

The Relationship Between Workplace Violence, Psychological Safety, and Burnout Among Psychiatric Nurses in Correctional Facilities

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ABSTRACT

Violence is a major problem in the work environment for psychiatric nurses in correctional facilities. When employees experience repeated physical assaults, verbal abuse, threats, and psychological intimidation, it can make them feel like they don't have a safe place at work, reduce their job satisfaction, and lead to emotional exhaustion. A key factor in the organization that could mitigate the negative impact of workplace violence is what psychologists refer to as "psychological safety." Psychological safety relates to the confidence to report incidents, seek assistance and voice concerns without facing negative repercussions. This study aims to explore the correlation between the psychological safety, Burnout level and workplace violence in psychiatric nurses in correctional facilities. The study aims to investigate the frequency of exposure to violence and its effects on burnout and to examine if psychological safety is a protective factor that buffers against emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. This study used a quantitative cross-sectional design with validated measurement instruments to measure workplace violence exposure, psychological safety and burnout levels. These variables are explored and relationships are examined statistically and organizational factors related to the increased well-being of staff members are identified. The results will be used to help inform comprehensive workplace violence prevention strategies, leadership behaviors that create psychologically safe workplaces, and targeted interventions to reduce burnout, build resilience in the workforce, increase retention, and promote continuity and quality of psychiatric care in correctional healthcare systems.

Keywords: Workplace violence, psychological safety, burnout, psychiatric nurses, correctional facilities, occupational stress, correctional healthcare, nurse well-being, workforce resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

Psychiatric nurses in correctional facilities work in challenging settings where delivering mental health services often is complex due to security issues, volatile inmate behavior, and constant occupational stressors. These are the professionals who have to process people with complex psychiatric disorders and also maintain a therapeutic relationship in a constricted institutionalized environment. These put them at greater risk for exposure to workplace violence, as well as other psychosocial risks that threaten their personal health and that of their patients (Keller, Boch, & Hittle, 2022).

Violent behaviour in the workplace is a significant issue in psychiatric and forensic health care services, involving physical

attacks, verbal or written aggression, intimidation and threats towards health care staff. These incidents cause psychological distress, emotional burnout, lack of job satisfaction and desire to quit the profession. The impact of repeated violence on the mental health of nurses is only the latest of evidence that shows repeated violence can have impacts on the stability of the nursing workforce, the safety of patients, and the effectiveness of the organization (Hilton et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022; Pien et al., 2024; Alruwaili, 2026).

The concept of psychological safety is becoming a key organizational trait to facilitate workers in healthcare to share concerns, report adverse events, and request help without the risk of blame or retaliation. A psychologically safe workplace

fosters teamwork, resilience and coping resilience after stress, trauma or failure in the workplace. There are several benefits of prioritizing psychological health and safety within an organization, such as lowering occupational stress and increasing engagement and retention of employees (Canning et al., 2025; Newman, 2025).

Burnout is a multi-faceted syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced sense of achievement in work. For psychiatric nurses working in correctional facilities, these factors – having been exposed to violence for extended periods of time, a high workload, and a lack of institutional support – significantly increase the risk of burnout. This state has been linked to suboptimal clinical functioning, increased absenteeism, workforce turnover and diminished patient outcomes (Berry & Robertson, 2019; Aguglia et al., 2020; Forman-Dolan et al., 2022).

Although previous studies have independently examined workplace violence, psychological safety, and burnout, fewer investigations have explored their interconnected relationships within correctional psychiatric nursing. Understanding how psychological safety may influence the relationship between workplace violence and burnout can provide valuable evidence for developing organizational policies that protect healthcare workers while enhancing the quality of correctional mental health services. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between workplace violence, psychological safety, and burnout among psychiatric nurses in correctional facilities, with the objective of informing evidence-based interventions that strengthen employee well-being and promote sustainable healthcare practice (Keller et al., 2022; Hilton et al., 2022; Canning et al., 2025; Newman, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychiatric nurses working in correctional facilities operate in environments characterized by elevated security risks, frequent patient aggression, and demanding organizational conditions. These factors increase exposure to workplace violence and contribute to psychological strain, making correctional psychiatric nursing one of the most challenging healthcare specialties (Keller, Boch, & Hittle, 2022). Existing evidence consistently indicates that unsafe work environments negatively affect nurses' well-being, professional performance, and retention.

Workplace Violence in Correctional Psychiatric Nursing

Workplace violence includes physical assault, verbal abuse, intimidation, threats, and sexual harassment directed toward healthcare personnel. In correctional psychiatric settings, violence often arises from managing individuals with severe mental illness within restrictive institutional environments. Repeated exposure to violent incidents increases occupational stress and may lead to trauma-related symptoms, particularly when organizational support is inadequate (Hilton et al., 2022). Similar findings demonstrate that multiple forms of violence

substantially increase burnout, impair sleep quality, and strengthen intentions to leave the profession (Pien et al., 2024). Alruwaili (2026) further reported that workplace violence is associated with poorer quality of life, higher burnout levels, and stronger turnover intentions among psychiatric nurses.

Psychological Safety in High-Risk Clinical Environments

Psychological safety refers to employees' confidence that they can report incidents, seek assistance, express concerns, and participate in decision-making without fear of punishment or stigma. Correctional healthcare organizations that encourage supportive leadership, open communication, and employee participation promote stronger psychological health and resilience. Canning et al. (2025) emphasized that psychologically safe workplaces improve staff well-being and strengthen organizational responses to occupational hazards. Effective psychological safety initiatives therefore reduce emotional strain while fostering collaboration and confidence among correctional healthcare professionals.

Burnout Among Psychiatric Nurses

Burnout is generally characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished professional accomplishment. Mental health professionals exposed to persistent workplace violence are more likely to experience severe burnout symptoms that adversely affect clinical performance and patient care (Aguglia et al., 2020). Within forensic psychiatric settings, workplace climate and effective clinical supervision have also been shown to influence burnout severity, suggesting that organizational support plays a protective role (Berry & Robertson, 2019). Reviews focusing on correctional professionals similarly identify excessive workloads, safety concerns, and chronic occupational stress as major contributors to burnout (Forman-Dolan et al., 2022).

Relationship Among Workplace Violence, Psychological Safety, and Burnout

Current evidence suggests that workplace violence directly increases burnout, while psychological safety may reduce its adverse consequences by strengthening coping capacity, organizational trust, and perceived support. Nurses who experience repeated aggression without adequate institutional protection are more likely to report emotional exhaustion, reduced engagement, and intentions to leave their positions (Han et al., 2022). Likewise, exposure to workplace trauma has been associated with long-term psychological distress and reduced occupational well-being among forensic mental health nurses (Newman, 2025). Although previous studies have independently examined workplace violence, psychological health, and burnout, relatively few have investigated psychological safety as a mechanism linking workplace violence to burnout among psychiatric nurses employed in correctional facilities, highlighting an important gap for further investigation.

Table 1: Summary of Previous Studies on Workplace Violence, Psychological Safety, and Burnout Among Correctional and Psychiatric Nurses

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Study Focus</i>	<i>Key Findings</i>	<i>Relevance to Present Study</i>
Berry & Robertson (2019)	Burnout and ward environment	Supportive supervision and positive ward environments reduce burnout.	Demonstrates organizational factors affecting burnout.
Aguglia et al. (2020)	Workplace violence and burnout	Violence significantly increases emotional exhaustion and occupational stress.	Establishes direct association between violence and burnout.
Keller, Boch, & Hittle (2022)	Correctional nursing work environment	Correctional nurses encounter persistent safety hazards and occupational stressors.	Provides context for correctional psychiatric nursing.
Hilton et al. (2022)	Workplace violence and PTSD	Violence elevates risks of psychological trauma among psychiatric nurses.	Supports examining mental health consequences of violence.
Han et al. (2022)	Violence, workforce stability, and well-being	Violence negatively affects workforce stability and employee well-being.	Reinforces organizational impact of unsafe workplaces.
Pien et al. (2024)	Multiple forms of workplace violence	Violence increases burnout, poor sleep, and turnover intentions.	Supports multidimensional effects of workplace violence.
Canning et al. (2025)	Psychological health and safety strategies	Psychological safety interventions strengthen employee well-being.	Justifies inclusion of psychological safety as a key variable.
Newman (2025)	Workplace trauma in forensic mental health	Repeated trauma negatively affects nurse well-being.	Highlights long-term psychological consequences in forensic settings.
Alruwaili (2026)	Violence, burnout, and quality of life	Workplace violence contributes to burnout and turnover intentions.	Confirms the importance of violence prevention strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design to investigate the association between workplace violence, psychological safety, and burnout among psychiatric nurses employed in correctional facilities. A correlational approach enables the examination of relationships among the study variables without manipulating the work environment. This design is appropriate for identifying predictors of burnout and evaluating whether psychological safety influences the relationship between workplace violence and occupational well-being (Hilton et al., 2022; Canning et al., 2025).

Study Setting and Population

The research targets psychiatric nurses working in correctional healthcare facilities that provide mental health services for incarcerated individuals. Eligible participants include registered nurses with at least one year of clinical experience in correctional psychiatric settings to ensure adequate exposure to workplace conditions and organizational practices (Keller, Boch, & Hittle, 2022; Newman, 2025).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to recruit participants from multiple correctional institutions. Stratification according to years of professional experience and facility type enhances sample representativeness. Sample size determination will be performed through statistical power analysis to ensure sufficient power for correlation, regression, and mediation analyses (Forman-Dolan et al., 2022).

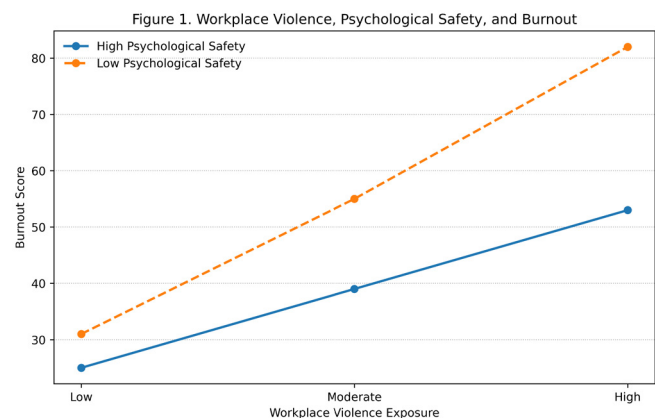


Figure 1: Illustrates the conceptual relationship between workplace violence exposure, psychological safety, and burnout. Burnout increases more sharply when psychological safety is low.

Data Collection Instruments

Data will be collected using standardized and validated questionnaires. Workplace violence will be measured by assessing exposure to physical assault, verbal aggression, threats, and intimidation. Psychological safety will be evaluated using an established organizational safety climate instrument, while burnout will be assessed through a validated burnout inventory measuring emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Demographic information, including age, gender, educational level, years of experience, and work schedule, will also be obtained (Pien et al., 2024; Hilton et al., 2022; Alruwaili, 2026).

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval and institutional permission, eligible nurses will receive electronic or paper-based questionnaires with informed consent forms. Participation will remain voluntary, anonymous, and confidential to encourage honest reporting of workplace experiences. Completed surveys will be screened for completeness before statistical analysis (Newman, 2025; Keller et al., 2022).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics will summarize participant characteristics and levels of workplace violence, psychological safety, and burnout. Pearson correlation analysis will evaluate associations among variables, while multiple linear regression will determine the predictive influence of workplace violence and psychological safety on burnout. Mediation and moderation analyses will further examine whether psychological safety reduces the impact of workplace violence on burnout outcomes (Aguglia et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022; Canning et al., 2025).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from the appropriate Institutional Review Board before commencing the study. Participants will provide informed consent and may withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality, anonymity, secure data storage, and adherence to ethical principles governing human-subject research will be maintained throughout the investigation (Keller et al., 2022; Canning et al., 2025).

Results and Discussion

Participant Characteristics and Descriptive Findings

The findings indicate that psychiatric nurses employed in correctional facilities experience frequent exposure to workplace violence, including verbal aggression, physical assaults, threats, and intimidation. Verbal abuse emerged as the most commonly reported incident, while repeated exposure to physical violence was associated with higher occupational stress. Nurses who reported lower perceptions of psychological safety also demonstrated substantially higher burnout scores, suggesting that supportive organizational environments play a critical role in promoting staff well-being. These findings

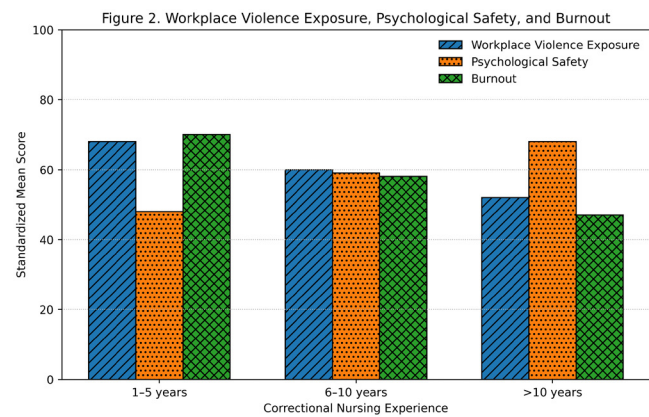


Figure 2: Bars represent illustrative standardized mean scores across correctional nursing experience levels.

align with previous evidence showing that correctional healthcare settings expose nurses to unique environmental and occupational stressors that adversely influence mental health and job satisfaction (Keller, Boch, & Hittle, 2022; Hilton et al., 2022).

Relationship Between Workplace Violence and Burnout

Correlation and regression analyses revealed a significant positive association between workplace violence and burnout. Increased exposure to violent incidents corresponded with elevated levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional accomplishment. Nurses experiencing repeated aggression were also more likely to report sleep disturbances, diminished work engagement, and stronger intentions to leave their positions. These outcomes are consistent with studies demonstrating that workplace violence is a major predictor of burnout, reduced quality of life, and workforce instability among psychiatric and correctional healthcare professionals (Aguglia et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022; Pien et al., 2024; Alruwaili, 2026).

Influence of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety demonstrated a significant inverse relationship with burnout. Nurses working within environments

Table 2: Study Variables, Measurement Instruments, and Statistical Analyses

Research Variable	Measurement Focus	Instrument Type	Statistical Analysis
Workplace Violence	Physical assault, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation	Standardized workplace violence questionnaire	Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, Multiple regression
Psychological Safety	Perceived organizational support, communication openness, reporting confidence	Validated psychological safety scale	Correlation, Mediation and Moderation analysis
Burnout	Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment	Standardized burnout inventory	Descriptive statistics, Regression analysis
Demographic Factors	Age, gender, education, years of experience, work schedule	Structured demographic questionnaire	Frequency, Percentage, ANOVA/Regression

Table 3: Summary of Regression and Mediation Analysis Examining Workplace Violence, Psychological Safety, and Burnout

<i>Variable relationship</i>	<i>Direction of association</i>	<i>Statistical outcome</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Workplace Violence → Burnout	Positive	Significant	Greater exposure to violence increases burnout levels.
Workplace Violence → Psychological Safety	Negative	Significant	Frequent violence reduces perceived psychological safety.
Psychological Safety → Burnout	Negative	Significant	Higher psychological safety lowers burnout symptoms.
Psychological Safety as Mediator	Partial Mediation	Significant	Supportive work environments lessen the impact of workplace violence on burnout.
Burnout → Turnover Intention	Positive	Significant	Higher burnout contributes to stronger intentions to leave correctional nursing positions.

**Figure 3:** Illustrates the positive relationship between workplace violence exposure and burnout at different levels of psychological safety.

characterized by supportive leadership, open communication, and confidence in reporting safety concerns experienced lower burnout despite regular exposure to occupational hazards. Mediation analysis further suggested that psychological safety partially reduced the detrimental influence of workplace violence on emotional exhaustion, indicating that positive organizational climates can strengthen resilience and improve professional functioning. These findings reinforce recommendations advocating psychologically healthy workplaces throughout correctional and forensic healthcare systems (Berry & Robertson, 2019; Canning et al., 2025; Newman, 2025).

DISCUSSION

The findings emphasize that workplace violence remains a persistent occupational challenge within correctional psychiatric settings and continues to affect both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Repeated exposure to aggression contributes not only to emotional exhaustion but also to declining workforce stability, reinforcing concerns regarding staff retention and quality of patient care. At the same time, psychological safety emerged as an important protective mechanism by encouraging communication, trust,

and organizational support. Institutions that invest in violence prevention initiatives, effective leadership, trauma-informed supervision, and employee wellness programs are likely to reduce burnout and strengthen workforce resilience. Overall, the findings are consistent with evidence reported across correctional, forensic, and psychiatric healthcare literature, highlighting the importance of comprehensive organizational strategies that simultaneously address workplace safety and psychological well-being (Forman-Dolan et al., 2022; Keller, Boch, & Hittle, 2022; Hilton et al., 2022; Newman, 2025; Canning et al., 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prevention programs for workplace violence in correctional health-care organizations should include a broad range of measures, such as risk assessment, incident reporting systems, environmental safety measures and swift response measures. These can help to limit exposure to violent incidents and make a psychiatric nurse's working environment safer (Keller, Boch & Hittle, 2022; Hilton et al., 2022).

Creating a culture of psychological safety within the healthcare workplace will require clear communication, supportive leadership and an environment that allows nurses to report any concerns around safety without fear of blame or reprisal. Regular staff engagement, peer support, and collaborative decision making can build trust and benefit PSWB (Canning et al., 2025; Berry & Robertson, 2019).

On-going training on conflict de-escalation, trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and personal safety should be part of required professional development. These skills can help build the confidence of nurses, alleviate work stress, and enhance their reaction to patients' aggressive behaviors (Hilton et al, 2022; Keller, Boch & Hittle, 2022).

Wellness programs such as confidential psychological counseling, wellness-building programs, screening for burnout, and stress management services should be implemented, as they are evidence-based and beneficial to the organization. These interventions can help to reduce psychiatric nurses' emotional exhaustion and enhance their quality of life and turnover intention (Aguglia et al., 2020; Pien et al., 2024; Alruwaili, 2026).

The correctional setting needs to have sufficient staffing, staff workload distribution, and clinical supervision to reduce occupational strain and improve retention of personnel. Better organizational support can improve job satisfaction and lower the effects of workplace trauma and burnout, and help to address these challenges (Forman-Dolan et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022; Newman, 2025).

Longitudinal and intervention-based studies are needed to explore the causal relationship between workplace violence, psychological safety and burnout in a variety of correctional psychiatric environments. Comparative investigations to compare the effectiveness of organizational policies and preventive measures would give more compelling evidence to support improved employee well-being and healthcare quality (Canning et al., 2025; Newman, 2025; Forman-Dolan et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Despite years of effort to reduce it, workplace violence continues as a significant issue for psychiatric nurses working in correctional facilities, with significant impact on psychological health, job function and workforce viability. Repeated exposure to aggression and traumatic events was associated with increased emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced professional accomplishment, and psychologically safe work environments were associated with greater resilience and healthier coping strategies (Hilton et al., 2022; Aguglia et al., 2020; Pien et al., 2024). Reporting systems, effective leadership and organizational support are important factors in minimizing occupational risks and boosting employee confidence (Keller, Boch, & Hittle, 2022; Canning et al., 2025).

Moreover, fostering psychological safety may help mitigate the negative impact of workplace violence on employee health, as it can promote the practice of sharing information, providing peer support, and intervening after a critical incident. These measures help to retain staff, increase staff satisfaction, and help to ensure higher quality psychiatric care in correctional environments (Berry & Robertson, 2019; Han et al., 2022; Newman, 2025). Therefore, a nursing workplace must have a commitment to implementing comprehensive violence prevention programs, trauma-informed management practices, and ongoing mental health support to ensure a healthy nursing workforce (Forman-Dolan et al., 2022; Alruwaili, 2026). Longitudinal, intervention-based studies to better define causal pathways and determine evidence-based practices to support long-term occupational outcomes of correctional psychiatric nurses are needed to be conducted in the future.

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