



Deutsches Forschungsinstitut
für öffentliche Verwaltung

Violence against public service staff

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Summary



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1. Introduction

The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) commissioned the German Research Institute for Public Administration (FÖV) to study the level of violence against public service staff. The aim of the project was to establish a factual basis for developing sustainable and nuanced strategies to address violence against public service staff, as no comprehensive figures on attacks on public service staff have been available to date, nor has any systematic overview of practical experience with approaches to curbing such violence. Violent attacks within an organisation or attacks committed by public service staff were not included in the scope of this study.

As a first step, researchers compiled and evaluated key research, statistics and other documents on the topic of violence against public sector staff, and summarised their main findings in a literature review. This review provides an overview of the current state of research on the phenomenon of violence against public service staff in Germany as well as an overview of strategies, measures and initiatives to prevent violence.

Following the literature review, two nationwide surveys were designed and carried out, one of which was aimed at heads of public institutions and the other at employees. To gain as comprehensive a picture as possible, authorities and employees from different levels of administration (federal, state and local) and from the following sectors were surveyed:

- ! Fire brigades and rescue services
- ! The justice system (including court bailiffs)
- ! The correctional system
- ! The labour and social services administration
- ! The education system (schools and universities)
- ! Agencies for public order on a local level (Ordnungsamt)
- ! Municipal offices rendering administrative services for the public (Bürgeramt)
- ! Veterinary inspection offices

Along with data on the level of violence against employees, the survey responses also provided information on the reporting and recording of violent incidents as well as on prevention and follow-up care measures.

2. Main findings of the literature review

The literature review provides an overview of the current state of research on the phenomenon of violence against public service staff in Germany, as well as an overview of

strategies, measures and initiatives to prevent violence. It covers all sectors of the public service for which information about violence against staff is available. The study focuses on acts of violence committed against public service staff by individuals from outside the public service. Because a variety of different definitions of violence are used in academic research, this study works with a broad-based concept of violence that encompasses a wide range of different forms (e.g. verbal abuse, verbal or physical threats or physical attacks). The different ways that the term “violence” is used make it difficult to compare findings or to reach a conclusion regarding how the level of violence has developed in recent years.

On the whole, the literature review revealed the following research gaps and problems in the literature on the phenomenon of violence in the public service: *first*, to date there is no overall picture of the situation in the public service in Germany. The different definitions of violence also make it difficult to compare studies across different sectors. As part of this research project, this gap is being addressed through surveying employees and authorities from different levels of administration about violent attacks in a uniform way – including relatively unresearched sectors such as Ordnungsämter (agencies for public order on a local level) and Bürgerämter (municipal offices rendering administrative services for the public). *Second*, the large number of definitions of violence and ways they are applied makes it difficult to reach clear conclusions about whether or not violent attacks on staff have increased in recent years. Standardised surveys (e.g. retrospective cross-sectional surveys, panel surveys) are well suited for establishing a general overview of the frequency and type of experiences of violence. *Third*, however, it is sensible to supplement such approaches with qualitative approaches (e.g. situational analyses) that facilitate deeper insight into experiences of violence, which have been used only rarely to date. *Fourth*, there have been few studies to date which deal with the question of how effective different prevention measures are in practice.

3. Findings of the surveys of public institutions and their staff

The aim of the two empirical surveys was to estimate the level of violence against public service staff in Germany. The level of *reported* violence against staff, including certain specific criminal offences, was part of the survey of public institutions. The survey of staff focused particularly on determining the number of unreported cases – that is, the discrepancy between the number of reported violent attacks and the actual total number of violent attacks. As with the survey of public institutions, the survey of staff focused on certain selected criminal offences. The surveys also addressed the impacts of violence, the options available in different public institutions for reporting and recording violent incidents, and prevention and follow-up care measures.

For the purposes of both surveys, “violence” is understood to designate behaviour by one or more parties outside the public service that is directed against an individual employed in the public service and which meets the definition of at least one of the following criminal offences under the Criminal Code:

- ! Criminal insult
- ! Threat
- ! (Attempted) bodily injury
- ! (Attempted) homicide
- ! Sexual violence

It is irrelevant to the definition whether and, if so, with what outcome criminal prosecution took place.

In total, 1,631 public authorities and organisations responded fully to the survey of public institutions. This included 525 local government bodies, the various organisational units of which (e.g. social welfare office, Bürgeramt, Ordnungsamt) were in most cases each evaluated separately in order to reach differentiated conclusions for the different sectors. Of the 10,674 employees who responded to the staff survey, the largest share were the 6,708 respondents employed in the labour and social services administration.

Schools and veterinary inspection authorities are included only from the staff perspective, because the survey sample size for the veterinary inspection authorities in the survey of public institutions was too small (n=less than 30) to draw valid conclusions from it. For the schools, the survey of public institutions had the problem that the survey sample was composed almost entirely of respondents from one federal state.

3.1 Type and level of violence

The surveys covered two different time periods: the first was before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (T1: 1 January to 31 December 2019) and the second was during the pandemic (T2: 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021). The two surveys were evaluated using different methods, as the data structures of their results were different. It was

possible to establish categories of cases of violence per person per year for the staff survey, but not for the survey of public institutions. As a solution for the latter study, the cases were averaged across 1,000 employees. For this reason, the results of the two surveys are not comparable and are presented alongside one another rather than comparatively. It is also assumed that the sample for the staff survey is somewhat distorted, as it is highly likely that those individuals who had experienced violence felt more motivated to take part in the survey and therefore were disproportionately likely to respond. For this reason, extrapolating the survey results to case numbers for 1,000 employees would result in a severe distortion, such that no such calculation was made for the staff survey. Rather, categories were generated for the average number of cases of violence experienced per person and per year (see section 3.1.2.).

3.1.1 Reported incidents of violence (survey of public institutions)

In the survey of public institutions, 1,465 institutions provided information about the level of violence, and 40 percent of these institutions had reported cases of violence. In these institutions, the number of reported cases of violence (T1: n=358,099, T2: n=344,061) averaged 16 cases per year per 1,000 employees for the two time periods surveyed. All of the case numbers below refer to average rates per 1,000 employees for the period of one year. For both periods, male employees (T1: n=83,380, T2: n=83,812, 20 cases) reported almost twice as many cases of violence as female employees (T1: n=129,858, T2: n=131,740, 12 cases). For individuals categorised as non-binary, the average number of cases of violence per 1,000 employees was much higher (employees in T1: n=20, T2: n=19, 259 cases). Here, however, the very small sample size of fewer than 30 individuals should be noted. For both periods, the most heavily affected *employment sectors*¹ were court bailiffs (114 cases), Bürgerämter (189 cases), and Ordnungsämter, with the latter reporting the most cases of violence (314 cases) per 1,000 employees. The sectors affected to a middling degree were the justice system (13 cases), fire brigades and rescue services (18 cases), local-level labour and social services administration (43 cases) and the correctional system (62 cases). Institutions of higher education (0.7 cases) and the federal- and state-level labour and social services administration (6 cases) had the lowest rates of reported violence.

The most commonly reported *types of criminal offence* were insults (14 cases) and threats (9 cases), followed by forms of serious violence such as attempted bodily injury (3 cases) and bodily injury (2 cases). These were followed by sexual violence (0.2 cases) and attempted homicide (0.03 cases).² As with the overall numbers, the frequency with which individuals are affected decreases, irrespective of gender, with increasing severity of

¹ Number (n) of public institutions per employment sector ranges from 46 (higher education T2) to 380 (justice system T2). Number (n) of employees in these institutions per sector and time period ranges from 1,200 (court bailiffs T1/T2) to 67,000 (federal- and state-level labour and social services administration T2).

² Fortunately, no cases of homicide were reported by any institution. For each reporting period, the number of responding institutions that provided information regarding types of criminal offence was greater than 1,000 institutions, which together employed more than 200,000 staff. In the survey of public institutions, for each type of offence and binary gender (m/f), the numbers of employees included were above 60,000 and below 110,000. The group of non-binary individuals was not evaluated in terms of specific types of criminal offence due to the small sample size (n= fewer than 30 employees).

crimes. Among the categories of criminal offences, male employees (m) reported almost six times as many violent attacks as female employees (f) and were, in comparison with women, more frequently affected by severe forms of violence such as attempted bodily injury (m: 4 cases, f: 1 case), bodily injury (m: 4 cases, f: 0.5 cases) and attempted homicide (m: 0.09 cases, f: 0.01 cases). Sexual violence was the only category of crime for which this pattern did not hold true. In this category, women were more frequently affected than men (m: 0.03 cases, f: 0.1 cases).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the average number of cases reported by all employees increased by two cases per 1,000 employees per year. The level of violence directed against female employees increased considerably more than the level directed against male employees (by 3 cases for women, by 0.5 cases for men). In the group of non-binary individuals, violence increased sharply (by 218 cases, but n= fewer than 30). Violence declined in the correctional system (decrease of 15 cases), local-level labour and social services administration (decrease of 4 cases), fire brigades and rescue services (decrease of 4 cases), federal- and state-level labour and social services administration (decrease of 2 cases) and higher education (decrease of 0.5 cases). Violence increased (moderately) for the justice system (by 9 cases), the Ordnungsämter (by 15 cases) and court bailiffs (by 48 cases). Violence increased most dramatically for the Bürgerämter, which saw an increase of 98% or 125 cases.

The *types of criminal offence* which increased most sharply were criminal insults (by 2 cases), threats (by 1 case) and bodily injury (by 1 case). The categories of attempted bodily injury (by 0.4 cases) and attempted homicide (by 0.01 cases) saw a smaller increase. The level of sexual violence remained almost constant (decrease of 0.001 cases). For male staff, violence increased most dramatically in the category of threats (by 2 cases), followed by criminal insults and (attempted) bodily injury (by 1 case each). The decrease in the rate of attempted homicide was smaller (by 0.1 cases). Sexual violence increased the least of any category for men (by 0.01 cases), while decreasing both for women and overall. For female staff, criminal insults increased most dramatically (by 3 cases), followed by threats (by 1 case). Cases of bodily injury increased by less than a case (by 0.2 cases). All other types of criminal offence decreased for female staff (attempted bodily injury (by 0.2 cases), sexual violence (by 0.1 cases), attempted homicide (by 0.01 cases)).

3.1.2 Violence and unreported cases (staff survey)

On average during the two periods covered by the survey, 23% of respondents stated that they had experienced violence and 77% that they had not (T1: n=9,620, T2: n=10,371). Of the respondents, 12% experienced one to three incidents of violence within a year; 6% experienced four to nine cases, and 4% experienced ten to 25 cases. Another 2% experienced violence more than 25 times in a year. Overall, men were affected by violence somewhat more frequently than women. The rate of violence varies greatly between different sectors. One third or more of the staff of fire brigades and rescue services, veterinary inspection offices, Ordnungsämter and the correctional system experienced violence within a period of one year. By contrast, in higher education, the federal- and state-level labour and social services administration and the justice system,

less than 20% of staff experienced violence. Among staff who provide technical assistance in emergencies, threat aversion in the field, or medical care within or outside of institutions, more than 40% experienced violence.

The more serious a type of crime is, the lower the rate at which it is committed. While 21% of public service staff experienced criminal insults within a period of one year and 16% experienced threats, all other surveyed types of crimes were experienced at a rate of less than 10%. Attempted bodily injury was committed against 6% of survey respondents and bodily injury against 3%. About 1% of those surveyed experienced sexual violence and 0.2% experienced attempted homicide. Almost half (44%) of those who experienced criminal insults were criminally insulted more than three times per year. 22% of them even stated that they had experienced 10 or more incidents of criminal insult in a year. Of the survey respondents who experienced threats, 66% experienced one to three threats per year, while 16% were threatened ten or more times. For all other types of criminal offence covered by the survey, the vast majority of those affected experienced the offence in question one to three times per year. For all types of offence covered, but especially physical violence, male staff are more frequently affected than female staff. On average, men experienced bodily injury and attempted bodily injury three times as often as women.

A comparison of the surveyed periods before (2019) and during (1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic shows clearly that overall, staff experienced violence more frequently during the pandemic. This applies to every surveyed type of crime other than attempted homicide and to almost every sector of employment. Only in higher education and local-level labour and social services administration did the rate of violence decrease slightly. The increase was particularly marked in the justice system, Ordnungsämter and Bürgerämter.

On average, the survey respondents reported only about 30% of the violent attacks that they experienced. Around 70% of cases remained unreported, although this figure varies considerably among the different employment sectors and types of criminal offence. For staff of fire brigades and rescue services, 80% of the experienced violence remained *unreported*; for most other sectors, this rate was between 66% and 75%. In the correctional system, just over half (53%) of cases were reported. The more serious a type of crime, the lower the percentage of unreported cases. On average, 72% of criminal insults, 66% of threats, 49% of cases of attempted bodily injury and 38% of cases of bodily injury went unreported. It is striking that no less than 68% of the cases of sexual violence against public services staff remained unreported.

The high percentage of unreported cases raises the question of *why* employees choose not to report experiences of violence. Survey results suggest that the decision about whether to report violence is largely a matter of weighing the costs of reporting against the benefits of doing so. Survey respondents chose not to report violence primarily because they expected that reporting the incident would not change the situation (56%), they considered the attack not be worth reporting (55%), or the administrative effort

entailed in reporting was too great (32%).³ The cases in which staff responded that they did not report their experiences because their employer did not offer any support (17%), reporting was unwelcome (11%), reporting violence could have negative consequences for the person who reported it (11%) or their supervisors instructed them not to report the violence (3%) are especially problematic. The latter set of reasons were cited particularly often by staff of the correctional system and schools and by victims of sexual violence.

3.1.3 Overall findings: Parallels between the two surveys

Both surveys (institutions and staff) found that *on average*, men and non-binary individuals experienced higher rates of violence than women. The findings of the survey of institutions and the staff survey diverged considerably within specific employment sectors, the causes for which may include the high number of unreported cases. Both surveys find that the correctional system and agencies for public order on a municipal level experience high rates of violence, while institutions of higher education and federal- and state-level labour and social services administration have the lowest rates. The number of unreported cases (covered only by the staff survey) was generally high and remained relatively unchanged *over time*. Both the number of cases reported and the number experienced by staff increased moderately to severely for violence on the whole and across all genders. Both surveys found that the rate of violence increased for the Bürgeramt, court bailiffs, the justice system and the Ordnungsamt. And both surveys found that offences in the categories of criminal insult, threats and bodily injury increased more than other offences. It is therefore evident across both surveys and across genders that violence has increased moderately to severely since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for the categories of criminal insult, threats and bodily injury and for Bürgeramt staff, court bailiffs, justice system staff and Ordnungsamt staff.

3.1.4 Developments during the COVID-19 pandemic

The increasing number of incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic matches both employees' and heads of public institutions' assessment of the impacts of the pandemic. A significant share of employees, 38%, stated that violence on the whole had increased (considerably); 46% saw no change, and only 16% perceived the rate of violence to be decreasing (considerably) (n=8,776). More employees saw psychological violence (e.g. insults) (n=8,953) than physical violence (n=7,587) as having increased since the beginning of the pandemic. More than half of respondents (53%) stated that psychological violence had increased, and 16% saw a considerable increase in it. 24% of the heads of public institutions perceived a (considerable) increase in violence, while 7% saw a decline in violence (n=2,218). A large majority, 69%, saw no change.

3.2 Impacts of violence on the victims

60% of the employees who had experienced violence stated that the violence had

³ Survey respondents could cite more than one reason, due to which the percentages here total more than 100%.

impacted their lives. The most commonly cited impacts were a feeling of discomfort in the workplace (44%), followed by psychological problems such as sleep problems, depressive moods or depression (25%). The more severe the violence experienced was, the more frequently it was followed by psychological problems. 4% of the victims entered into psychotherapeutic treatment and another 4% suffered bodily injuries; for 2%, the injuries required medical treatment. 5% of those surveyed had to take sick leave due to the attacks they suffered.

In terms of violent attacks on staff from different sectors, two phenomena are particularly striking: first, staff of fire brigades and rescue services on the whole appear particularly unlikely to suffer from psychological symptoms as a result of attacks, although they suffer physical injuries relatively often. Second, violent attacks in the education sector seem to have the greatest impact on their victims. In this sector, about 60% of staff felt uncomfortable at work after being attacked and 43% suffered from psychological problems. This may be due to the fact that violent attacks harm the relationship of trust between teachers and pupils, and that teachers would regularly encounter their attackers at school.

3.3 Employees' sense of security

The majority of employees surveyed (58%) feel (relatively) safe from violent attacks in their workplace (n=10,501). Employees who experienced violence during the period surveyed felt considerably less safe than those who did not experience violence. While more than half of respondents stated that their sense of security in the workplace had remained the same over the past three years, for 31% it had deteriorated (considerably) (n=8,382). Only 11% responded that it had improved. On average, staff in the area of labour and social services administration felt safest. Staff of the Ordnungsamt and of fire brigades and rescue services felt least safe and reported the greatest deterioration in their sense of safety in the past three years. For the Ordnungsamt, this perception is also reflected in a rise in the number of reported cases (see chapter 3.1), which is likely related to Ordnungsamt staff's enforcement of COVID-19-related restrictions.

3.4 Reporting and recording cases of violence

The systems for reporting incidents vary among public institutions. At about half of the institutions, violent attacks are to be reported to the victim's direct supervisor, and at about a third of them attacks are to be reported to the head of the institution (n=1,523). At a quarter of public institutions, no person to report to has been designated. This is the situation particularly often in the fields of higher education and local administration. In the majority of cases (57%), attacks are documented in a centralised way for the entire institution (n=1,294). Only 8% of institutions document attacks in a decentralised way within the specific unit in which the attacks occurred; about a fifth of municipalities take this approach. One quarter of responding institutions do not document violent attacks on their staff. For municipalities, this figure is 39%.

Of those employees who reported violence during the period covered by the survey, 90% informed their direct supervisor (T1: n=1,044, T2: n=1,253). About a quarter informed the head of their institution and about a quarter informed the police. While men made more

frequent use of “formal” channels of reporting (head of institution, police, personnel department), women more often turned to trusted individuals. Employees who experienced physical violence turned to the police considerably more frequently than those who experienced verbal violence. Those affected by sexual violence used formal channels of reporting less often than those who experienced physical violence.

3.5 Perceived importance of the issue of workplace violence

While 91% of respondents considered the issue of protecting staff from violent attacks to be (rather) important, those at higher levels of the staff hierarchy tended to place less importance on the issue (direct supervisors (63%), heads of division (53%), heads of institution (47%)). Among employees who have personally experienced violence, this discrepancy is even greater. This suggests that employees who have experienced violence generally felt themselves not to have received adequate support from their superiors.

3.6 Preventive measures

In the two surveys, the heads of institutions and the staff were asked for their opinions of the prevention measures currently in place in their institutions. They were asked about their institution’s current application of the prevention measures as well as the costs and benefits of each prevention measure.

The measures were compared in terms of their cost-benefit ratio from the perspective of the institutions and staff, based on the difference between their costs and benefits as evaluated by the survey respondents. For individual measures, the numerical result of this calculation ranged from highly negative to highly positive.

For the purpose of these results, the measures were grouped into the overarching categories of structural/technical, organisational and personnel-related.

Within the category of *structural/technical prevention measures*, the surveys showed that alarm systems are most widespread. They are used in five of the eight surveyed sectors. In the correctional system, they are used almost without exception (93%), and they are also used very frequently in the justice system (83%) and the labour and social services administration (79%). Work mobile phones are used in seven of the eight sectors surveyed, but by a limited number of employees, ranging from 6% (Bürgeramt) to 49% (fire brigades and rescue services). The correctional system is the sector in which structural and technical measures are most widely used. Along with the aforementioned alarm systems, irritant spray devices (90%), batons (77%), protective vests (72%) and secure entry systems (57%) are also widely used. These measures are a response to the specific situation of the correctional system, where a high level of potential for conflict can generally be expected. However, the controlled environment of a correctional facility – unlike, for example, work performed on location – makes it possible to install structural measures and technical systems. Among the structural and technical measures, those which survey respondents across all sectors found to have the best cost-benefit ratio were alarm systems as well as emergency exits and open doors and escape routes. The measure that was evaluated least positively – albeit still positively – was the use of batons, presumably because they can contribute to escalation.

The respondents' evaluation of *organisational measures* showed clearly that cooperation with the police (89%) was the most widespread of any prevention measure in this category in one employment sector – in this case, court bailiffs. Risk assessments are conducted in seven of the eight sectors surveyed; the percentage of staff using them ranges from 23% (fire brigades and rescue services) to 56% (labour and social services administration). One remarkable finding is that risk assessments are not used very much even though public institutions are legally required to conduct them and implement their results. Staff and heads of institutions also rated their relative costs and benefits less positively than those of other measures. The policies of banning specific individuals from the premises (ranging from 55% of Bürgerämter to 86% of labour and social services administration) and getting backup from colleagues in serious cases (between 53% and 62% in labour and social services administration, the correctional system, Ordnungsämter and Bürgerämter) are widespread. Banning individuals from the premises was the measure for which the survey of institutions and the survey of staff differed most greatly in respondents' assessment of the relative costs and benefits. While the institutions evaluated this measure very positively, the staff evaluated it only as mildly positive (Ordnungsamt and Bürgeramt) to positive (labour and social services administration and the justice system). The involvement of colleagues and a risk-conscious office furnishing have received the best ratings across all measures: The cost-benefit ratio is clearly positive for both heads of institutions and employees in all areas of employment surveyed.

Among the *personnel-related* measures, de-escalation and communication training are most widespread. They are used in all surveyed sectors, ranging from 29% of Bürgerämter to 78% of labour and social services administration. In comparison to how widespread such measures are and how frequently they are recommended in various guidelines, de-escalation and communication training received relatively poor (albeit still positive) ratings. It is notable that in almost all sectors, the institutions rated the benefits of this measure more positively relative to its costs than the employees did. However, the evaluation of the trainings is certainly related to their specific design, for which no more precise statements are possible in the context of this comparative overview study. Self-protection training is also quite a widespread measure (ranging from 16% to 72% in seven different sectors). Overall, the benefit of this measure was rated more positively relative to its costs than for de-escalation/communication training.

In summary, two overarching points are evident: *First*, the prevalence of the individual prevention measures varies greatly. As different as the working contexts are in different areas of public service employment, so too is the spread of different preventive measures. *Second*, *all* of the prevention measures presented here – all of which are recommended in various guidelines – were positively evaluated to the extent that they are already being used. Overall, therefore, the benefits of the measures are estimated to be higher than the costs for their implementation.

3.7 Follow-up care measures

To support victims of violence and mitigate the impacts of attacks, it is important to begin the process of follow-up care as quickly as possible after an incident. Employees who were victims or witnesses of violence during the survey period (n=4,929) rate 37 percent of the

support provided by their authority/service as (very) bad and a further 37 percent as ambivalent; only 28 percent gave a (very) good rating. While staff of the labour and social services administration rated the follow-up care they received ambivalently on average, for all other sectors the ratings were mildly negative on average. Staff of the education sector and the justice system felt themselves to be particularly poorly supported by their institutions. The more severe the violence was that employees experienced, the more negatively they rated the support.

Management and employees were asked about the existence and use of aftercare measures in their authorities. In most sectors, staff members who suffered an attack were offered *support in the further procedure* – for example, with filing charges. Such support is most prevalent in the labour and social services administration (federal- and state-level) (88% of institutions). Across the different sectors, many people affected by violence make use of support services.

The *care of collegial emergency responders* is already very widespread in law enforcement (86 percent of the authorities). Similarly, 70% of job centres (joint federal-local institutions) stated that they have employees who provide immediate follow-up care to colleagues, as did roughly half of respondents from fire brigades and rescue services. Municipalities provide this form of support at a much lower rate, 17%. This measure appears to be well received wherever it is offered.

Debriefing after violent attacks is carried out both in the labour and social administration (federal/state) as well as in law enforcement and fire brigades and rescue services (70%). This measure is offered by more than half the responding institutions in the justice system and job centres (joint federal-local institutions).

Professional psychological care for staff affected by violence is offered most frequently by institutions in the labour and social services administration (79%) and the correctional system (60%). Likewise, 46% of job centres and 46% of fire brigades and rescue services offer such care. Employees make use of this service considerably less often than the immediate follow-up care, as attacks do not have strong psychological impacts on all who experience them.

Designated contact persons for the issue of workplace violence are, in comparison to other measures, available only in relatively few institutions, and are most frequently available in the labour and social services administration (45%) and the higher education sector (41%).

Across the different sectors, guidelines for follow-up care after violent attacks are used only very infrequently.

4. Outlook

This study has yielded a wealth of findings that can contribute to a better understanding of violence as well as to more intensive dialogue with employees and targeted prevention and follow-up care measures.

Given the large number of unreported cases, employees should be encouraged to *report violent attacks*. An employee's decision about whether or not to report incidents appears to hinge largely on their perception of the costs and benefits doing so. It is important both to make reporting systems as simple and as easily accessible as possible and to increase the benefits to employees of reporting incidents. Supervisors should take employees' experiences of violence seriously and should offer support to those affected. Attacks should be prosecuted.

Prevention measures should always be embedded in an overall strategy and should be tailored to both the conditions of a specific institution and the specific risks of different jobs. It is, however, beneficial to learn from the experiences of other institutions. When comparing the different sectors, it is striking that many measures are already widespread in the labour and social services administration – for example, emergency exits/open doors and escape routes, alarm systems, risk-aware furnishing and design of offices, and de-escalation and communication training. At the same time, employees in this area are rarely affected by violence and felt the safest in their workplace on average. The presumption is that comprehensive prevention has contributed to this, but this cannot be conclusively established on the basis of the periods considered here. Up to now, the described measures have been used much less frequently in the Ordnungsamt and Bürgeramt. Given the high level of violence that these institutions' employees experience and especially the increase in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, it appears sensible to make greater use of prevention measures in these institutions.

Even ideal prevention measures, however, cannot prevent every violent attack on public service staff. That is why it is important for authorities to offer the best possible support to the affected employees, individually tailored *support*. In this context, reference is made, for example, to two groups of affected persons, which should be particularly taken into account: On the one hand, victims of sexual violence should be considered, and on the other those who experience workplace violence in schools. Overall, although only very few employees were victims of sexual violence during the survey period, those affected felt the worst supported by their authority and the number of unreported incidents of sexual violence is high. The study's findings also show that violence in the education sector has a particularly strong impact on the lives of those who experience it and that these employees feel comparatively poorly supported by their employers. On the whole, then, it is important to take the experiences of those affected seriously and to offer them support.