

Violence against careworkers in psychiatry; is prosecution justified?

Summary

The number of (severe) violent incidents against staff caused by psychiatric inpatients is high. Victims often do not report these incidents to the police, because of various reasons. But if they do report these incidents, the judicial authorities are often reluctant in prosecuting and convicting these patients. The central question in this article is 'in which cases is it appropriate to prosecute assaultive psychiatric patients?' In order to identify the influential factors in the decision in respectively reporting, prosecuting and convicting psychiatric patients who assault staff, a literature review has been performed. On the basis of this literature it is advised to report and investigate a case when the incident resulted in severe injury, the incident is a sexual offence, or when a patient repetitively causes violent incidents. Moreover, it appears that, although large amount of studies has been published on violence in psychiatry, the prosecution of violent psychiatric patients has hardly received any attention in the international literature. Empirical studies on this subject are suggested, in order to develop a uniform policy, which is embraced by all parties involved.

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