

# Clamping Down on Violence

## UNISON's Health and Safety Charter for Traffic Wardens and Parking Attendants

### Introduction

Violence at work is extracting a high toll from police traffic wardens and local authority parking attendants. Although their responsibilities and powers are different, they both work for the local community dealing with traffic crime and car congestion. And with traffic forecast to rise by 65% over the next 30 years, they will be needed more than ever.

The police service introduced traffic wardens in 1965 to deal with dangerous or illegal parking, vehicle excise infringements, and a range of other traffic offences. In 1991 the Road Traffic Act enabled local authorities to take over some parking enforcement from police forces. Local authorities employed parking attendants for the first time. The wider powers available to police traffic wardens, however, did not transfer to local authorities and in 2001 UNISON launched its "Safe Roads/Civil Streets" campaign to modernise the police traffic warden service. The campaign aims to secure new powers and functions for police traffic wardens in the context of the Government's police reform agenda.<sup>1</sup>

Since the transfer of controlled parking zone enforcement to local authorities in 1991, concerns have emerged over the way in which some authorities have administered the decriminalised parking regime. Privatisation of local authority parking control began in the 1990's. The key contractors, in 2002, are: Apcoa with 7 local authority contracts, Central Parking with 4 contracts, and Sureway with 3. National Car Parks has recently moved into the local authority parking market and has 3 contracts and a joint venture arrangement with Birmingham City Council.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, traffic wardens and parking attendants are having to pay a high price for the work they do. There is evidence that some local authorities, or more particularly the private companies they employ to undertake parking control, are exploiting drivers and attendants alike in the relentless pursuit of higher fines revenue. This can have a significant effect on the health and safety of attendants, putting them at even greater risk of violence in an already dangerous job. Police traffic wardens also face daily harassment and the very real threat of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> *Safe Roads/Civil Streets*, UNISON Stock No. 1965

<sup>2</sup> *Best Value in the Traffic Warden Service*, UNISON Stock No 1968

A report following UNISON's survey of traffic warden and parking attendant members on their experience of violence at work.

## **The Survey**

To establish the exact extent of the problem, UNISON conducted a national survey of its traffic warden and parking attendant members during mid 2001. A questionnaire was sent out to all UNISON branches with such members, with a request that they forward it on to them.

The questionnaire had 4 main sections: section 1 asked for their branch name, section 2 for their employment details, section 3 asked about any violence which they had experienced at work within the previous 12 months, and section 4 asked about their employers approach to violence at work.

800 individual replies were received covering 88 different employers. 1370 questionnaires were sent out in total, giving a return rate of 58.4%.

Of the 800 questionnaires returned:

- 323 (40.4%) were from parking attendants, and
- 477 (59.6%) were from traffic wardens.

## **Summary of the Main Findings**

- 90% of traffic wardens and local authority parking attendants had suffered some form of violent incident at work during the previous 12 months.
- Almost 20% were attacked or threatened on at least a weekly basis.
- They had almost a 1 in 3 chance of being physically assaulted during the year.
- Almost 90% of attacks consisted of verbal abuse.
- Almost one-third of respondents had been the victim of an attack involving a vehicle, and over 10% had been attacked or threatened with an offensive weapon.
- Over 12% were injured, 7% required medical treatment, 20% reported suffering from shock, and 1% suffered a broken bone or limb.
- Over 7% had to take time off work because of an injury caused by work related violence.
- Less than a third of employers appeared to have risk assessed violence, despite the law requiring them to do so.
- 62% of respondents reported receiving training on how to deal with violence at work, but the figures suggest that for most this was a one off event with no refresher training.

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- Almost two-thirds of respondents knew of a specific mechanism for reporting violence to their employer, but many employees of the same employer gave conflicting answers. Almost one-third said their employer did not have one or that they did not know of one.
- Almost half of the respondents said their employer provided some sort of aftercare, but almost another 50% said that their employer did not provide any or they did not know of it.

## **Recommendations**

### **Employers should:**

- Carry out their legal duty to risk assess all the hazards faced by their staff, including violence, with regular reviews.
- Within the risk assessments, consider ways of preventing exposure to the risk of violence wherever possible, and ways of controlling it where prevention is not possible.
- Implement the methods of prevention and control which are identified in the risk assessments.
- Inform all wardens and attendants about the risk assessments, the findings, the methods of prevention and control, and the importance of following these.
- Due to the serious risk of violence, avoid lone working wherever possible.
- Ensure that all staff receive appropriate training followed by refresher training at appropriate intervals.
- Put in place specific reporting mechanisms and then ensure that all staff are made aware of these mechanisms and the importance of using them.
- Encourage employees to report all violent incidents, whether verbal or physical.
- Provide free and confidential aftercare so that when an employee is attacked, they receive all the support and assistance necessary to make a speedy recovery and return to work, and ensure that all staff are made aware of this provision.
- Adopt a zero tolerance approach towards violence as a deterrent, ensuring that those who attack wardens or attendants are always prosecuted.

### **The Government should:**

- Review parking control methods, to encourage its use primarily as a method of public safety and congestion control, rather than a revenue collection service.

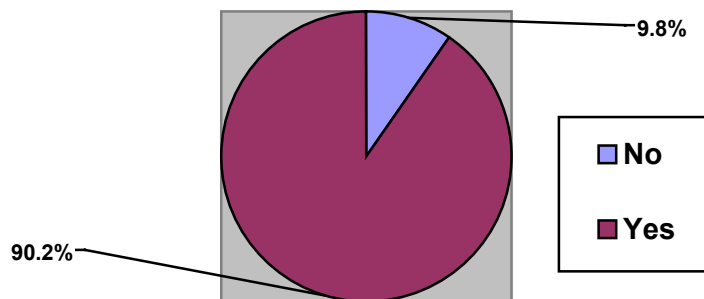
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- Establish a new offence of assaulting a public sector worker in the course of their duty, similar to that of assaulting a police officer.
- Modernise the police traffic warden service in line with UNISON's "Safe Roads/Civil Streets" Campaign.

## The Level of Violence at Work

When asked whether within the last 12 months, they had experienced any sort of verbal or physical abuse or attack at work, a total of 78 (or 9.8%) replied no, but an overwhelming 722 (90.2%) reported that they had experienced some form of violence at work.

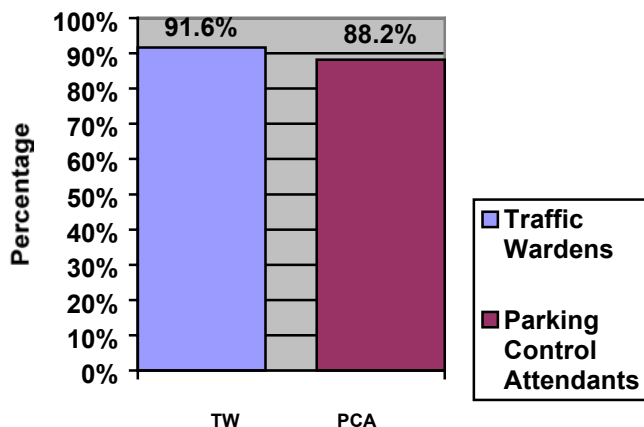
**Wardens and attendants experiencing violent incidents at work within the previous 12 months**



Breaking down those who reported being a victim of violence by type of employment:

- 91.6% of traffic wardens reported being attacked, as did
- 88.2% of parking attendants.

**Those attacked by type of employment**



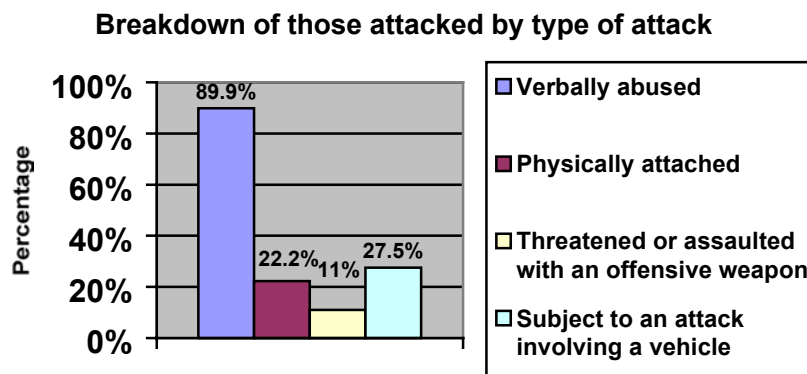
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Therefore, the likelihood of attack was no different whether the employee was a traffic warden or a parking attendant, both being very close to the average of 90.2%.

A total of 37,724 attacks over the previous 12 months were reported by those replying. Almost 20% were attacked at least on a weekly basis.

Looking at the attacks in more detail, of the 722 who were attacked:

- 719 (89.9%) were verbally abused,
- 178 (22.2%) were physically attacked,
- 89 (11%) were threatened or assaulted with offensive weapons, and
- 220 (27.5%) were subject to an attack involving a vehicle.



Most individuals who were attacked were usually attacked more than once, and sometimes in more than one manner, although possibly during one incident. Over the course of 12 months, they therefore recorded:

- 37,536 incidents of verbal abuse,
- 250 physical assaults,
- 106 threatened or actual assaults with an offensive weapon, and
- 243 attacks involving a vehicle.

There were therefore enough incidents of verbal abuse over the 12 months for every warden and attendant to experience it on a weekly basis (if they were to experience it at the same rate).

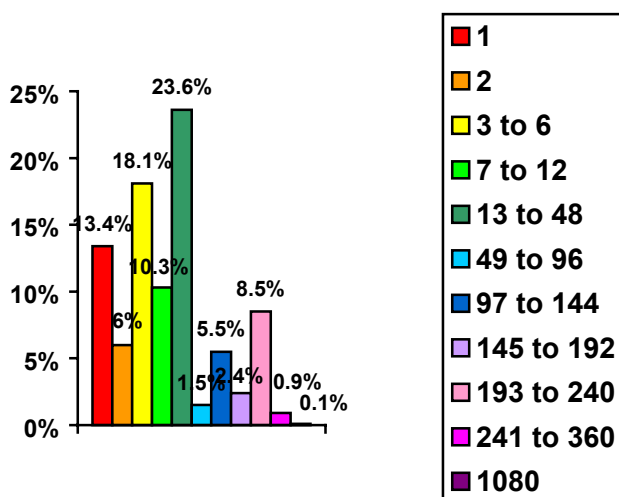
Also over the previous year, each respondent therefore had:

- almost a 1 in 3 chance of being physically assaulted,
- a 13% chance of being threatened or attacked with an offensive weapon, and
- almost a 1 in 3 chance of being threatened or attacked with a vehicle.

## Number and percentage of wardens and attendants attacked by frequency of attack

Number of Attacks Per Year	Frequency of Attacks	Respondents -	
		Number of:	Percentage of:
Once	Yearly	107	13.4%
Twice	Every 6 months	48	6%
3 - 6	Every 4 months – twice per month	145	18.1%.
7 - 12	More often than every 4 months - monthly	82	10.3%
13 – 48	More than monthly – weekly	189	23.6%
49 - 96	More than weekly – twice weekly	12	1.5%
97 - 144	More than twice weekly – 3 per week	44	5.5%
145 - 192	More than 3 – 4 per week	19	2.4%
193 - 240	More than 4 – 5 per week (approximately once every single working day)	68	8.5%
241 - 360	More than daily – 3 every 2 days	7	0.9%
1080	4 – 5 daily	1	0.1%

### The percentage of wardens and attendants attacked by frequency of attack within the previous 12 months



## The Extent of Injury Suffered

Again a similar picture is found in that some individuals were injured more than once:

- 98 (12.3%) were injured, 23 more than once giving 129 incidents of injury,
- 52 respondents (6.5%) required medical treatment on 70 separate occasions,
- 79 (9.9%) suffered from bruising,
- 21 (2.2%) reported receiving a cut or laceration,

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- 160 (20%) reported suffering shock on 201 occasions in total, and
- 7 respondents (0.9%) reported suffering a broken limb or bone.

There were various other types of injuries reported including:

- back pain injuries,
- stress and stress related injuries,
- burns and scalding,
- dislocation,
- concussion,
- muscle and ligament injuries,
- neck injuries,
- shoulder injuries,
- swollen livers,
- indecent exposure,
- lose of a tooth, and
- being spat upon.

## **Time Off Work**

58 respondents (7.3%) reported needing to take time off work due to an injury caused by violence at work. Those taking time off work amounted to 8% of those attacked.

### **Amount of time took off work following a violent incident**

<b>Time took off work</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
1 - 3 days (1 individual twice)	17
4 - 6 days	9
7 - 14 days (1 – 2 weeks)	9
15 days – 1 month	14
42 days (6 weeks)	1
2 months	1
3 months	2
4 months	2
6 months	2
12 months	2

## **Employers Approach to Violence at Work**

### **Risk Assessing Violence**

The fourth section of the survey looked at the employers approach to violence at work. One question asked whether the employer had conducted a risk assessment that considered the risk of violence at work. Employers must under the law assess the risks to their employees health and safety, take steps to prevent or control hazards, and notify the employees of the outcome of these assessments. Also, risk

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assessments must also be reviewed where there has been a significant change or there is reason to believe that they are no-longer valid.

241 (30.1%) replied that violence at work had been risk assessed. Of these:

- 45 (5.6%) said this was prior to a violent incident taking place,
- 9 (1.1%) said this was after a violent incident taking place, and
- 15 (1.9%) said that this was both before and after a violent incident.

263 respondents (32.9%) said that a risk assessment including violence at work had not taken place. 220 respondents (27.5%) didn't know, and 76 (9.5%) gave no answer.

A significant number of those who reported that a risk assessment had been carried out worked for the same employer as others who stated that one had not been carried out, or that they didn't know whether one had been conducted. This is probably explained by the failure of their employers to ensure that they notify all their wardens or attendants about the findings of the risk assessments. If employers fail to notify their workers about the risk assessments, then the workers may be less aware of the hazards that they face, and therefore at even greater risk.

### **Training on Violence at Work**

A further question on the employers approach to violence at work was concerned with the training of wardens or attendants in how to deal with the risk of violence at work.

497 respondents (62.1%) reported that they were trained on dealing with violence at work. Of these:

- 326 said that this had covered conflict resolution,
- 229 said self-defence, and
- 55 mentioned various other subjects, including 27 who loosely used the term "aggression".

However, of those trained, 241 (48.5%) did not get any refresher training and 82 (16.5%) didn't know if they would or not. At best, it may be assumed that these 82 were newly trained and so had not yet required refresher training. However, it is possible that these 82 respondents had been trained some time ago and were due refresher training, but had not received any. If this is the case, this would mean that a total of 65% of those trained did not get refresher training.

155 or almost one-third of those trained reported that they did get refresher training. If it is presumed that those who had said that they didn't know whether they got refresher training will in due course receive it, then at most only 47.7% or under half of those trained get refresher training.

19 (3.8%) of those who said that they received training, did not answer the question about refresher training.

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Only one individual specifically mentioned being trained on lone working. This is extremely worrying because: traffic wardens and parking attendants are clearly subject to high levels of violence at work, they usually or often work alone, and lone working is known to increase the risk of violence at work (in what is in this case, an already extremely hazardous job).

### **Specific Mechanisms for Reporting Violence to Employers**

When asked whether there was a specific mechanism for reporting violence to their employer:

- 510 respondents (63.8%) said that there was,
- 141 (17.6%) said there employer did not have one, and
- 111 (13.9%) did not know, but 97 of these had been attacked within the last 12 months.

Of course for the 97 (or 12.1% of respondents) who were attacked but did not know of a specific reporting mechanism, their employer effectively did not have one and it is therefore questionable whether their employer knew about the attacks. Indeed, if wardens or attendants are unaware or not informed of any specific reporting mechanism then the employer may as well not have one. With almost one-third (31.5%) of respondents (those who answered "no" or "don't know") in effect not having a reporting mechanism, there clearly is a major problem.

For 58 different employers where employees had said that there was a specific mechanism for reporting violent incidents, other wardens or attendants they employed said either that there was no such mechanism or that they did not know if there was one or not.

Clearly these figures are of major concern in an occupation where violence at work is so prevalent. In such a high risk job there should be clearly identified and specific reporting mechanisms for violent incidents at work so that individual attacks and any trends can be identified and dealt with. However, such mechanisms are worthless unless they are clearly made known to employees before they suffer a violent incident. There is a clear lack of communication in that employees of the same company often gave different answers to the question of whether a separate specific report mechanism existed or not.

### **Violence at Work and Aftercare**

The last question on the survey asked whether the employer provided any sort of aftercare for violent incidents at work.

- 388 respondents (48.5%) said that there was some form of aftercare provision,
- 150 (18.8%) said that there was not, and
- 230 (28.8%) did not know.

However, again some of the wardens or attendants answers in relation to the same employers were conflicting. 68 employers had employees who gave conflicting

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answers with some stating that aftercare was provided, whilst others either reported that there was no aftercare or that they did not know of any.

Clearly, in an occupation subject to so much violence, it is of grave concern when 47.6% of the sample (380) said that their employer did not have aftercare or that at least they did not know of it. Aftercare clearly needs to be provided and just as importantly once it is provided, there needs to be clear communication of the provision to those who may be at risk and before they become victims. If employees are unaware of its provision, they will not use it, which means in effect, it is not provided.

## **Conclusion**

Working as a traffic warden or local authority parking attendant is clearly a hazardous job. The majority of these staff face an overwhelming likelihood of being the victim of workplace violence, many on a weekly basis. Although most attacks are verbal in nature, these are nevertheless very stressful. A fifth of attacks are physical assaults with the risk of more direct physical injury. Worryingly, almost one-third of attacks involve a vehicle, where there is a huge potential to cause serious harm. The use or threat of offensive weapons is thankfully lower, but at just over 10%, is still worryingly high.

Fortunately, the rate of injury was not as high as the level of attacks might have suggested. But still, just over 12% of respondents were injured, with 7% requiring medical treatment. 20% reported suffering from shock, and almost 1% suffered a broken bone or limb. The fact that these workers face this level of risk of injury is appalling. In total, just over 7% take time off work because of their injuries.

However, this relatively low rate of injury and time-off work when compared to the level of violence experienced, is in no way thanks to action taken by the employers. Under one-third reported that their employer had conducted a risk assessment, when all employers are legally obliged to do so, and this cannot be overemphasised when the levels of violence are so high.

Only 62% reported having received some training, but most appeared not to get refresher training, and only one individual specifically mentioned "lone worker" training. Refresher training is essential if the training is to remain effective, and in a job with this level of violence, all need to be trained.

Similarly, whilst almost two-thirds knew of their employers specific reporting mechanism for violence, almost 50 employers who apparently had such a mechanism, also had employees who did not know about it. In total, one-third said that either there wasn't any, or that they did not know of any mechanism, even though 97 of these had been attacked.

Almost half said their employer provided some sort of aftercare, but amongst those employers thus identified, there were other employees who said aftercare wasn't provided or that they did not know of it. In total almost 50% said that there wasn't any provided or that they did not know of it.

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So many respondents gave conflicting answers about how the same employers dealt with violence at work, that it is clear that employers need to do more to ensure that all their staff are kept accurately informed about how they are tackling the problem of violence at work, including: the risk assessments they may have carried out, the training they provide, the reporting mechanisms they have, and the aftercare they provide. Many other employers need to review their strategy or actually develop a strategy for tackling workplace violence.

UNISON wants all employers to take this hazard seriously, and be proactive in dealing with it so that our members exposure to the risk is reduced so far as possible. No one should have to go to work expecting to experience some sort of violent incident.