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“VIOLENCE AT WORK IN NORTH AMERICA”*

INTRODUCTION

On October 15, 2002, a 55-year-old civil servant in Kamloops, British Columbia, shot and killed his boss and a co-worker and then committed suicide. In Jefferson City, Missouri on July 1, 2003, a 25-year-old factory worker fatally shot three co-workers and wounded five others, before turning the gun on himself. On October 17, 2001, the company Medical Service division of Banamex received a request to investigate the suffering of a 44-year-old employee with 26 years of service with the company, who exhibited considerable changes in her behavior and in her performance. The diagnosis of the company psychiatrist and medical internist revealed that the behavior was a result of an assault on a branch bank in which the employee had been working years ago.¹ These incidences, along with many others, show that violence at work and the threat of violence at work has emerged as an important workplace problem. But these incidences are only the tip of iceberg.

Violence at work includes many other behaviors in addition to the commonly known physical assault and homicide. In North America, workers, managers and employers alike confront all types of violence at work on a regular basis. As a result,

¹ “Asaltos Bancarios y su impacto en la salud mental de los empleados,” presented by Dr, Javier Calero Lomelín, Manager of the Banamex Corporate Medical Service Division at the Tri-National Conference on Workplace Violence, Montreal, Québec, Canada, 2001.

there is a growing consensus that finding solutions to violence at work is an integral part of the organizational development of sound enterprise (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 6, 15, 49).

Canada, the US and Mexico already have acted on this growing awareness by sponsorship of a seminar on violence at work in Montreal, Canada, in November 2001, in which employers, union representatives, scholars and practitioners in both the public and private sectors throughout North America participated. When the three countries signed the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) in 1993, each party pledged to improve working conditions and quality of work life in their respective territories. These objectives are explicitly stated in NAALC labor principles nine and ten, which commit the three countries to preventing occupational injuries and illnesses as well as compensating workers in cases where they occur. The Montreal meeting demonstrated the three countries' affirmative willingness to fulfill those obligations. In so doing, the North American countries acknowledged that understanding the causes of and remedy for violence at work was crucial to building viable occupational safety and health regimes. This study synthesizes the conceptual and empirical material from the 2001 conference and occasionally adds additional material where necessary.

In so doing, this study begins by framing a definition of violence at work, after which violence at work is categorized by type. The prevalence of violence at work is then examined, and it is followed by discussion of the reasons for the lack of adequate, uniform, reliable and comprehensive statistics on violence at work. The section concludes with a brief summary of some data from the three countries.

The next section provides a model of the various dimensions of workplace violence and synthesizes the work of some of the contributors to the Montreal conference. Victim and assailant characteristics, along with individual and organizational risk factors are then discussed, as well as the consequences of violence for the victims and the organizations for which they work. The section ends with discussion of certain high-risk occupations, linking the characteristics of these occupations to the risk factors in the model.

This study concludes with a section that focuses on violence at work prevention and remedy. In the process, best practices are identified as well as a series of steps that could be taken to prevent violence at work and ways to best possible respond to it are discussed.

WHAT IS VIOLENCE AT WORK?

While increasing attention has been paid to the problem of violence at work in recent years, it still remains an under-recognized problem. Perhaps the most notable result of this factor is the current absence of a universally accepted definition of violence at work. Another factor responsible for this situation is a lack of agreement on what actually constitutes violence and how both work and the workplace are defined. For example, violence associated with work is no longer limited to a specified workplace, such as an office, factory, or retail establishment. Violence can also occur during commuting and in non-traditional workplaces such as homes, satellite centers, and mobile locations, which are increasingly used as a result of the spread of information technology. In essence, those behind the efforts to establish a definition of violence at work are forced to contend

with rapid changes in the workplace environment, which at least up to this point, have presented obstacles to forming a universally accepted definition.

Another contributing factor to the current absence of a universal definition of violence at work is that, at present few accurate, reliable and uniform statistics are available regarding workplace violence. The problem exists not only across national boundaries but also inside countries themselves. For example, violence perpetrated against traditionally geographically diverse occupational activities often is presented in crime statistics rather than as a component of occupational safety and health data. Activities conducted by law enforcement officials, taxi drivers, journalists, insurance claims adjusters and other occupational groups whose work takes them into people's homes, like meter readers, plumbers, electricians, and mail carriers often fall into this category.

Perhaps more important in explaining why it has been difficult to arrive at a universal definition for violence at work, not only across North America but internationally as well, is the common image of violence at work as one of only physical assault and homicide. Although personal physical violence at the workplace has always been recognized, the existence of non-physical violence such as sexual harassment, bullying, mobbing and other forms of verbal abuse has long been underestimated. Now receiving more attention, non-physical violence is emerging as a priority concern in the workplace, primarily because in real work situations, physical and non-physical violence often overlap, happening either simultaneously or consecutively. This occurs frequently in cases of sexual harassment where instances of touching and comments with sexual

connotation may combine on a specific occasion or point in time (Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper 2003).

The recognition that physical and non-physical forms of violence often fuse is also reflected in the ongoing evolution of the definition of physical violence. In 1993, the National Academy of Science in the U.S. defined violent or aggressive conduct as “behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt or inflict physical harm on others or on oneself” (Reiss and Roth 1993). In 2000 the World Health Organization (WHO) advanced this definition by defining physical and non-physical violence, or what is sometimes referred to as psychological violence (Textbox 1: Physical and non-physical violence).

Physical violence: The use of physical force against another person or group that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm.

Non-physical violence: Intentional use of power against another person or group that can result in harm to physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

Source: Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper 2003.

The European Union (EU) has made progress both in advancing the definition of violence at work. In 1995, the European Commission proposed a definition of violence at work that distinguished between different types of workplace violence, and it caught the importance of non-physical violent behaviors such as verbal abuse, mobbing, sexual harassment, bullying and other abuses known to cause mental stress, versus the traditional profile centered on physical violence. By defining violence at work as

“incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well being and health,” it subsequently became a milestone for definitions across Europe. Chappell and Di Martino (2000) determined that this definition centered on three legal figures. (Textbox 2: legal figures)

- **Abuse:** Behaviors that depart from reasonable conduct and involve the misuse of physical or psychological strength.
- **Threats:** The menace of death, or the announcement of an intention to harm a person or damage their property.
- **Assault:** Any attempt at physical injury or attack on a person including actual physical harm.

Source: Chappell and Di Martino 2003

When examining violence at work in North America, Canada and the U.S. include physical and non-physical behaviors as violence at work, while Mexico views violence at work solely in the realm of physical assault and homicide (Estrada Rodríguez 2001). As noted previously, the NAALC parties already acknowledge that violence at work occurs regularly in all three countries, and each country may experience all forms, though how they are categorized may vary because of the different cultural, social and legal nuances found in the respective countries (Plante 2001).

Problems related to the conceptualization of violence at work are not peculiar to North America. Because violence at work is frequently linked to a particular social and cultural environment, generally it is often considered as mere manifestation of a more

generalized and increasing violence found in many areas of social life in a given country. Contributing to this notion is that the workplace traditionally has been viewed by many as an environment relatively free of violence. However, as mentioned earlier, the definition of what actually constitutes the workplace is also changing. Consequently, violence at work now involves more workers, directly and indirectly. These changes have led to the emergence of at least a profile of violence at work on a general level, one that gives equal emphasis to physical as well as non-physical aggressive behavior (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 14, 19). In North America this is reflected by the Quebec Occupational Health and Safety Commission's recognition of the equal importance of physical and non-physical (psychological) injuries (Chabot 2001).

In November 2001, the Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work of the European Commission adopted a definition of violence at work that clearly reflected the fusion of physical and non-physical forms of violence.

(Textbox 3: 2001 EU definition)

- **Violence** can be defined as a form of negative behavior or action in the relations between two or more people, characterized by aggressiveness, sometimes repeated, sometimes unexpected, which has harmful effects on the safety, health and well-being of employees at their place of work.
- **Aggressiveness** may take the form of body language indicating intimidation, contempt or disdain, or of actual physical or verbal violence.
- **Violence** manifests itself in many ways, ranging from physical aggression to verbal insults, bullying, mobbing and sexual harassment, discrimination on grounds of religion, race, disability sex or, in any event, difference and may be inflicted by persons both outside and inside the working environment.
- **Physical** violence can have consequences that are not only physical but also psychological, which can be immediate or delayed.

Source: (Di Martino, Hoel, and Cooper 2003).

Although this definition is extensive and compelling, it does not include violence against property, and it lacks succinctness to serve as a working definition. Accordingly, the following definition, which is both concise and comprehensive and largely consistent with the presentations given at Montreal, has been developed for this study.

Violence at work is defined as behaviors by individuals and/or groups that intentionally threaten, attempt or inflict physical/non-physical harm on property, other individuals or oneself. It includes emotional abuse and the systematic infliction of fear and anxiety.

TYPES OF VIOLENCE AT WORK

While non-physical forms of workplace violence are increasingly recognized, the most notable and publicly visible form of violence at work is still physical assault and homicide. The National Academy of Science in the U.S. defines violent or aggressive conduct as “behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt or inflict physical harm on others or on oneself” (Reiss and Roth 1993). Assault is defined generally as any attempt at physical injury or attack on a person, including actual physical harm. Homicides on the job almost always are classified as workplace fatalities and often follow threats of death, or the announcement of an intention to harm a person or damage their property (Chappell and Di Martino, 15).

In terms of categorizing types of physical assault at work, the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration developed a classification system that has been widely adopted in which three types of physical assault are explained. These types reflect the prevailing notion that the definition of the workplace has changed and expanded:

(Textbox 4: Typologies of physical assault)

- ***Type I*, where the assailant has no legitimate relationship to the workplace and the main object of the attack is cash or some other valuable commodity.**
- ***Type II*, which involves some form of assault by a person who is either the recipient or the object of a service provided by the affected workplace or the victim.**
- ***Type III*, where an assault is perpetrated by another employee, a supervisor, or an acquaintance of the worker.**

Source: California/Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSH) 1995.

It is also important to note that, physical assault in the workplace, regardless of type, takes a variety of forms. And, while there is growing recognition that violent behaviors, both physical and non-physical often overlap, it is necessary to delineate the specific forms that these two broad categories of violence at work entail. The boxes below identify what experts (e.g. Chappell and Di Martino 2000) have selected as some of the most common forms of violent behavior at work within the rubric of physical and non-physical violence.

(Textbox 5: Examples of physical and non-physical violence)

Physical	Non-physical
Homicide	Stalking
Rape	Harassment, including sexual and racial abuse
Robbery	Bullying
Wounding	Mobbing
Battering	Victimizing
Physical attacks	Intimidation
Kicking	Threats
Biting	Ostracism
Punching	Rude gestures
Spitting	Swearing, shouting
Scratching	Name calling

Perhaps the most prominent and best known form of non-physical violent behavior at work is sexual harassment. Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper (2003) note that, while both men and women are at risk of violence at work, the amount and type of violence perpetrated against women is dramatic, particularly in certain sectors, occupations and jobs. Law in all three North American countries prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace is testimony to the level of seriousness surrounding violence at work against women. Accordingly, more attention is paid here to this particular type of non-physical violence than others.

Another dimension of sexual harassment that accentuates its critical importance as a non-physical form of violence at work is that, while a single incident of sexual harassment often stands alone as a serious act of workplace violence, sexual harassment often consists of repeated, unwelcome and imposed action that has a cumulative and ultimately a devastating affect on the victim. While sexual harassment conceptually provokes images of physical contact such as touching, in many cases it is characterized

by remarks about dress or figure, or implicit and subtle references to sexual orientation. Once regarded as a “personal dispute” between employees, and something to be resolved by the parties themselves, sexual harassment is now widely recognized as inappropriate behavior. Employers now routinely take disciplinary action against an employee for sexual harassment, a factor that also has gained the attention of trade unions as they too, seek resolution to the growing workplace problem (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 12, 18).

According to the European Parliament Directive of June 5, 2002, sexual harassment rises to serious levels in the workplace when either a superior or colleague uses a person’s rejection of, or submission to sexual harassment as a basis for a decision affecting a worker’s condition of employment. These include access to vocational training or employment, continued employment, promotion, salary, or any other employment decisions, and/or sexual harassment creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the victim. Further, the 2002 Parliament Directive incorporated definitions of harassment related to sex and sexual harassment, which are presented in the box below. (Textbox 6: Sexual harassment)

Harassment related to sex: Where an unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment: Where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Source: (Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper 2003)

Also indicative of the growing awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace is the adoption by the International Labor Organization (ILO) of Convention No. 169, of which Mexico is a signatory. It contains an instrument that expressly provides protection against sexual harassment. Article 20(3) (d) of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989, states that governments shall adopt special measures to ensure “that workers belonging to these peoples enjoy equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women, and protection from sexual harassment.”

Although labor legislation in Mexico does not explicitly address sexual harassment for private industries, the Federal Criminal Code does stipulate sexual harassment under Article 259, which reads: “for one who repeatedly is lewd to anyone of any sex, using their superior position in the areas of labor relations, teaching, domestic relations or any other that involves subordination, they will receive a 40 day fine. If the harassing person is a public servant and used their position to commit such acts, they will be removed from office.” Also the Federal Constitution stipulates that when workers are

subject to “wrongful treatment” by their employers or superiors during working hours, they are entitled to leave their jobs and receive indemnification of up to three months of their salary (Article 123, Section XXII). The Federal Labor Code also stipulates that when harassment is committed by one worker on a co-worker of the same level, the employer has legal cause to dismiss the aggressor only if his/her actions “disrupt discipline in the workplace”(Article 47, Section III).

The Canadian Federal Labour Code requires employers to issue a sexual harassment policy that not only condemns sexual harassment but also includes a provision that disciplinary measures will be taken against transgressors. The policy also must outline procedures to deal with instances of harassment as well as inform employees of their rights (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 12, 18, 131). The provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan have taken a more encompassing approach to sexual harassment by enacting regulations that embrace the issue of violence as an occupational health and safety issue.²

In the U.S., Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits two kinds of sexual harassment –quid pro quo and hostile work environment. Quid pro quo cases require that the unwelcome sexual demand on the employee be made by someone with the ability to grant or deny an employee some benefit. Also, there must be a link between the demand for sex and the granting or denial of the benefit. When a quid pro quo case is proven, employers automatically are liable. Hostile work environment cases must involve pervasive, unwelcome sexually charged behavior that is directed toward an employee by

² *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation B.C. Reg. 296/97 and Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993, S.S. 1993, O-1.1*

someone in the workplace. Employers are liable only under certain circumstances when hostile work environment is proven (Title VII: 42 USC 2000e).

In light of the emergence of sexual harassment legislation across the globe in recent decades, in 1996 an ILO Committee of Experts conducted a special survey on the application of Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (no.111), especially as it pertains to Article 1 of the Convention. Article 1 provides a broad definition of the term discrimination to include “any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of sex, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.” In their findings, the Committee of Experts provided examples and cases of sexual harassment in the workplace and stressed that it has a deleterious affect on the working relationship (ILO 1996).

Another type of non-physical violence at work includes bullying, which is defined as offensive behavior through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to either undermine an individual employee or groups of employees. Bullying takes special aim at one’s personal and professional performance, and entails negative attacks that are unfair, irrational and typically unpredictable. As illustrated in the box below, bullying is carried out in a variety of ways. (Textbox 4: Definition of Bullying)

Bullying

- **Making life difficult for those who have the potential to do the bully’s job better than the bully.**
- **Punishing others for being too competent by constant criticism or by removing their responsibilities, often giving them trivial tasks to do instead.**
- **Refusing to delegate because they feel they can’t trust anyone else.**
- **Shouting at staff to get things done.**
- **Persistently picking on people in front of others or in private.**
- **Insisting that a way of doing things is always right.**
- **Keeping individuals in their places by blocking their promotion.**

- **If someone challenges a bully's authority, overloading him/her with work and reducing the deadlines, hoping they fail at what they do.**
- **Feeling envious of another's professional or social ability, so setting out to make them appear incompetent, or make their lives miserable, in the hope of getting them dismissed or making them resign.**

Source: (Chappell and Di Martino 2000).

In addition to bullying, mobbing, a form of systematic collective violence, has been reported to be on the rise. Like sexual harassment and bullying, mobbing tends to fall within the rubric of cumulative workplace violence, and can potentially have a devastating affect on a person's mental health, causing serious psychosomatic disorders and longer periods of sick leave. Mobbing includes behaviors such as making continuous negative remarks about a person or criticizing them constantly. Mobbing often involves isolating a person by leaving them without contacts as well as gossiping or spreading false information about a person or constantly ridiculing them either by comments or shouting (Lippel 2001).

Some recent studies have moved away from separating bullying (principally referring to situations of individual harassment) and mobbing (primarily covering situations of collective harassment) to a conceptual assimilation of these two terms. Piñuel y Zabala (2001) argue that no meaningful distinction between bullying and mobbing exists, since the psychological processes entailed appear to be the same as regards to the number of perpetrators or targets involved.

Another form of type III violence at work includes acts committed by domestic abusers or arising from other personal relationships that follow an employee into the workplace. Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior in which one intimate partner uses

physical violence, coercion, threats intimidation, isolation and emotional, sexual or economic abuse to control the other partner in a relationship. Stalking, threats or other harassing behavior is often an integral part of domestic violence. In fact, homicides represent a tiny fraction of workplace incidents related to domestic violence. Often, an employee's personal relationship is considered a private matter, and employers are often reluctant to intervene. But when domestic violence and stalking enter the workplace, the employer and other employees are affected, and it then becomes a workplace problem. Studies have shown that women are the primary victims of this type of behavior, but in a smaller percentage of cases, both men and women are stalked and harassed by casual acquaintances or strangers (USDOJ 2004, 41-42).

PREVALENCE

Documenting the prevalence of violence at work in North America faces many obstacles, one of which is the cultural, social and legal differences between the three countries that prevent very little opportunity, if any, to develop a universal definition of violence at work and make a statistical comparison between the countries. Also, within the three countries themselves, there is a lack of comprehensive and systematic statistics. None of the three countries gather data in a systematic way on non-physical violence at work. All of these factors are affected by the fact that, until recently, a general lack of awareness existed about violence at work, especially non-physical behavior, and its importance as an occupational safety and health issue and to the healthy functioning of enterprises. Notwithstanding, some statistics are available, and while they are not necessarily comparable across borders, they do show that violence at work exists in its various forms and occurs with some regularity in all three countries.

Although comprehensive data on violence at work is not maintained in Canada, a 1998 study of on-the-job aggression conducted by the ILO found Canadian workers reported rates of assault and sexual harassment in the workplace that were among the highest in the world. Compiled from 130,000 interviews, the study revealed that Canada ranks fourth out of 32 countries for the number of women assaulted in the workplace, and that the nation ranks fifth for the number of men assaulted in the workplace (ILO 1998). For example, in a survey conducted in 1994 by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), it was found that, among 70 percent of the respondents, verbal aggression was the leading form of violence against employees. Although the non-physical violence such as verbal aggression and sexual harassment are not cataclysmic events like homicide or assault, they are often repetitive and, consequently, tend to have a cumulative affect on employees (Pizzino 1994, 9). In 2002, the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board received 1,747 claims for lost-time injuries—injuries that forced the employee to take at least a day off work—that resulted from assaults and violent acts in the workplace. The 2002 figure was between 10 and 15 percent higher than in each of the previous six years (Globe and Mail: December 2, 2003).

In the United States, homicide and suicide were the third most frequent causes of workplace-related deaths in 2002, and accounted for 15% of all work-related fatal occupational injuries in the same year. Violent acts are perennially among the top three causes of workplace fatalities for all workers in the U.S., and a major cause of fatalities among taxicab drivers, police officers, and sales workers (BLS 2003). According to a report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) based on the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and supplemented from data provided by the Bureau of

Labor Statistics (BLS), during each year between 1993 and 1999, 1.7 million people were victims of violent crime while working or on duty in the United States. An estimated 1.3 million (75%) of these incidents were simple assaults while an additional 19% were aggravated assaults. The report focused on nonfatal violence in the workplace, including rape and sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. It did not include data on non-physical violence at work (BJS 1999).

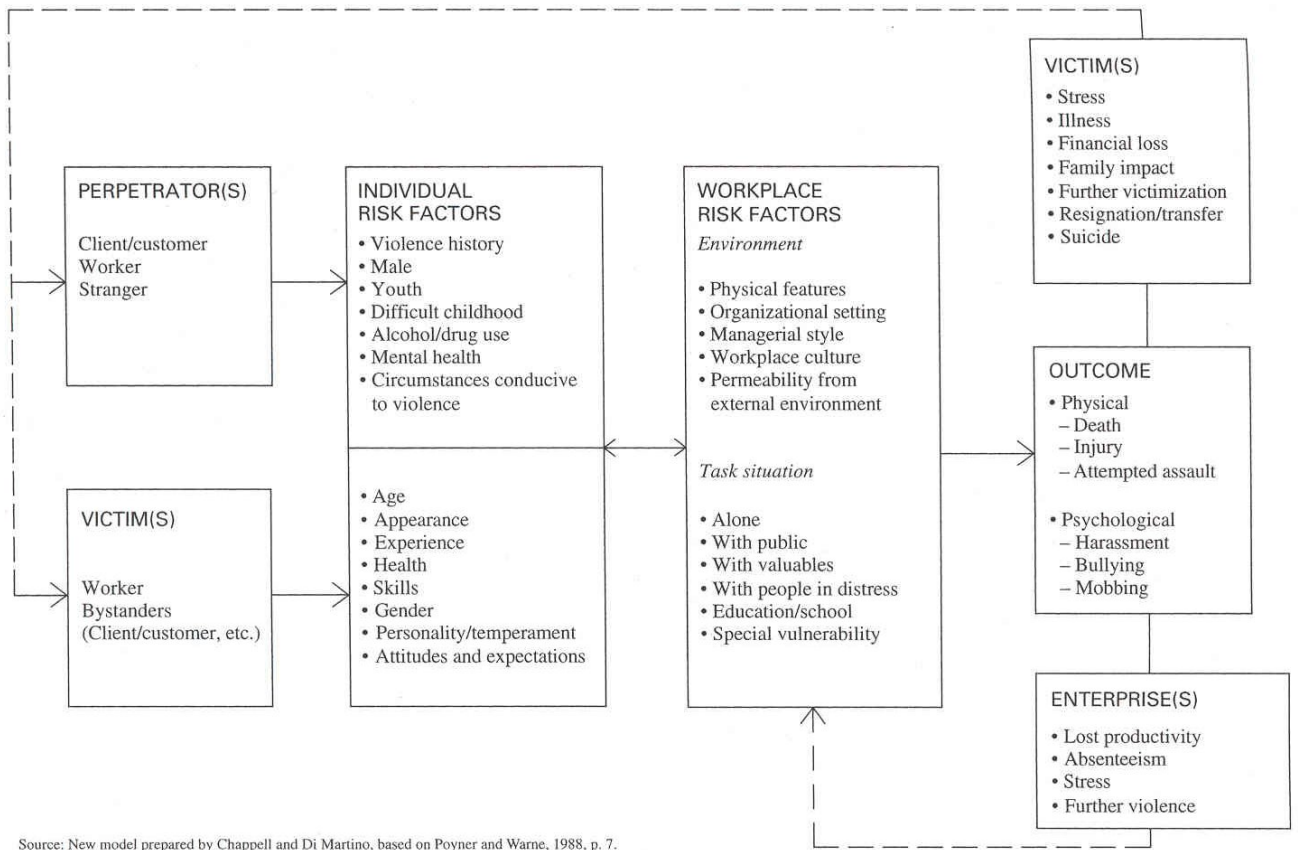
In Mexico, statistics for 2000 indicate that a total of 3,997 workplace injuries and 78 fatalities resulted from violence. These incidents involved bodily force attack, attacks with cutting objects and gun shots. Violence at work is most often found in industrial and urban areas, and men experience a much higher rate of incidence than women. Many workers at high risk, such as policemen and bank employees are covered under insurance systems separate from the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), and are thus not included in the occupational safety and health data, which also excludes non-physical violence at work (Estrada Rodríguez 2001).

EXPLAINING VIOLENCE AT WORK

Because of heavy media exposure to incidents of homicide in the workplace, public impressions of persons who commit acts of violence at work and of violence at work in general are often dominated by images of senseless action by people. Although they are often viewed as acts by “disgruntled employees” who just “snapped,” violence at work grows from a variety and complexity of factors rooted in the changing economic, social and cultural factors that are the foundation of a society. Although some experts view workplace violence as individual behavior and study the phenomenon exclusively within this dimension, Chappell and Di Martino (2000) have synthesized a model culled from

various studies by leading experts. Those studies have found linkages between individual behavior and more broadly termed social issues, which involve socioeconomic, psychosocial and biological variables. However, it is important to note that the model presented here is not explanatory in terms of being able to generate a testable hypothesis. Rather, it is employed simply as a way of mapping a number of dimensions of violence at work in order to underline the various facets associated with them.

Combining both individual and social risk factors, the model incorporates particular situations in which certain types of work tasks are performed. In the process, a number of risk factors growing out of individual behavior that potentially may produce violence in the workplace are identified. A common situation found in the workplace is when an employee has a sense of being treated unfairly, whether real or imagined. When no outlet is provided for addressing the concerns of the aggrieved employee, studies have shown that the risk of violent behavior increases. Prejudice, whether racial or sexual, could provoke violence against members of another group. As Hoad (1996) and McDonald and Brown (1997) reveal, mental instability in individuals almost always generates a risk of violent behavior, and it often interfaces with other individual behavior such as alcohol and drug abuse to potentially provoke aggression and violence. Thus, the model used by Chappell and Di Martino (2000, 64) with the idea of helping to explain some of the causal factors of violence at work, places acts of violence into three principal categories: a client of the particular enterprise; a colleague or fellow worker; or a stranger.



Source: New model prepared by Chappell and Di Martino, based on Poyner and Warne, 1988, p. 7.

Many factors can play a role in influencing the incidence and process of violence at work and can apply to both the assailant and the victim in physical and non-physical violent behaviors, and they are as follows.

Individual risk factors

Individual risk factors are often associated with socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and marital status. Also important are personality characteristics, traits, styles, specific behaviors and specific characteristics of the individual's affiliation with their workplace (such as tenure, level of experience and level of training). Individual characteristics that have been identified as possibly raising the likelihood of a person to commit violent acts at work are youth, being male, having a history of violent behavior or a troubled childhood, suffering from severe mental illness and having access to weapons or firearms. Another risk factor frequently identified as a

precursor to violence at work is the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs, although some experts caution that the relationship between substance abuse and violence at work is complex, because numerous examples exist of people under the influence not behaving in an aggressive or violent manner (Leather and Lawrence 1999). Frequently cited individual risk factors of victims include being young, wearing a uniform, personal appearance and behavior, attitudes and personality and employees with less training and experience as more vulnerable to attack than their better-trained co-workers.

Work environment factors

Increasingly recognized as increasing the risk of violence at work are environments that produce high numbers of violent incidents. Some have suggested an association of work environment factors to larger societal factors, and that this combination may be linked to violence at work. Although the relationship between the overall state of a society and the well being of its citizens is extremely complex, researchers have identified some factors that may affect violence at work. They include increased workplace diversity, changing norms concerning aggression, downsizing, global competition and changing technology (Vezina 2001). Social isolation, financial stress and shifting family structures also have been identified as possible reasons for violence at work (McClure 1999, 71-99).

Global competition also has been identified as a possible reason for workplace violence because it has placed pressure on firms to make changes in methods of production and workplace organization. Also, the introduction of new technology has obliged employees to perform in new ways and more efficiently. Mandatory overtime, higher production goals, and more flexible work schedules may intensify pressure felt by employees. Business mergers associated with this more competitive business

environment have sometimes led to a clash of management “cultures,” creating uncertainties about the goals and priorities of the amalgamated organizations (Denenberg and Braverman 1999).

These trends are evident in labor conditions throughout North America. Dr. Alejandro Córdova Castañeda of the Instituto Mexicana del Seguro Social (IMSS) claims that worker frustration with labor conditions combines with a high cost of living, low wages and a lack of enforcement of existing labor codes help to produce a climate for the potential outbreak of workplace violence (Córdova Castañeda 2001). Denenberg and Braverman (1999) note, mass layoffs and “re-engineering” in both public and private organizations, make workers anxious about unemployment as they struggle to remain in jobs with prospects of either stagnant or declining wages and uncertainty about employment security. Uncertainty about work organization and job security may produce trauma, which is often characterized by irritable and hostile behavior, mistrust, anger and withdrawal from social and family support.

In addition to the trauma induced by fears about employment security and matters pertaining to the nature and pace of work, an employee’s loss of personal autonomy also has been identified as a possible reason for tension and violence at work (Vezina 2001). The frame of reference typically used to explain the concept of the loss of personal autonomy on the job is the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor, a turn-of –the nineteenth to twentieth-century industrial engineer responsible for the introduction of the practice of “scientific management.” In the name of efficiency, scientific management reduced manufacturing processes to mechanistic tasks. Critics charged that these methods deprived workers of autonomy; i.e. the ability to use skills, exercise judgment and control

the pace of work. One study claimed that “scientific management pitted workers as individuals against one another, and made them claw at each other” (Kanigel, 534).

In recent years, the efficiency principle embodied in scientific management has shifted to the white-collar realm. The introduction of telecommunications and computers has generated what some have called “information overload” (Shenk 1997). In 1996 Benchmark Research, a division of the Reuters news organization, revealed that, especially among managers, “information overload” or “information fatigue” resulted in higher levels of stress leading to ill health. On the job, according to the Reuters-sponsored survey, these higher stress levels generated paralysis of analytical capacity, increased anxiety, and a tendency to blame others. A recent study in Mexico indicated a strong correlation between “job burnout” and worker suicide among protective service workers (Enríquez Jiménez 2002, 28).

Shenk also notes that information fatigue increasingly involves the lack of separation between the workplace and the home. Fax machines, modems, cell phones and a steady stream of e-mail have created a new group of workers called telecommuters, working from home. Accordingly, no distinction is made between work and home-life, and employees have reduced their ability to escape work pressures. As a recent Mexico study indicates, work pressures also impact the amount of control workers have over the creation of free time for themselves (Mañon Garibay 2002, 57). Experts assert that the loss of control may relate directly to hostile or violent behavior, and that work-induced fatigue and its corollary-job stress may lead to increased use of alcohol and drugs (Denenberg and Braverman 1999, 22, 27).

Lack of control, heavy demands, repetitive work and pervasive fatigue can combine to produce an increase in stress, depression, anxiety and hostility, according to a 1997 Duke University study. The study also found male workers, more than women were more likely to react to job stress by becoming hostile. In 1990, transportation workers in Canada were asked to identify those aspects of their job that they believed prompted them to depend on alcohol or other drugs. Job fatigue, long hours, boredom and repetition were most often cited as risk factors that combined with pressure and stress to the use of drugs and alcohol among people in the various transportation jobs (Denenberg and Braverman 1999, 25, 27).

Although difficult to measure, stress is increasingly singled out as a major reason for outbreaks of workplace violence. According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in the U.S., nearly everyone agrees that job stress results from the interaction of the workers and the conditions of work. (NIOSH 2001). Views differ, however, on the importance of *worker characteristics* versus *working conditions* as the primary causes of job stress. When applied to certain personality traits, stress can either inhibit or enhance a person's ability to find useful ways to deal with pressure and conflict. The risk of violence increases when a person with predisposition for-or history of-violence is subjected to stress. Some persons develop to a level of a risk for violent or threatening behavior when they sense that nothing can be done to change their situation. Lacking organizational supports and poorly equipped to maintain positive supports, these persons feel powerless (Denenberg and Braverman 1999, 143).

Although the importance of individual worker characteristics cannot be ignored, scientific evidence suggests that certain working conditions are stressful to most people.

According to NIOSH researchers, excessive workload demands and conflicting expectations between a worker and supervisor as well as job redesign and work speedup can increase stress levels. Further, Denenberg and Braverman (1999) find that serious levels of stress in the workplace can also result from a loss of employment or income, humiliation, or isolation in the workplace. Such evidence has resulted in greater emphasis on working conditions as the key source of stress. A recent Mexican study of nurses and health care workers in the “Dr. Bernardo Sepúlveda” hospital in Monterrey, Nuevo León confirms the affects of work overloads. The findings show that these changes cause stress, lead to higher employee absenteeism and the inability to provide adequate levels of care for patients who, along with relatives, may sometimes react to the situation by physically assaulting hospital employees (Medina Villareal 2002).

Several ILO studies on stress and violence at work show that both perpetrators and victims of violence interact at work and that the working environment often influences the risks of violence that results from this interaction. Managerial style, management culture, workplace physical design and organizational settings are important for determining whether or not violence can either be triggered or defused. For example, overcrowded, poorly ventilated, dirty and noisy premises experience higher rates of violence than workplaces, which exhibit good physical design features. Poor work organization, sometimes leading to excessive workloads and labyrinthine bureaucratic procedures for employees can foster negative attitudes among such workers and induce aggressive behavior among customers. It also has been recognized that where dialogue and communication are extensively used the risks of violence may be defused. In contrast, a working environment where people work in isolation under an authoritarian

management culture, and bad labor-management relations may increase the risk of violence (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 65).

The example of OC Transpo in Canada illustrates how worker characteristics and working conditions can provide a lethal combination for producing violence at work. On April 6, 1999, four employees of OC Transpo were shot and killed by a former co-worker in a garage of the company's headquarters, two other employees were wounded and the gunman eventually killed himself on the same site. The perpetrator was a loner with a history of violence. He had been terminated, reinstated and then quit before the tragedy. OC Transpo had a history of bitter labor relations, violence at work and a wide gap between the large blue-collar workforce and the small, elitist management team. Bullying, mobbing, absenteeism and festering anger were underlying factors at OC Transpo before the accident (Gilligan and Legault 2001).

Task situation

The specific task situation of a particular occupation is an important variable associated with an enhanced risk of physical violence at work (Chappell and Di Martino 2000). Working alone and working at night and having to work outside of normal working hours generally have been found to increase the risk of violence. Increased risk of exposure to violence also involves working in contact with the public and working with valuables and handling cash.

Working alone has drawn great attention, especially in terms of constructing legal requirements to ensure the safety of workers laboring in that task situation. In the Canadian public sector, for example, nearly 84 percent of respondents in a survey

indicated they often worked alone (Pizzino 1994, 15). A Labour Program Policy specifically addresses the needs for the safety of those working alone.

It remains the responsibility of the employer to ensure the safety and health of every employee at work. Through discussion with the safety and health committees, the affected worker (s) and examination of the work site, many different alternatives may be found to be available to ensure that the solitary worker would not be placed in a situation of undue risk, by virtue of their solitude.

Source: Labour Program Policy (OPD 905-1-IPG 059)

Although solitary work does not automatically involve a higher risk of violence at work, it is generally recognized that it may increase the vulnerability of the workers concerned.

Working with people in distress also increases the potential for physical violence at work. Working in jobs or occupations with an unequal sex ratio as well as in situations where a power differential exists; i.e. when female employees gradually have improved their position in relation to their male co-workers, and, consequently, sexual harassment may be the result of exclusionary behavior on the part of men (Veale and Gold 1998). Some studies (e.g. Hoel and Cooper) have shown that working in industries with a high customer service orientation emphasizing customer satisfaction, employees run a higher risk of exposure to abusive behavior and heavy demands from customers. Workers in the health service, hotel and retail sectors are particularly vulnerable to bullying by customers.

Occupations most exposed to violence at work

In addition to the circumstances or situations under which a person may be working, the magnitude of exposure to violence on the job also depends on occupation. Accordingly,

there are certain situations and occupations that run a higher risk of exposure to violence at work. Occupations most exposed to violence at work are frequently linked to certain features of a work environment that involve multiple risk situations. For the most part, these particular occupations combine the task situation and the work environment and sometimes individual risk factors, such as substance abuse, a history of psychological problems, gender or ethnicity, all of which may increase the probability of violence occurring. Over time, consensus has emerged about the frequency of violence at work among certain occupations, especially because of the availability and reliability of data on physical violence.

One such occupation that suffers from a disproportionate number of incidences of physical violence in North America is driving a taxi cab. Taxi drivers are more likely to be assaulted than workers in any other occupation because they face a number of risks. Those risks include: working alone; working with the public; working at night, working in high crime areas and working with cash. In 1993 taxi drivers had the highest risk of work-related homicide in the United States with a rate of 43 homicides per 100,000 workers. The occupation accounted for almost a tenth of all victims of job-related homicide, but less than one-half of 1 percent of the U.S. work force. In 1993, almost half the taxi drivers died from 9 p.m. to 3 p.m. In the U.S., taxi drivers are 60 times more likely to be murdered on the job than workers in any other occupation (Toscano and Weber 1995). Some surveys suggest that approximately 75 percent of assaults against taxi drivers in the U.S. go unreported, making it difficult to obtain reliable statistics on the incidents of workplace violence that do not result in death. Taxi drivers in both

Mexico and Canada rank among the highest occupations as regards to homicide on the job (Kabrick 2001).

Health care workers also encounter a high risk of work-related assaults stemming from many factors. Workers in this sector are commonly assaulted by their patients and even relatives of patients, many of whom are distraught about the fate of their loved ones or upset at a perceived lack of adequate treatment. Violence occurs in all kinds of health care settings, such as in emergency care units, psychiatric hospitals, old-age care units and drug abuse rehabilitation centers (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 72).

Other workers are at high risk because they are involved in financial transactions. In the United States, in 1993, petrol station workers ranked second among the occupations most exposed to homicide with a rate of 13 per 100,000 (USDOJ 2001). Workers in banks and financial institutions handling large sums of cash are particularly susceptible to physical assault and homicide during armed robberies, and they tend to suffer from post-trauma stress associated with the event. In Mexico, the methods of bank robbers fall into general categories from those threatening notes and no weapon, to those in which a hand-held weapon is used to either fatally shoot a victim, or in kidnapping. Because bank robberies can affect everyone in the bank, and not just the teller, the psychological impact of any bank robbery can be deep and is often delayed as one researcher of the subject in Mexico has noted. Remedy and prevention of this problem in Mexico is discussed in the next section (Calero Lomelín 2001).

Employees alone at work outside normal working hours are also at higher risk for violence at work. Cleaners, maintenance and repair workers are at special risk. Women working in the cleaning sector are especially vulnerable to harassment and other forms of

abuse by supervisors or by someone in the client-company. In Mexico, for example, janitors and security guards are occupations at high risk for death on the job in this category (Gisela Estrada 2001).

In the fast food sector, violence at work emerges from several sources. Burger King Corporation, which operates stores throughout North America, has identified armed robbery as the greatest threat, followed by impaired or disgruntled customers. Management at Burger King reports that 70 percent of fast food industry robberies are related to current or past employees. Employee-on-employee verbal assault or bullying is also seen as a problem (Offutt 2001).

In particular, workers providing social services, and especially health care workers, encounter a high risk of work-related assaults stemming from many factors. Health care workers are commonly assaulted by their patients and even relatives of patients, many of whom are distraught about the fate of their loved ones or upset at a perceived lack of adequate treatment. Violence occurs in all kinds of health care settings, such as in emergency care units, psychiatric hospitals, old-age care units and drug abuse rehabilitation centers (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 72). In a 1994 Canada survey, 61 percent of the social service and institutional workers in the province of Alberta reported having been verbally threatened, while 42 percent said they were physically threatened and 30 percent reported that they had been physically assaulted (Pizzino 1994, 6).

Denenberg and Braverman (1999) outline some of the risk factors in the United States affecting health care workers. They include:

- A prevalence of handguns and other weapons among patients, their families or friends is a growing problem.

- The increasing use of hospitals by police and the criminal justice systems for criminal holds and the care of acutely disturbed or violent individuals.
- The availability of drugs or money at hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, making them likely robbery targets.
- Isolated work with clients during examinations or treatment.

In a 2001 survey of nurse's unions/associations in North America, workplace violence and bullying was reported as a significant problem by almost 90 percent of respondents. Experts attribute this high rate to the challenges facing health care systems as they restructure to make more efficient use of available resources. Because health care is a labor-intensive industry, the stresses experienced by these systems inevitably affect their employees (Clark and Clark, 2003, 38).

Héctor Ulises García Nieto, of the National Union of Social Sector Workers (SNTSS) has attempted to explain some of the root causes that lead to the risk of violence in the health care work environment in Mexico. He notes that the capacities of medical units in Mexico have been overloaded for years, and that health care professionals regularly suffer physical and verbal abuse. Work overload combined with the lack of medicine, personnel, support staff and infrastructure is among the most important risk factors leading to violence in health care, which often can involve a patient or a relative of the patient. And although the cost of this violence is difficult to quantify, increased workloads for other workers resulting from absenteeism and workdays lost due to disabilities because of assault on the job, ultimately lower levels of service for patients and also raise legal issues (García Nieto 2001). A recent study of Mexican nurses also

shows the build up of stress as a result of work overload, leads to reduced job satisfaction and an increase in absenteeism (González Rodríguez 2002).

Even working environments which traditionally have been almost immune from violence are gradually becoming more affected. Violence in schools is part of this trend. For example, a 1993 survey of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Association revealed that 66 percent of teachers report having suffered abuse during their career. Abuse of school teachers, ranging from verbal and physical assaults to the destruction of personal property, at the hands of students, parents, fellow teachers, administrators has become increasingly common (Chappell and Di Martino 2000, 73). The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the U.S. reported in 1992 that, between 1985 and 1990, attacks on public school teachers in Detroit, Michigan increased 900 percent (Nemeth 1992, 7).

Besides teachers, immigrant workers and people of different ethnic origin experience a disproportionate share of violent incidents. In the United States, African Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders and Hispanics incur a disproportionate share of workplace homicides, compared with their share of total workplace fatalities and their rate of participation in the labor force. In the U.S. where immigrants comprise approximately 9 percent of all workers, they also constitute 25 percent of workplace homicide victims (Windau and Toscano 1994, 1). Demographic shifts that have affected the U.S. construction industry have led to violence on the job site. An increase in the number of women and minorities as well as an influx of immigrants has generated tensions in an industry in which for nearly 50 years had a workforce that was almost made up of white males. As a result of these changes, the United Brotherhood of

Carpenters and Joiners of St. Louis, Missouri, have reported a sharp increase in workplace hazing, threats, bullying, and sexual harassment (Gaal 2001).

Workers in export processing enterprises often experience not only exploitative conditions, but also an inordinate exposure to violence (Chappell and Di Martino 2001, 76). Many of these enterprises are largely composed of unskilled young women toiling at precarious jobs in highly labor-intensive environments. The consensus among experts is that sexual harassment and physical aggression are in some cases a part of these environments. Statistics from Mexico between 1997 and 2000 show that the greatest number of workplace accidents and death from violence have occurred in industrialized and urbanized states, such as the Federal District, where a large percentage of Mexican industry is located (Estrada Rodríguez 2001).

Like their Canadian and U.S. counterparts, Mexican working women also are heavily concentrated in the service and retail trade sectors, both of which are considered high-risk occupations for exposure to workplace violence (CLC 1998, Appendix B; INEGI 2002).³ Some scholars have found that the continued segregation of women in low paid and low status employment is a major reason why so much violence is perpetrated against women (ILO 1995).

The postal sector of employment, which traditionally has been a male-dominated work environment, is widely perceived among the general public for its social disorder and violence at work, so much that violence at work is often described as “going postal.” However, the perception that postal workers are at greater risk than other workers for

³ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Geografía e Informática (INEGI). Obtained in October 2002 at <https://www.inegi.gob.mx>, “Estadísticas Sociodemográficas de Mediano Plazo.”

violence at work has been proven to be a misconception, as statistics show that, at least in the U.S., postal workers are not at greater risk (USPS 2000). Notwithstanding, a recent ILO report documents that rapid change in the workplace that has been identified elsewhere as possible contributing factors to violence at work has also affected the postal sector. In recent years, for example, the postal sector has witnessed higher rate of female participation, and this development has combined with fundamental changes in work organization to produce tension within the work environment. New technologies have been introduced, leading to automation, deskilling, increased job insecurity, workload pressures, and a resulting loss of autonomy on the job.

Male workers often blame their female counterparts for these changes, and sometimes this resentment finds expression in the form of sexual harassment and rude behavior toward customers. In the United States Postal Service, for example, out of a total workforce of around 700,000 postal worker grievances amount to approximately 150,000 a year, and around 69,000 postal workers face disciplinary hearings from management (Giga, Hoel and Cooper 2003). Among the causes cited for violence and stress in the postal sector is low pay and pay inequity between managers and workers, i.e. compensation systems that reward managers with performance bonuses but fail to do the same for employees when they achieve performance targets (American Postal Workers' Union 2001).

CONSEQUENCES

Violence at work in North America produces a variety of consequences, one of which is the costs borne by enterprises and organizations. Accordingly, experts have begun calculating the costs of workplace violence, and in broad terms they have found

that workplace violence negatively affects the performance and efficiency of organizations and generates job dissatisfaction among employees, which often results in higher rates of absenteeism and turnover, lack of motivation and lower levels of productivity. Its impact is felt across a wide range of occupations and work environments in both the public and private sectors (USDOJ 2004).

In the United States, for example, an increasing number of lawsuits have been filed against enterprises for failure to recognize and address the problem of violence at work, and in some cases, juries have awarded victims substantial monetary settlements. In September 2003 a Virginia jury awarded more than \$4 million in compensatory and punitive damages to a hospital supervisor who alleged that she was forced to resign following her attempts to prevent sexual harassment in the hospital's operating rooms and facilities (Daily Labor Report: September 5, 2003).

In the U.S. the yearly cost of violence at work has been estimated at \$35.4 billion. Worker absenteeism in the U.S. because of violence at work is 30 to 40 percent higher than in the European Union, and a recent report of the ILO estimates the combined cost of violence at work and job-related stress at 0.5 to 3.5 percent of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per year (Di Martino 2001).

These figures reveal that the costs of workplace violence are not only borne by firms and organizations, but by individuals, communities and society as a whole. Another reflection of this consequence is that the negative consequences of workplace violence not only affect the direct victim, but often extend to people in proximity of the act, and even to those far removed from the workplace, such as family, neighbors and citizens of a community where these behaviors occur. Experts have noted the degree to which

workplace violence serves to multiply fear and anxiety about crime and violence and other abuses that occur in the larger society, which has prompted concerted efforts to seek prevention and remedies for violence at work (e.g. Denenberg and Braverman 1999). One such example is Canada's Occupational Health and Safety Program, which includes pre-incident training of managers and critical incident stress management intervention. A recent cost-effectiveness study revealed that the Canadian government saves \$7 for every \$1 spent on these types of programs, supporting the notion that the costs of violence at work can increase in the absence of pro-active intervention (Legault 2001).

REMEDIES: PREVENTION AND BEST PRACTICES

Although workplace violence is still an under recognized problem, a valuable body of knowledge is now available for the development of strategies to prevent its occurrence. Guidelines are emerging from government, trade unions, workplace violence experts, employers' groups and sections of industry and business. Developing a response to workplace violence is increasingly viewed as an essential element of human resource management. A recent U.S. Department of Justice—Federal Bureau of Investigation study shows that, while different approaches and methods are being utilized, prevention programs and remedies appear to focus on several common themes:

- Preventive action is both possible and necessary
- Work organization and the working environment hold significant keys to the causes and solutions to the problem
- The participation of workers and their representatives is crucial both in identifying the problem and in implementing solutions

- There is no one blueprint for action; but rather the uniqueness of each workplace situation must be considered
- Continuous review of policies and programs is needed to keep abreast of changing situations.

One of the most inclusive and comprehensive programs for the prevention of workplace violence occurred at OC Transpo in Canada. Immediately following the 1999 tragedy, the company focused upon maintaining operations and offering individual counseling for employees affected by the incident. OC Transpo also recognized poor labor relations as a root cause of workplace violence, and, in so doing, terminated one-third of management personnel, and management advancement was now linked to merit. One expert described the former OC Transpo organization so rigidly hierarchical that it was a time bomb to explode. The union cooperated by allowing the company to terminate any employee making threats against or bullying other employees. After two-and-one-half years following the violent deaths, increased employee voice, better labor relations and significant changes in the working environment and management culture resulted in increased productivity (Gilligan and Legault 2001).

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) strongly asserts that violence is an occupational health and safety hazard, and that when establishing guidelines for prevention it is important that its root causes and consequences not be concealed. This approach is based upon the experience of CUPE in applying collective bargaining strategies and participation in the development of legislation. These practices are guided by the union's firm belief in the application of British Columbia's and Saskatchewan regulations on workplace violence, which embody the principle that employers have a

responsibility to provide safe working conditions and workers have a right to participate in making conditions safe. In working with the Canadian federal government to develop laws, CUPE advocates statutes that would include identifying the problem, solving it using a preventive focus, involving workers and monitoring results. CUPE rebukes making worker characteristics the center of any preventive strategy, and rejects worker profiling and zero tolerance policies, while classifying them as reactive rather than preventive (Pizzino 2001).

The public sector SNTSS union in Mexico also advocates a prevention approach that involves developing strategic planning for the prevention of violence linking the institution, unionized workers and experts. Health and Safety Committees that are comprised of both union members and supervisors are active in developing training programs to avoid accidents, and the union invests dues money to train workers in violence prevention (García Nieto 2001).

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in the U.S. also engages in Joint Labor/Management Safety and Health Committees in an attempt to address all types of workplace violence problems, particularly in the health care sector, where the union has a strong presence. Besides having negotiated contracts that contain a general duty clause for management to provide workplace violence prevention programs, some AFSCME contracts go further, requiring adequate security, counsel, and even leave for employees affected by workplace violence.⁴ An example of a

⁴ Four different AFSCME collective bargaining agreements provide these provisions: AFSCME Local 544-1, Ohio Council 8 and the Franklin County Department of Human Services, 1991-1993 Contract; AFSCME Local 3999, Council 18 and City of Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1991-1993 Contract and the AFSCME Local 461-1 and the Matthews Board of Education [Ohio], 1991-1994, contract.

model clause on violence in the workplace in a Canadian collective agreement also comes from the public sector and is provided in a contract of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). A unique feature of the agreement is a clause that spells out a definition of workplace violence (Textbox 6: CAUT-U of Toronto Agreement)

Definition: for purposes of this agreement “violence” includes any attempted, threatened or actual act that endangers the health and/or safety of an employee. This definition includes threatening statements or threatening behaviour that gives an employee reasonable grounds to believe that the employee is at risk or injury.

Violence prevention: The parties agree that the employer shall develop a workplace violence prevention plan that includes:

- (a) arrangements for providing training and information to employees about workplace violence**
- (b) specific procedures for reporting, investigating, and recording incidents of violence in the workplace**
- (c) specific procedures for providing security controls and/or personal protective equipment and devices to employees at risk**

Access to psychological services shall be provided for all employees who may have been involved directly or indirectly, or who may have witnessed a violent incident in the workplace.

Source: Agreement Between CUAT and University of Toronto, 2001-2006.

A successful prevention program on workplace violence in the private sector’s banks and financial institutions in Mexico focuses on making working conditions safer for employees. Some of the preventive measures taken include promotion of operational standards that place limits on the amount of cash a teller can handle, planning and training employees to react to a robbery, the installation of more reliable alarm systems and better coordination between banks, financial institutions and local law enforcement. Victims of bank robberies also receive psychotherapy for disorders that may result from

robbery such as drug and alcohol abuse, memory loss and general disorientation. One year after implementing the prevention program, the incidence of bank robberies declined by 45 percent, and when they did occur, the level of physical aggression decreased (Calero Lomelín 2001).

Burger King developed a holistic approach violence prevention program that involved a cross-section of departments and discipline, including professionals from the medical, psychological security, law enforcement and insurance sectors. A central feature of the program was the “Life Balance” program, which provided a 24-hour contact to assist with stress release and personal issues. Some job-design changes were also implemented, such as placing time-delayed safes under the front counter and initiating a strict back-door policy for employee entrance and exit. Implementation of these policies has resulted in an increase in reporting incidents while armed robberies and assaults have decreased. As a company operating in all three countries, Burger King sought solutions for problems that were particular in a regional context. For example, in Mexico, store managers were not interested in having alarm systems connected to local police stations. Instead, they first tried armed guards and finally settled on the use of attack dogs to prevent robberies. In the U.S., managers preferred the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) to monitor the workplace. But in Canada, while stores did use CCTV, it was not widely implemented because some areas of Canada enforced regulations that prohibited its use (Offutt 2001).

CONCLUSION

In today’s world of work there is wide-ranging consensus that violence at work is a serious and broad-based occupational safety and health problem. Not limited to just

physical assault and homicide, violence at work can take many forms, including behaviors that have a cumulative effect on the victims, such as sexual harassment and bullying. Although there is increasing recognition that violence at work is an occupational safety and health issue that is costly to workers, employers and communities alike, a universal definition of violence at work has still not emerged. Consequently, the gathering of data and uniform statistical information on violence at work across borders has yet to materialize. Ultimately, any study of the problem that would eventually result in the construction of sound and enduring programs for the prevention and remedy of violence at work, would at the same time, also require the systematic compilation of better, comprehensive and comparable statistics.

Despite these obstacles, the study of the causes of violence at work has at least advanced enough to produce a number of pilot programs for remedy and prevention. Occupational health and safety practitioners, employers and trade unions have begun to develop some solutions based upon the fact that violence at work is a complex problem that involves the crafting of complex remedies that focus on specific industries, individual risk factors, workplaces and occupations. In the process, cultural variations have been considered, and as a consequence, solutions are often sought that are molded to fit the regional and national context.

While many remedies across North America have focused on worker personality and characteristics, increasingly a consensus has been building on creating remedies that search for solutions based more on working conditions. In the process, occupations at high risk for violence at work have been identified and special work situations have been analyzed and combined with examining how work organization, worker participation and

management practices might potentially affect either the precipitation or prevention of workplace violence. Within this context, stress is universally noted as a key factor in raising the potential for incidences of violent behavior at work. Consequently, a strong emphasis on reducing stress at work has been at the core of remedy and prevention programs, especially in high-risk occupations. Finally, although notable strides have been made in addressing violence at work in its multiple dimensions in recent years, further cooperation among governments, employers, unions and practitioners in North America is needed to help prevent a growing occupational health and safety problem that is increasingly costly in both social and economic terms.

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