



Male agents aren't as worried about safety as women. Here's why they're wrong

'The guys who got up and left when they heard the topic are the ones who most need to be there,' real estate safety expert Tracey Hawkins told Inman

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When giving her presentations to teams of real estate agents, [safety](#) expert Tracey Hawkins noticed an [alarming pattern](#): when she clicks on the slide that touches upon [attacks and keeping oneself safe](#), one or two male agents will usually get up and leave the room.

"I go to a screen where I have seven names of real estate agents who have been killed or hurt in the line of duty and, from 2017 to 2019, they were almost all men," Hawkins told Inman. "But when I look around the room, I see almost exclusively women. The guys who got up and left when they heard the topic are the ones who most need to be there."



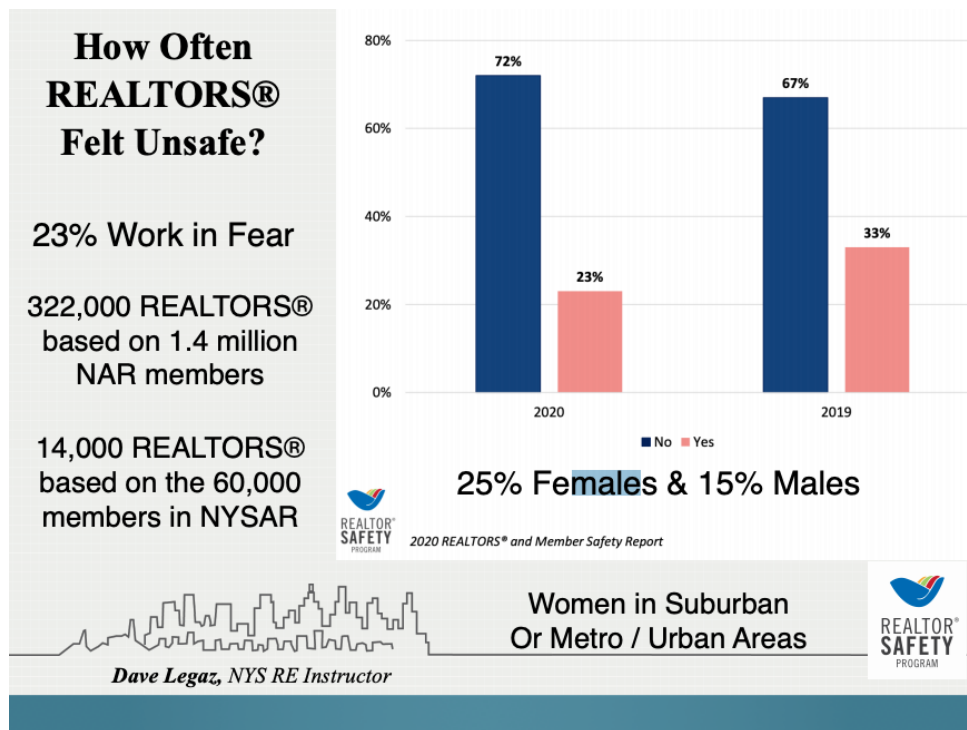
Tracey Hawkins

While the statistics do show that female or female-presenting agents are at a higher risk of on-the-job attacks, in recent months a spate of male agents has been targeted as well. In July, a male agent was opening a lockbox when an 18-year-old [approached him at gunpoint](#) and demanded his cash and keys. Earlier this month, 66-year-old home inspector Michael Alderson was [killed in a shooting](#) that also left two agents wounded while, in the same month, a tenant in Kentucky [fatally shot](#) an agent and his wife after they had come to collect money for their investment property.

David Legaz, a retired New York Police Department sergeant, longtime broker and the current safety adviser for the New York State Association of Realtors, said the numbers paint a clear picture that real estate is a dangerous profession for everyone. Twenty-three percent of those polled by the National Association of Realtors in 2020 said they work in fear and 60,000 annually are victims of violent crimes like assault, sexual abuse, rape, robbery or murder. The number of murders, Legaz said, is higher than that of New York Police Department officers killed in a typical year.

When divided by gender, female agents are significantly more likely to face an attack but, at 30 percent, the number of attacks against men is also high. According to numbers provided by Hawkins, 25 percent of female agents were concerned for their personal safety on the job while only 15 percent of male agents were. But the point that often gets ignored is that there is no way to know in advance who will be targeted or attacked — and so everyone can benefit from learning basic safety tips, according to Legaz.

“James Olsen is 5’11, 300 pounds and an army infantry vet,” Legaz told Inman, referring to a Milwaukee Realtor who was [set up to view a fake rental property](#) and held at gunpoint in 2016. “He never in his life thought that he would be the victim of a predator attack or a robbery where he was pistol-whipped. I think male agents probably don’t believe it’s going to happen to them but 30 percent of the time it does.”



Courtesy of David Legaz

Longstanding safety adages like “be careful” or “don’t talk to strangers” are irrelevant in an industry that requires agents to be public-facing, Legaz said. His research shows that the majority of attacks are not opportunistic but predatory — attackers specifically seek out open houses and showings as an easy opportunity to commit crimes.

Legaz found that agents who chose to carry weapons can also have a false sense of security when, in fact, most attackers work themselves into an agent’s confidence and get them off their guard through things like false IDs or even coming back for more than one viewing. That’s why discussions need to move away from how “big and strong” an agent is and toward how he or she can prevent attacks, he added.

“The industry has a common misconception that these attacks upon Realtors are random opportunistic street crimes and in fact we’ve learned through police reports that they are of a predatory nature,” Legaz said.

Along with trying to have at least one other agent present at showings, Legaz recommends focusing on the “initial inquiry” for those who come in to see the home. Questions like “You wanted to see 123 Main St. What about the house caught your eye?” or “What about the neighborhood interests you?” will get a real prospect talking but will make someone with ill intentions uncomfortable.



David Legaz

If red flags start to go off and an agent begins to feel uncomfortable, comments like “We will have 15 minutes to view the property as the sellers will be returning at 5:45 pm” or “Thank you for inquiring on 123 Main St. It is one of our most popular listings. This home has plenty of windows accenting the natural sunlight” will help throw those with bad intentions off their guard.

That said, such discussions often tend to take place in the wake of a high-profile attack or situation that forces brokerages to reevaluate their safety protocols. When it comes to preventative actions, Hawkins found that women tend to be much more proactive — more sign up for her safety courses and reach out for advice. Over the past year, she has been trying to dispel the stereotype that Realtor attacks are a “women’s problem” or that only physically small people get attacked and instead encourage everyone to prioritize Realtor safety, particularly for Realtor Safety Month in September.

“I can’t tell you how many times I have heard the male agent say ‘Hey ladies if you are uncomfortable on showings, I will accompany you,’” Hawkins said. “And what I’m trying to say is that you need to be careful too.”