Prioritizing Home Visitor Safety

Strategies to Support the Home Visiting Workforce

Research-to-Practice Brief | November 2025

Introduction

Home visitor safety is a complex issue that encompasses real or perceived threats of physical violence and experiences that may threaten psychological and emotional safety in the workplace.[i] Because home visitors enter the homes and communities of the families they serve, they typically lack control over their work environment. Individual home visitors may experience different levels of comfort—and perceptions of risk based on their own characteristics and life experiences. Home visiting programs play an important role in ensuring safety for home visitors. Research suggests that safety concerns are associated with lower job satisfaction, retention, well-being, and organizational commitment.[ii,iii,iv,v]

About This Brief

This brief discusses the potential effects of home visitors feeling unsafe at work and the strategies program leaders can use to create a culture of safety. It is primarily based upon a scan of existing literature and resources conducted by the Institute for Home Visiting Workforce Development (Workforce Institute). It also incorporates voices from the home visiting field gathered through Workforce Institute engagement activities.

This brief describes how home visiting programs can support and retain their workforce by prioritizing home visitor safety. It aims to—

- Describe why it is important to consider home visitor safety and the potential detrimental impacts that a lack of safety can have on home visitors and programs
- Share concrete strategies that home visiting programs can implement to foster home visitor safety

This brief can help leaders of local home visiting programs support and strengthen their workforce by implementing staff safety strategies. Opportunities for state leaders, network leaders, model developers, and researchers to facilitate and promote home visitor safety are also shared.

Importance

Safety is often a concern for the home visiting workforce. At the national level, almost half of Early Head Start home visitors reported feeling threats to their personal safety at least some of the time during home visits.[vi] Data collected from Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)-funded programs in three states also reveal safety concerns. In Illinois, for example, many members of the MIECHV workforce expressed high levels of concern about their personal safety.[vii] Home visitors in California partially attributed their safety concerns to time spent working in isolated areas, lack of safety protocols, and limited training on safety.[viii] Home visitors in Florida noted the stress of conducting home visits in environments they perceived to be unsafe.[ix]

Feeling unsafe at work may lead to lower job satisfaction and retention among home visitors; it may also weaken family engagement. Research suggests that perceived lack of safety while conducting home visits is associated with lower job satisfaction among home visitors.[x] The perception that employers are not committed to home visitor safety has also been recognized as a predictor of home visitors resigning from their jobs.[xi,xii] Home visitors who don't feel safe at work also tend to form weaker relationships with families than those who feel safe. Their diminished bond can negatively impact family engagement and retention.[xiii]

> *"I believe home visitor safety can often be seen as an afterthought."*
> *—Home visiting program leader*

Safety concerns at work negatively affect home visitor well-being. The demands of being a home visitor—combined with other factors such as safety concerns—may have a negative impact on morale and occupational well-being over time.[xiv] Research in home visiting and child welfare suggests that concerns about personal safety can result in increased levels of anxiety, fear, stress, hypervigilance, and depression. Over time, this constant exposure to traumatic events may lead to workplace burnout[xv] and compassion fatigue[xvi] (see sidebar).[xvii,xviii]

Organizational commitment may also be impacted by safety concerns, although adequate resources and support may buffer the negative effects. Kim and Hopkins (2015) found that frequent exposure to unsafe working environments contributed to lower levels of organizational commitment. The quality of the relationship between workers and program leadership, however, acted to buffer the effects. This finding is important because reduced organizational commitment can influence turnover, burnout, and the quality of services provided to families.[xix]

Key Terms

Workplace burnout is ongoing emotional and physical exhaustion due to unmanaged workplace stressors.

Compassion fatigue is ongoing emotional and physical exhaustion from working in an intense caregiving environment.

Organizational commitment is the level of engagement and dedication employees feel toward their individual jobs and the organization.

Voices From the Field: Workforce Engagement

While home visitors experience unsafe situations in the workplace, it is not a challenge they report facing on a daily basis. When we asked over 200 home visitors, only 7 percent endorsed feeling unsafe at work and in communities where home visits take place as one of their biggest daily challenges.

However, given the fundamental importance of safety, the home visiting workforce would like more professional development on safety. During field engagement activities with home visitors, supervisors, program leaders and others, home visitor safety was a frequently reported professional development need.

Program Strategies

Although home visitor safety can be improved across all levels of the home visiting system, research emphasizes the importance of program-level resources and support.[xx, xxi] One key priority for program leaders is creating a workplace environment that validates and responds to home visitors' concerns.[xxii,xxiii,xxiv] Concrete strategies that programs can implement to promote home visitor safety are presented across four key categories: policies, practices, resources, and supports.

Policies

Programs should have clear safety policies and procedures co-created by home visitors and program leaders to ensure they are relevant and actionable. Suggested strategies include—

- **Offering home visit flexibility** to allow home visitors with safety concerns to meet caregivers outside of the home (e.g., library, school, location of the local home visiting program), conduct home visits in pairs, or cancel visits without workplace repercussions. Program leaders may need to work with models and funders to establish these policies.[xxv,xxvi]
- **Monitoring community alerts** for weather, police activity, and other critical events. Encourage home visitors to subscribe to the alerts and set up a group text for program leaders to communicate with them while they are in the field.[xxvii,xxviii]
- **Implementing a reporting system** that encourages home visitors to document safety concerns. Establish practices for notifying supervisors and leadership and ensure that all staff receive training on the system.[xxix] Review reported incidents with home visitors to discuss if safety practices were followed and how those practices could be improved. Lessons learned can be used to update policies and practices and should be shared with the full team.
- **Establishing a safety committee** that includes participants from all levels of the organization, community leaders, and members of law enforcement. Committee members should provide input on policies and practices, review safety incidents to suggest needed changes, and raise awareness of community-level safety concerns that may impact home visitors in the field.[xxx]

Practices

Program leaders should implement safety practices that guide the work of home visitors and require comprehensive training. Other practice-focused strategies include—

- **Maintaining updated information** on home visitors' personal information and home visit schedule. Keep updated records of emergency contacts, make/model of home visitors' cars, and license plate numbers.[xxxi] Document the names, addresses, and phone numbers of participants on home visitors' caseloads and the dates and times of home visits. Require home visitors to notify supervisors of schedule changes.[xxxii,xxxiii,xxxiv]
- **Discussing safety regularly** during staff meetings and reflective supervision sessions. These conversations provide an opportunity for peers and supervisors to review emergency protocols and to provide support related to staff safety concerns.[xxxv]
- **Reviewing intake information** to identify possible safety concerns, such as a history of domestic violence or substance use. If safety concerns are present, hold a team meeting that includes program staff (e.g., home visitor, supervisor, program manager) and staff from other organizations involved with the family to develop a plan to work with the family safely.[xxxvi,xxxvii]
- **Partnering with law enforcement or other agencies** that can provide information and/or training on situational awareness, self-defense, and other safety topics.[xxxviii]

Resources

It is imperative that program leaders give home visitors the tools and resources they need to keep themselves safe while conducting home visits. Resource-focused strategies include—

- **Implementing a safety word** that home visitors can use when texting or calling the program to indicate a threat or emergency.[xxxix,xl]
- **Providing tangible resources** to home visitors such as whistles, cell phones, agency-issued cars, emergency kits, emergency phone numbers, and name tags or badges. Proper identification distinguishes home visitors as professionals and may alleviate uncertainty among people in the home and the community.[xli,xlii]

Voices From the Field: Home Visitor Safety Training

As a program manager for Healthy Families Livingston, a program housed at LACASA, Holly Naylor delivers safety training to home visitors and other professionals working in families' homes. Designed to take a proactive approach, the training presents attendees with customized scenarios and a set of discussion questions to help them process their response.

Holly first developed the training with former colleague, Kayla Grant, after a local program requested a safety training specific to home visitors. The two discovered that they were unable to find such a program, and that most home visitors relied on a patchwork of safety checklists, online modules, and some model training/discussions of past safety concerns during reflective supervision. As such, Holly and Kayla set out to create a comprehensive and accessible home visitor safety training.

The newly developed training encourages participants to reflect on how their personal and professional experiences may impact their perceptions of—and reactions to—situations encountered during home visits. Specifically, Holly creates small group discussions for attendees, "to recognize whether something is unsafe or whether it's uncomfortable for them, because that's not their normal." The training also addresses feelings of guilt that helping professionals may experience when deciding to prioritize their safety.

To date, Holly has delivered the training to local community partners and at state conferences. She continues to refine the curriculum after each training, customizing group discussion scenarios using relevant examples, and hopes to broaden the scope of organizations reached. She notes the importance of program leaders in elevating the training's impact to affect the organization's culture of safety. Staff, she says, need to hear program leadership state that, "Your safety is our greatest priority."

Supports

Program leaders should offer home visitors the opportunity to process incidents where they felt they were at risk. Strategies to promote support include—

- Conducting individual reflective supervision and group sessions with other home visitors.[xliii]
- Encouraging home visitors to seek out peer support.

- Offering employer-provided counseling, covering mental health services through health insurance benefits, or encouraging home visitors to access Employee Assistance Program benefits.
- Encouraging home visitors to seek mental health services.[xliv]

Considerations

When adopting a strategy to promote home visitor safety, there are important considerations for planning, implementing, and evaluating the strategy. For example, if planning a training like the one described earlier—

- Talk to home visitors about the topics they consider most important. This may include policies, practices, concrete and tangible resources, or emotional support.
- Get staff ideas about scenarios to include in the trainings.
- Get feedback from home visitors about what types of support would increase their confidence in making decisions about their own safety in visits.

While implementing a training on safety—

- Offer home visitors continued opportunities to reflect on safety concerns they have encountered, how their personal characteristics and experiences impact their perceptions of safety, and the implications of safety concerns on their well-being and work with families. Opportunities for reflection can be individual and within the group of home visitors.
- Solicit feedback about how the training can be improved and ideas for additional scenarios.
- Ask home visitors what types of ongoing support they feel would best support their safety and well-being.

To evaluate how safety training affects staff—

- Conduct short surveys with staff to determine the impact of the training on their decision-making during home visits about situations that pose potential safety concerns; personal well-being; ability to use supports offered by the program (e.g., supervision, group peer support) and external supports (e.g., counseling, support from friends or family); and safety practices while conducting home visits.
- Allow staff survey responses to be submitted anonymously to ensure everyone is comfortable providing feedback.
- Use staff survey responses to modify policies and practices and include home visitors in that process to ensure their voices are heard.

Opportunities for Research

There is a need for more formal research on home visitor safety. Starting points for future research include—

- Exploring the prevalence and nature of safety concerns and their impact on home visitor well-being.
- Examining associations between safety and home visitor outcomes, such as retention.
- Identifying resources and supports that promote home visitor safety at all levels of the home visiting system.

Opportunities for Funders and Policymakers

Funders and policymakers who wish to support home visitor safety can—

- Implement policies that allow flexibility for home visitors to conduct home visits in pairs or cancel visits, without penalty, if safety is a concern.
- Facilitate data collection on home visitor safety to better understand how to support the workforce.
- Increase the visibility of home visiting staff so they are recognized as helping professionals in the community.[xlv]

Conclusion

Ensuring that home visitors feel safe and supported in their role is critical to helping expand, support, and retain a diverse and qualified home visiting workforce. Program leaders can play a key role in validating and responding to home visitors' safety concerns through policies, practices, resources, and support. Researchers, funders, and policymakers can take important steps to prioritize and promote home visitor safety.

Home visitors have expressed a need for more resources and support to address safety concerns. Research also suggests there is a link between safety and job satisfaction, retention, and well-being.[xlvi,xlvii,xlviii,xlix,l] More research is needed to further explore these associations and to determine additional strategies or resources to support home visitor safety.

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