



EXTERNAL VIOLENCE IN PARAMEDICINE

EXTERNAL VIOLENCE AGAINST
PARAMEDICS WORKING GROUP

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Violence, in fact is not "part of the job"

BY MANDY JOHNSTON

Fact - Paramedics in the Region of Peel, Ontario, Canada and globally commonly experience workplace violence.

I'm here to unequivocally tell you workplace violence IS NOT NORMAL and should never be considered "PART OF THE JOB." The experience of violence from the public has a very real and serious impact on paramedics, their employers and our patients.

My name is Mandy Johnston and I'm an Advanced Care Paramedic, Acting Superintendent and Lead of the External Violence Against Paramedics (EVAP) working group. I have been working as a medic in the Region of Peel (ROP) for 15 years.

In my 15 years as a paramedic I have had more experiences with violence than I can remember. One incident still sits heavily on my mind and remains hard to forget. Seven years ago, on a day shift, I was on a call that resulted in my partner being strangled by an intoxicated male. My partner couldn't break the patients grip on his own. It took multiple attempts with my help before my partner was finally able to escape.

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Even many years later we would talk about that call saying, “remember when?!” and we would laugh and brush the experience off. It wasn’t until I started leading EVAP and speaking publicly about the external violence that paramedics experience, that we were both able to admit just how terrifying the incident was. We didn’t realize how helpless and vulnerable it made us feel, even after so many years.

That call has had a lasting impact on both of us personally and in our careers.

In paramedicine, we deal with chronic exposure to workplace violence, be it verbal harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation, physical or sexual assault. Regardless of how long you have been a paramedic, if you take a moment to reflect on your career, how many times have you personally experienced external workplace violence? How did it really make you feel? Nervous, anxious, on edge? Did you notice physical manifestations? Did you feel angry, unsafe, unprotected or helpless? How did you feel leaving your shift that day? How does it make you feel now?

We at Peel Regional Paramedic Services (PRPS) have studied and reported on paramedic experiences with workplace violence. Now that we better understand the impact that violence has on us both personally and professionally, we are committed to changing the culture within PRPS to one in which we do not implicitly accept violence as an expected and tolerated part of our job.

I sincerely hope that in sharing our study and work with your service, we can help propagate positive change that benefits not only your service, but all paramedics in Ontario.

Mandy



-Quotes from Peel Regional Paramedics

“It’s a whole other layer of negativity to unload before going home.”

“They can leave me feeling burnt out and just tired.”

“I loose my compassion for people.”

“AS I’M TYPING, IT IS BRINGING UP SOME ANXIETY THAT I DIDN’T REALIZE THAT I HAD ABOUT IT.”

“YOU SHINE A LITTLE LESS BRIGHT”

“Definitely more aware and anxious on certain calls.”

“I felt a loss of power over myself and my job.”



CHIEF PETER DUNDAS



"We as Paramedics, superintendents, and management have always existed in a culture where violence has been viewed as just a part of the job."

A LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF

When I started my career as a paramedic, we were called 'ambulance attendants.' Armed with a first aid certificate and a desire to make a difference, I went to calls wearing a tie and a pale coloured shirt that showed every drop of body fluid that sprayed on it. In those days, a 'good' call was defined by the amount of blood on our hands when we were done. Protecting ourselves from potential harm was rarely, if ever, considered.

We also didn't consider the toll that violence would take on us.

In my forty-odd years as a paramedic, violence was always considered 'part of the job.' It wasn't something we even mentioned, let alone worried about. There was always the threat that someone could hurt us, but it was what it was. We told each other to 'suck it up, buttercup,' and we told ourselves to be tougher, stronger, harder. To ignore it and to let it go.

Times have now changed, and I'm very glad they have. The work Mandy and her working group are doing has been instrumental in helping to change our culture. No longer will we be an organization that accepts violence. We now recognize the impact that violence has, and that it should never, ever happen.

Violence is emotionally, physically and psychologically damaging to the brave people who do this hard work everyday. I urge you to look at the violence perpetuated on your paramedics with the perspective that it took me so long to develop; violence is not something we should, or can, accept.

And we can do something about it.

In the pages of this booklet, you should find all the information and resources you need to start addressing external violence against paramedics in your organization, and to help your people be safer on the job. Let's not wait any longer.

Peter Dundas,
Chief
Peel Regional Paramedic Services

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PARAMEDIC EXPERIENCE WITH WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

In 2019, EVAP surveyed Peel Regional Paramedics. We wanted to understand and address the growing problem of external workplace violence in the service. We asked the medics questions about their experience(s) with violence and reporting practices to both management and police. Most importantly we wanted to know how these incidents of violence made them feel.

Justin Mausz, a Peel Paramedic and PhD candidate at McMaster University, conducted a qualitative analysis of the survey comments and prepared a comprehensive report: Paramedic Experiences with Workplace Violence: A Qualitative Study.

(Yes, it's long, but I promise it's worth the read!)

This study has been the backbone of a major culture change within PRPS. Frontline medics, with the support of upper management, are working to change the organizational culture, as well as create and execute several strategies to support paramedics and help prevent future violent experiences.

Table 1

Survey questions developed through consensus at the External Violence Against Paramedics working group meetings and sent to a regional survey team for external consultation. Options for Question 3 included verbal assault, intimidation, physical assault, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

Survey Questions	
1	How many years of service do you have as a paramedic? (0-5, 6-10, 11+)
2	What is your gender? (Man, Woman, Other Gender)
3	Have you experienced any of the following by a patient, a patient's family member, or a bystander? (Check all that apply)
4	Did you report the incident to your supervisor?
5	If you did, what were the results?
6	If you did not, can you let us know why?
7	Did you report the incident to the police?
8	If you did, what were the results?
9	If you did not, can you let us know why?
10	How do these experiences affect your work life?
11	Can you describe your experiences?
12	What does a solution to public violence against paramedics look like to you?


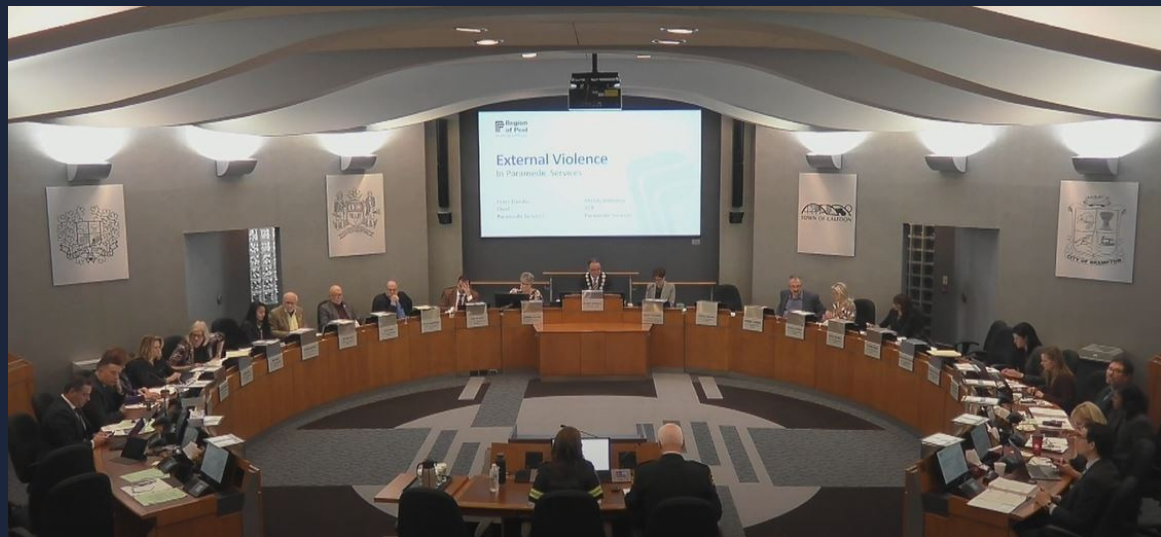


Table 2

Demographic characteristics of sample and summary of quantitative findings.

Demographics	Number	Percent	Types of Abuse	Number	Percent
Years of Experience			Verbal Assault	191	97.9%
0-5	53	27%	Intimidation	168	86.1%
6-10	52	26.5%	Physical Assault	153	80%
over 11	91	46.4%	Sexual Harassment	120	61.5%
Gender			Sexual Assault	27	13.8%
Man	94	48.2%	Reported to		
Women	98	50.2%	PRPS Supervisor	78	40%
Gender Diverse	2	1%	Peel Police	41	21.1%



REPORTING

Our 2019 study indicated that less than half of survey respondents reported violent incidents to their supervisors, and less than a quarter of respondents had reported violent incidents to the police.



Lack of reporting of violent incidents is worrisome for Paramedics and their organization because:

- Not reporting violence reinforces the idea that it is “part of the job”. Submissively accepting violence can result in serious emotional harm
- Cumulative exposure to harassment and violence can lead to psychological injuries such as anxiety, depression, PTSD and suicide
- Paramedics can’t receive the support they need and deserve if the service isn’t aware of the violence they experience
- Under-reporting seriously compromises an organization’s capacity to identify high-risk calls and implement policies that enhance paramedic safety



The (EVAP) working group has created a mechanism for reporting incidents of violence perpetrated against Paramedics. The ‘External Violence Incident Report’ (EVIR) is an mDOC, conceptualized and designed by EVAP and developed by Interdev. The EVIR has been designed to address all the barriers to reporting.



Our innovative reporting process is...

Accessible:

"It is an mDOC that is attached to our EPCR, readily available to the paramedics with as little extraneous work as possible."

Easy to use:

"Minimizing the workload for both the paramedics and superintendents, the form is easy to complete, minimizing - as much as reasonably possible - redundant or unnecessary information, and maximizing the use of auto-populated fields, drop-down menu selections, and tick boxes."

Comprehensive:

"The information gathered on the form is comprehensive enough to fulfill a variety of purposes, including address hazard flagging, tracking cumulative exposure to workplace violence among individual paramedics, and providing high-level organizational risk mitigation."

Compliant:

"With existing policy and regulatory requirements: This includes meeting the Ontario Ambulance Service Documentation Standards requirements for an incident report, and enabling superintendents to complete Regional Accident, Incident, and Disability Report (RAIDR) forms."

Mausz, J., Johnston, M., and Donnelly, E. (2020). Development of a reporting process for violence against paramedics.

Canadian Paramedicine, in press.

Adopting the EVIR? Consider JOINING OUR RESEARCH STUDY!

Creating a reliable reporting mechanism is critical for providing post-incident support to Paramedics, and for data monitoring to identify, and more appropriately respond to, emergency calls with a high risk of violence. This allows Paramedic services to develop procedures that proactively enhance Paramedic safety and mitigate the risk of violence.

The ‘External Violence Incident Report’ is available for use to any Paramedic Organization that utilizes the services of Interdev for their EPCR documentation.

HERE IS WHAT WE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON...

COLLABORATION WITH PEEL REGIONAL POLICE



- Paramedics have experienced Police not intervening when they've been experiencing violence. Through strengthening our partnership, we're working together to solve this issue
- Presenting EVAP study findings to all field training officers and new recruits, with the goal of better understanding each others' roles, training and skills
- Paramedic participation in Police new recruit scenarios. Scenarios have been developed to create mutually beneficial learning opportunities, improving inter-agency collaboration on future calls
- Requesting Police support, and early intervention when they are witness to harassing or violent events
- Identify and address Police Communications and CACC communication barriers which put Paramedics at risk, examples include communicating hazard flags and appropriate staging locations

ZERO TOLERANCE SIGN IN AMBULANCE



ZERO 
tolerance
for violence

Violators will be reported
to the police



#ProtectParamedics

- Educate the public on violent behaviours which are unacceptable in a Paramedic's workplace
- Informs the public that we have Police support, and there will be consequences for assaulting Paramedics
- Visual reminder for Paramedics that the employer prioritizes their wellbeing and safety

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN



The EVAP working group has a sub-committee made up of Paramedics with skills in visual arts and communications. They are working with the Region of Peel (RoP) Communications division to create a public awareness (PA) campaign.

The PA campaign will be aligned with PRPS' 'Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public' policy and will be created in collaboration with Peel Regional Police.

We will be utilizing social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Google to spread campaign messaging. Subsequent phases will highlight our partnerships with Police and be shared in more traditional media spaces. We'll be asking the public to act to help reduce violence against Paramedics.



MY WORKPLACE IS EVERCHANGING AND DYNAMIC. I THINK WE ALL UNDERSTAND THIS AS PARAMEDICS, BUT WE DESERVE TO FEEL SAFE AND MOST OF ALL, SUPPORTED. I WANT TO BELIEVE THAT IF I AM VERBALLY OR PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED OR SEXUALLY HARASSED BY A PATIENT OR BYSTANDER, THAT THE SERVICE AND THE POLICE WILL PROTECT ME AND FIGHT FOR ME. RIGHT NOW, I DON'T HAVE THAT BELIEF.

-REGION OF PEEL PARAMEDIC



SPIT HOODS AND SOFT RESTRAINTS

- Paramedics have been provided with additional equipment to better protect themselves and patients
- Soft restraint use is supported by the BLS Patient Care Standards, Mental Health Standard and Violent/Aggressive Patient Standard
- Spit hoods protect Paramedics from the most common form of physical assault



Spitting at or on someone is illegal within the Canadian criminal code and can have serious psychological and health impacts for Paramedics.

The use of this equipment creates a safer environment therefore enabling Paramedics to provide better patient care.

Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public Policy and Position Statement

The Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public Policy clearly states that:

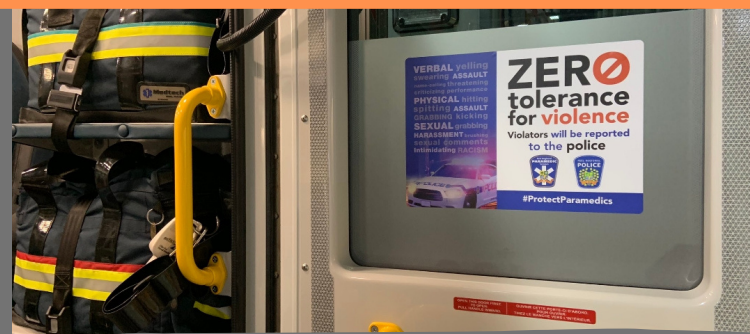
Violence is not an expected part of the job

○

Paramedics have a responsibility to keep themselves safe from violence to the best of their abilities

○

Superintendents have a responsibility to respond to incidents of violence with compassion, advocacy and support



Having this policy shows PRPS Paramedics that management will support them when violence occurs.

The position statement is a concise paragraph created by PRPS management that reiterates the most pertinent sections of the Zero Tolerance Policy.

HARASSING CLIENT LETTERS

The harassing client process is an escalating letter system.

Successfully used in the ROP Human Service Department, it addresses perpetrators of all forms of violence who assault regional employees.

There are provisions within PHIPA and the OHSA which legally allow PRPS to leverage the Region of Peel harassing client letters within Paramedic Services. (PHIPAs.40(1) and OHSA Part III.0.1 s 32.0.5(3))

Adapted for Paramedic Services, a series of letters would be delivered via registered mail to patients who have subjected Paramedics to any form of violence: verbal assault, intimidation, sexual harassment, sexual assault and physical assault.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTERS WOULD BE TO DECREASE THE RISK THAT PARAMEDICS WILL BE REPEATEDLY SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE BY THE SAME INDIVIDUAL(S).

PRPS' harassing client letter will include the following information:

- The form of assault enacted
- PRPS' Violence Policy and Position Statement
- Legislation relevant to the assault
- Letters will educate the perpetrator as to the consequences of assaulting a paramedic- for the patient, the paramedic, and the organization

The delivery of letters provides an additional opportunity to educate a person on the role of paramedics in the community, and why keeping them safe is everyone's job.



ADVOCATING FOR LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CHANGE

With the support of Regional Council, PRPS is advocating for legislative and policy changes to reduce external violence against Paramedics. The primary focus for this advocacy will be amendments to the Criminal Code that would strengthen protections for Paramedics who are subject to external violence.

An assessment of current local, provincial and federal policy raises additional opportunities to engage the provincial government and paramedic services provincially to advance the following:



A 'Call to Action'!

A copy of Peel's November 2020 eliminating violence against paramedics report and letter to the federal justice minister was sent to all Ontario land ambulance designated delivery agents for their endorsement and advocacy support.

Has your council joined in our call to action?

- Standardizing processes for reporting violence across our sector, and sharing these practices with other paramedic services in order to increase consistency and compliance with reporting of violence against Paramedics
- Ensuring Paramedics are provided with adequate tools and training to mitigate external violence so that Paramedics have stronger means to prevent violence in their work environment
- Leveraging opportunities to work collaboratively to raise awareness about protecting first responders from violence as an important component of supporting mental wellbeing

FINDINGS FROM OUR 2019 SURVEY

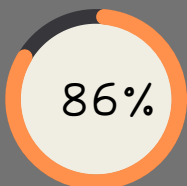
Peel Paramedics have experienced many forms of violence throughout their career.



Physical Assault



Verbal Assault



Intimidation



Sexual Assault



Sexual Harassment



"look at your face, the things I would do to you."

"my tax dollars pay for your salary"

"being called names like a terrorist or a bomber."

"(the pt) told me he was going to kill my family and rape my wife."

"... put their hand up a medic's thigh, or 'accidentally' grab a breast, all regardless of a paramedics verbal warnings."

"Rip Me Open And Infect Me With Aids So (I) Die A Slow And Painful Death."

"yelling at how incompetent we were...that we were 'PIECES OF SHIT PARAMEDICS'"

"racial slurs have been hurled at me"

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Do you want to address the external violence that Paramedics experience in your organization?

Let us help.

To contact Peel Regional Paramedic services for more information on the External Violence Against Paramedics (EVAP) working group, research, violence reporting mechanism or other programs please email ...

ZZG-EVAP@peelregion.ca

[Zero Tolerance Ambulance Sticker](#)

[VIOLENCE, IN FACT, IS NOT 'PART OF THE JOB'](#)

[PARAMEDIC EXPERIENCES WITH WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY](#)

[HS-19 Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public Policy and Position Statement](#)

REPORTING EXTERNAL VIOLENCE

- [Development - Gap Analysis](#)
- [Development - Process Map](#)
- [Development - Business Requirements](#)
- [External Violence Incident Report \(mDOC\)](#)

[Region of Peel - Advocacy for Legal Change](#)

- ['19 Council Report: Violence Prevention in Paramedic Services](#)
- ['19 Council Resolution](#)
- ['20 Council Report: Eliminating violence in Paramedic Services - a Call to Action](#)
- ['20 Council Resolution](#)