will experience an "all on the wall" exercise. Participants will be given colored paper that matches one of three categories of risk above. They will be asked to come up with three risk factors in the category they are assigned.

They will then work with a partner to talk about the six ideas between the two of them and prioritize so that the pair will eliminate three and have three factors to present.

The facilitator will begin by having one pair in each of the three risk factor areas post their factors and briefly describe their choices. After ideas in each category are presented, the facilitator will ask other pairs to post new ones next to factors already on the wall and post the same ones touching factors already there.

Discussion:

The facilitator will encourage a discussion with description of examples and clarification.

Summary:

The facilitator will lead a group discussion on themes that emerge. The facilitator will ask participants to look at the risk factors listed on the reverse. How are the factors the group described similar or different from factors listed on the fact sheet? The facilitator may close with having participants vote on the risk factors they want to address in a health and safety plan or review the fact sheets in the fact pack that address specific hazards.