

# How to prevent workplace violence criminology essay



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Workplace violence is any violent act that occurs in the workplace and creates a hostile work environment that affects employees physical or psychological well-being. Violence at work can take many forms: harassment, intimidation, threats, theft, stalking, assault, arson, sabotage, bombing, hostage taking, kidnapping, extortion, suicide, and homicide. One thing that these many types of workplace violence have in common is that the perpetrator believes he or she is gaining “ control” or “ getting even” with some person or entity. Violence is more likely in workplaces where workers exchange money, work alone at night, handle valuable items, work as public-safety employees, work in a high-crime area, or work with those who may become violent. But all workplaces, regardless of size or type of business, have the potential for violence. Across the nation, violence in the workplace has become a significant occupational hazard. People have long been concerned about violence, but the use of behavioral assessment and intervention to prevent violent behavior is fairly new. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States, the legal system began to ask “ alienists,” who are now called psychiatrists, to render opinions concerning the likelihood of identified individual to commit violence in the future.

It is difficult to know exactly what to think about the extent of violence in America’s workplaces

in 2008. If you go by the headlines or listen to firms that toss around words like “ epidemic” in an effort to sell you workplace violence services, then things seem very bad indeed. But if you go strictly by the numbers and look only at the ultimate form of workplace violence-homicide-then the workplace has never looked safer.

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Richard Sem is the former chief security officer for Waste Management and now regularly

serves as expert witness in cases of workplace violence, and since Sept. 11 and the massacre

at Virginia Tech, he says he has seen a change in the media response to workplace violence.

He believes that, especially in cases of employee-on-employee violence and when domestic

violence spills over into the workplace media coverage has greatly intensified. This, combined with the 24-hour news cycle and the explosion in the number of news outlets, make it seem as if we're losing the war against workplace violence. If the statistics got the heart pumping then the characteristics will

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produce a heart attack. Many people in the workforce think it will never happen to them. I don't need to worry about workplace violence because it will never happen to me. The fact of the matter is that the people that commit these acts are more common than some people think. Author Joseph Kinney contends that perpetrators of work-place violence do not fit a standard profile. He advises to focus behavior, not characteristics. However based on previous acts of violence, some experts have identified warning symptoms. These include: middle-aged male, loner, usually quiet, with defiant outbursts, emotionally unstable; erratic behavior, pathological  
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blamer or complainer, always frustrated strained work relationships, reduced productivity, ignores tardiness or absences, undergoes a dramatic personality swing, changes in health of hygiene, feels victimized, makes threats, fascination with weapons, exhibits paranoia, seems depressed, is a Hate Group member, dependence on alcohol or drugs, is involved in a troubled, work-related romantic situation (OSHA).

Every employer in the United States has an obligation to provide a safe workplace. This obligation could arise from federal laws, state laws, local ordinances, case law precedents, or all those sources. The obligation extends to employees, contractors, visitors, and guests on the premises and generally does not distinguish between internal and external sources of danger. Consequently, if an employer or its representative has reasonable cause to believe that someone may commit an act of violence on the premises or against one of the organization's employees who is acting within the scope of his or her at another location, the employer has an obligation to protect the potential victim. It does not matter whether the aggressor is an employee, spouse or significant other of an employee, shareholder, contractor, supplier vendor, client, guest or third party.

Many professionals whether they may be in the business world or security industry, all facets of those organizations must establish a violence risk assessment program. A violence risk assessment program must address a variety of workplace behaviors. Policies and programs dealing with inappropriate workplace conduct, including harassment, intimidation, and discrimination, should be seen as related to the violence risk assessment program because in some cases such behavior are early warning signs that

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can lead to violence. Other behaviors that would fall directly into a violence risk assessment program include oral or written threats, assaults with or without battery, stalking, sabotage or vandalism, and homicide. Business related concerns that the program should address include liability, productivity, workplace morale, and associated costs. The primary source of concern may be the cost of being proven liable for negligent security continues to grow in number and cost to business throughout the United States. Judgments' and settlements for wrongful death cases are averaging more than \$2. 8 million dollars (Anderson, 2002).

It is important the company research, document, and understand the method by which it or its employees can obtain restraining or protective orders against individuals who threaten to harm them. Before committing violence, a workplace aggressor must first determine that violence is an acceptable means to establish or re-establish control (Corcoran and Cawood, 2003, p. 6). Next the aggressor selects target and locations. Then the act of violence can occur (Corcoran and Cawood, 2003, p. 6). In deciding to commit violence, aggressors do not "snap" but go through a process of emotional escalation or in the case of psychopaths, non emotional decision making.

For security practitioners, the most effective means of preventing workplace violence is detection of this behavioral, emotional, and psychological dynamic. The way to detect individuals who are destabilized and seeking control is to assess their mental and emotional levels along a continuum of violent behavior and then develop a plan to divert them from violence

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through a case specific use of communication, company resources, community resources, and legal system. In general, the continuum of violent behavior starts with general disgruntlement with a business or a person (Calhoun & Weston, 2003 p. 60).

One way I have found to help minimize the risk is to establish an Incident Management Team. The IMT should include at a minimum, a senior management representative, a senior human resources manager, a senior security manager and a legal representative who is familiar with labor and employment law and litigation. The role of the team may be defined differently in different organizations. Some

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larger enterprises have established regional teams along with an enterprise-wide oversight team to facilitate consistence of practice, communicate lessons learned and provide support. Since this role of situation assessment and intervention is similar to the role of crisis management teams, it may be possible to assign an existing team to handle violence risk assessment or develop a subset of the established team to take on that role.

It is essential that the IMT be empowered to commit company assets and personnel to resolve an incident. If the IMT must brief other manager to obtain a decision on employment actions, deployment of personnel, or payment of costs, the assessment process will slow down and the risk of an unsuccessful resolution will increase significantly.

When notification is made, the receiver of that information decides, based on company criteria, whether the situation calls for an immediate emergency response. Certainly, managers and supervisors should be taught to respond to immediate risks by notifying community emergency resources. However, they do not always do so. Therefore, the initial assessment must examine what has happened and what has been done, if anything, in deciding whether to contact community emergency resources for help.

The next decision, based on the availability of the community emergency resources, may be whether to evacuate the facility or in the case of a bomb threat, employees are best suited to search the premises. A lot can happen in the time it takes for law enforcement officers to respond. The company must consider whether locking down, sheltering in place, or evacuating the facility would best protect employees and other occupants. For example, when an aggressor has a firearm on the premises, a preferred strategy is a 360-degree evacuation in which evacuees move away from the building and find shelter in other buildings or out of sight of the building, preferably behind other objects (such as buildings or trees). This approach minimizes pooling of potential victims the aggressor can shoot. If the shooter is outside the building, then a lockdown might be appropriate. If the perimeter is breached, then evacuation might be necessary. The use of a single, unchanging process, such as locking students in classrooms regardless of the location of the shooter, does not work. This is illustrated by both the 1999 Columbine

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High School shooting and the 2005 Red Lake High School shooting in the United States. In those incidents, students were shot as they huddled in the library (Columbine) or were locked in a classroom (Red Lake). As was learned in the 101 California Street office shooting in San Francisco in 1993, “ those that run live and those that hid die” (Cawood, 2005).

Monitoring for new behavior is a critical and underappreciated part of the violence risk assessment process. Monitoring creates the behavioral feedback loop that allows the violence risk assessment to be updated, the value of the interventions to be tested and final resolution of the incident or situation to be determined. In any given case, the IMT can establish passive monitoring or active monitoring. Passive monitoring relies on the target and others who might witness new behavior to report that behavior to the IMT on a timely basis. This is effective only in very low risk cases, in which a lapse in immediate reporting would not lead to a significant risk of harm.

Active monitoring means the assessor actively pursues new behavioral information rather than passively waiting for a report. The more elevated risk, the more often the contacts are made. Active monitoring is the best option for a moderate-to high-risk situation or one in which the target or witnesses cannot be relied on to report new behavior. This lack of reporting reliability could be due to shock, denial, rationalization, minimization or other psychological defense mechanisms; fear of retaliation or retribution; or a misperception of the target’s ability to handle the situation without help. Regardless of the reason, the information is actively pursued. An example of this might be a domestic violence risk where the target, at work, receives threatening calls in which the aggressor says he or she will make the target  
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pay and threatens to come to the workplace to confront the target. In an interview, the target says the aggressor is not a threat and expects that nothing will happen, but investigation reveals that the aggressor has a history of perpetrating domestic violence against the target and prior partners, including confrontations in a prior partner's workplace. In this case, the target may conceal or play down any contact from the aggressor (because of embarrassment, concern about keeping his or her job, or a belief that he or she is safe) and might not be a reliable source of information on a new interaction. In this case,

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the IMT might locate workers who could witness new contacts from the aggressor and could be relied on to report the contacts. The IMT might also check with them several times a day to see if new contacts occurred. If new contacts are reported, the IMT could contact the target and ask for an update. If the target denies an interaction, the IMT could attempt to lower the target's resistance to providing the information. The frequency of the active monitoring could be increased or decreased depending on the level of current assessed risk of imminent violence.

A final way to end your Incidence Management Team process is always by review and debriefing. Incident review occurs on an ongoing basis as new behavioral information is learned from all sources. This ongoing cycle of reassessment, review of intervention options, implementation of intervention options and monitoring for new behavioral cues continues until the situation

is considered resolved by IMT standards. Review can be used continuously to fine-tune operational and tactical processes to provide the greatest safety.

Debriefing incidents and gleaning lessons learned is a critical part of incident management and process improvement. It allows for a strategy-level look at how a particular incident might affect process improvement on a larger scale. Some companies conduct short incident debriefings after the initial round of assessment and intervention and then conduct monthly, quarterly, semiannual or annual debriefings to provide updates on specific cases and discuss possible process improvements.

Incident reviews, debriefings or a blend of both can allow for continuous improvements in the management of a particular case and the overall process.

So what is really the future of workplace violence? Some may argue that improvements in assessment, intervention and monitoring are leading to a greater understanding of the behavioral cues that signal impending violent behavior. In addition, the psychological research literature available on workplace violence has mushroomed in the last decade. There are others that believe that as the economy continues to falter, many workplace violence experts anticipate that there will be a rise in shootings. But the laid off worker may not be venting their frustrations on their previous employer.

Many

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of those in distress will be seeking support from human services and upset about the mounting bills that they must pay. The employees that work with this public will need to prepare for the continuing increase client aggression.

But I offer this opinion, what if workplace violence could just be a matter of knowing how to treat one another? What if we learned to treat people as we want to be treated? Even though, it's so simple, it could be so hard for a lot of us. During my research on workplace violence, I never once ran across a study that tied in kindness to workplace violence. I'm not saying that I know all of the many facts; all I'm saying is " what if"?