

Challenging Behaviour and Injury in the workplace

The Education and Healthcare sector whitepaper on mitigating injury resulting from challenging behaviour at home or in the workplace.



About

Protecting professionals from challenging behaviour injuries

BitePRO® Limited was first established in 2016, after developing its Cut-Tex® PRO fabric, offering fantastic protection from biting, scratching and pinching.

We understand the needs and challenges of professionals from the education, medical and care industries and have constantly innovated to create our protective range of clothing that offers exceptional bite protection.

BitePRO® aims to raise awareness of the problem, develop high quality and durable PPE and support the individuals who educate and care for individuals with challenging behaviour.

Introduction

BitePRO® knows how misleading and misused the term 'challenging behaviour' can be. Our intention with this survey and whitepaper is to better understand challenging behaviour from the viewpoint of those who are at risk of injury from it.

We see injurious behaviour as any behaviour that results in someone causing physical harm to others and/or themselves. Our approach to this was to speak to people with first-hand experience of this behaviour globally and to get their thoughts and insight.

Throughout this document and the process of creating it, we use the term 'challenging behaviour' in its original sense. This is to encourage carers and professionals to find effective ways of understanding a person's behaviour and its underlying causes and to get appropriate personalised support.

Challenging behaviour can include tantrums, biting, hitting or kicking other people, throwing things or self-harming. Behaviour that challenges can be very distressing for the individual and those around them.

Family members, educators, carers, medical professionals and a huge range of support staff witness challenging behaviour regularly, yet it is something that the general public seems largely unaware of. With this document, we aim to raise awareness of challenging behaviour injuries in the workplace and provide a resource for those at risk



Rachel Riding
Head of Sales BitePRO®

Challenging behaviour and injury

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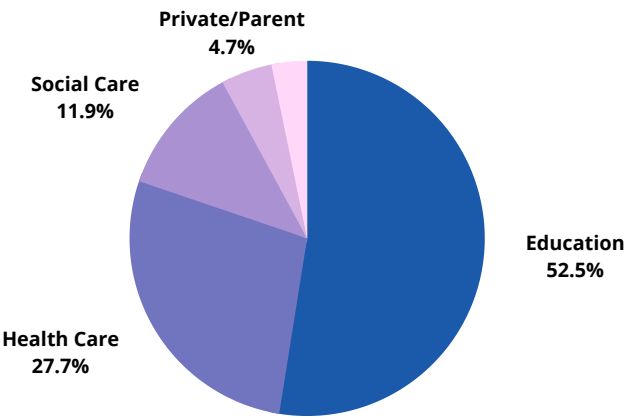
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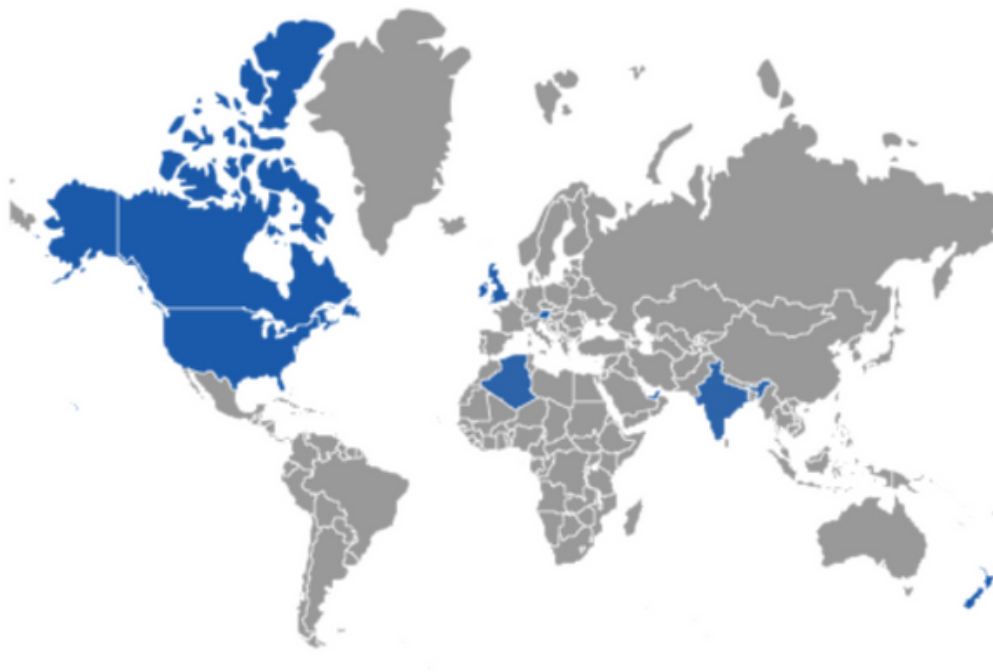
Our goal when conducting this survey was to gain insight into the experiences of as many people as possible from different countries, industries, and backgrounds. We wanted the big picture view of challenging behaviour injuries to see if there were shared experiences or if the results would be locally influenced.

To everyone that participated, we would like to say a huge thank you. We appreciate your participation and your very honest insight and feedback.

Industry sectors. The survey was completed by professionals, including representatives from public and private organisations. The majority of the respondents were from within the Education sector. Just under half held positions as teachers or classroom assistants in schools with Health, Social and Private care making up approximately 44% of respondents.



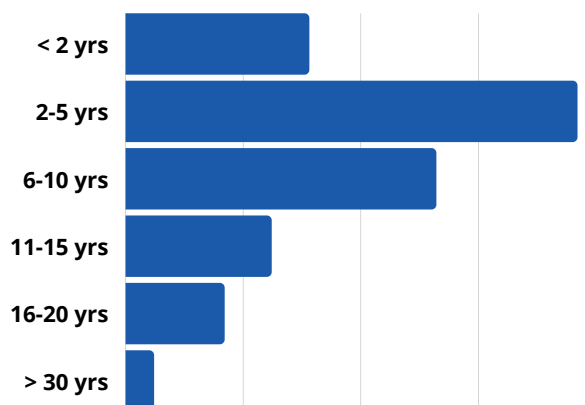
Countries of origin. The 2021 Survey was far-reaching with responses from across the globe. Approximately 40% of respondents were based in the US and UK respectively with the remaining 20% of respondents from countries such as New Zealand, India, and beyond.



Job Titles. When asked about their profession, the answers provided by respondents highlighted the broad range of individuals who had knowledge of or had first-hand experience of challenging behaviour and had themselves dealt with injury resulting from dealing with individuals with challenging behaviour.

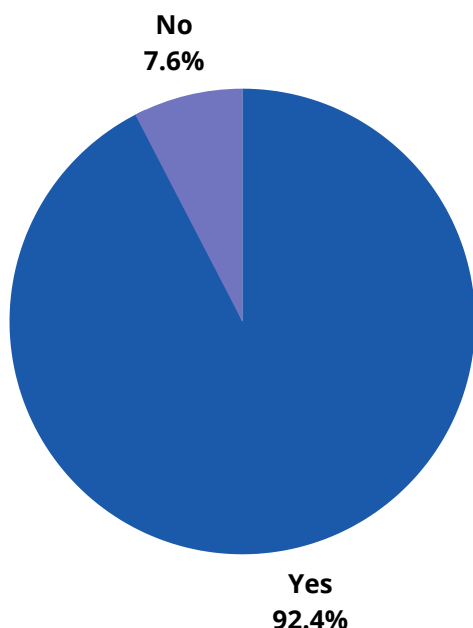


Experience in the field. With over two thousand years worth of experience, respondents to the 2021 BitePRO Survey had approximately 8 years of experience in their current role. The majority had served between 2 and 10 years.



Challenging behaviour in 2021

2021 was difficult for most people, including people with challenging behaviour. Normal activities, routine and support structure were impacted, and this may have caused an increase in challenging behaviour. Living with challenging behaviour can be a stressful and exhausting time. Everyday activities, such as going to school or to the park, can become more complicated.



Public perception. Over 90% of survey respondents felt that the general public does not fully appreciate that injury from behaviour that challenges is a genuine risk. Conditions such as Autism, a complex, lifelong developmental disability are often perceived incorrectly because of popular culture. Generally, it is felt that there is a lack of education with regards to triggers, behaviours, and associated risks linked to similar conditions.

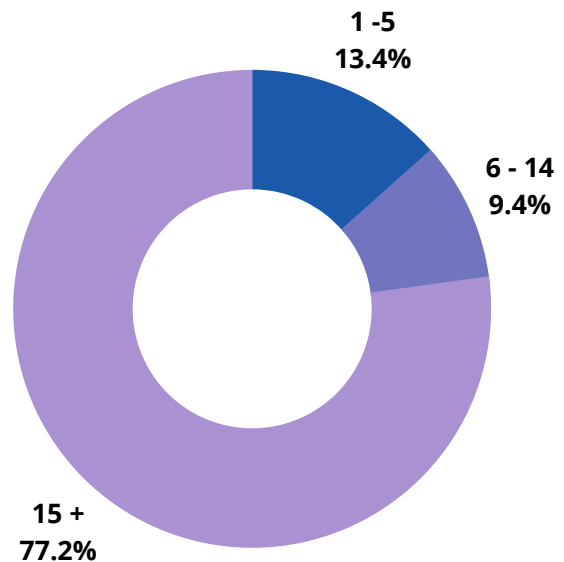
Those who experience challenging behaviour. 95% of respondents have experience in dealing with behaviours that challenge. The survey recorded most topographies of physical aggression (biting, pinching, scratching, hitting/punching, kicking, hair pulling, shoving), spitting, and pica, as well as non-physical aggression such as non-cooperation, misuse of property, self-abuse, elopement, disruptive behaviour, and destruction and misuse of property.



Number of occurrences for an individual in the last year.

The survey asked respondents to record the number of times they had experienced behaviour that challenges. The majority reported fifteen or more incidents, many dealing with these behaviours on a daily basis throughout their entire career.

Our initial survey underestimated the frequency of these behaviours with many professionals dealing with incidents from single individuals multiple times a day.



Challenging Behaviour as a form of Communication. There was an overwhelming response when the survey asked if biting and/or challenging behaviour could be a form of communication. The majority of respondents agreed that these behaviours were in direct response to sensory needs, frustration, and overstimulation. Particularly when the individual in question was non-verbal.

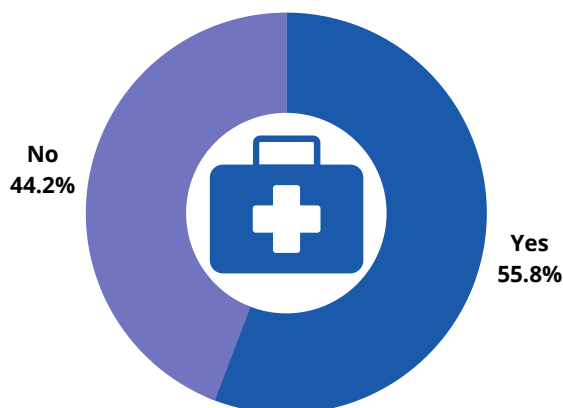
However, one specific behaviour does not determine function, for example, biting could communicate any number of wants/needs.

Injury in the workplace the facts

It is generally accepted that every company employing staff is responsible for their health and safety while they are on the job. Risks of injury and severity vary drastically depending on the role, industry, and location. Work-related injuries, accidents, and illnesses cost the UK over 40 million working days every year.

The UK Human health and social work industry reported 82,000 nonfatal injuries in 2021, more than other industries with similar work activities. 36% involved over three days absence and 30% over seven days absence. Around 1.9% of workers in this sector suffered from a reportable injury. How many of these injuries weren't reported to the government?

Source: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/industry/health.pdf>

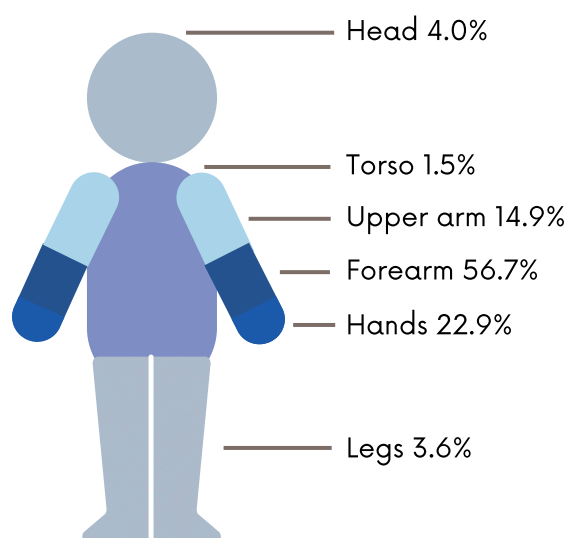


Injuries that required medical attention. 55% of respondents had been injured as a direct result of dealing with behaviour that challenges. These injuries included but were not limited to bruising, broken skin, tendon damage, cuts, infection, fractures, and concussion. Many incidents lead to tetanus shots, stitches, X-Ray, CT scans, and physiotherapy.

Where on the body injuries occur.

Over 70% of respondents have received injuries to their upper and lower arms. The survey also reported many injuries being sustained to the faces, neck, breasts, feet, shoulders, and groin.

% where injuries from biting, scratching or pinching occur



Self injury & injuries to others.

In the UK one of the most commonly used definitions of challenging behaviour is;

'Behaviour can be described as challenging when it is of such an intensity, frequency, or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others and it is likely to lead to responses that are restrictive, aversive or result in exclusion.'

Source: Royal College of Psychiatrists, British Psychological Society, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, (2007), Challenging behaviour – a unified approach



Psychological distress. 68% of respondents felt that the risks associated with dealing with challenging behavior can cause psychological distress. Despite safe practices and training, incidences not only take a physical toll but can have a toll on mental health, leading to anxiety and depression. There were respondents that felt that this was normal or 'part of the job'

Time off work. Were incidents have led to injury the survey recorded 32% led to time off work. Ranging from check-ups with GP's, to hospitalisation. Although the survey did not record the length of time off, it concluded that time off was in multiple days, weeks, and some incidents that led to long-term absence. Where counseling was required, this would also require time away from work over a prolonged period of time.



Many different types of challenging behaviour are effective ways for a person with a learning disability to control what is going on around them (or a means to display that their needs are not being met). There is no single cause for challenging behaviour, but environment, relationships, discomfort and frustration are all common reasons. People with a disability are more likely to show challenging behaviour in order to express themselves.

Sensory feedback. Many individuals will have an unmet sensory need which will result in them demonstrating challenging behaviour. However, this is not seen as positive sensory behaviour, and that the sensory feedback from biting is not the maintaining consequence for these behaviors either. It is based on the individual, for example, for some people, those behaviors might be automatic. Some individuals might engage in the behaviors in order to get the sensory feedback of being blocked or restrained. For others, there might not be a sensory component at all.



Child's bite mark on Mothers arm, Getty Images

Biting and /or challenging behaviour which causes injury often occurs when someone is in a heightened state/crisis. As triggers for this behaviour can be different not only by each individual, there can be multiple triggers that lead to biting with one individual and therefore some unpredictability is expected. However as highlighted earlier, some individuals learn to bite to satisfy a sensory need, meeting that need often reduces the incidences of biting.

Mitigating injury in the workplace

Although workplace health and safety is already a focus at many organisations, there is always plenty of room for improvement.

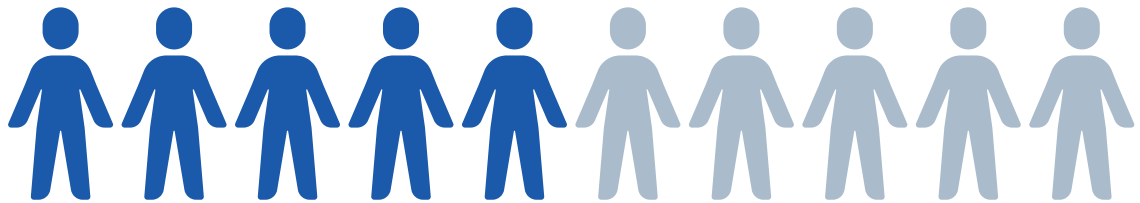
Considering the number of workplace injuries that occur every year, in the US there were 2.7 million nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in 2020, down from 2.8 million in 2019.

Employers have a duty of care to understand the risks faced by their workforce and to then provide training, equipment, and guidance that mitigate those risks. Regulations also exist to ensure that equipment and any associated training are suitable for its intended purpose.

(PUWER 1998)

Sadly there is no blueprint for mitigating the risk of injury from challenging behaviour, instead an personalised approach in conjunction with positive behaviour support is current best practice.

Source <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/osh.pdf>



Are you adequately protected? 45% of professionals do not feel adequately protected enabling them to effectively deal with behaviour that challenges. Although the survey did not differentiate between equipment and training, it was felt that a combination of the two would decrease the threat of incidental injury occurring. A combination of behaviour planning, risk assessment, and effective PPE would be the most effective way to mitigate injury.

Makeshift equipment. 50% of respondents to the 2021 survey had used some form of temporary or 'makeshift' protective clothing. In an attempt to mitigate injury to themselves they have used a combination but not limited to the following; extra layers, elbow/shin pads, thick fleeces, denim jackets, pillows, pool noodles, hard hats, leather gloves, and welding sleeves.



Personal protective equipment (PPE) is an all-encompassing term that includes gear worn by anyone in order for them to safely do their job or operate in a certain capacity safely to protect an individual from injury or infection. Apart from it being a legal requirement in many countries, there are a huge number of benefits in individuals wearing protective equipment, especially when working with individuals with challenging behavior:

- Reduces Injuries
- Reduces the severity of injuries if they do still occur
- Staff retention – Positive impact on morale and culture when staff are protected
- Recruitment – Your reputation within your industry includes how you value and protect your staff
- Cost-effective – Reduces days off from injured staff, legal costs, fines or health and safety investigations
- Helps your staff do their job
- Gives your staff peace of mind, reducing the worry about being injured and having to explain injuries and bruises to family and friends
- PPE designed specifically for your needs will be comfortable, effective and long-lasting
- It's the law, complying with national, federal, state, and regional laws and regulations



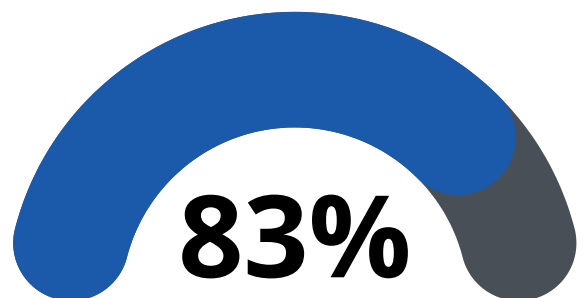
Confidence. Following carefully planned procedures and maintaining up to date training is key to reducing the incidence of challenging behaviour and mitigating injury however the correct PPE can instill confidence to be able to deal with the sometimes unpredictable nature of the role.

Reduction of incidents. The survey reported that after adopting bite-resistant clothing, the number of crisis/meltdown incidents had decreased due to the individual not receiving the same sensory feedback. However, this can be dependant on the individual, if the biting is cognitive, what the motive for biting is, etc.



Decrease in situations. We do not have enough evidence to maintain that situations decrease as a result of wearing bite-resistance clothing however respondents claimed a reduction in duration and intensity. Wearing bite-resistant clothing allows the wearer to implement physical management earlier, protecting the individual and those around them sooner.

Physical Restraint. 83% of respondents agreed that physical intervention of any type increases the risk of a bite or injury.





Summary

Being injured in the workplace is a real possibility for those who care for, educate or support individuals with challenging behaviour. In many workplaces it is a known risk yet there seems to be limited support, guidance, and literature surrounding the topic available. The purpose of this whitepaper is to acknowledge the risk and to encourage an open discussion on the experience of those who have been injured. Identifying the risk and understanding the options available to mitigate any injuries is important for employers and employees alike.

There is a common theme through all the survey responses that the whitepaper was based on, in that the unique nature of the problem and the fact that it is so heavily dependent on the behaviour of a single individual, makes this risk very difficult to manage. Only through a combination of factors such as training, PPE, risk assessment, and sharing best practices will progress be made in protecting the individuals at risk of injury from this type of behaviour.

A personalised approach is required whenever you are working with individuals with complex needs and challenging behaviour. In the case of reducing the risk of injury from challenging behaviour it is especially important to understand the needs, triggers, and environmental factors which may cause an individual to injure themselves or others. From there you may need to try several different approaches to reducing the risk of injury, especially in the case of PPE user adoption is very important and offering a range of solutions that the staff member or service user can choose from is important to ensure that they are used consistently.

The use of makeshift equipment to mitigate injuries still seems to be commonplace, as well as a view by carers in particular that being injured as just a “part of their job”. Neither should be case and we need to speak more openly about these problems to raise awareness and improve working practices.

It is very important that the workforce of the care, healthcare, and education industries are valued, empowered, and protected from the array of risks they face. These people are devoted to offering support and care to vulnerable individuals in our communities and are often underappreciated for the difficult and challenging work that they do.

The reporting of injuries from challenging behaviour appears to be increasing globally and it is not yet clear if that is due to an increase in the severity, frequency, or awareness of incidents. It is our hope that through projects like this whitepaper this issue is addressed more frequently and that those who are at risk of injury can find the help and support they need.





Contact Us

Unit 603, Avenue D, Estate,
Wetherby Leeds LS23 7FS

www.bite-pro.com

info@bite-pro.com

+44 (0) 1423 863 790

