

## **Workplace Violence and Cyber Crime Prevention**

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*With increased rates of workplace violence and violent trends increasing in society as a whole, more and more focus has been placed on workplace safety. Workplace violence can stem from several different causes and is detrimental to the work environment. This research looks at the different types of workplace violence, the causes of workplace violence, and some viable solutions to mitigate the violence.*

### **THE PROBLEM**

In recent years, workplace violence has been a topic of much debate and criticism. Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide, one of the leading causes of job-related deaths (OSHA, 2002). The number of workplace homicides in 2009 was 542 which represent a 3% rise from 2008 totals (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Those most vulnerable to workplace violence are those who exchange money with the public, deliver goods or services, or work alone or in small groups during late night hours in areas with high crime rates (OSHA, 2002).

There are four different types of workplace violence. Type I are violent acts made by criminals who have no connection with the workplace, but enter to commit robbery or another crime. This type of violence, in which criminals are unconnected with the workplace accounts for around 80% of workplace homicides. In these cases the motive is usually theft and the criminal is carrying a gun or other weapon, which increases the chances a victim will be killed or wounded (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2002).

Type II is violence directed at employees by customers, clients, patients, students, inmates, or any others for whom an organization provides services. This type of violence occurs regularly in some occupations such as police officers or correctional officers but for other occupations, the violent reactions by clients are unpredictable. These acts can be triggered by an argument, anger at the quality or denial of service or some other hastening event (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002).

Type III is violence against co-workers, supervisors, or managers by a present or former employee. Type IV violence, similar to Type III violence, is violence committed in the workplace by someone who doesn't work there, but has a personal relationship with an employee; such as a spouse or partner. When the violence originates from an employee or an individual close to any employee, there is a greater chance the acts could have come with warnings signs prior to the events. Knowledge of how to identify and treat early warning signs can alleviate the potential for violence (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002).

There are several factors that contribute to workplace violence. These factors include:

### **Personal and Physiological**

When those who commit violent acts are asked why they have done so, they typically rationalize it to an outside source and place the blame on the person or factor. To them, their actions are justifiable and feel it is not their fault because someone else "drove" them to do what they did. In fact, they frequently imply that any reasonable person would have done the same thing (T. Harris, 1993).

One variable that can be associated in this category is an individual's ability to self-monitor him or herself. This has to do with the level of which a person has an understanding of their own behavior and how it affects others. High self-monitors are exceedingly aware of their behavior and its potential impact on others. These people are able to more easily adapt and adjust their behaviors to different situations. Low self-monitors are relatively unaware of how their behavior is going to directly impact others. These individuals may be obstructionists and be completely unaware that their behavior is negatively impacting others. Low self-monitors may not normally behave aggressively, but may react aggressively when an aspect of change is introduced (Paludi, M. A., Nydegger, R. V., & Paludi Jr., C. A., 2006).

### **Behavioral Risks**

The two most common behavioral risk indicators are a history of aggression and substance abuse. These two behaviors have historically been predictors of violence towards co-workers (Paludi, M. A., Nydegger, R. V., & Paludi Jr., C. A., 2006). Another behavioral factor comes from one's feeling of need or urge to seek revenge. A study has found that the desire to seek revenge was directly related to workplace violence. A person who is predisposed to seek revenge, either in real life or imaginary, may very well be capable of violent or aggressive behavior (Stuckles, N. Goranson, R. 1992).

Another behavioral indicator of risk is the use of threats. Most people who threaten, normally do not actually follow through, however, it could be too costly not to take these threats seriously. It is not easily to determine who is a seriously potential threat to carry out violence acts, so each case should be taken seriously. The act of making a threat in and of itself is reason enough to treat the situation seriously, especially in the workplace (Paludi, M. A., Nydegger, R. V., & Paludi Jr., C. A., 2006).

### **Organizational Factors**

Workplace stress is often a factor that can contribute to violent or aggressive acts in the workplace. Change is almost always followed by stress. Extreme forms of change can bring large levels of stress and even good change promotes stress (Nydegger, 2000). However, it is normally negative change that facilitates stress that can lead toward aggression. Stress related disorders often result from environmental effects found inside the office such as heat, humidity, noise, poor lighting and poor ventilation. Other factors such as rushed deadlines, job insecurity, and a heavy workload have all been shown to increase levels of stress (Pelletier, K.R., 1985). Stress also tends to encounter a snowball like effect. Effects of even small levels of stress do not go away quickly and are carried over into other situations. This process continues and small levels of stress can easily grow and mature into large levels, which can then lead toward aggressive behaviors. Other organizational factors that can lead to violence are downsizing, unfair treatment, manufacturing moving offshore, rapid and unexpected change, low staffing levels, working alone, working with money, and a lack of support services (Paludi, M. A., Nydegger, R. V., & Paludi Jr., C. A., 2006).

## **Social and Cultural Factors**

Many people look at the changes in society itself and suggest that increased levels of societal violence assimilate into the work place. Reports have indicated that we live in a more violent society, one that has an easier access to firearms, and one that is more willing to turn to violence (AFSCME, 2005). These studies suggest that this natural progression makes its way into the work place and as society becomes more violent, the workplace becomes more dangerous (Teamsters, 2005).

One area of social and cultural factors that has generated a large amount of controversy is the role of the media. There has been a large amount of research done on the correlation of media violence and the effect it has on the younger viewers. Throughout the years, many researchers have continued to point out the exposure to media violence significantly enhances a viewer's aggressive behavior. Studies have pointed out that exposure to media violence at a young age, predicts violent behavior in young adults. Other studies have shown a clear and positive relationship between the amounts of time spent watching television during adolescence and early adulthood and the likelihood of subsequent aggressive acts against other people (Paludi, M. A., Nydegger, R. V., & Paludi Jr., C. A., 2006).

Others have suggested that the relationship between the two is not quite so simple. It is clear that not all people who see violence in the media mature to be violent adults. It has been found that the aggressive youths, tend to seek out media violence. It has been suggested that this interaction can cause a downward spiral effect that leads to high levels of aggression. In subsequent studies it was reported that the effect of media violence leading to aggressive behavior in youths was found to be more forceful among students who reported feelings of alienation from school and times during increase levels of peer victimization. This evidence becomes more of a reality in the aftermath of tragedies like the shootings at Columbine and many other institutions (Slater and Others, 2004).

## **Layoffs of Law Enforcement**

A major factor that could contribute to higher levels of workplace violence in the future is the laying off of law enforcement personnel. Dan Wagner, a police expert, says that police will not be able to respond quickly to incidents involving a weapon or potential in jury. He also went on to predict rampant crime (Nykodym, N., Patrick, B. & Toussaint, T. 2010). With lowering numbers of police officers available and a rise in crime, response times may be drastically decreased. Police observed, "It's going to be like the cable company – we'll be there Wednesday between 12 and 3" (Nykodym, N., Patrick, B. & Toussaint, T. 2010). An unexpected consequence of looming layoffs is early retirement of senior police officers. Reports indicate that senior police officers are choosing early retirement over pay cuts. By accepting pay cuts and waiting for retirement they will be forced to retire at a lower pay scale (Nykodym, N., Patrick, B. & Toussaint, T. 2010). These mass retirements will undoubtedly leave police departments with a lack of leadership and knowledge.

## **Cyber Bullying**

Another potential factor that could contribute to the workplace violence issue is the recent emergence of cyber bullying. The spread of communication technology has led to a massive growth of the number of people using the internet and mobile phones. Widespread access to modern communication devices has provided an alternative ways for bullies to target their victims. Various terms are used to describe this new phenomenon, including cyber bullying, electronic bullying, e-bullying, SMS bullying, mobile bullying, online bullying, digital bully and internet bullying (Privitera, C., & Campbell, M. 2009).

This experience of workplace bullying can have negative consequences on victims' physical health and emotional well-being. The impact of workplace bullying can also extend into the victim's social and family relationships. In addition, future career advancements such as job promotions can be threatened or damaged because of victims taking long-term or recurring sick leave as a result of ill health from being bullied at work. The psychological well-being of those who witness bullying at work is also compromised. Workplace bullying can produce low staff morale, reduced commitment, lowered job satisfaction, and the breakdown of teamwork. All these consequences can be multiplied even more by cyber bullying in the workplace (Privitera, C., & Campbell, M. 2009). The negative impacts of workplace

bullying, magnified by the effects of cyber bullying, could be a reason of concern for managers. Psychologically damaged victims of cyber bullying could react violently towards others in the workplace.

## **SOLUTIONS**

There is a wide array of possible solutions to diffuse the level of threat in ones workplace. A very possible option for many already safe and stable work environments is to simply do nothing at all. Others, on the other hand, may need to take more drastic measures such as allow employees to carry concealed weapons and increase security surveillance.

### **Risk Assessment**

The first step management should take in preventing workplace is to complete a risk assessment. A risk assessment provides the firm with security and a strategic plan. The objective is to identify current and future risks the firm may encounter. The assessment may incorporate details such as the nature of the workplace, conditions, workloads, area crime risk and the history of workplace violence in similar places of employment (Hyde, 2011). By undertaking a risk assessment, management is about to be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with violence. The outcome is a more knowledgeable, prepared, and risk-adverse staff.

### **Stress Management Courses**

One viable option available to mangers via the web is online stress management courses. These courses are widely available, cost effective, and can be utilized at the convenience of the organization in need. This can be a great option for employers for training or disciplinary purposes. It can be used to promote individual health, which relates directly to the overall health of the work environment. There are a multitude of websites offering these types of services ranging from onsite counseling to online stress and anger management classes.

### **Segregation of Duties and Internal Controls**

Another possible solution is increased segregation of duties and a system of internal controls. One of the main causes of workplace violence highlighted was on the job stress and a constant feeling of having deadlines due soon. One way to combat this is distribute workloads between more workers. Not only will segregation of duties help managers reduce the possibility of theft and employee corruption, but it will decrease the amount of work employees have, while giving them a support network of their peers to talk to about the project.

Along with segregation of duties, employers can increase the levels of internal controls. Increased internal controls will give systems more security and allow employees to feel more comfortable in their work environment. This could encourage more organization through different programs such as Outlook that combines emails and calendars into on application allowing workers to stay efficient and effective. A modern method of control is the monitoring of the internet and electric media to catch “threats” in the early stages.

### **Warning Alert and Surveillance**

One option available to organizations with a large number of people at a given time with a higher level of risk is an emergency alert system. A system of codes will easily and effectively alert people to the danger, the direct level/type of danger, and the appropriate action to be taken to ensure the highest level of safety. This type of system is discussed by Nykodym, Patrick, & Mendoza (2011), in which a system of alerts is proposed. This system of codes is shown here below:

CODE Adam	(color) = light blue – infant/child abduction
CODE BLACK	Bomb threat
CODE BLUE	Medical emergency response team
CODE BROWN	Missing Adult patient
CODE GREEN	Internal evacuation
CODE RED	R.A.C.E. (Rescue, Alarm, Confine, Extinguish/Evaluate) P.A.S.S. (Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep)
CODE WHITE	Snow/Transportation emergency
CODE GRAY	Severe Weather/Tornado Procedure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 0: Severe Weather/Tornado Watch</li> <li>• Phase one: 1–14 victims expected</li> <li>• Phase two: 15 or more victims expected</li> </ul>
CODE ORANGE	Chemical, Biological, or Radioactive Incident <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 0: Potential</li> <li>• Phase one: 1–14 victims expected</li> <li>• Phase two: 15 or more victims expected</li> </ul>
CODE YELLOW	MASS CASUALTY DISASTER PROCEDURE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 0: disaster warning</li> <li>• Phase 1: 1–14 victims expected</li> <li>• Phase 2: 15 or more victims expected.</li> </ul>

The additional surveillance system could be a great tool to first responders and security personnel to be used to identify the area of origin, major areas of concern or need, and the person(s) responsible for the act, if that be the case. The greatest benefit this system may be its ability to deter crime from happening in the first place. Violent individuals or workers may reconsider acting out in a violence manner if they are aware a system of warnings and surveillance is in place. One disadvantage to this system is its high level of cost and need for additional personnel to operate the system. (Nykodym, Patrick, & Mendoza, 2011)

### **Carry Concealed Weapons**

One possible solution that has been proposed as a solution to violence, particularly on college campuses is the use of concealed weapons. In research done by Nykodym, Patrick & Mendoza (2011), the author highlights the fact that in most states the legal age to acquire a concealed carry permit is at the age of 21. This would mean primarily faculty, staff, administration, graduate students and a few undergraduates would be permitted to carry a concealed weapon. Nykodym, Patrick & Mendoza (2011) goes on to make a unique distinction between first responders, which are law enforcement and emergency personnel, and immediate responders, which would be faculty and students in the case of a college campus. Immediate responders who are properly trained and educated have the best possibility of defusing a violence situation rather than first responders who often arrive to the aftermath of the violence.

### **CONCLUSION**

In order to effectively combat workplace violence it is essential to take proactive steps. It is not a responsible or acceptable option to do nothing. It has been said that firms are most vulnerable during times of success due to complacency. Even firms that now are believed to be above industry averages in preventing workplace violence need to continue to work towards that goal and avoid that complacency effect.

There is a vast array of solutions available to prevent and effectively manage workplace violence. Security starts from the top with upper management and the overall culture of an organization. An

organization who invests in its people, delivers superior customer service, and gives back to its community will be undertaking the critical steps to building a superior organizational culture. Organizational culture is built through hiring the right people.

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