



Briefing October 2010

Managing the Risks of Workplace Violence and Harassment

At a Glance

- ◆ Workplace violence has expanded beyond the domain of physical behaviour to encompass a broader range of negative actions and behaviours, including harassment.
- ◆ Employers need to raise awareness of early warning signs and the professional assistance service options available to employees.
- ◆ Employers need to provide clear expectations, sufficient resources, and effective crisis leadership in responding to an incident.
- ◆ Workplace violence and harassment prevention and response plans require periodic review.

INTRODUCTION

The cost of workplace violence and harassment to employers is significant. First and foremost, individual employees that have been victimized—as well as the colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, and others who witness incidents of violence and harassment in the workplace—pay a heavy price in human terms. This human cost extends beyond the workplace and into the community as families and loved ones of those directly and indirectly affected cope with the aftermath of an incident. Workplace violence and harassment adversely affects individual employees, who suffer feelings of guilt, anger, fear, isolation—and, in extreme instances, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹

¹ Attridge and VandePol, “The Business Case,” 135–136.

There is also financial fallout for employers from incidents of workplace violence and harassment. In addition to the direct loss of productivity in terms of days lost, employers may face increased health costs as employees require physical or psychological treatment to assist in recovery or transition onto either short-term or long-term disability. Workplace violence and harassment may also adversely affect organizational performance in a number of other ways. Such events bring with them serious reputational risk for an organization, as media reports affect the company's image in the eyes of employees, customers, shareholders, regulators, prospective new hires, and other stakeholders. The organization may also be vulnerable to legal action. All of these impacts can lead to reduced productivity, quality, and profitability.²

The scope of what constitutes workplace violence has been broadened beyond extreme physical actions to encompass psychologically harmful behaviours.

Globally, the incidence of workplace violence has grown steadily in recent decades, as has awareness and understanding of the issue.³ The scope of what constitutes workplace violence has been broadened beyond extreme acts—such as the 1999 shooting deaths of four OC Transpo workers by a former colleague in Ottawa, and the 2005 slaying of nurse Lori Dupont by a doctor at the Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor—to include psychologically harmful behaviours.⁴ Legislative changes have broadened the responsibility of employers to act.

In recognition of this broader scope and of recent legislative changes (such as the Bill 168 amendments to Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act*),⁵ The Conference Board of Canada's Council on Emergency Management and the Council of Industrial Relations Executives have each held meetings dedicated to the issue of workplace violence. During the course of the

meetings, members heard from a number of experts, including:

- ♦ Ross Arrowsmith, Senior Security Advisor, Workers' Compensation Board—Alberta (Calgary, Alberta)
- ♦ Jim Davis, Director, Corporate Security, Ontario Power Generation (Toronto, Ontario)
- ♦ Justin Dunn, Director of Facilities Management, Holland College (Charlottetown, P.E.I.)
- ♦ Jacques A. Emond, Senior Partner, Emond Harnden (Ottawa, Ontario)
- ♦ Cst. Ron Kennedy, SAFE Coordinator, Charlottetown Police Services/RCMP (Charlottetown, P.E.I.)
- ♦ Dr. Phil Klassen, Deputy Clinical Director and Associate Head (Education), Law and Mental Health Program, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Toronto, Ontario)
- ♦ Hugh Pelmore, President and Training Specialist, ARETE Safety and Protection Inc. (Vancouver, B.C.)
- ♦ Jim Van Allen, President, Behavioural Science Solutions Group Inc. (Orillia, Ontario)
- ♦ Bob VandePol, President, Crisis Care Network (Grandville, Michigan)

The purpose of this briefing is to identify the essential information and key messages that emerged as a result of the presentations, facilitated discussions, and informal exchanges of best practices that occurred at the two meetings. This briefing identifies six key actions that organizations should take to reduce their risk of workplace violence and harassment.

UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

THE LEGAL CONTEXT AND SCOPE

Following the lead of Quebec (the first Canadian province to legislate that employment environments must be free of psychological harassment),⁶ Ontario now requires employers to prepare, post, implement, and regularly review written policies with respect to workplace violence *and* to workplace harassment. These policies must include

2 VandePol and Beyer, "Crisis Management," 10.

3 Chappell and Di Martino, *Violence at Work*, 31–40.

4 Keith and Chandler, *Preventing and Managing Workplace Violence*, 1–6.

5 *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.O.1.

6 Quebec first passed these amendments to its employment standards legislation in December 2002. The changes took effect on June 1, 2004.

measures and procedures to control the associated risks; to call upon immediate assistance; and to report, investigate, and deal with incidents and complaints related to violence and harassment.

The inclusion of psychologically harmful workplace behaviours is important for employers for two reasons. First, legal compliance is becoming more challenging as the frequency of workplace harassment incidents continues to grow.⁷ Second, harassment often precedes physical violence,⁸ which raises the importance of early detection and effective management of workplace harassment.

One recent study reported three-quarters of those surveyed had witnessed workplace harassment at some point in their careers.

It is now widely recognized that harassment in the workplace occurs more often, and with more pervasive and far-reaching effects, than do violent incidents.⁹ For example, one recent study reported three-quarters of those surveyed had witnessed workplace harassment at some point in their careers, and close to half of those surveyed had themselves been victims of harassment while on the job.¹⁰

Each jurisdiction in Canada has its own occupational health and safety legislation that includes either specific workplace violence provisions (and, in some cases, workplace harassment provisions) or general clauses requiring employers to take reasonable precautions to keep employees safe.¹¹ Organizations need to critically consider, on a case-by-case basis, what “reasonable precautions” are required. For example, legislation in Manitoba includes provisions entitling workers to freedom from harassment that creates a risk to the health of the worker.¹² There are also provisions in both the *Canada Labour Code* and

7 Greenberg and Barling, “Predicting Employee Aggression,” 898.

8 Murphy and O’Leary, “Psychological Aggression Predicts Physical Aggression,” 580.

9 Lee, “Dealing With Workplace Harassment,” 2–3.

10 Fisher-Blando, *Workplace Bullying*, 72.

11 Demby, “The ‘General Duty’ Clause in Canada.”

12 Manitoba Regulation 217/2006, *Workplace Safety and Health Regulation*.

Workplace Violence and Harassment Definitions

PHYSICAL FORCE

The generally accepted definition of workplace violence now encompasses all behaviours intended to harm an employee or an organization, including a wide variety of negative workplace actions or behaviours that are *physical* in nature. In some Canadian jurisdictions, such as Ontario, the legal definition of workplace violence extends to any “attempt” at physical force, or any statement or behaviour that can be reasonably interpreted as “threatening” physical force.¹

PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM

A number of definitions have now been widened to include *psychologically* harmful behaviours in the workplace—that is, workplace harassment. Workplace harassment has been defined as a “course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known, or ought reasonably to be known to be, unwelcome.”² This may include “hostile or unwanted conduct” and/or “verbal comments, actions or gestures” that affect an employee’s “dignity” or “psychological integrity.”³ Four Canadian provinces—Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario—now legally distinguish between workplace violence and workplace harassment, and a private member’s bill proposing amendments to deal with psychological harassment under the *Canada Labour Code* is currently at the first reading stage before Parliament.⁴

1 *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, R.S.O. 1990, s1(1).

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Act Respecting Labour Standards*, R.S.Q. s.81.18.

4 Bill C-487, *An Act to Prevent Psychological Harassment in the Workplace*.

Ontario’s *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to protect whistle-blowing employees from reprisals. A case-by-case approach will thus often involve delicately balancing an employee’s right to privacy against an employer’s own legal and moral obligations to protect other employees in the workplace from potential threats.

RISK FACTORS

In assessing the risk for workplace violence and harassment, organizations need to consider individual personality attributes that might make a particular employee a potential threat in the workplace, as well as high-risk work situations.¹³ Undertaking these separate risk assessments can help an organization identify its vulnerabilities to workplace violence and harassment.

13 Hershcovis and others, “Predicting Workplace Aggression,” 233–234.

The Personality Attributes of Potential Aggressors

There are a number of tools available that can assist organizations in identifying individuals who may pose a risk of workplace violence or harassment. One of the tools available to employers to assist in identifying personality attributes and behaviours that can indicate an elevated risk of workplace violence is the *Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21)*.¹⁴ The WAVR-21 is a leading research-based assessment tool for professional risk assessors. It is used to evaluate the existence, level, and nature of workplace-targeted violence risk posed by employees and others.¹⁵ (See Table 1.)

Gender is the only demographic difference that has consistently been shown to predict workplace violence and harassment.¹⁶ Studies have shown that other demographic differences—such as age,¹⁷ education,¹⁸

and occupation¹⁹—have little or no effect when it comes to predicting workplace violence and harassment. Thus, rather than demographically profiling individuals, employers identifying potentially violent existing employees or new hires would be better served by:

- ◆ verifying a prospective employee’s employment history and educational qualifications;
- ◆ conducting employee reference and criminal history checks; and
- ◆ undertaking credit bureau assessments, identification verification, and driving record checks.²⁰

High-Risk Working Conditions

There are particular working environments and conditions that can increase the risk of workplace violence and harassment. These include environments characterized by interpersonal conflicts or incompatible relationships between two or more individuals,²¹ frequent

14 White and Meloy, “A Brief Description of the WAVR-21.”

15 Van Allen, “Responding to Legislated Obligations to Workplace Violence in Ontario.”

16 Hershcovis and others, “Predicting Workplace Aggression,” 230, 233.

17 Huesmann and others, “Stability of Aggression Over Time,” 1126.

18 Dupré and Barling, “Predicting and Preventing Supervisory Workplace Aggression,” 20-22.

19 Douglas and Martinko, “Exploring the Role of Individual Differences.”

20 Davis, “Workplace Threats at OPG.”

21 Dupré and others, “Workplace Aggression in Teenage Part-Time Employees,” 992.

Table 1
The WAVR-21 Factors

1. Motives for violence	12. Anger problems
2. Homicidal ideas, violent fantasies, or preoccupation	13. Depression and suicidal thinking
3. Violent intentions and expressed threats	14. Paranoia and other psychotic symptoms
4. Weapons skill and access	15. Substance abuse
5. Pre-attack planning and preparation	16. Isolation
6. Stalking or menacing behaviour	17. History of violence, criminality, and conflict
7. Current job problems	18. Domestic/intimate partner violence
8. Extreme job attachment	19. Situational and organizational contributors to violence
9. Loss, personal stressors, and negative coping	20. Stabilizers and buffers against violence
10. Entitlement and other negative traits	21. Organizational impact
11. Lack of conscience and irresponsibility	

Source: White and Meloy, *The WAVR-21: A New Instrument for Assessing Workplace Violence Risk*.

labour-management disputes,²² the perception of mistreatment among individuals,²³ and abusive supervisory and leadership behaviours.²⁴ For example, the environment at Ottawa’s public transportation services prior to the 1999 OC Transpo shootings was characterized by frequent labour management disputes, and the shooter himself was subjected to years of targeted harassment by a number of co-workers—a situation that was well known to his family, his employer, and his union.²⁵

Another significant situational predictor of workplace violence and harassment is procedural injustice, or the perceived lack of fairness in an employer’s policies and practices.²⁶ For example, in 2010, French car parts manufacturer Sodimatex announced it was closing a plant near Paris. The company offered the affected employees

lump-sum payouts in their severance packages that were considerably less than the payouts given to employees at another plant operated by Sodimatex in 2006. The workers responded by occupying the factory and threatening to blow it up.²⁷

Employers also need to be aware of job dissatisfaction²⁸ and any situational constraints or job characteristics that may inhibit employee performance, such as role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, or lack of job autonomy.²⁹

Characteristics of High-Risk Jobs

Some jobs are more prone to incidents of workplace violence than others. Researchers have identified job characteristics that place individuals at a greater risk of becoming a victim of workplace violence.³⁰ (See Table 2.)

22 Kgosimore, “Workplace Violence: A Criminological Analysis,” 61.
 23 Andersson and Pearson, “Tit for Tat?” 468.
 24 Inness, LeBlanc, and Barling, “Psychosocial Predictors,” 1402.
 25 Branswell, “Ottawa Massacre,” 14.
 26 Greenberg and Barling, “Predicting Employee Aggression,” 904

27 Sparks, “We’re Going to Blow the Plant Up.”
 28 Hershcovis and others, “Predicting Workplace Aggression,” 232.
 29 Bowling and Beehr, “Workplace Harassment From the Victim’s Perspective,” 998.
 30 LeBlanc and Kelloway, “Predictors and Outcomes,” 449.

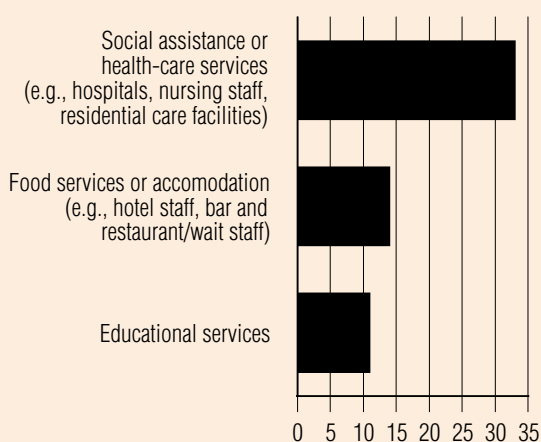
Table 2
 Job Characteristics That May Increase the Risk for Workplace Violence

1. Physical care of others	15. Serve alcohol
2. Emotional care of others	16. Exercise security functions
3. Interact with the public	17. Exercise physical control over others
4. Deny the public a service or request	18. Supervise others
5. Decisions that influence other people’s lives	19. Interact with frustrated individuals
6. Work alone during the day	20. Discipline others
7. Work alone during the evening/night	21. Deliver items of value
8. Oversee or administer other people’s money	22. Collect items of value
9. Dispense drugs	23. Work nights or evenings
10. Handle valuables	24. Go to clients’ homes
11. Exchange money with the public	25. Handle weapons other than guns
12. Guard valuables	26. Contact with individuals under the influence of alcohol
13. Handle guns	27. Contact with individuals under the influence of illegal drugs
14. Sell alcohol	28. Contact with individuals under the influence of medication

Source: LeBlanc and Kelloway, “Predictors and Outcomes of Workplace Violence and Aggression.”

Canadian data confirm that incidents of workplace violence are more likely to occur at organizations where the job characteristics noted in Table 2 are most often found, such as in social services, health care, and educational settings. (See Chart 1.) Dr. Phil Klassen argues that the social environment in which an organization is operating (i.e., socio-economic factors, such as the level of violent crime in the region where the organization is active) must also be considered when assessing workplace violence and harassment risk.³¹

Chart 1
Places Where Violent Workplace Incidents Are Most Likely to Occur
(per cent)



Source: de Léséleuc, *Criminal Victimization in the Workplace*.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL THREATS

The risk for workplace violence and harassment comes from a number of individuals, both internal and external to an organization. Those who commit acts of violence and harassment in the workplace include:³²

- ◆ individuals who target and enter workplaces (for example, taxicabs, convenience stores, and gas stations) to commit a criminal act such as robbery;
- ◆ clients who receive products or services from an organization, such as a health-care facility or a social services provider;

- ◆ employees (co-workers) or former employees; and
- ◆ individuals who have, or have had, a relationship with an employee of the organization—such as a current or former spouse, relative, friend, or acquaintance.³³

Bill 168, which came into force in Ontario in June 2010, acknowledged the risk presented by this fourth type of individual. The bill amended the province's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to include protection against domestic violence at work. Indeed, data from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey suggest that the majority of workplace violence is committed by individuals with a close relationship to the victim.³⁴ (See Chart 2.)

Employers can significantly reduce the risk of suffering the negative effects of workplace violence and harassment by undertaking six key actions.

ACTIONS TO REDUCE THE RISK AND CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Employers can comply with legislative requirements and significantly reduce the risk of suffering the negative effects of workplace violence and harassment by undertaking six key actions:

- ◆ Conduct periodic risk assessments.
- ◆ Raise awareness of early warning signs (and take action to curb escalation).
- ◆ Offer, and raise the awareness of, the professional assistance service options available.
- ◆ Express clear expectations and provide sufficient resources with which to respond in the event of an incident.
- ◆ Conduct periodic reviews of prevention and response plans.
- ◆ Demonstrate effective crisis leadership and response.

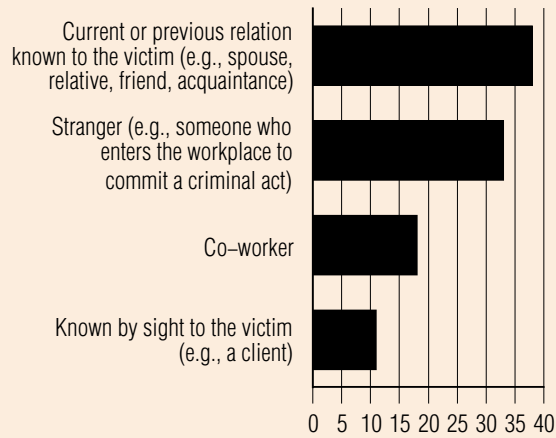
31 Klassen, "Understanding Workplace Violence."

32 Braverman, *Preventing Workplace Violence*, 17.

33 Barling and others, "Predicting Workplace Aggression," 676.

34 de Léséleuc, *Criminal Victimization in the Workplace*, 10.

Chart 2
 Relationship Between Perpetrators and Victims in
 Violent Workplace Incidents
 (per cent)



Source: de LéséLuc, *Criminal Victimization in the Workplace*.

CONDUCT PERIODIC RISK ASSESSMENTS

Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* currently requires employers to regularly assess the risks of workplace violence arising from the nature of the workplace and the type and conditions of work, and to report the results of such assessments to employees. Research indicates that most corporate boards of directors have yet to create committees assigned to deal solely with the management of workplace violence and harassment risk. (However, a number of other board committees—including risk, social responsibility, and human resources oversight committees—often subsume such responsibility.)³⁵ Organizations that do not have the expertise required to perform these assessments can outsource the task to workplace violence and harassment risk assessment consultants.³⁶

HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Management and employees at all levels of an organization must be able to spot the early warning signs of potentially violent individuals and work situations. One of the critical components in preventing workplace violence

is the implementation and delivery of appropriate training that recognizes the differences in managing the threat of violence by customers (or other individuals external to an organization) and that of violence by co-workers (individuals internal to an organization).³⁷ Such training can curb progression along the commonly tread path to workplace violence and diminish an otherwise escalating series of deliberate, and oftentimes detectable, set of behaviours. (See Exhibit 1.)³⁸

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MAKE TARGETED USE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICE OPTIONS

Professional assistance services are critical tools that can be effectively used by organizations to reduce the risk of workplace violence and harassment. This is because they specialize in the identification and management of workplace violence and harassment, provide expert consultation services that identify risks, and suggest effective elimination or mitigation strategies. Professional assistance services, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), also often address other external problems that have been linked to workplace violence, such as addiction and substance abuse,³⁹ marital difficulties,⁴⁰ and financial and economic concerns.⁴¹ Finally, professional assistance services play a role in responding to workplace violence and harassment incidents by providing a range of clinically based response services (including risk identification training, corporate communication plans, organizational recovery strategies, and personal return-to-work strategies),

37 Pelmore, Hugh, President, ARTE Safety and Protection Inc. E-mail message to Lisa Hughes, September 15, 2010.

38 Note that “the grievance” in the diagram refers to an unresolved issue (rather than to the specific method of problem solving typically found in unionized environments). This exhibit is excerpted from White and Meloy, “What Is the Pathway to Violence? (as adapted by White and Meloy, with permission, from Calhoun and Weston, *Contemporary Threat Management*).

39 McFarlin and others, “Alcohol Use and Workplace Aggression.”

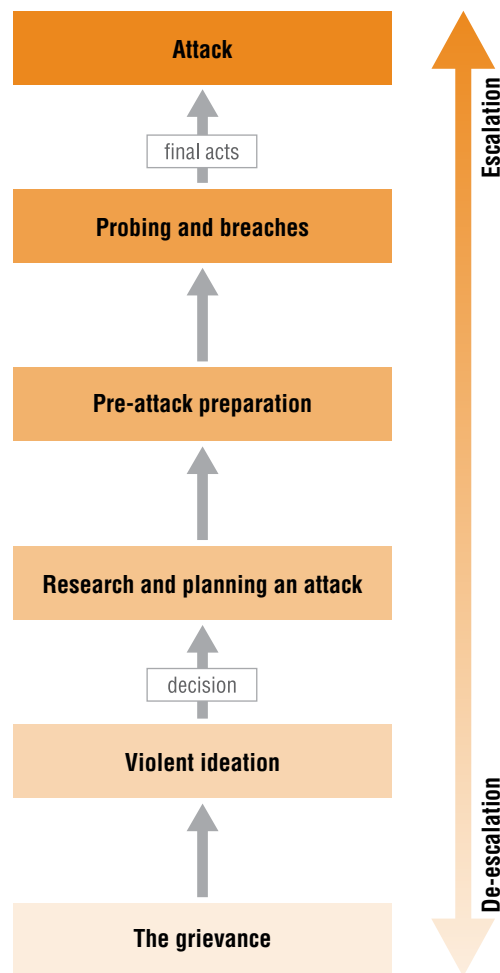
40 Murphy and O’Leary, “Psychological Aggression.”

41 Panchuk, “Down Economy Means Rise in Workplace Violence Threat.”

35 Hallock and others, *The 2009 Directors’ Compensation and Board Practices Report*, 63.

36 Van Allen, “Responding to Legislated Obligations to Workplace Violence in Ontario.”

Exhibit 1
Pathway to Workplace Targeted or Intended Violence



Note: Adapted with permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003). *Contemporary Threat Management: A Practical Guide for Identifying, Assessing and Managing Individuals of Violent Intent*. © 2003 F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston. All rights reserved.
Source: Calhoun and Weston.

which can help organizations return to productivity more quickly. It is imperative that organizations continually ensure that their employees are aware of the options available to them.

HAVE APPROPRIATE POLICIES AND RESOURCES WITH WHICH TO RESPOND WHEN NEEDED

Workplace policies that include violence and harassment provisions should have in place clear expectations and consequences for individual conduct. The organization

should have a written, detailed process for addressing any concerns that are raised under the policy. Having appropriate policies and reporting processes already in place may reduce the fear of confrontation and conflict when it comes to responding to unwanted workplace behaviours. It is also essential that employers provide the proper resources to support these policies (including any necessary training) at all levels of the organization, as such policies and procedures may cross lines of organizational responsibility. Taking these steps can result in a reduction in employee stress, absenteeism, and turnover rates, and help to ensure compliance with human rights legislation.⁴²

Having appropriate policies and reporting processes already in place may reduce the fear of confrontation and conflict when it comes to responding to unwanted workplace behaviours.

It can also be helpful to review policies that regulate access to the workplace. For example, violence prevention in health-care settings uses “layered levels” of access control. This includes the use of lighting, barriers, and fencing to secure property perimeters; controlled access through all entrances, exits, and stairwells; and strategically positioned work stations.⁴³ The International Labour Organization’s (ILO) *Code of Practice on Workplace Violence in the Services Sector* champions restricting access to and from workplaces (including access to parking areas and transport facilities), and relies on the use of gates, identification tags, and reception desks as a means of minimizing workplace violence risks.

Beyond controlling physical access to workplaces, job redesign can also prevent or lessen exposure to workplace violence risks. Organizations may, for example, need to revisit policies around the quantity and manner of dispensing drugs. Scheduling practices might also be revised to minimize potential workplace violence risks. For example, personnel employed in high-value delivery and collection services (such as those working in the cash-processing

⁴² Pelmore, “Effective Management of Conflict in the Workplace.”

⁴³ The Joint Commission, “Preventing Violence in the Health Care Setting.”

services at Brinks Canada) do not typically work alone. Additional strict practices and procedures might also be used to safeguard employees working nights or evenings.

It is important to review an organization's emergency plans to ensure that workplace violence and harassment risk is explicitly and adequately addressed.

REVIEW PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PLANS

Measures in place to reduce workplace violence and harassment risks must be continually monitored and reassessed. The steps noted earlier—including conducting a risk assessment to identify an organization's vulnerabilities concerning workplace violence and harassment, and implementing appropriate preventative measures intended to reduce such risk—are ongoing processes. Employers need to be vigilant in reassessing risks and adapting policies and procedures as new situations arise. It is important to review an organization's emergency plans to ensure that workplace violence and harassment risk is explicitly and adequately addressed. An effective, proactive workplace violence and harassment strategy must be tailored to fit the specific needs, resources, and circumstances of a specific organization—and it must be supported from the top. The design of the strategy must also take into account the overall culture and atmosphere of the organization—as revealed by an assessment of the individuals, work environments, and job characteristics potentially associated with violence and harassment risk. The workplace violence and harassment components of an effective emergency preparedness and response plan should include:

- ◆ procedures with which to address violence and harassment risk assessments and events;
- ◆ procedures that address the graduated enforcement of behavioural expectations articulated in the workplace violence and harassment policy;
- ◆ the designation and training of an incident response team that, ideally, should include representatives from the legal, human resources, risk management, and security functions; and
- ◆ identification and contact details of external resources, such as employee assistance programs, safe houses, crisis intervention teams, and post-event trauma specialists.

PROVIDE EFFECTIVE CRISIS LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSE

When an incident of workplace violence or harassment occurs, intervention is essential. Although rare, a violent incident or attack in the workplace can be extremely traumatic to both the organization and a wide range of individuals who have witnessed or have simply heard about the incident. In such instances, there are a number of immediate actions that effective crisis leaders will take to promote a sense of safety and calming, and to ensure that employees remain connected and hopeful. (See Table 3.)

Table 3
Employer Interventions in Challenging Situations

- | |
|--|
| 1. Provide a voice of leadership that is accurate and organized. |
| 2. Deal expediently and openly with the media. |
| 3. Provide a sense of calming. |
| 4. Share information about specific types of social support. |
| 5. Identify, and keep socially connected, those employees who are lacking strong social support systems. |
| 6. Ensure that workplace rules, order, and supervision continue to be observed. |
| 7. Engage mental health professionals external to the organization. |

Source: Hobfall and others, "Five Essential Elements."

Responding to the multiple and diverse consequences of an incident is critical. It is necessary to understand the damages suffered and the implications and opportunities for present and future operations in the wake of any violent incident in the workplace. To help in dealing with the aftermath of a major incident, organizational leaders should:

- ◆ acknowledge and name the incident and the impact suffered at the workplace in order to rebuild trust with employees and other stakeholders;
- ◆ communicate with competence (facts), and compassion (care and concern for those involved); and
- ◆ transition people—both external and internal to the organization—to a future focus. This includes outlining the steps that organizational leaders will take

to address current challenges and explaining how these steps will get the organization back to normal and make it more resilient. Managers should also outline the specific “next steps” for employees, to assist them in transitioning from a sense of powerlessness and inertia to one of empowerment and efficacy.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

Workplace violence has expanded beyond the domain of physical behaviour to encompass a broader range of negative actions and behaviours that impact individuals and the organization itself. The increased understanding of the frequency and effects of *psychologically* harmful behaviours in the workplace has resulted in new legislation against workplace harassment in a number of Canadian jurisdictions. The threat of violence and harassment in the workplace comes not only from existing and former employees, but also from individuals external to an organization—including criminals, clients, and individuals (such as spouses) with current or former relationships to employees.

This briefing identified six actions organizations can take to significantly reduce their risk of workplace violence and harassment. These actions are:

- ◆ Conduct periodic risk assessments.
- ◆ Raise awareness of the early warning signs (and take action to curb escalation).
- ◆ Offer, and raise the awareness of, the professional assistance service options available.
- ◆ Express clear expectations and provide sufficient resources with which to respond in the event of an incident.
- ◆ Conduct periodic reviews of prevention and response plans.
- ◆ Demonstrate effective crisis leadership and response.

Employers will be well served by taking steps to reduce the risk of workplace violence and harassment within their organization. The costs of not taking action include, most importantly, the potential human cost suffered by

employees and their families. However, the financial costs—including the cost of caring for the physical and psychological needs of those affected, the legal liability, and the lost productivity, as well as the reputational costs to the organization—cannot be ignored.

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Managing the Risks of Workplace Violence and Harassment

by *Lisa Hughes* and *Bjorn Rutten*

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