

# Physician Abuse and Mistreatment: *A Growing Concern*

December 20, 2021

# Summary

Following an increase in incidents of mistreatment reported to Doctors Manitoba, a survey of physicians conducted in November found that:

- 57% of physicians have experienced incidents of mistreatment over the previous month, including verbal abuse, threats, bullying and physical assault.
- Over half of incidents appear to be linked to the pandemic in some way.
- Nearly 60% of physicians report that incidents are occurring more frequently now than a year ago.

Incidents appear to be having a cumulative affect, with reports that they are contributing to emotional exhaustion, stress and burnout. Some physicians are considering retirement, reducing their workload, or relocation to a different community to cope.

Many physicians reported feeling more concerned about staff who sometimes “get the most abuse.”

## **Methodology**

Doctors Manitoba conducted an online survey of physicians in November 2021. There were 403 responses. The survey was adapted from one used by the [British Medical Association](#) earlier this year.

# Physician Mistreatment

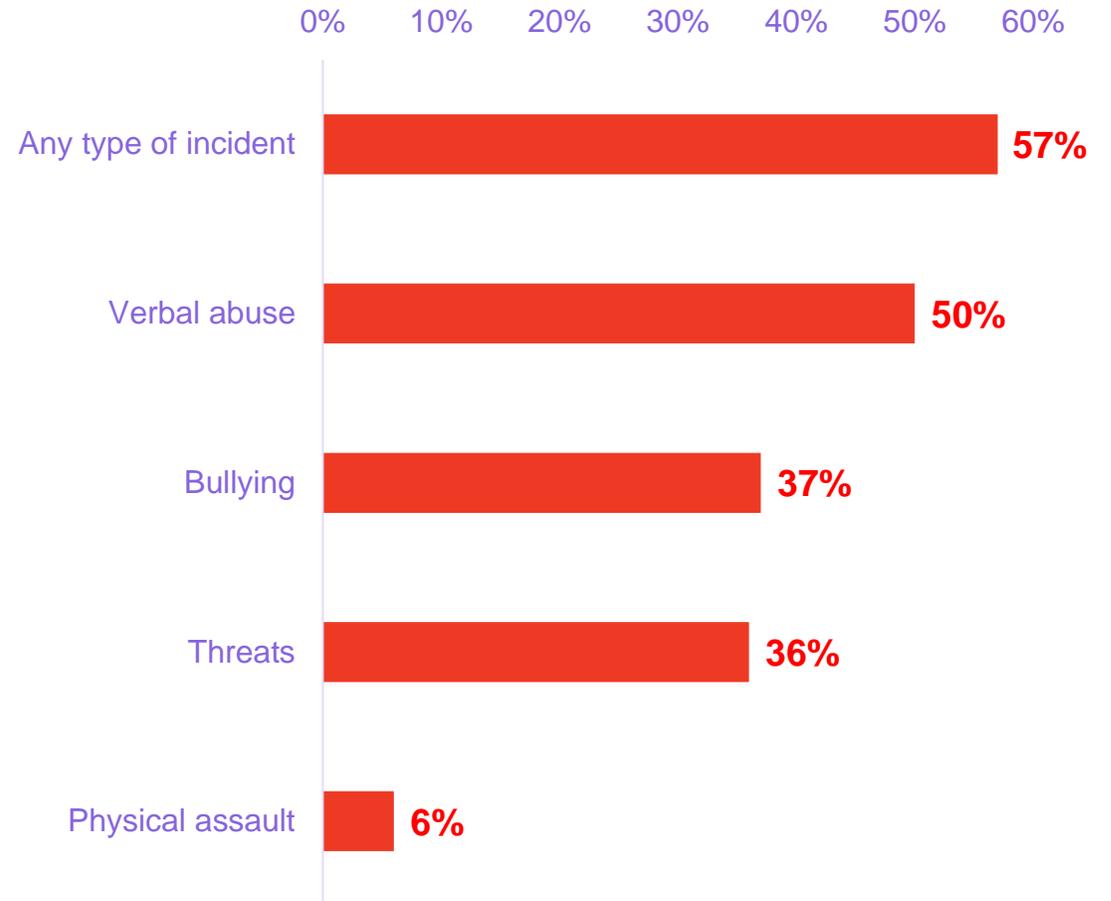
**57%** of physicians experienced at least one incident of mistreatment over the last month.

Incidents of mistreatment reported by physicians include verbal abuse, bullying, threats and physical assault.

Among physicians who experienced these incidents in the last month:

- 62% experienced multiple incidents
- 15% experienced six or more incidents

## Physicians Reporting One or More Incidents



# Examples of Incidents

## Bullying and Threats

- *“Patients have compared me to the Nazis and the pandemic response to the holocaust.”*
- Multiple physicians have received death threats.
- Accusing physicians of “breaking the Nuremburg Code” and hoping they are executed/hanged.
- Threats of filing complaints and lawsuits for refusing patient requests (e.g. vaccine/mask exemptions, medical tests, treatment options).
- Pamphlets left on physician/clinic staff cars and delivered to personal residences criticizing vaccination policies.
- Photos taken of physicians and clinic staff with threats of reporting them to authorities.

## Verbal Abuse

- Yelling, name calling, discriminatory language, blaming, and disrespectful accusations.
- “People are calling me a ‘piece of shit’ and telling me to ‘fuck off.’”
- “Patients yell and accuse me of benefiting from the pandemic.”

## Physical Assault

Reports of patients/visitors who:

- “Physically pushed past” a physician.
- Spit on a physician.
- Blocked the exit to the exam room so a physician could not exit.

## Other Types of Incidents

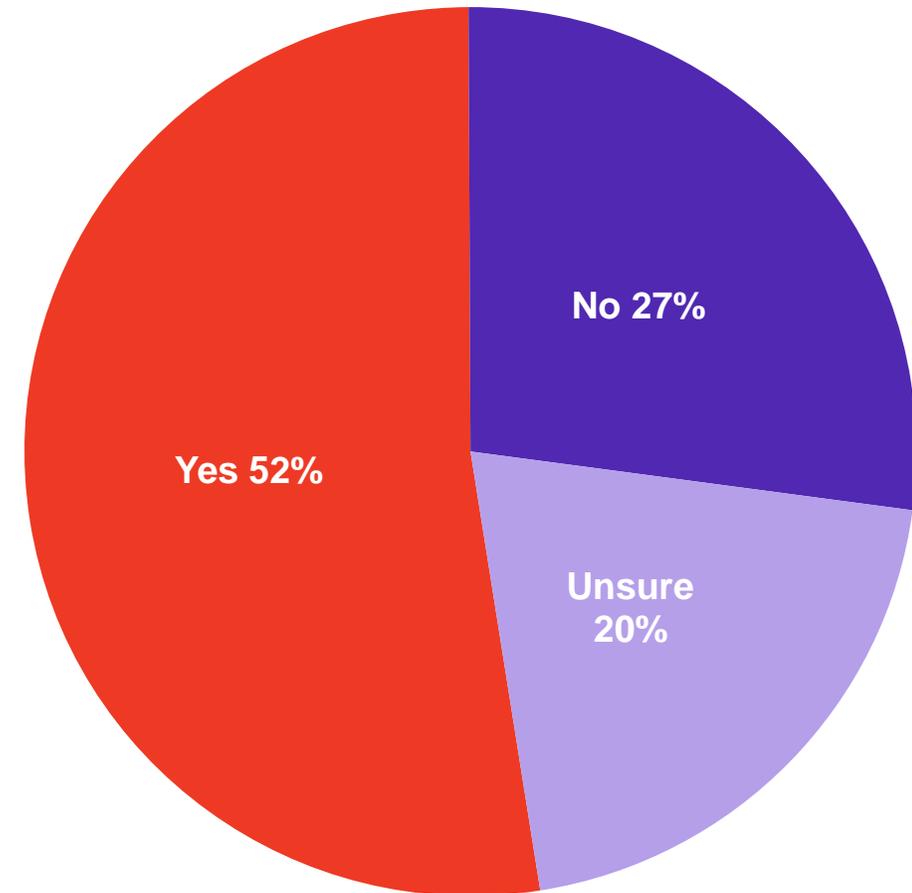
- Vandalism, such as breaking signage and graffiti.
- Social media attacks and bullying.
- Protests outside of health facilities.

# Cause of Incidents

52% of physicians reporting incidents believe they are connected to the pandemic in some way. There are several reasons for this, including:

- Views that restrictions are unnecessary;
- Frustration with vaccination requirements;
- Frustration with test/surgery delays;
- Disagreement with visitation policies; and
- Anger about lack of vaccine availability.

Are Incidents Related to COVID-19?



# Frequency Increasing

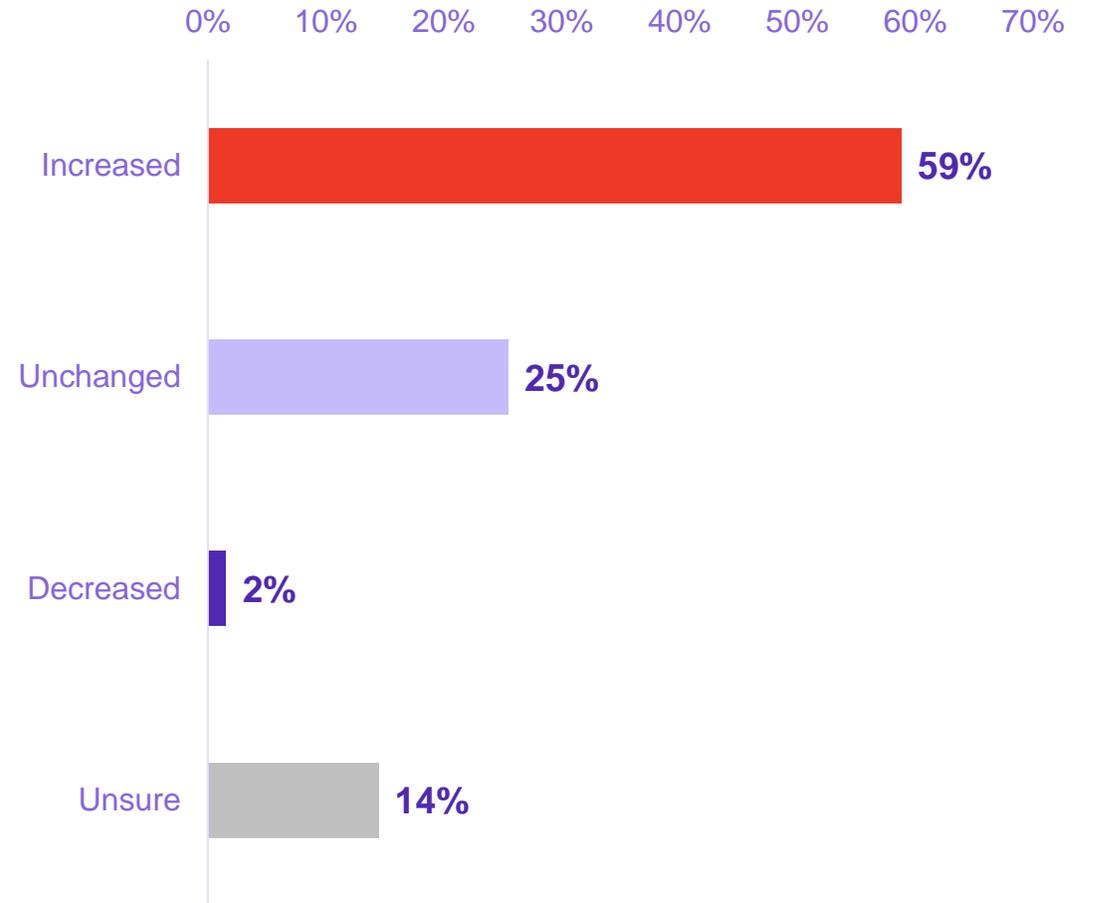
Nearly 6 in 10 physicians (59%) indicated that incidents are happening more often:

- 27% reported incidents increased significantly
- 32% reported incidents increased slightly

*“I get death threats quite a bit more lately.”*

“Patients harass and threaten me and our staff daily.”

Frequency of Incidents Compared to 1 Year Ago



# Location of Incidents

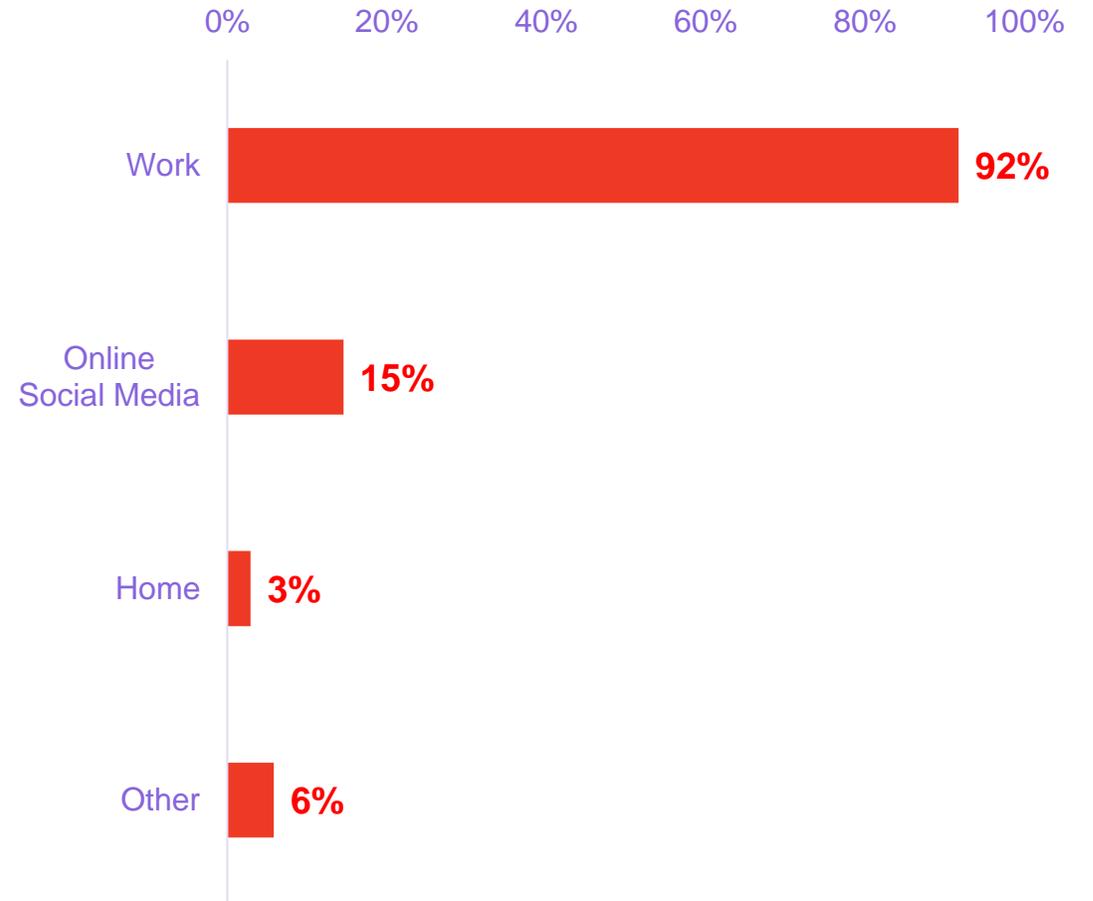
Most of the reported incidents occurred at physicians' workplaces. Among physicians who experienced incidents of mistreatment:

- 52% work primarily in doctors' offices or clinics
- 43% work in hospitals
- 5% work in other locations, such as a PCH

Of concern, a small number of incidents have occurred at physicians' homes or in public places such as retail stores.

Online and social media threats and bullying have also increased.

## Location of Incidents Reported



# Response to Incidents

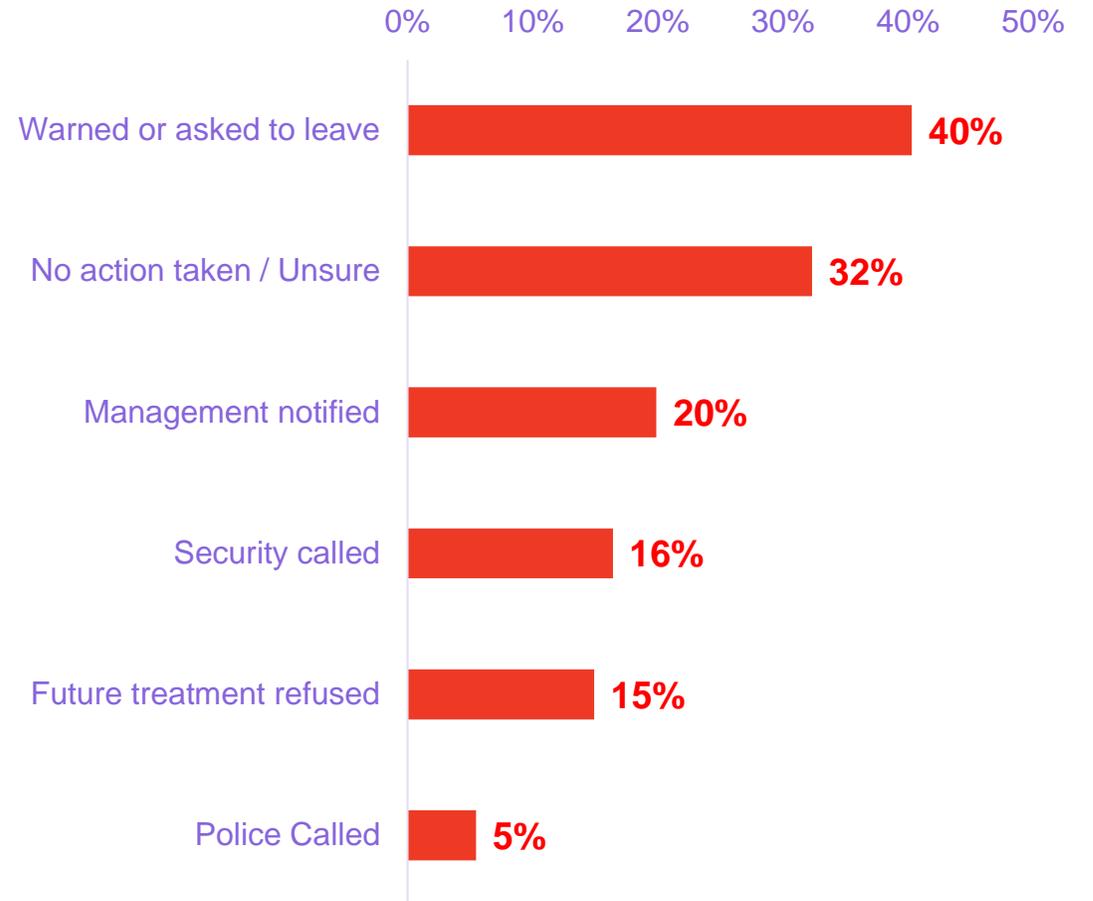
Among physicians reporting incidents:

- 40% indicated individuals were warned and, if needed, asked to leave
- 20% indicated facility management was notified
- 19% indicated security or police were called

32% of physicians reported that no action was taken (24%) or they were unsure if action was taken (8%).

In 15% of cases, physicians indicated that treatment was refused because of serious issues. In many of these cases, individuals are notified about why and offered the opportunity to remedy the situation or seek care elsewhere.

## Response to Incidents



# Physician Attributes

Physicians are more likely to report an incident of mistreatment in the last month if they are:

- A family physician (vs. specialist)
- Younger (Age 25-44 vs. 45+)
- Working primarily in Rural/Northern Manitoba
- A woman (vs. a man)
- Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour (BIPOC vs. White)

## Physicians More Likely to Experience Incidents

