Understanding Workplace Violence in the Australian Library Sector

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AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY ALLIANCE

Australian Library and Information Association

CAUL
Council of Australasian University Librarians

Focus on Branch Manager Data

Previously reported on customer service staff

Data from branch managers tells the story of the impact of caring for staff facing occupational violence issues

Branch managers have good ideas about what works

What is the personal impact on you from managing staff who are exposed to occupational violence and aggression?

Trigger Warning

These are your words

It can be confronting to see them gathered together

Psychological, Emotional, and Physical Exhaustion

- *"When I go home at the end of the day I feel like I have nothing to give my family or friends emotionally… On the weekend I need the two days to mentally recover from the week. On the first day of the weekend I just cannot do anything. It has totally ruined my quality of life outside of work."*

Psychological, Emotional, and Physical Exhaustion

- *"I’ve experienced extended periods of heightened hyper-vigilance, often with physical symptoms. Compassion fatigue is evident, and many indicators of psychosocial harm are present."*

Feelings of Helplessness, Guilt, and the Burden of Protection

- *"I feel useless - you always want to help your staff but don't know how to help with the resources you have."*

- *"I feel unable to improve the situation for staff, which brings a sense of guilt."*

Institutional Frustration, Resource Constraints, and Role Misalignment

- *"It is stressful, upsetting, and frustrating knowing that you can't put resources into place to keep them safe due to not having the budget."*

- *"Branch Managers are not trained social workers nor psychologists, yet we are expected to fill that role."*

Operational Strain

- *"Repeated debriefing and reporting on incidents of occupational violence and aggression leave me feeling low and reduce my capacity to focus on my other responsibilities."*

- *"Lost time for myself and the staff, which leads to not enough staff on desk to assist customers, high staff turnover, constant recruitment."*

- *"All time spent managing staff and patron behavior. No time for strategic work on library service."*

Please describe any approaches to managing or reducing occupational violence and aggression that you have found to be successful

Tailored staff training and skill development

De-escalation and specialised training

Scripting and boundary setting

Ongoing refreshers and safety meetings

Clear Behavioral Policies and Enforcement Frameworks

Conditions of Entry and Zero-Tolerance Policies

Structured Banning and Consequence Pathways

Leadership and Organisational Backing

Physical Security, Infrastructure, and Staffing Protocols

Security personnel

Safety technology and security barriers

Staffing standards and desk protocols

Staff Empowerment, Team Culture, and Post-Incident Support

Delegation and empowerment

Post-incident debriefing and peer-support

Mental health and wellbeing services

Relational, Empathetic, and Community-Oriented Approaches

- Empathy and trust building
- Early intervention and trust-building
- Community and specialist partnerships