

## **“That’s not my job”: A mixed methods study of challenging client behaviors, boundaries, and home care occupational health and safety**

Karlsson et al, American Journal of Industrial Medicine (2019)

This research paper describes a study which was conducted to help understand the boundary-challenging behaviors of clients asking for services beyond aides’ job duties. The study looked at how often this happens, what kind of requests the aides get, and what impacts these requests have. It also identified interventions that could minimize the occurrence of these client behaviors and their effects on home care aides.

The study took place in Massachusetts and involved a survey of home care aides, focus groups with home care aides, and in-depth interviews with home care industry and labor representatives between 2012-2014. 1,249 home care aides responded to the survey, and from these, 954 aides who had at least one non-family member client were included in the analyses in this paper. After the survey, to get feedback on results and recommendations for intervention, 70 aides participated in focus groups and 8 industry/labor representatives were interviewed.

In the survey, nearly half (47%) of the home care aides said they were often asked to do things outside the job duties. Aides who reported this were more likely to report verbal and/or physical/sexual abuse and injuries requiring medical care or lost time. They were less likely to recommend the job to a friend or plan to stay on the job. Clients requests often reflect genuine needs that nonetheless exceed the limits of aides’ duties. Aides indicated that they felt conflicted about the requests since they wanted to help their clients and valued the close relationships they had with their clients.

### **Employers and other Stakeholders –**

#### What is the relevance of the research findings?

Home care aides participating in this study frequently experienced client requests for help with tasks beyond their job duties and want help with this issue. The task requests are wide-ranging and include cleaning help, physical labor and purchasing items. Industry representatives also report that clients have needs that go beyond what home care can provide.

Aides who were often asked to perform tasks beyond their job duties, were more likely to experience:

- verbal and/or physical/sexual abuse
- injury
- reduced job satisfaction

#### Intervention Opportunities –

Employers may be able to reduce client requests as well as the risk of associated adverse outcomes. Organizational factors that may help, include:

- a clearly understood care plan that addresses boundaries with clients and their families
- a supportive agency/employer who will intervene with clients and their families when necessary to protect home care aides

- training for aides to assist them with developing skills for navigating boundary challenging behaviors
- opportunities for peer support and feeling part of a team
- identification of other resources beyond home care to meet client needs

In focus groups, aides strongly praised the important role of supportive supervisors. Letting the agency be the one who says “no” can be more effective. Feeling less like a lone worker – thinking compassionately about the next aide who will care for a client – also helped aides say no to tasks.

### **Home Care Aides and their Advocates -**

Here are some steps that home care aides can take to protect themselves from risks associated with boundary-challenging behaviors by clients and their families:

- Review the client’s care plan and ask your employer for assistance when the plan doesn’t address conditions that may increase the risk of boundary-challenging behavior by clients and their families
- Ask for and participate in training on communication skills and how to keep healthy boundaries
- Report critical client needs to a supervisor instead of feeling a responsibility to meet them yourself
- Ask for and participate in training on how to recognize and reduce the risk of experiencing abuse
- Recognize other conditions that may lead to the increased risk of experiencing abuse. These conditions may include:
  - a client home that doesn’t have enough room to work in
  - a client with dementia
  - a new client, or a client who does not have a predictable schedule with you
  - clients with unclear care plans
  - clients with limited mobility
- Connect with peers in home care for support and ideas