



# Employee Perceptions of Federal Workplace Violence

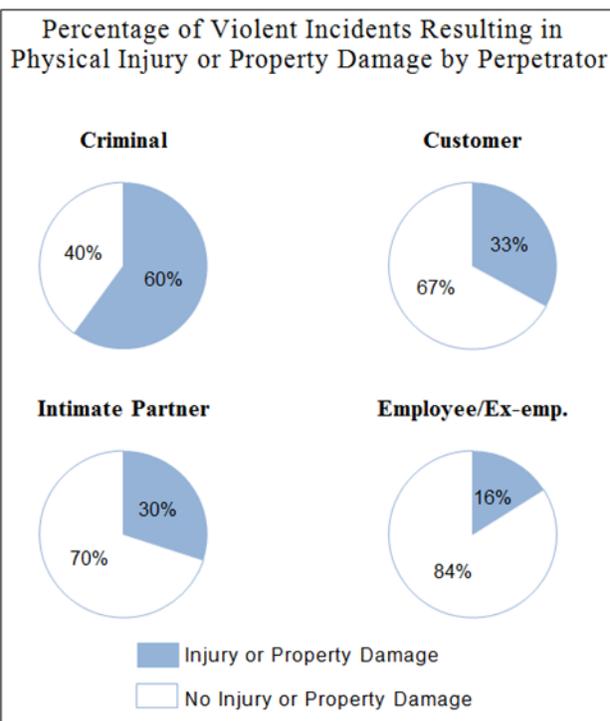
Workplace violence has effects that stretch far beyond individual victims. As discussed in our September 2012 report, workplace violence can spoil the work environment with negative consequences for an entire organization. Physical violence is clearly not acceptable in any workplace, but other violent behavior such as the threat of physical attack, harassment, intimidation, and bullying can also hurt organizations and their members.

Our 2010 Merit Principles Survey (MPS) asked Federal employees about their experiences with these physical and non-physical violent behaviors. Thirteen percent of respondents said that they had observed such behavior over the preceding two years. The vast majority of these observations (88%) were perpetrated by individuals who, for the most part, belonged in the workplace—current and former employees (54%) and customers (34%). Physical security measures that keep individuals who would do harm out of the Federal workplace are vitally important. However, these findings indicate that Federal agencies should also focus on strategies to reduce the incidence of violent behaviors by those who appropriately pass through those physical barriers.

Although current and former employees were the most frequent perpetrators of violence in the Federal workplace, they rarely exhibited physically violent behavior. Only 16% of the observations of violence perpetrated by current and former Federal employees resulted in either physical injury or damage to, or loss of, property (see chart). This means the observed violent behavior of current and former Federal employees typically involved threats, harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

Almost three-quarters of MPS 2010 respondents agreed that their agencies take sufficient steps to ensure their safety on the job. However, only about one-third of respondents who witnessed a violent act by a current or former Federal employee agreed likewise.

Among our recommendations to help reduce the number of violent incidents perpetrated by Federal employees are that Federal agencies: (1) foster organizational cultures that do not tolerate violent behaviors; (2) appropriately screen job applicants; (3) train employees on the warning signs of violent behavior and what to do if those signs are observed; (4) resolve serious conflicts in the workplace before they escalate into violent incidents; and (5) allow organizational factors such as geographic location, mission, occupational mix, and customer base to drive workplace violence prevention efforts.



*For the full report, including a discussion of the incidence of workplace violence across different agencies and within varying occupations, please visit [www.mspb.gov/studies](http://www.mspb.gov/studies).*