

Violence in the workplace



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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. In spite of this, it manifests itself, workplace violence is a growing concern for employers and employees nationwide or in community settings and homes where they have extensive contact with the public. This group includes health-care and social service workers such as visiting nurses, psychiatric evaluators, and probation officers; community workers such as gas and water utility employees, phone and cable TV installers, and letter carriers; retail workers; and taxi drivers. Incidents of workplace violence increased in number and intensity.

These incidents involved current and former employees, former customers, and husbands. The violence is directed towards managers, supervisors, co-workers and spouses. And this violence is moving from the streets to the workplace. Stress, drugs, and layoffs are just a few factors that prompt such crisis events. This paper will examine what leads to workplace violence, the tangible and intangible costs of violence and what public personnel managers can do to legally protect themselves.

The first priority in developing a workplace violence prevention policy is to establish a system for documenting violent incidents in the workplace. Such records are essential for assessing the nature and magnitude of workplace violence in a given workplace and quantifying risk. These data can be used to assess the need for action to reduce or alleviate the risks for workplace violence and implement a reasonable mediation strategy. An existing

intervention strategy may be recognized within an industry or in similar industries, or new and unique strategies may be needed to address the risks in a given workplace or setting. Implementation of the reporting system, a workplace violence prevention policy, and specific prevention strategies should be publicized company-wide, and appropriate training sessions should be scheduled. The demonstrated commitment of management is crucial to the success of the program.

The success and aptness of intervention strategies can be monitored and adjusted with continued data collection. A comprehensive workplace violence prevention policy and program should also include procedures and responsibilities to be taken in the event of a violent incident in the workplace. This policy should explicitly state how the response team is to be assembled and who is responsible for immediate care of the victim(s), re-establishing work areas and processes, and organizing and carrying out stress debriefing sessions with victims, their coworkers, and perhaps the families of victims and coworkers. Employee assistance programs, human resource professionals, and local mental health and emergency service personnel can offer assistance in developing these strategies. For a situation that poses an immediate threat of workplace violence, all legal, human resource, employee assistance, community mental health, and law enforcement resources should be used to develop a response. The risk of injury to all workers should be minimized.

If a threat has been made that refers to particular times and places, or if the potential offender is knowledgeable about workplace procedures and time frames, patterns may need to be shifted. For example, a person who has leveled a threat against a worker may indicate, “ I know where you park and what time you get off work! ” In such a case, it may be advisable to change or even stagger departure times and implement a

buddy system or an escort by security guard for leaving the building and getting to parking areas. The threat should not be ignored in the hope that it will resolve itself or out of fear of triggering an outburst from the person who has lodged the threat. If someone poses a danger to himself or others, appropriate authorities should be notified and action should be taken. Much discussion has also centered on the role of stress in workplace violence. The most important thing to remember is that stress can be both a cause and an effect of workplace violence.

That is, high levels of stress may lead to violence in the workplace,

but a violent incident in the workplace will most certainly lead to stress, perhaps even to post-traumatic stress disorder. The data from the National Crime Victimization Survey [Bachman 1994] present compelling evidence (more than a million workdays lost as a result of workplace assaults each year) for the need to be aware of the impact of workplace violence.

Employers should therefore be sensitive to the effects of workplace violence and provide an environment that promotes open communication; they should also have in place an established procedure for reporting and responding to violence.

Appropriate referrals to employee assistance programs or other local mental health services may be appropriate for stress debriefing sessions after critical incidents.

Within the family, a pattern of emotional abuse is usually passed down from one generation to the next. Emotional abuse is not always rooted in the soil of poverty. In fact, abuse of this nature crosses all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. Many parents are simply unfamiliar with any other method of discipline, often believing they are OK as long as they don't hit their children.

Experts say that belittlement, denigration,

and other forms of verbal assault on children are not only cruel but also ineffective ways to teach good behavior. About 250, 000 cases of emotional abuse of children are reported annually, but the real incidence is probably much higher. Abuse includes a range of behavior from neglect and rejection to deliberate cruelty and humiliation. When people have been emotionally abused in their childhoods, they bring this trauma into the workplace. Adults often report similarities in the dynamics and feelings produced by their work relationships compared with the dynamics they experienced as children growing up in an alcoholic or abusive family system, taking on the old roles they played in their family of origin.

It is as if the boss really IS the parent. On-the-job relationships may echo elements of old family relationships for many employees; as a result, historic issues get played out in the workplace just as they do elsewhere. In times of crisis, such as organizational mergers, domestic violence, or job loss, people

are “ triggered” into acts of violence. Where violent employees, as children, could not act out against their parents or siblings, they do act out against a boss, co-worker, or spouse in a time of

stress. Clearly, public personnel managers must recognize that a critical relationship exists between the employee and employer which, in essence, constitutes a “ psychological contract.

” When there is a violation of this psychological contract by the employing firm or its representatives, cumulative psychological impairment can occur for which the employer may be held liable. From the employee’s perspective, the terms of this contract generally include some assumptions that the employer would behave in a just manner with respect to both outcomes and the procedures used to arrive at those outcomes.

There are implications for both the employee and the employer when the relationship contracts are not clear. A severance of the psychological contract between the employer and employee gives rise to tremendous morale problems and power issues. Companies that ignore human feelings and provide no mechanisms of support for their employees may pay for years to come. Clearly, eighty percent of mergers eventually fail because companies do not handle the emotional needs of employees well.

There is a well known American aversion to talking about feelings. Despite the avoidance, feelings are at the secret heart of many U.

S. institutions. When feelings are not discussed, violence occurs.

Violent employee behavior is not confined to urban or rural companies, blue or white-collar employees, and union-nonunion shops. It affects companies of every size and description, in every region of the country . Negligent hiring is based on the principle that an employer has a duty to protect its employees and customers from injuries caused by employees whom the employer knows, or should know, pose a risk of harm to others. If the employer fails to do this, an employer may be found to have been negligent in selecting the applicant for employment.

Thus, the employer must contact the applicant's former employers and check references. Such an investigation would demonstrate that the employer has taken care in screening potential employees.

The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero tolerance-policy towards workplace violence against or by their employees. The employers should establish violence prevention program or incorporate the information into an existing accident prevention program, employee handbook, or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all employees know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. In addition, employers can offer additional protections such as the following: _ Provide safety education for employees so they know what conduct is not acceptable, what to do if they witness or are subjected to workplace violence, and how to protect themselves.

_ Secure the workplace. Where suitable to the business, install video surveillance, extra lighting, and alarm systems and minimize access by

outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, and guards. _

Provide drop safes to limit the amount of cash on hand. Keep a minimal amount of cash in

registers during evenings and late night hours. _ Equip field staff with cellular phones and hand-held alarms or noise devices, and require them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day. Keep employer provided vehicles properly maintained.

_ Instruct employees not to enter any location where they feel unsafe.

Introduce a “buddy system” or provide an escort service or police assistance in potentially dangerous situations or at night. _ Develop policies and

procedures covering visits by home health-care providers. Address the conduct of home visits, the presence of others in

the home during visits, and the worker’s right to refuse to provide services in a clearly hazardous situation. Nothing can guarantee that an employee will not become a victim of workplace violence.

These steps, however, can help reduce the odds: _ Learn how to recognize, avoid, or diffuse potentially violent situations by attending personal safety training programs. _ Alert supervisors to any concerns about safety or security and report all incidents immediately in writing. _ Avoid traveling alone into unfamiliar locations or situations whenever possible. _ Carry only minimal money and required identification into community settings.

Conclusion When people have been emotionally abused as children, they bring this trauma into the workplace. In times of crisis, people are “triggered” into acts of violence. When the psychological contract is broken, employees feel powerless and they are likely to strike out in an explosive manner. The cost of this violence is billions of dollars a year, and the courts are finding companies liable in the area of negligent hiring, supervision, and retention. Currently, many employers provide workplace training on sexual harassment. Certain states now require such training.

This type of educational program

would readily lend itself to the inclusion of a component dealing with the potential of workplace violence. Indeed, there is often an overlap between sexual harassment and violent behavior. (33) An organizational policy which deals with workplace violence should cover the characteristics of potentially violent behavior, an outline of who should be contacted if violence is suspected, and the basics of how to conduct an investigation of violent behavior. Violence is irrational and unpredictable. It can strike at any time or place, and violence in the workplace can have wide-ranging ramifications.

It can impact productivity and leave the organization vulnerable to potential liability.

The current trend in business is to take action before something happens. In fact, in the next five years, it is forecasted that more than seventy-five percent of employers will have such a program in place. As Victor Hugo once said, “ An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come. ” The time has come to address workplace violence”..

<https://assignbuster.com/violence-in-the-workplace-2/>

Reference

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