

OHS Risks of Health and Social Care Workers Working in Clients' Homes in Finland

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Background

- The client's home as a work environment is challenging, and employers' ability to ensure home care workers' safety and health is limited
- Health and social care workers face multiple OSH challenges while working in clients' homes.
 - biological hazards, such as needle puncture infections or other infectious diseases
 - chemical hazards, such as medicines and disinfectants used in cancer treatments;
 - physical hazards, such as ionizing radiation
 - ergonomic risks when dealing with patients
 - psychosocial risks, such as violence and shift work, unpredictable nature of home care work affect aspects such as travel time and time spend with the client, heavy workloads, short notices of schedule changes and insufficient time to plan
 - The home as a work environment: the home's layout and suitability for the necessary work equipment

Objectives

- This study aims to provide new information about the OSH risks faced by health and social care workers working in clients' homes in Finland

Materials and Methods

- Eight teams from three municipalities, two private companies, and one nonprofit organization participated in the study.
 - The participants included nurses, personal assistants, supervisors, and heads of home care and safety organizations.
- The data for this paper were collected through questionnaire (n = 160) and semi-structured interviews (n =55)
- The survey and interviews covered various dimensions of OSH, including psychosocial load factors to physical, biological, and organizational factors. The focus was on questions about the respondents' perceived OSH risks and challenges related to working in clients' homes.
- The material was analyzed using thematic categorization

Occupational safety risks for health and social care workers working in clients' homes

How often do you feel that your occupational safety is compromised...	Monthly or more frequently
due to psychosocial load factors?	40%
due to physical workloads?	49%
due to chemical hazards?	20%
due to biological hazards?	44%
due to physical hazards?	29%
due to travelling during the workday?	50%
in the use of various assistive devices and tools?	19%

Occupational violence encountered by health and social care workers working in clients' homes

Statement	Weekly	Monthly	Infrequently	Never
I have experienced physical violence from a client over the past year.	1%	1%	18%	78%
I have experienced physical violence from a client's family member or other person in the apartment, yard, or neighborhood in the past year.	0%	1%	9%	89%
I have been threatened by a client over the past year.	1%	4%	21%	71%
I have been threatened by a client's family member or other person in the apartment, yard, or neighborhood in the past year.	0%	3%	14%	80%
I have experienced sexual harassment from a client over the past year.	4%	4%	16%	74%
I have experienced sexual harassment from a client's family member or other person in the apartment, yard, neighborhood, or district over the past year.	0%	1%	11%	86%
I encounter situations in which a security guard is required for my safety.	3%	3%	24%	68%
I encounter situations in which a police officer is required for my safety.	0%	1%	17%	80%

Conclusions

- This study indicates that there are many risk factors related to working in a client's home involves risks because homes are not designed for work purposes
- The work is demanding. Many workers experience their work physically and psychosocially burdensome
- Home care involves traveling from one client to another during the day it poses many risks related to traffic and timetables
- Identifying the risks involved is the foundation of work safety. In the future the focus should be on how the OSH risks related to home care can be controlled, considering the limited possibilities of affecting clients' homes.