

## **Preventing and Managing Workplace Violence: An International Learning Perspective**

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### **The Problem of Workplace Violence**

In September 1989, Joseph T. Wesbecker, an employee who was on long-term disability leave from his job at the Standard Gravure Company in Louisville, Kentucky, entered the plant and killed eight co-workers with a semi-automatic assault rifle. Twelve other workers were injured by Wesbecker before he took his own life. Wesbecker, an emotionally disturbed employee of the company, was evaluated by experts and it was determined that he did not fit into the classic model for the prediction of violent behaviour.

In March 1996, Thomas Hamilton entered the gymnasium at the Dunblane Primary School in Scotland and started shooting sporadically, killing fifteen children, one teacher and seriously injuring many others. They had sustained a total of 58 gunshot wounds. The shooting spree ended when Hamilton took his own life. The tragedy was magnified because of the death of so many children.

A Canadian study recently identified a number of examples of workplace violence, including: a health care aide who was punched in the side of the head; a hotel doorman who broke a hand when escorting a drunk from the bar; a bus driver who was assaulted after requiring a passenger to pay the fare; a cashier who was robbed at knife-point; and numerous injuries sustained by police officers in the line of duty.<sup>1</sup> In August, 1998, Frank Roberts, the inventor of the Obus Forme backrest was shot dead as he stepped out of his Mercedes motor vehicle after arriving at work. Police investigating the homicide indicated they would be checking for possible disgruntled employees.

In Japan, the longstanding recession in 1990s resulted in major corporate downsizing that had not been known in that country before, shattering career stability and assumptions about Japanese economic life. Loss of life-time positions and job security had been accompanied by bullying other white collar workers. The problem had become so severe that a “bullying hot line” was established by the Tokyo Managers Union.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Violence in the Workplace in British Columbia, May 1993, Professor Neil Boyd, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> D. Chappell and V. Di Martino, *Violence at Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Geneva: I.L.O., 2000) at pp. 9.

In Germany, after reunification of West Germany and East Germany, a national study revealed that 93 percent of women questioned stated that they had been sexually harassed at the workplace during the course of their career. The problem was so pervasive that sexual harassment in the workplace was not considered an 'exceptional phenomenon' in the day-to-day working life of women in Germany.

Workplace violence is not only an American<sup>3</sup> or Canadian problem, it is an international problem, as has been documented in a recent study by the International Labour Organization. A survey of 32 countries on trends in workplace violence was conducted in the early 1990's by an International Working Group composed of representatives of the Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands, the United National Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and the Home Office of the United Kingdom. While the scope and findings of that international study are beyond the intended purpose this paper, they emphasize that workplace violence is a real and growing problem in most developed countries covered by the study.<sup>4</sup>

## Defining Workplace Violence

Workplace violence may be defined as: *any incident in which a worker is threatened, coerced, abused or sustains physical, emotional or psychological harm or injury in, at, or related to the workplace.* Workplace violence includes, but is not limited to beatings, stabbing, suicides, shootings, rapes, near suicides, psychological traumas such as threats, obscene phone calls, an intimidating presence, and harassment of any nature such as being followed, sworn at or shouted at. For statistical purposes, many law enforcement communities define workplace violence as the commission of proscribed criminal acts or coercive behaviour which occurs in the work setting. It includes, but is not limited to homicides, forcible sex offences, kidnapping, assault, robbery, menacing, reckless endangerment, harassment and disorderly conduct. The term coercive behaviour is intended to convey the sense that workplace violence may take many forms in addition to the use of force. The aggressor may use berating language, physical or verbal threats, or damage personal property.<sup>5</sup>

The International Labour Organization ("ILO") defines workplace violence in the 2005 version of their online thesaurus as, "Any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed or injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Data from the National Crime Victimization Surveys for 1992-96 indicate that during each year American residents experience 2 million violent victimizations while they are at work each day.

<sup>4</sup> D. Chappell and V. Di Martino, *Violence at Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Geneva: I.L.O., 2000) at pp. 23-32.

<sup>5</sup> Norman A. Keith, *Human Resources Guide to Preventing Workplace Violence*, (Aurora, Ontario: Canada Law Book, 1999) page 26

<sup>6</sup> ILO Thesaurus 2005, online: [www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ILO-Thesaurus/english/tr1261.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ILO-Thesaurus/english/tr1261.htm)

## Types of Workplace Violence<sup>7</sup>

Safety professionals should be aware that there are a number of different types of workplace violence. The types of workplace violence will often dictate the risks and needs of a workplace violence prevention and management program. In addition to defining workplace violence, there is also merit in characterizing different types of workplace violence. Human resource managers will benefit from classifying and identifying the different types of workplace violence. Since there are different types of workplace violence there are also different types of solutions to prevent workplace violence. Therefore, it is not only helpful, but also critical to analyze and characterize different types of workplace violence in order to prevent and manage the problem. The four types of workplace violence are (1) violence committed by clients, patients or customers; (2) violence committed by strangers; (3) violence between or among co-workers; and (4) domestic violence in the workplace.

## Workplace Violence Statistics

Workplace violence is a global phenomenon. Statistics from various sources indicate that workplace violence is widespread, although risk factors such as age and gender play a significant role in determining whether an individual will be exposed to workplace violence during their lifetime. In 1996 the European Union (“EU”) conducted a survey among its then 15 member states. The results of the survey showed that in the past year 4 percent of workers, about 6 million individuals, were subjected to physical violence at work.<sup>8</sup> An additional 2 per cent of workers were subject to sexual harassment and another 8 per cent to intimidation and bullying.<sup>9</sup> That means that almost 21 million workers were the victims of workplace violence. This is a sobering statistic indeed.

The United States has long been known for incidents of workplace violence. Between the years 1993 and 1999 an average of 1.7 million people were subjected to incidents of workplace violence each year.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in the United States between 800 and 1,000 workers are murdered while at work each year. Workplace homicide is the leading cause of workplace death for women and the second leading cause of workplace death for men (after traffic collisions).<sup>11</sup> Of the occupations examined in recent American surveys, police officers, corrections officers and taxi drivers were victimized at the highest rates.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The four types of workplace violence are adapted from Norman A. Keith, *Human Resources Guide to Preventing Workplace Violence*, (Aurora, Ontario: Canada Law Book, 1999), Ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan Chappell and Vittorio Di Martino, “Violence at Work” in the *Asian-Pacific Newsletter on Occupational Health and Safety*, volume 6, number 1, April 1999, page 1

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), NIOSH Safety and Health Topic: Occupational Violence, online: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence)

<sup>11</sup> ILO Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork), online: [www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/preface.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/preface.htm) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), NIOSH Safety and Health Topic: Occupational Violence, online: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence)

<sup>12</sup> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), NIOSH Safety and Health Topic: Occupational Violence, online: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence)

In 2000 the EU conducted another study on working conditions and found that 2 percent of workers are subjected to physical violence from people within their workplace. A further 4 percent of workers are subjected to physical violence from those outside their workplace. These statistics show that over 9 million European workers were subjected to physical violence at work.<sup>13</sup> The highest levels of workplace violence from those outside of the workplace were in the public administration (6 per cent) and trade and retail (5 per cent) industries.<sup>14</sup>

In Canada our experience with workplace violence has been that it is still a real and growing problem. In 2004 the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics conducted a study on criminal victimization in the workplace. The survey found that 17% of all self-reported incidents of violent victimization occurred at work. This works out to over 356,000 incidents of workplace violence across Canada's ten provinces.<sup>15</sup> According to the same report, 58 per cent of all workplace violence incidents occurred against victims who worked in educational services, health care, social assistance, accommodation and food services.<sup>16</sup>

In the United Kingdom ("UK") the Health and Safety Executive ("HSE") is responsible for curbing workplace violence. The HSE reports that the estimated number of violent incidents experienced by workers in England and Wales in 2004/2005 was 655,000.<sup>17</sup> While this is a very large number, it is significantly smaller than the peak of 1.3 million incidents in 1995.<sup>18</sup> The HSE notes that workers in the National Health Service ("NHS") are up to four times more likely to experience work-related violence than workers in other sectors of the economy.<sup>19</sup>

In Australia, while the risk of death or serious physical injury from an incident of workplace violence is relatively remote, each year approximately one Australian health care worker is murdered on the job.<sup>20</sup> However, many more individuals in high-risk occupations suffer verbal abuse and bullying on the job, in addition to physical violence. For example, about 81% of taxi drivers surveyed reported suffering verbal abuse on the job.<sup>21</sup>

Although it is not a government, the ILO is addressing the issue of violence in the workplace through its Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment, also known as "SafeWork."<sup>22</sup> The SafeWork section of the ILO website introduces the problem of workplace violence and then proceeds to set out preventative strategies and strategies for dealing with violent incidents. The SafeWork site is also a useful resource for international statistics on workplace violence and for employers who need a starting point for drafting their own workplace violence policies and procedures. Finally, the ILO is in the process of creating its

<sup>13</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin, Ireland, December 2000, online: [www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/eusurvey/eusurvey.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/eusurvey/eusurvey.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series 85F0033MWE, Number 13, *Criminal victimization in the workplace*, 2004, online: [www.statcan.ca/english/research/85F0033MIE/2007013/findings.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/85F0033MIE/2007013/findings.htm)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Health and Safety Executive, *Work Related Violence*, online: [www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Claire Mayhew and Duncan Chappell, *Violence in the Workplace*, MJA 2005; 183(7): 346-347, online: [www.mja.com.au/public/issues/183\\_07\\_031005/may10621\\_fm.html](http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/183_07_031005/may10621_fm.html)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Programme on Safety and Health at W and the Environment, online: [www.ilo.org/public/safework/violence.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/safework/violence.htm)

own SafeWork Training Package that relates to workplace violence. The package will include an action manual, training modules and a trainer's manual.<sup>23</sup>

## **Governmental Responses to Workplace Violence**

For workplace violence to be reduced or eliminated, governments must take responsibility. It is not enough to delegate the problem of workplace violence to individual employers if there is going to be any progress made on the issue.

In the United States reducing workplace violence is the responsibility of the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety ("NIOSH"), which is an arm of the Center for Disease Control ("CDC"). NIOSH conducts, funds and publishes research related to workplace violence, also referred to in the US as occupational violence. This research is posted on the NIOSH website and relates to both risk factors and prevention strategies of workplace violence. NIOSH has also partnered with the US Bureau of Labor Statistics to conduct a survey on workplace violence. In addition to collecting information about workplace violence incidents, the survey also inquired about employer's workplace violence programs and policies.<sup>24</sup> That survey revealed that only about 30 per cent of business surveyed had any form of a workplace violence policy.<sup>25</sup> Clearly additional workplaces should adopt a workplace violence prevention plan so that the current high rate of workplace violence incidents can be reduced.

The general duty clause set out in the US Code requires employers to, "furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees."<sup>26</sup> This duty includes protecting employees from workplace violence.

Also, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has published two policy documents that are intended to act as guides to preventing workplace violence. One document focuses on the social service industry, while the other addresses late-night retail establishments.<sup>27</sup> Certain states also have legislation aimed at preventing and reducing workplace violence. California has legislation that requires businesses to have a workplace injury prevention plan and a specific law to combat violence in hospitals. Washington and Florida have laws in place to protect against certain types of retail violence.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> NIOSH Update: Data from Survey for NIOSH on Workplace Violence Reported by US Bureau of Labor Statistics, online: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/upd-10-27-06.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/upd-10-27-06.html)

<sup>25</sup> Table 10. Percent of establishments that have a workplace violence prevention program or policy by industry, size and class, 2005, online: [www.bls.gov/iif/osh\\_wpvs.htm](http://www.bls.gov/iif/osh_wpvs.htm)

<sup>26</sup> US Code, Title 29 – Labor, Chapter 15 – Occupational Safety and Health, section 654 – Duties of employers and employees.

<sup>27</sup> Guidelines for Preventing Violence for Health Care and Social Service Workers, online: [www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3148.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3148.pdf) and Recommendations for Workplace Violence Protection Programs in Late-Night Retail Establishments, online: [www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3153.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3153.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> OHS Answers: Violence in the Workplace, online: [www.ccohs.ca/ohsanswers/psychosocial/violence.htm](http://www.ccohs.ca/ohsanswers/psychosocial/violence.htm)

In Canada each province has control over occupational health and safety legislation. However, for federally regulated employers the *Canada Labour Code* applies. It requires employers to take the necessary steps to prevent and protect workers against violence in the workplace.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of the provincial legislation has a general duty provision which requires employers to take all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of employees.<sup>30</sup> Some provinces also have specific workplace violence regulations.

In Nova Scotia the “Violence in the Workplace Regulations” was created under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.<sup>31</sup> Although they are not yet fully in force, they will be completely operational on April 8, 2008.<sup>32</sup>

Manitoba also has provisions in their regulations with respect to workplace violence. Part II of the “Workplace Safety and Health Regulation” addresses violence in the workplace.<sup>33</sup>

Prince Edward Island’s occupational health and safety legislation addresses the problem of workplace violence under section 52 of the “General Regulations” made under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.<sup>34</sup> The Regulations also have a separate section, section 53, that applies to workers who are working alone. While that section does not specifically address workplace violence, it sets out requirements that employers must follow when employees are working alone that could help prevent acts of violence from occurring.

Saskatchewan addresses workplace violence in both its *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and accompanying Regulations. Section 14 of the Saskatchewan *Act* requires employers at a place of employment where violent situations have occurred or may reasonably be expected to occur, to develop and implement a policy statement to deal with potentially violent situations.<sup>35</sup> Section 37 of the Regulations made under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* sets out which places of employment may be reasonably expected to have violent situations occur. These places include: pharmaceutical-dispensing services; education services; police services; corrections services; other law enforcement services; security services; crisis counseling and intervention services; retail sales in establishments that are open between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.; financial services; the sale of alcoholic beverages or the provision of premises for the consumption of alcoholic beverages; taxi services; and transit services.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, British Columbia also has provisions in its *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* that address the problem of workplace violence. Sections 4.27-4.31 apply to workplace violence. Section 4.28 sets out the requirement for a workplace risk assessment in any workplace in which a risk of injury to workers from violence arising out of their employment may be present.<sup>37</sup> If the

<sup>29</sup> R.S.C. 1984, c. L-2, s. 125(z.16).

<sup>30</sup> OHS Answers: Violence in the Workplace, online: [www.ccohs.ca/ohsanswers/psychosocial/violence.htm](http://www.ccohs.ca/ohsanswers/psychosocial/violence.htm)

<sup>31</sup> N.S. Reg. 209/2007, enabling statute the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, S.N.S. 1996, c. 7

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Man. Reg. 217/2006, enabling statute the *Workplace Safety and Health Act*, C.C.S.M. c. W210.

<sup>34</sup> P.E.I. Reg. EC180/87, enabling statute the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, R.S.P.E.I. 1988, c. O-1.01

<sup>35</sup> *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, 1993, S.S. 1993, c. O-1.1, s. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 1996, R.R.S. c. O-1.1 Reg. 1, s. 37.

<sup>37</sup> B.C. Reg. 296/97, section 4.28.



risk assessments determine that the workplace is at risk to workplace violence the employer must establish procedures, policies and work environment arrangements to eliminate or minimize the risk to workers from violence.<sup>38</sup>

In the UK the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, 1974* sets out a general legal duty for employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees.<sup>39</sup> This would include preventing acts of violence in the workplace. Additionally, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to consider the risks to their employees, including reasonably foreseeable risk of violence, and develop a plan to prevent or control the risks.<sup>40</sup>

Elsewhere in Europe certain countries have introduced specific legislation to address workplace violence. Notable countries that have workplace violence legislation are Sweden, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Finland.<sup>41</sup> It is unfortunate that more countries have not adopted similar legislation.

Occupational Health and Safety laws in Australia impose broad obligations on employers to ensure the safety of their workers. Under these laws employers and individuals can be prosecuted for acts of workplace violence.<sup>42</sup>

## **Developing a Policy and a Program<sup>43</sup>**

Workplace violence may be prevented and managed by a systematic approach to solving the problem. A positive and safe workplace, free from violence, does not occur by chance. In most cases a violence free workplace has been the result of either good luck or a good program; good luck will likely run out, but a good program will not. Since the problem of workplace violence affects all workplace stakeholders, all stakeholders need to be part of a prevention and management system in order for any meaningful results to occur. This, in terms of workplace violence, requires human resource managers and other executives to establish and implement a policy and program that addresses and prevents workplace violence.

A workplace violence prevention policy should describe the extent of the potential problem, the aims and goals of the employer, and the response that will be taken by the employer and other workplace stakeholders to prevent violence. The policy must be a broad expression of the employer's intention to prevent workplace violence. The program, unlike the broad and general policy, must be a detailed explanation of the standards and procedures to prevent workplace violence in that particular workplace.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. at section 4.29.

<sup>39</sup> Health and Safety Executive, online: [www.hse.gov.uk/violence/law.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/law.htm)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Preventing violence and harassment in the workplace, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003, at page 4.

<sup>42</sup> Oonagh Barron, Violence in the Workplace – Protecting the Rights of Employees, (Job Watch Inc., 1999) at page 4

<sup>43</sup> Adapted from Norman A. Keith, *Human Resources Guide to Preventing Workplace Violence*, (Aurora, Ontario: Canada Law Book, 1999), Ch. 5.

## **Risk Assessments and Checklists**

An assessment of the risk of an individual workplace's exposure to workplace violence is critical to the development of an effective workplace violence prevention program. If the program is to address all of the possible violence risks that workers face, then there must first be a comprehensive risk assessment process. A checklist is a helpful tool used in many different contexts for the assessment of risks. Most human resources managers are comfortable with checklists in their other functions. Part of the process of assessing the risk of workplace violence to workers, customers, patients and clients is the development and use of a workplace checklist.

The risk assessment process may be broken down into at least five separate stages which include the following: (1) the risk assessment team; (2) the workplace risk assessment; (3) the victim profile assessment; (4) the perpetrator profile assessment; and (5) the development of the prevention policies. These separate stages of the risk assessment process are necessary for the development of an effective workplace violence prevention and management program. All five steps are set out below in greater detail.

### **The Risk Assessment Team**

The first step in developing a workplace violence prevention program is to designate a Risk Assessment Team ("the Team"). The Team will form an important part of the development of the workplace violence prevention program. The Team should be designated to assess the vulnerability of the workplace to workplace violence and then reach an agreement on the preventative actions to be taken. The team should also be responsible for the overall risk management process and including, but not limited to the following:

- defining and recommending the risk hazard assessment process;
- identifying and recommending employee training programs on workplace violence;
- planning and implementing the response to acts or threats of violence; and
- communicating internally with employees with respect to development and implementation.

### **The Workplace Risk Assessment**

The human resources manager will have an important role in the risk assessment process. The assessment will include a general risk assessment, a victim profile assessment, a perpetrator profile assessment, and ultimately the development of a risk hazards checklist. Generally, a risk hazards assessment should include, but not be limited to the following factors that may increase workers' risk of violence:

- Handling or exchange of money with the public;
- Working alone or in very small numbers;
- Working late at night or early in the morning hours;
- Working in high crime areas;
- Guarding valuable property or possessions; and



- Working in community settings.

## **Victim Profile Assessment**

An important part of the risk hazard assessment of the Team is to determine the nature of the potential victims among workers and employees of the organization. The classic method to create a victim profile assessment is to simply look to occupational factors: Is the type of job that a worker is performing naturally going to attract violent behaviour? This approach would suggest, for example, that the night gas station attendant is always at a higher risk of violence than the office receptionist. However, some studies and experience have demonstrated that a victim profile assessment is somewhat more complex. For example, a receptionist at a controversial government agency may have higher environmental risk factors opposed to a night gas station attendant where the safety and security of that attendant has been carefully thought through.

A myriad of risk factors may have an effect on the victim profile assessment. Those risk factors include Occupational Risk Factors, Environmental Risk Factors and Personal Risk Factors. Each factor is discussed in detail below.

## **Occupational Risk Factors**

Human resources managers should be familiar with occupational risk factors. Occupational factors include the type of job, position, or occupation that workers are in that might expose them to a higher risk of workplace violence. Occupational risk factors relate directly to the type and nature of the job, whereas environmental risk factors relate to the workplace environment, structure, organization and culture of the workplace. Occupational risk factors may include, but not be limited to the following:

- Employees who work in homes or in the community;
- Employees who handle money;
- Employees in institutions for the mentally ill or disabled who are not trained in violence avoidance or self defence;
- Employees who provide care, advice and information, such as health care workers, mental health workers, emergency room and admission workers, and other social service employees;
- Employees who deal with complaints, such as child welfare and unemployment officers;
- Employees who have the power to act against the public, inspect premises and enforce laws, such as inspectors, child welfare officers, law enforcement/corrections officers, and security guards;
- Employees working alone, such as child welfare workers, custodians, public park workers, parking meter attendants, and housing inspectors; and
- Employees working very early or very late hours, such as health care workers, custodians and workers in homeless shelters.

## Environmental Risk Factors

Safety and human resources managers should also be familiar with environmental risk factors. The environmental risk factor that might expose a worker to a greater degree of risk of workplace violence is less obvious than occupational factors. Environmental risk factors refer to the working environment, physical and organizational settings, and interpersonal relationships. This could include the organizational structure, managerial style, workplace culture and related environmental factors. Environmental factors may vary from workplace to workplace and may overlap with occupational factors. However, environmental risk factors must be considered separate from occupational risk factors because often environmental factors are easier to address or require different solutions than occupational risk factors. The environmental risk factors may include, but are not limited to the following:

- the physical design of the workplace, including overcrowding, ventilation, and noise levels, has been associated with increased levels of violence in the workplace;
- organizational settings such as imbalances in workload distribution, unjustified delays, excessive queuing, and negative attitudes of workers may increase the risk of workplace violence;
- management styles such as authoritarian versus democratic, and centralized versus de-centralized may have an important impact on workplace environmental risk factors; and
- the relationship between the external environment and the working environment may also be important. This includes such issues as the degree to which outside dangers in a dangerous neighbourhood will impact the safety of workers.

## Personal Risk Factors

Human resource managers should familiarize themselves with the personal risk factors that expose workers to workplace violence. The personal risk factors that should be considered by the Team in their victim profile assessment may be quite important. The response to stressful circumstances and situations that workers are faced with can result in workplace violence. Personal risk factors touch on the differences and sometimes personal fears and emotional vulnerability that some workers may have. Therefore, the Team must be particularly sensitive when reviewing, dealing and assessing the personal risk factors.

The personal risk factors may include, but are not limited to the following:

- the worker's natural personality is relevant in considering risks of victimization. Some workers are better at handling difficult situations than others;
- the attitude of a worker towards their job duties, loyalty to the employer's enterprise, and, met or unmet job expectations;
- the lack of job knowledge or training of a worker may cause the worker to be uncertain and unsure of themselves or overconfident when they should be cautious in dangerous situations; and
- the ability of an individual worker to handle aggressive behaviour may often have an effect on whether the aggression is increased or diminished.

## Workplace Surveys

Part of the risk hazard assessment process may include a questionnaire or survey of workers. Human resource managers may have considerable experience with surveys and questionnaires in other aspects of their job that can be applied to the prevention of workplace violence. The survey should be distributed to employees to identify the potential for violent incidents and to identify or confirm the need for improved security measures. All employees should be encouraged or even required to complete the questionnaire. Worker questionnaires should be reviewed, updated and distributed as needed, or at least once within a twenty-four (24) month period of time. Results should be analyzed and used to revise and improve the overall content and implementation of the Workplace Prevention Policy and Program.

## Development and Use of Checklists

The Team then needs to move the assessment process to a practical response. Once the first four steps have been taken, the next and last step in the suggested process is the development of the workplace violence hazards checklist. The purpose of the hazards checklist is to analyze, organize, record and systematically delineate the information that has been obtained in the first four steps. The form of the checklist may vary depending on the preferences of the Team, the nature of the workplace, the various risk factors that were identified in the assessment and the intended use of the checklist.

A checklist is a helpful means by which workplace parties may address the issues of workplace violence that are specific to them. During an inspection of the workplace a checklist is a valuable tool. The checklist usually groups specific hazards into categories and serves as a guide to ensure that the inspection is done systematically. It helps to set priorities, but it should not become an obstacle to hazard identification. Every workplace is unique and the checklist is only a guide. It should be customized for future inspections by adding items specific to the workplace as the inspection proceeds. Some of the issues that a checklist should include are as follows:

- The existence of hidden doors closets hallways, driveways;
- The presence of isolated work areas;
- Hours of operation which may create an isolated work area;
- Adequate and available lighting;
- Unrestricted areas where unauthorized individuals can gain access;
- Work areas where workers may work alone;
- Appropriate locks on doors and windows;
- Appropriate, accessible alarm systems and fire alarms;
- Adequate, clearly identified escape routes;
- Employee concerns in the inspected area;
- Overall security of the area;
- The use of ID Badges;
- Security/surveillance Cameras;
- Card and bar coded access systems;
- Metal detectors;

- Armed guards;
- Guard dogs;
- Bullet proof glass/partitions/barricades;
- Escort system; and
- Buddy systems for workers.

The use of the workplace violence prevention checklist as part of a regular health and safety inspection or audit that is conducted by the joint health and safety committee or by management itself is integral to its success. Although a checklist can be used for any facility that the employer has, it is best to have a specific section of the checklist for any unique or different aspects of a workplace.

The results of the inspections that follow the development of a checklist should be reviewed, analyzed and acted upon as soon as possible.

## **Workplace Design and Engineering Controls**

Sometimes the physical layout of the workplace can either deter or permit instances of workplace violence. The design and layout of the workplace will impact how people may act or behave. A good workplace layout or design can minimize unnecessary stress that sometimes leads to violence. Areas where workplace violence may be anticipated, for example in hospital emergency rooms, should be free of furniture and fittings that could be used as weapons. Where they are necessary these items should be either secured or of sufficient size that they can not be easily moved.

With respect to general building, workstation and work area designs issues, the following factors should be considered and addressed as part of the workplace violence prevention program:

- Review the design of all new or renovated facilities to ensure safe and secure conditions for employees;
- Ensure that facilities are designed to ensure the privacy of patients, clients and customers, yet permit employees to communicate with other staff in emergency situations;
- Communication via clear partitions, video cameras, speakers or alarms as appropriate to the workplace situation;
- Design work areas and arrange furniture to prevent entrapment of the employees and/or minimize potential for assault incidents;
- Control access to employee work areas via use of locked doors, buzzers, and card access; and
- Provide appropriate lighting systems for all indoor building areas as well as grounds around the facility and in parking areas: Lighting should meet the requirements of national and industry standards, as well as local building codes.

The visibility and lighting of the workplace and surrounding areas is important in the management of workplace violence. Good lighting is another form of engineering control of workplace violence. As an optimum goal, all areas of the workplace should be visible to both workers and security personnel. If possible, there should be no hidden corners where an intruder could hide.

Entrances, hallways, corridors, and elevator areas should be clearly visible from work stations. Adequate lighting is especially important in parking lots and garages that cannot be monitored by security guards or cameras. Large, unobstructed windows in stores allow workers a clear view out. But they also give a clear view in to security personnel, police or passers-by. There should be more than one exit from a work area. Additional exits provide escape routes for workers who might otherwise be cornered by an intruder or violent person.

## **Worker Training and Instruction**

An effective workplace violence prevention program must have, as an essential element, a worker training and instruction component. Human resource managers usually are involved in the training and continuous improvement of the workplace. Since the prevention of workplace violence is for the benefit of workers, as well as the prevention of loss of property and process, the workers knowledge and involvement in the program is critical. This will not occur unless there is a specific and concerted effort to ensure that workers are trained and instructed in the program.

When such training and instruction has been completed, there will be several benefits to the organization and the workers themselves. First, the workers will understand the program. Second, the workers will follow the program. Third, the workers will recognize the efforts that management has put into a program that is for their benefit. Fourthly, workers will support the program.

Regular and current training is essential for violence prevention in the workplace. Training involves the development and enhancement of interpersonal skills and communication skill which may diminish and defuse potentially threatening situations. The better trained an employee or worker is at anticipating a violent encounter and defusing or avoiding it, the better they will handle a real life confrontation. Every employer with any possible risk of workplace violence should have a comprehensive training program to equip workers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to address and respond to potentially violent circumstances.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In summary, it is clear the modern world has given a higher risk of workplace violence than ever before. Violence at work is an undeniable international trend. The responsibility for the prevention of workplace violence rests first with employers, but also with employees and governments.