



Violence Against Working Women

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ABSTRACT

This document reviews what is known about fatal and nonfatal violence in the workplace to determine the focus needed for prevention and research. The document also summarizes issues to be addressed when dealing with workplace violence in various settings such as offices, factories, warehouses, hospitals, convenience stores, and taxicabs. Violence is a substantial contributor to occupational injury and death, and homicide has become the second leading cause of occupational injury death. Each week, an average of 20 workers are murdered and 18,000 are assaulted while at work or on duty. Nonfatal assaults result in millions of lost workdays and cost workers millions of dollars in lost wages. Workplace violence is clustered in certain occupational settings: For example, the retail trade and service industries account for more than half of workplace homicides and 85% of nonfatal workplace assaults. Taxicab drivers have the highest risk of workplace homicides of any occupational group. Workers in health care, community services, and retail settings are at increased risk of nonfatal assaults. Risk factors for workplace violence include dealing with the public, the exchange of money, and the delivery of services or goods. Prevention strategies for minimizing the risk of workplace violence include (but are not limited to) cash-handling policies, physical separation of workers from customers, good lighting, security devices, escort services, and employee training. A workplace violence prevention program should include a system for documenting incidents, procedures to be taken in the event of incidents, and open communication between employers and workers. Although no definitive prevention strategy is appropriate for all workplaces, all workers and employers should assess the risks for violence in their workplaces and take appropriate action to reduce those risks.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors. Homicide is currently the fourth-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), of the 4,547 fatal workplace injuries that occurred in the United States in 2010, 506 were workplace homicides. Homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. [More...] However it manifests itself, workplace violence is a major concern for employers and employees nationwide.

Who is at risk of workplace violence?

Nearly 2 million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence each year. Unfortunately, many more cases go unreported. The truth is, workplace violence can strike anywhere, anytime, and no one is immune. Research has identified factors that may increase the risk of violence for some workers at certain work-sites. Such factors include exchanging money with the public and working with volatile, unstable people. Working alone or in isolated areas may also contribute to the potential for violence. Providing services and care, and working where alcohol is served may also impact the likelihood of violence. Additionally, time of day and location of work, such as working late at night or in areas with high crime rates, are also risk factors that should be considered when addressing issues of workplace violence. Among those with higher risk are workers who exchange money with the public, delivery drivers, healthcare professionals, public service workers, customer service agents, law enforcement personnel, and those who work alone or in small groups.

The circumstances of workplace violence also vary and may include robbery-associated violence; violence by disgruntled clients, customers, patients, inmates, etc.; violence by coworkers, employees, or employers; and domestic violence that finds its way into the workplace. These circumstances all appear to be related to the level of violence in communities and in society in general. Thus the question arises: why study workplace violence separately from the larger universe of all violence? Several reasons exist for focusing specifically on workplace

violence:

- Violence is a substantial contributor to death and injury on the job. NIOSH data indicate that homicide has become the second leading cause of occupational injury death, exceeded only by motor-vehicle-related deaths [Jenkins 1996]. Estimates of non-fatal workplace assaults vary dramatically, but a reasonable estimate from the National Crime Victimization Survey is that approximately 1 million people are assaulted while at work or on duty each year; this figure represents 15% of the acts of violence experienced by U.S. residents aged 12 or older [Bachman 1994].
- The circumstances of workplace violence differ significantly from those of all homicides. For example, 75% of all workplace homicides in 1993 were robbery-related; but in the general population, only 9% of homicides were robbery-related, and only 19% were committed in conjunction with any kind of felony (robbery, rape, arson, etc.) [FBI 1994]. Furthermore, 47% of all murder victims in 1993 were related to or acquainted with their assailants [FBI 1994], whereas the majority of workplace homicides (because they are robbery-related) are believed to occur among persons not known to one another. Only 17% of female victims of workplace homicides were killed by a spouse or former spouse [Windau and Toscano 1994], whereas 29% of the female homicide victims in the general population were killed by a husband, ex-husband, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend [FBI 1994].
- Workplace violence is not distributed randomly across all workplaces but is clustered in particular occupational settings. More than half (56%) of workplace homicides occurred in retail trade and service industries. Homicide is the leading cause of death in these industries as well as in finance, insurance, and real estate. Eighty-five percent of nonfatal assaults in the workplace occur in service and retail trade industries [BLS 1994d]. As the U.S. economy continues to shift toward the service sectors, fatal and nonfatal workplace violence will be an increasingly important occupational safety and health issue.
- The risk of workplace violence is associated with specific workplace factors such as dealing with the public, the exchange of money, and the delivery of services or goods. Consequently, great potential exists for workplace-specific prevention efforts such as bullet-resistant barriers and enclosures in taxicabs, convenience stores, gas stations, emergency departments, and oth-

er areas where workers come in direct contact with the public; locked drop safes and other cash-handling procedures in retail establishments; and threat assessment policies in all types of workplaces.

Long-term efforts to reduce the level of violence in U.S. society must address a variety of social issues such as education, poverty, and environmental justice. However, short-term efforts must address the pervasive nature of violence in our society and the need to protect workers. We cannot wait to address workplace violence as a social issue alone but must take immediate action to address it as a serious occupational safety issue.

How can workplace violence hazards be reduced?

In most workplaces where risk factors can be identified, the risk of assault can be prevented or minimized if employers take appropriate precautions. One of the best protections employers can offer their workers is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should cover all workers, patients, clients, visitors, contractors, and anyone else who may come in contact with company personnel.

By assessing their worksites, employers can identify methods for reducing the likelihood of incidents occurring. OSHA believes that a well written and implemented Workplace Violence Prevention Program, combined with engineering controls, administrative controls and training can reduce the incidence of workplace violence in both the private sector and Federal workplaces.

This can be a separate workplace violence prevention program or can be incorporated into an injury and illness prevention program, employee handbook, or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all workers know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. In addition, OSHA encourages employers to develop additional methods as necessary to protect employees in high risk industries.

Violence against women at work

Women from all backgrounds are attacked each year at work. Among women, murder is the leading cause of death from a workplace injury. Sometimes women are attacked during a robbery. Usually, though, women are hurt by someone they know, like a co-worker, customer, client, or patient. And sometimes attacks are the result of domestic violence that spills over into the workplace.

Here are steps you can take if you are concerned about violence at work:

- **Learn how to stay safe.** Ask your supervisor about any safety policies and trainings. Make sure you know how to get help in a violent situation. Find out what security services are available, such as a security escort to your car.
- **Talk to your supervisor about adding safety tools.** These can include panic alarms, closed circuit TV cameras, better lighting, and signs saying that only small amounts of cash are available.
- **Report any incidents that worry or upset you.** Tell your supervisor about physical or verbal abuse. Also report worrisome behaviors of co-workers, clients, or customers. This can include sexual comments or advances that make you feel uncomfortable. Provide a written report, and keep a copy. You can ask that the report be kept confidential.
- **If you are experiencing domestic violence, tell your employer.** If you have a court order of protection, share it with your employer, along with a photo of your abuser. If you don't have a court order, your employer may be able to help you get one. Your employer may be able to help in other ways, too. For example, if your workplace has an employee assistance program (EAP), staff there can provide support and resources.

Workplace Security Analysis

Employers should have the designated team, worker or consultant periodically inspect the worksite and evaluate job tasks to identify hazards, conditions, operations and situations that could expose workers to violence. An initial walkthrough survey should be conducted to identify risks and establish a baseline. To find areas requiring

further evaluation, the team or coordinator should:

- Analyze incidents, including the characteristics of assailants and victims. Incident descriptions should include an account of what happened before and during the incident, and the relevant details of the situation and its outcome. When possible, someone should obtain police reports and recommendations.
- Identify jobs or locations with the greatest risk of violence as well as processes and Procedures that put workers at risk of assault. The analysis should include an estimate of the frequency and time when the risk of violence is greatest.
- Note high risk factors such as types of store patrons or environmental factors, such as:

Building layouts, interior and exterior lighting, establishments. The selection of any measure should be based on the hazards identified in the workplace security analysis. Given that late- night retail businesses are prone to robberies, employers should seek to reduce their risk by improving visibility and surveillance, controlling customers' access, and limiting the availability of cash. Such measures could include:

- Limiting window signs to low or high locations and keeping shelving low so that workers can see incoming customers and so that police can observe what is occurring from the outside of the store;
- Ensuring the customer service and cash register areas are visible from outside the establishment;
- Placing curved mirrors at hallway intersections or concealed areas;
- Maintaining adequate lighting inside and outside the establishment;
- Installing video surveillance equipment and closed circuit TV to increase the likelihood of identification of perpetrators;
- Using door detectors so that workers are alerted when someone enters the store;

When is workplace harassment sexual harassment?

If the abuser or perpetrator harasses you or is violent toward you at work and your employer knows about it and fails to take quick action to remedy the situation, you may have a legal claim for sexual harassment. Your employer could be liable for sexual harassment if the abuser or perpetrator is your supervisor, your coworker, or even if the abuser or perpetrator works elsewhere. Examples of conduct by an abuser, stalker, or perpetrator that may be sexual harassment:

Employment Discrimination Against Abused Women

What can I do if I have been discriminated against or sexually harassed or assaulted at work? 1. Use your employer's complaint procedure for sexual harassment or discrimination.

Your workplace should have a complaint or grievance procedure for sex discrimination and harassment. First, find out whether your employer has a complaint procedure. If so, file a complaint. If your workplace does not have a formal policy, tell a supervisor or someone with authority to change the situation about the discrimination or the harassment.

Resolving the problem internally will save you the time and effort of filing an administrative complaint or lawsuit. Also, even if you end up filing an administrative complaint or a law suit, you often must show that you filed an internal complaint before doing so. If you believe your complaint has not been handled satisfactorily by your employer, you may want to file an administrative complaint or lawsuit.

File an administrative complaint.

You can file an administrative complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) or with the government agency in your state or city that enforces state or city laws against discrimination. These governmental agencies generally have strict deadlines for filing a complaint. There is no charge for filing a claim with an administrative agency. Generally, you must file an administrative complaint before you file a lawsuit.

File a lawsuit.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your workplace's com-

plaint procedure or your administrative claim, or if you would like to file a lawsuit, you have the right to do so. Be aware that lawsuits take many years and are expensive and time consuming. It is not easy to find a lawyer who will take your case for free or for a low fee. There are strict deadlines for filing lawsuits and you may have to file an administrative claim first. There

may also be specific requirements to prove your claim, such as showing that your employer was aware of the harassment and that you gave your employer the opportunity to resolve the claim.

Do I have any other legal claims if I have been fired or forced to quit because of? Most employees are employees at will. This means they can be fired for any reason or no reason. There are some exceptions to this rule. One exception is that an employer cannot fire a person for a discriminatory reason (see discussion of sex discrimination above). Another exception is that in most states, an employer cannot fire a worker for a reason that violates public policy. What this means is different in each state. For example, in some states an employer cannot fire someone because she attended jury duty or because she filed a claim for workers compensation. If an employer fires someone for a reason that violates public policy, the employee may have a claim for money damages, which is called a wrongful discharge or wrongful termination claim.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OBJECTIVES:

To decrease the incidence (number of experiences) of sexual harassment women and girls experience in a year by X%; to increase the public's knowledge of what constitutes sexual harassment; and to increase women's confidence and desire to use public spaces in the city at night (measured by survey responses).

- Understand the social and historical context of domestic and sexual violence work
- Understand patriarchy and its relationship to violence against women
- Be able to identify aspects of gender stereotypes that are related to violence against women.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Second data was collected from books, journals, reports, website etc....

- In 2000, 13,935 women had injuries or illnesses involving days away from work that resulted from assaults and violent acts (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS]).
- Homicide is the second-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries for women, after traffic accidents. Thirty-one percent of women who die at work are killed as a result of an assault or violent act. In 2003, 119 women died as a result of an assault or violent act in the workplace (BLS).
- 12.7 percent of all female violent crimes were committed while the victim was working or on duty. These acts of nonfatal violence include rape and sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault and simple assault (BLS).
- Some 36,500 rapes and sexual assaults occur annually in the workplace. In 80 percent of these incidents, the victim was female (NCVS).
- Nurses experience workplace crime at a rate 72 percent higher than medical technicians and at more than twice the rate of other medical fieldworkers (NCVS).
- Professional (social worker/psychiatrist) and custodial care providers in the mental health care field were victimized while working or on duty at rates more than three times those in the medical field (NCVS).

- Junior high school teachers have a rate of victimization in the workplace similar to convenience store clerks—54.2 versus 53.9 per 1,000 workers (NCVS).

The data on workplace violence is scattered and inadequate to understand the extent of the problem. Many acts of nonfatal violence and threats in the workplace go unreported because there is no coordinated data-collection system to process the information. More than 936,000 of the nearly 2 million workplace crimes committed yearly were not reported to the police. Rape and sexual assaults were reported to the police at an even lower rate of 24 percent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a clear policy for workplace violence, verbal and non-verbal threats and related actions. All personnel employed in the retail establishments should know the policy.
- Ensure that no worker who reports or experiences workplace violence faces reprisals.
- Encourage workers to promptly report incidents and suggest ways to reduce or eliminate risks.

Require records of incidents to assess risk and measure progress.

- Outline a comprehensive plan for maintaining security in the workplace. The plan should include establishing a liaison with law enforcement representatives and others who can help identify ways to prevent and mitigate workplace violence.
- Assign responsibility and authority for the program to individuals or teams with appropriate training and skills. Ensure that adequate resources are available and that those responsible for the program develop expertise on workplace violence prevention in late-night retail settings.
- Affirm management commitment to an environment that places as much importance on worker safety and health as on serving store patrons.

Conclusion

Workplace violence has emerged as a major occupational safety and health issue in many industries, especially the retail trade. Systematic frameworks to help employers protect workers from risks of injury and death from occupationally-related violence. By treating workplace violence as a preventable hazard, employers can develop practical, effective strategies to protect their workers from this serious risk and provide a safe, healthful working environment.

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