Workplace Violence: the US Perspective

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Current Context for WV Prevention Initiatives in the U.S.

• Declining unionization
  – 8% of private sector workers
  – 12-13% of public sector workers
• Historical disconnect between OHS and security/law enforcement
• Anti-regulatory environment with very limited enforcement of existing legislation
• High unemployment/poor economy
• New Administration!!!
WV Definitions (U.S. Government)

- **NIOSH Current Intelligence Bulletin # 57 (1996)**
  - Violent acts, including physical assaults and threats of assault, directed toward persons at work or on duty.

- **Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey (2001)**
  - Victimization measured violent crimes - rape and sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault - that occurred while working or on duty.
  - Household respondents working during the week prior to the interview.

  - Violent acts directed towards a person at work or on duty (i.e. physical assaults, threats of assault, harassment, intimidation, or bullying).
  - Workplace violence can occur at the workplace, on official travel, at field locations, and at client’s homes or workplaces.
U.S. Federal Policy

• 1989 - NIOSH publishes data reporting that homicide is the 3rd leading cause of occupational injury death overall, #1 among women.
• 1992 – OSHA “letter of interpretation” stating that OSHA General Duty Clause includes WV as a recognized hazard in high risk worksites.
• Currently no federal standard or legislation
Current Federal Workplace Laws: Regarding Harassment

- Current discrimination laws require only that employees be treated equally.
- Employees who belong to a protected group are only protected from being fired because of their race, sex, etc., or if they are fired for opposing discrimination.
- If they are fired unjustly for any other reason, they have no protection.

Source: American Civil Liberties Union
http://www.aclu.org/workplacerights/gen/13385res19981231.html
WV Typology (CAL-OSHA, 1993)

- Type I – unknown perpetrator, criminal motive
- Type II – patient, client, customer as perpetrator
- Type III – coworker, supervisor as perpetrator
- Type IV – intimate partner perpetrator

Useful for assessing prevention strategies
U. S. State Legislative Initiatives
(Howard & Jenkins, 2008)

• 3 states passed laws since 1990 mandating engineering and administrative controls to protect convenience stores workers from violent crimes (T1).

• At least 5 states have passed laws (1998-2008) requiring some aspect of violence prevention program in health care (T2).
State Legislative Initiatives (T3)

• At least 13 states have introduced workplace bullying and interpersonal conflict legislation since 2003.
  – Project on Workplace Bullying and Discrimination (Yamada, Boston MA)
  – Model law to provide legal redress for workers and employer incentives for prevention.
State Legislative Initiatives (T4)

• 10 states have legislation permitting an employer to seek a temporary restraining order against one of its employees;
• 9 additional states have considered legislation since 2003;
• States vary in whether the employer can request protection on behalf of the employer, employee and whether the threatened employee must be notified.

- Management Commitment and Employee Involvement
- Worksite Analysis
- Hazard Prevention and Control
- Training and Education
- Recordkeeping and Evaluation
Magnitude of the Problem in U.S.

- ~ 600 homicides/year (BLS, 2007)
- 1.7 million victimizations/yr. among public & private sector workers (Duhart, 2002)
- 60% of non-fatal assaults resulting in lost work days in the healthcare sector (BLS, 2007)
- Up to 100% of staff report verbal/physical assault/year in acute care, varying by setting (Bensley 1997, May 2002)
- Rate of victimization 3 X higher in public vs. private sector
Workplace Violence Continuum

Verbal Hostility/Bullying
- Verbal threats
- Threats w/ weapon
- Assault
- Injury
- Fear/Stress/Vigilance

Lost Work

Time Injury

Verbal Hostility/Bullying

?
Risk Factors

- Contact with the public
- Exchange of money
- Delivery of passengers, goods, or services
- Having a mobile workplace (e.g. taxicab, police cruiser)
- Working with unstable or volatile persons in health care, social service, or criminal justice settings
- Working alone or in small numbers
- Working late at night or during early morning hours
- Working in high-crime areas
- Guarding valuable property or possessions
- Working in community-based settings

(Collins and Cox 1987; Davis 1987; Davis et al. 1987; Kraus 1987; Lynch 1987; NIOSH 1993; Castillo and Jenkins 1994)
Establishments with workplace violence incidents in the previous 12 months and their impact on programs and employees, United States, 2005

Establishments with a workplace violence incident in the previous 12 months: 389,380 establishments (5.3% of all establishments)

Did the workplace violence incident have a negative impact on your employees?

- Yes: 35.5%
- No: 64.2%

Was there a program or policy change after the incident?

- Yes: 10.2%
- No WVP program: 8.5%
- No: 80.8%

Over 5 percent of all establishments experienced an incident of workplace violence in the last year. While one-third reported a negative impact on employees, only 10 percent changed their policy after the incident; almost 9 percent had no program or policy.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention, 2005
Percent of establishments experiencing an incident of workplace violence by type of incident and ownership, United States, 2005

State governments experienced higher percentages of all types of workplace violence than did local governments or private industry. Thirty-two percent of State government establishments experienced some form of workplace violence in the previous 12 months.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention, 2005
In establishments with a formal workplace violence prevention program or policy, more emphasis was placed on customer and co-worker violence. State governments placed more emphasis on domestic violence than did private industry or local government.
NIOSH-Funded WV Research/Findings: Lipscomb et al

- Evaluation of WV Prevention Interventions in Social Service Settings (R01 - 2002 - 2007)
- Evaluation of Organization Justice Intervention to Alleviate Type III WV in NYS (R01 2006-2011)
WV Staff Survey Findings: Addiction Treatment Centers (2006)

• 409 staff (77% response)
• Self administered, on site at 13 ATC
• WV measured by 3 scales
  – Verbal aggression
  – Client assault
  – Staff assault
• Violence prevention strategies (n=8)
  – 17% of variance in verbal aggression
• Background risk factors (n=6)
  – An additional 3% of variance
What workers have told us across settings and states

- Patient rights movement creates a huge challenge to staff protection
- Culture that WV is “part of the job”
- Resistance/reprisal for filing criminal charges against pt/client
- Inadequate staffing - very high risk situation
  - Increases patient agitation
  - Makes staff easy targets
- Lack of regulations results in lack of WVP programming, even in high risk settings

- E-mailed, web-based survey of unionized state government workers
- 7797 completed surveys (4 agencies)
- 74% response rate
- Survey content
  - 6 item NAQ (modified from Einarsen)
  - Subjective bullying
  - Physical assault (or threat)
  - Perpetrator of act, reporting, response, impact, overall work environment
Survey Populations (N = 7797)

• 40% Male
• 16% non-white
• Time in current job:
  – < 1 year (22%)
  – 1-5 years (25%)
  – > 5 years (53%)
• Bargaining unit
  – Professional (55%)
  – Non-professional (37%)
  – Management (7%)
Preliminary Survey Findings (1)

Negative Acts in Prior 6 Mos.

- humiliated or ridiculed: 20-33%
- insulting/offensive remarks made: 15-38%
- intimidated / threatening behavior: 10-23%
- ignored or shunned: 23-40%
- excessive teasing/sarcasm: 10-21%
- shouted or raged at: 15-27%
- reported at least one negative act: 34-60%
Preliminary Survey Findings (2)

**Bullying**

“When abusive behavior is repeated over a period of time and when the victim experiences difficulties in defending him/herself”

- 9 - 15% “yes” to any
- 3 - 6% “yes”, at least monthly
- Perpetrator: generally a top manager, immediate supervisor, or co-worker. Rarely was it a subordinate
Preliminary Survey Findings (3)

Physical Violence

- Stalked or threatened with stalking
- Pushed, hit, or kicked
- Threatened with a weapon

- 1 – 5% at least one act of physical violence

- Perpetrator: most frequently immediate supervisor or co-worker. Rarely was it a top manager
Preliminary Survey Findings (3)

Individuals’ Responses

- 15 potential responses listed separately

- Most frequent responses
  - “Told a colleague” 18 - 61%
  - “Told friends/family” 16 – 59%
  - “Reported it to a supervisor” 13 – 35%
  - “Told the person to stop” 11 – 29%
  - “Pretend it never happened” 14 - 34%

Frequency of response was related to severity and frequency of the T3 behaviors that were experienced
Preliminary Survey Findings (5)

Impact on Individuals *

- Negatively affected your work 18 - 58%
- Influenced intention to remain in job 17 – 21%
- Negatively affected you personally 21 – 22%

- Impact is related to severity and frequency of the T3 behaviors that were experienced

* % who responded “very much” or “a lot”
Discussion