

Fear Factor

A 2025 Employee Survey Report on Workplace Violence and Safety





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Introduction

The increasing frequency of violent incidents in the workplace has left many employees feeling uneasy about their safety. As headlines of workplace shootings, retail assaults and rising tensions dominate the news cycle, employees across industries are bringing their fears to work.

In 2024, Traliant released its first annual report, "Fear Factor: A 2024 Employee Survey Report on Workplace Violence, Harassment and Mental Health, to gain a deeper understanding of how employees experience and perceive workplace violence and safety.

The results highlighted the seriousness of this ongoing threat. While many employees report generally feeling safe at work, an increasing number are being exposed to workplace violence at alarming rates and are not fully equipped with the skills needed to navigate these challenging situations. These experiences are not merely physical; they contribute to heightened anxiety and declining mental well-being, which can lead to further disruptions or escalate into more serious situations.

Additionally, in the year since Traliant's first report, more states like New York have enacted legislation that mandates employers to establish a written workplace violence prevention plan, deliver annual training to employees, and keep detailed records of any violent incidents that occur on the job.

To understand how these state-led initiatives and evolving employer programs have impacted employees' exposure to workplace violence over the past twelve months, Traliant conducted its second annual nationwide survey of more than 1,000 U.S. employees from companies with over 100 staff members. This report delves into critical insights regarding workplace safety and year-over-year changes in employee experiences, identifies gaps in training and response, and highlights where employers need to direct their efforts to establish safer, more resilient workplaces in light of emerging threats.

The data shows that the prevalence of workplace violence appears to be increasing, as indicated by year-over-year rises in both observed and direct experiences of such incidents. In 2024, about one in four employees (25%) reported witnessing workplace violence in the past five years. By 2025, that number increased to 30%, indicating a significant rise in the visibility of violent events in professional settings.

Even more troubling is the increase in employees who reported being directly targeted by workplace violence, rising from 12% in 2024 to 15% in 2025. These escalating numbers suggest not only a growth in actual incidents but also possibly a greater awareness or willingness to report, both of which underline an urgent need for stronger preventive measures, response protocols, and organizational support systems.

While many employees report generally feeling safe at work, an increasing number are being exposed to workplace violence at alarming rates.



Key findings



Workplace violence is impacting employees in **high-risk industries, like hospitality and healthcare, at significantly higher rates** than office settings (**46% of hospitality employees** reported they witnessed workplace violence compared to the **average of 30%**).



Workplace violence prevention training is on the rise, with **75% of employees reporting** they've **received training** compared to **70% in 2024**.



Older generations are more confident in their de-escalation skills: Baby Boomers (58%) and Gen X (54%) report **higher confidence** in de-escalation than **Millennials (47%) and Gen Z (41%)**.



There is a trust gap in reporting: Only 60% feel they could report safety threats even if anonymity wasn't guaranteed.



Employees want more workplace violence prevention legislation: An overwhelming majority (**93% compared to 90% in 2024**) of respondents believe that **states outside California and New York should adopt mandatory workplace violence prevention legislation**, indicating a broad consensus on the **need for stronger protections**.

The state of workplace violence in 2025

Workplace violence is an increasingly serious concern that employers cannot afford to overlook in 2025. As noted in the introduction, the survey revealed that this problem continues to escalate, with almost 1 in 3 employees (30%) witnessing workplace violence in the past five years and 15% having been targets of these incidents themselves, compared to 25% and 12% in 2024.



In 2024, about 25% of employees reported witnessing workplace violence in the past five years. By 2025, that number increased to 30%, indicating a rise in reported incidents.

In 2024, 12% of employees reporting being targets of workplace violence. In 2025, the percentage grew to 15%, highlighting a concerning upward trend.

Defining the terms

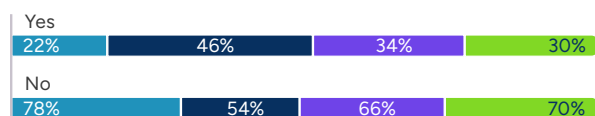
Workplace violence is defined as the use of physical force against an employee that results in or is likely to result in physical injury, trauma, or stress, or a threat to do so; or any incident involving use of a firearm or other dangerous weapon, including a threat to use a dangerous weapon.



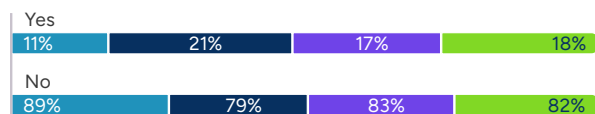
Workplace violence also varies across different sectors based on workers' level of interaction with internal or external parties. From overbooked hotel rooms to upset guests disputing charges, customer conflicts are becoming more frequent and intense in industries like hospitality and retail, leaving employees to manage them without the necessary tools.

The data shows that for some of these high-risk industries, like hospitality and healthcare, the rates of witnessing workplace violence are significantly higher than office settings.

In the last five years, have you witnessed workplace violence happening to another employee?



In the last five years, have you been the target of workplace violence?



● Office ● Hospitality (hotel, restaurant, bar setting) ● Healthcare ● Retail

This exposure reflects industry trends characterized by high stress levels, frequent customer interactions, and often limited security presence. Retail employees also face increased rates of violence from customers or strangers, including verbal abuse, threats, and physical confrontations. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, retail workers account for approximately 13% of all workplace violence incidents and a substantial 27% of all workplace homicides.

As workplace violence continues to rise, the responsibility to prevent it falls on all organizations, regardless of industry or work setting. Among the 13% of respondents who feel unsafe at work, the top contributing factors were:

- Lack of procedures and training (41%)
- Toxic workplace culture (41%)
- Physical job safety hazards (41%)
- Concerns of violence (32%) and retaliation (33%)

These findings make it clear: a lack of training, clear procedures and a toxic work culture can be just as threatening to employees as physical hazards.

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So, how can employers take meaningful steps to make employees feel safer? Implementing workplace violence prevention training is critical for fostering a safe and respectful workplace culture. This training raises awareness of the various forms of workplace violence, how to respond appropriately and effectively when situations escalate, and empowers employees to report concerns.

De-escalation training is another form of training that employers can leverage to empower employees to handle high-pressure, challenging situations with professionalism, empathy and care. Equipping employees with the skills to handle tense situations helps them feel more supported in their roles, leading to lower rates of burnout, fewer mistakes, and reduced turnover. With actionable techniques, employers can give employees the guidance they need to transform high-stress encounters into loyalty-building moments, especially in industries where service and guest experiences are top priorities.

What measures would make you feel most safe in the workplace? (Select all that apply.)



What does **de-escalation training** cover?

- Purpose and importance of de-escalation in workplace environments
- Techniques to stabilize tense situations
- Recognizing signs of an escalated individual
- Setting clear verbal and physical boundaries
- Problem-solving strategies and redirecting focus
- Steps to take when de-escalation efforts don't succeed

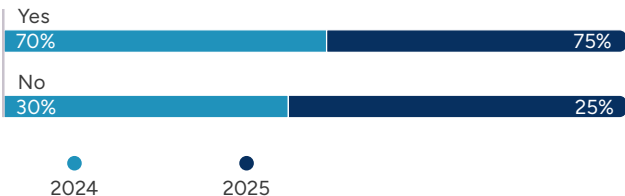


Gaps in preparedness and perception: generational and industry divides

It's no surprise that different workplace experiences exist among age groups because of varying backgrounds, cultural differences, and beliefs. However, employers are responsible for ensuring all employees can access the same resources for success.

The positive news is that workplace violence training is on the rise, with 75% of employees reporting they've received training compared to 70% in 2024.

Have you received training on workplace violence from your current employer?



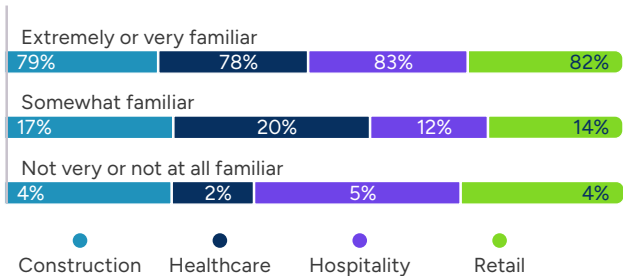
While overall training rates are improving, not all employees benefit equally — particularly younger workers in high-risk roles. Gen Z employees report significantly lower training exposure than their older peers. This gap is alarming given Gen Z's heavy representation in customer-facing roles such as retail or hospitality — sectors with heightened exposure to violence.

Additionally, there are varying degrees of confidence when it comes to de-escalation skills. Baby Boomers (58%) and Gen X (54%) report higher confidence in de-escalation than Millennials (47%) and Gen Z (41%).

This decline in confidence among younger generations may stem from limited workplace experience or fewer leadership opportunities, suggesting a need for tailored training programs that develop practical response skills for emerging workers. It also signals that receiving training alone does not equate to confidence. Employers should, therefore, prioritize training that empowers younger workers with confidence — not just compliance — by focusing on practical decision-making and real-world application.

Just as confidence differs across age groups, training and preparedness also vary significantly across industries. While 57% of all employees reported receiving formal active shooter training, only 53% of hospitality workers had received it, compared to 61% in healthcare. Similarly, familiarity with violence prevention plans is lowest in healthcare and construction, despite inherent risks in those sectors.

How familiar are you with your employer's workplace violence prevention plan?



These disparities highlight the need for industry-specific standards and more proactive employer involvement in high-risk sectors.

The role of workplace culture

The fear of workplace violence can have serious consequences, contributing to mental health challenges, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher employee turnover. When individuals feel unsafe, it becomes difficult to concentrate, stay engaged, or perform at their best.

When safety updates are clear, consistent, and transparent, employees express greater trust and confidence in their employer's ability to manage crises. This level of trust, however, hinges not just on disseminating information but on cultivating a culture where employees feel empowered to voice concerns without fear of reprisal.

A key component of this cultural foundation is promoting a "speak-up" environment. Nearly half of employees (49%) specifically identified the desire for a workplace culture that encourages open reporting of safety threats without fear of retaliation. This figure underscores a fundamental expectation: employees want to be heard — and protected — when they speak up about potentially dangerous or unethical behaviors.

What measures make employees **feel most safe** in the workplace?



Physical security measures



Safety technology



Access to emergency action plans and procedures



In-person drills



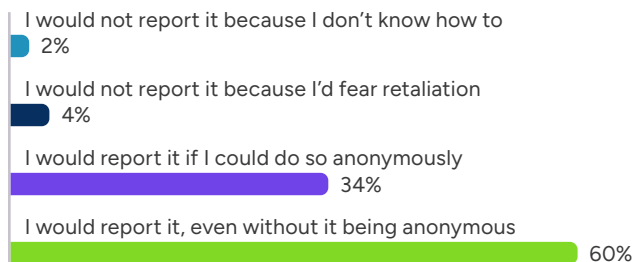
A "speak-up" culture where reporting is encouraged



Online training

However, a deeper look into the data reveals a disconnect between this sentiment and current reality. Only 60% of employees said they would feel comfortable reporting safety threats even if anonymity was not guaranteed. This means that approximately 40% of the workforce harbors significant concerns about potential repercussions.

If there was a scenario at work where you feared for your own or a coworker's safety, how likely would you be to report the issue?



Despite the common refrain, “If you see something, say something,” many employees remain silent. Without explicit encouragement, structural protections, and visible leadership modeling, the fear of retaliation or negative consequences looms large. Employees may worry about being labeled a troublemaker, facing career repercussions, or being socially ostracized for speaking up. This silence can have serious consequences — not just for individual safety, but for organizational resilience as a whole.

Reporting likelihood also varies generationally — Gen Z is more likely to fear retaliation or lack reporting mechanisms, with 12% unwilling to report concerns due to fear or uncertainty. In contrast, over 70% of Boomers and Gen X say they would report safety threats without anonymity. These trust gaps underscore a systemic breakdown in psychological safety, particularly for younger employees.

Creating a true speak-up culture requires more than suggestion boxes and policy handbooks. It demands proactive communication from leadership, mechanisms for anonymous reporting, visible accountability for those who breach safety protocols, and assurances that every concern will be taken seriously and followed up on. When these conditions are met, employees are more likely to trust the system — and each other — and take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their colleagues.

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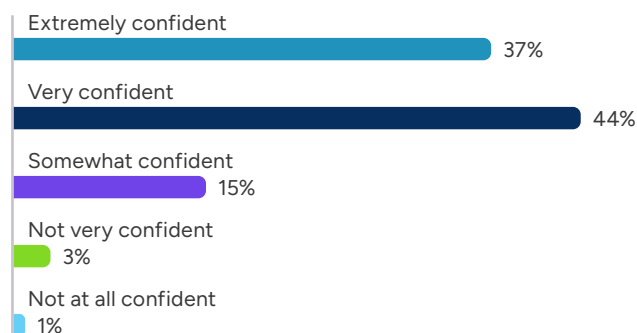
In summary, building a culture of safety begins with trust: trust that speaking up is not only safe but valued, and that employees will be supported for doing what's right.

Naturally, many employers may be surprised to hear the percentage of workers who would not come forward to report concerns. Employers must be proactive in cultivating a speak-up culture that reinforces ethical conduct and safety in the workplace. While employees are generally confident in their employer's overall approach to workplace safety, there's still work to be done. A majority of employees (89%) agree that employers need to do more to address the safety of employees in the workplace.

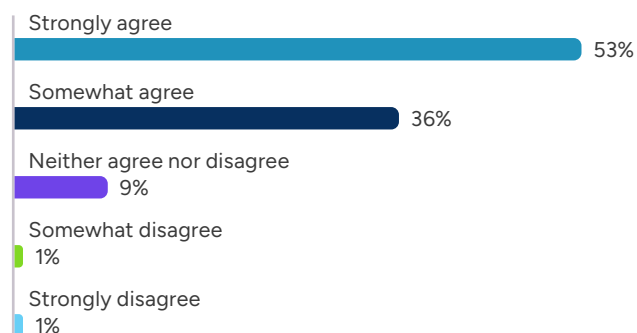
This consensus shows that workplace safety has evolved from a compliance issue to a cultural imperative. A common place for employers to start addressing this concern is focusing on cultural initiatives that promote confidence, transparency, and trust.

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How confident are you that your employer's overall approach to workplace safety meets your needs?



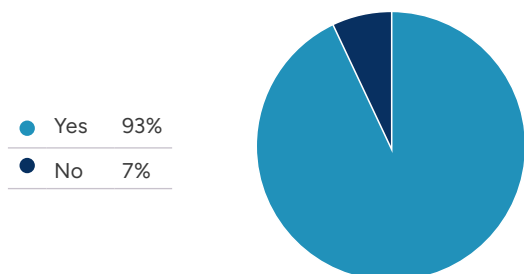
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement — Employers need to do more to address the safety of employees in the workplace?



Conclusion

Employers need to address the risk of workplace violence and show their commitment to the safety and well-being of employees. While there has been measurable year-over-year progress in workplace violence training and employee familiarity with prevention plans, the rise in reported incidents of workplace violence highlights the ongoing need for comprehensive prevention strategies and supportive workplace cultures.

California's workplace violence law and New York's Retail Worker Safety Act require state employers to adopt a comprehensive workplace violence prevention plan and properly educate employees on their protections. Do you believe other states should adopt similar policies?



Additionally, an overwhelming majority (93%) of survey respondents believe that states outside California and New York should implement mandatory workplace violence prevention legislation. The growing support for state-level legislative measures (up from 90% in 2024) further emphasizes the need for systemic approaches to ensuring employee safety.

With similar legislation being considered in other states, taking proactive steps, such as adopting California's training standards, can help reduce potential legal risks and demonstrate a strong commitment to employee safety. This proactive strategy prepares companies to meet future regulatory requirements and conveys to employees that their well-being and protection from workplace violence are top priorities.

While widespread support for state-level legislation shows a desire for systemic change, the survey data points out specific issues that need targeted attention:

- Generational training and trust gaps need to be addressed, especially as Gen Z workers join the workforce amid increased risks and limited preparedness.
- Industry-specific risk profiles highlight the urgent need for customized policies, particularly in the healthcare, retail, and hospitality sectors, which bear the heaviest burden yet receive the least support.
- Cultural and communicative improvements are as significant as physical security measures. Investing in transparency, employee voice, and inclusive leadership is crucial for ensuring genuine safety.

The rise in reported incidents of workplace violence highlights the ongoing need for comprehensive prevention strategies and supportive workplace cultures.

To truly move the needle on workplace safety, employers must go beyond regulatory checkboxes and compliance-driven approaches. The real progress lies in championing a culture of safety that prioritizes proactive measures over reactive responses, and where safety is embedded in the organization's values, behaviors, and leadership.

Creating this requires giving employees more than just training modules or policy manuals. It involves providing them with practical tools and real-world strategies to recognize early warning signs of violence, de-escalate tense situations, and access timely support without fearing retaliation. It also includes regular scenario-based training, clear communication protocols, and open-door policies that promote psychological safety. When employees feel seen, heard, and protected, they are more likely to engage, report, and help create a safer environment for everyone.

This is a crucial moment for HR leaders to lead with strategies at the crossroads of safety, mental well-being, and workplace culture. This sometimes requires a new style of leadership that better connects policy, practice, and people, since HR must serve as the bridge between compliance requirements and employees' lived experiences. This includes customizing training for different generational needs, working with department leaders to reinforce behavioral expectations, and developing metrics to assess safety culture over time. HR professionals are uniquely positioned to set the tone, hold teams accountable, and promote systemic change.

For legislators, the report's findings highlight the need for stronger, more comprehensive workplace violence prevention laws. While states like California and New York have made significant progress, increasing national support underscores a widespread demand for broader action. Legislation should require written plans and training and establish standards for reporting systems, response times, and protections for whistleblowers.

For advocates, the data in this report highlights the urgent need to protect every worker — regardless of their age, job title, industry, or role — from the increasing threat of workplace violence. Advocacy groups play a vital role in amplifying the voices of vulnerable and frontline workers, emphasizing industry-specific risks, and pushing for employer transparency and government action.

Ultimately, cultivating a safe workplace is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing commitment. It's about creating environments where every individual feels physically, emotionally, and psychologically respected, supported, and secure. When safety becomes a shared value rather than an afterthought, organizations are not only more resilient but also more ethical, inclusive, and productive.

At the center of all these efforts is training — practical, relevant and ongoing education that empowers employees to recognize risks, respond confidently, and help create a workplace where safety and respect are non-negotiable.

Methodology

The independent market research firm Researchscape conducted this online survey. Respondents were 1,009 US employed adults working in hospitality, healthcare, retail, industrial/manufacturing, office/professional settings and in other industries with 100+ employees. The survey was conducted in June 2025.



About Traliant

Traliant is a leader in compliance solutions, dedicated to making workplaces better for everyone. With unparalleled in-house legal expertise, Traliant delivers engaging training, a flexible platform and practical tools that not only help organizations build a stronger culture but also support their everyday compliance needs.

Trusted by more than 14,000 organizations worldwide, Traliant delivers a continuously compliant library of 50+ essential courses, such as [sexual harassment training](#), [workplace violence prevention](#), [employment law fundamentals](#) and [code of conduct](#), kept current by its team of in-house legal experts to reflect the latest laws and regulations. Known for bringing innovation to workplace learning, Traliant delivers innovative solutions, including Netflix-style training series, TikTok-style microlearnings, and podcast discussions, as well as bespoke course creation, policy and handbook reviews and phishing simulations in one scalable platform.

Recognized on Inc.'s 5000 Fastest-Growing Private Companies list for five consecutive years and backed by PSG, a leading growth equity firm, Traliant is consistently honored for its award-winning products and workplace culture. Learn more at www.traliant.com and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).