

Transcript for Violence on the Job

[Interviewee #1]:

I had bruises all over my body and my ribs were all bruised.

[Interviewee #2]:

At one point he was pushing, threatening, cursing at me.

[NARRATOR] Each week in the United States, an average of 33,000 workers are assaulted on the job and 17 are murdered.

[Interviewee #3]: Disastrous, a nightmare. I felt violated, I felt angry

[NARRATOR]

Homicide remains among the leading causes of workplace violence for both men and women.

[Interviewee #4]: We have had at least one death recently, and several in the past decade

[NARRATOR]

From 1993 to 1999, workplace violence accounted for 18% of all violent crime.

[Interviewee #5]: It was outrageous the amount of murders going on

[Interviewee #6]: We can't wait for incidents to occur you have got to be ahead of the curve on it

[Interviewee #7]: Being assaulted is not part of the job.

[NARRATOR]

Hello, I'm Ken Strunk for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Today violence is generally viewed as a social problem, the result of poverty, lack of education, and many other factors.

The solutions to these problems tend to be complex and require long-term interventions. Obviously, we cannot wait to address workplace violence solely as a social issue.

Because practical solutions are needed now, it must also be viewed as a serious workplace hazard, just like any other threat to worker safety. Some people might think that workplace violence is just another cost of doing business or that it comes with the territory in certain jobs.

NIOSH rejects this type of thinking. Exposure to violence is never an acceptable consequence of earning a living. Injury and death on the job must be eliminated no matter the cause. So stay with us as we look at the nature of violence in today's workplace and how to protect the lives of workers at risk.

[NARRATOR]

Acts of violence are not spread evenly across all workplaces. Rather, violence tends to occur around specific work settings. More than half of all workplace homicides occur in retail or service settings such as convenience stores, taxicab services, and gas stations. Homicide is the leading cause of death in these industries. That's right the number one cause. About three-fourths of these homicides occur during robberies. Fernando Mateo is president of the NY state federation of taxi drivers.

[MATEO]

We always believe that if you can rob someone at gunpoint the time is going to come when you are going to graduate and murder someone to take their money. And that is exactly what had happened.

[OSBORNE]

Our security department along with operations our main goal is safety of the employees and the customers. Our biggest concern would be robbery

[NARRATOR]

Stores and service industries are particularly vulnerable to violence because they generally involve the exchange of money, working alone or in small numbers, and the delivery of passengers, goods, or services. They may also involve working in high-crime areas or during late night or early morning hours. All of these factors can increase the risk of violence in any workplace.

[NARRATOR]

Although the most common form of violence is crime-related violence remains the most common, a significant number of workplace assaults occur where the aggressor has a legitimate business relationship with the victim.

[BEAGLE]

I was visiting a place of public assembly, during a routine compliance call when out of the blue I was assaulted by a cook. I managed to extricate myself and I went running towards the front door and he told me that the door was locked and that I wouldn't be able to escape but fortunately being a diligent inspector I had them put a crash bar on a few years earlier so I was able to escape. It doesn't make any difference what size you are If someone is irritated or agitated or mentally unbalanced they will come after a man just as easily as they would come after a woman.

[NARRATOR]

In these cases, the perpetrator may be a client, patient, inmate, or any other individual to whom services are provided. A large proportion of these assaults occur in the health care and social services sector. Take for example the case of Nancy Fitzgivens . . .

A children services worker in Franklin county Ohio.

While on a home visit to check on a child in her care Nancy was stabbed to death, leaving behind her husband and three children.

[BENSON]

We have records of people everyday getting broken noses, broken jaws, broken teeth and it has become a litany of terror for folks. They want to do their jobs but they have to deal with the issue of violence in the workplace. So for public sector employees the issue of dealing with difficult clients, inmates and the mentally retarded and the mentally ill is a very serious issue.

[NARRATOR]

In health care and drug treatment facilities, nurses are often the targets of violent outbursts.

[BEDOW]

We have 27 male patients, and 3 female staff on duty. One of the patients was not allowed to go smoking that day so decided to cause some disruption. When he started to disrupt then when we went to intervene he began to attack me. Even though the other 2 staff immediately came to my aid he slammed my head into a butcher block counter 4 or five times and was punching me on my shoulder and my arm and my back uncounted times. During the attack he hit me so hard my tied shoes came off underneath the desk , and my glasses ended up about 25 feet down the hallway. The whole time he was hitting he continued to say how he was trying to kill me.

[DANGLER]

We had brought all of the patients up to the dining room. There was 1 patient that stayed back I heard him yelling and threatening another nurse that had stayed back at the nurses station. He had attempted to go over the counter. So I called to him and tried to get his attention away from her and he just bolted at me. And he just started hitting my face with his fist and at probably the third blow I went down on the floor there was one patient that had stayed back. And that patient heard pounding that was my head hitting the wall as he would punch my face. And this patient that was left back ran up the hall and jumped on this man, this man was so big he was carrying this other patient on his back. If it wasn't for this other patient there is no way I would have lived through what was coming.

[NARRATOR]

Stories like these are not uncommon. Violence in treatment settings is usually caused by clients, and occasionally their family members, who feel frustrated, vulnerable, and out of control.

And what about cases of worker-on-worker violence the kind that figure prominently in newscasts and headlines? Contrary to popular belief, worker-on-workers violence accounts for only about 8% of workplace homicides. No industry is immune to this type of violence since it is usually motivated by interpersonal or work-related disputes.

Another type of workplace violence stems from a personal relationship between the attacker and victim. This type of violence spills over from personal life to the workplace. For example, domestic disputes in which the victim is assaulted or threatened while at work.

Laws and regulations regarding workplace violence vary by locality. There is no national legislation that specifically addresses workplace violence. OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and NIOSH has published voluntary guidelines and recommendations for taxi service late-night retail establishments, and health care and social service agencies. A list of these guidelines can be accessed through the main menu.

Only two states California and Washington, have OSHA plans that enforce regulations requiring comprehensive safety programs in all workplaces that address preventing assaults on workers. These states have also enacted specific legislation to protect health care workers. Such as nurses.

Washington, along with Virginia and Florida, has passed state laws aimed at preventing robbery-related homicides in late-night retail establishments.

Such as convenience stores.

Local ordinances to protect taxicab drivers from violence can be found in major cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Boston, Albany, and Baltimore

[NARRATOR]

It is important to note that while the potential to reduce workplace violence is great there is no conclusive scientific information on which specific approaches is most effective Research is in progress to determine which interventions are most appropriate for different work environments.

Violence is a serious workplace hazard that demands focused attention .

Because we have such a diverse economy, with all kinds of jobs there will never be a single violence prevention strategy that will work in every sitting.

But by examining the specific situations and activities that put people at risk, employers and workers can together begin to develop a comprehensive violence prevention program.

The goal of any such program should be to implement a system of controls that addresses the unique needs of the workplace. We'll talk about how to do that next.

Strategies for preventing workplace violence fall into three categories: environmental, administrative, and behavioral. environmental controls are often found in workplaces where cash is exchanged. Measures such as using locked drop safes, keeping small amounts of cash on hand, and posting signs to this effect are used to deter robbery.

[OSBORNE]

We have a limit in the register that the register will automatically notify the cashier or clerk to make a drop in order to keep the money low in the till and keep it un attractive.

[NARRATOR]

Acceptance of credit and debit cards also reduces the amount of available cash, especially in retail settings and taxicabs. Some safety advocates have proposed using prepaid cab fare cards similar to those used in subways.

Physical separation of workers from customers and the general public should also be considered. Creating distance between workers and others may reduce the chances of a physical attack. One way to achieve this is to increase the height and depth of counters. Bullet-resistant enclosures and barriers provide physical protection in a range of environments, from taxicabs to emergency rooms and social services agencies. When selecting methods of separation, companies must take into account the need to conduct business in a reasonable fashion. A safety device that is obtrusive or impractical may be self-defeating because it frustrates workers and customers.

Visibility and lighting are also important environmental considerations. High-risk areas should be made clearly visible to as many people as possible. Ample outdoor lighting is also essential. Access to the workplace needs to be addressed as well. Obviously, access to work areas by non-employees should be restricted. Some things to consider include the number of entry and exit points, the use of panic-bar doors that allow doors to be locked from the outside but still allow exit, and areas on the premises where potential attackers can hide. Keep in mind that a trespasser can be hidden by a variety of environmental characteristics such as landscaping, signage and outlying buildings. And of course there are numerous safety devices on the market to help secure the work environment. For example: closed-circuit cameras, alarms, key-card entry systems in fixed workplaces, and cell phones and other communication equipment in mobile workplaces and trouble lights and geographic locating devices in cabs,

[TINSLEY]

All of our employees are aware of where the quickest escape is for an exit we also have video cameras and very bright lighting

[OSBORNE]

approx 15 years ago we had an average of 158 robberies a year as we implemented closed circuit TV and alarm systems throughout the stores we cut our robberies down to approx 58 last year and so far half of this year we are at 18 for the company

[MATEO]

We are able to get Mayor Giuliani to give the industry 5 million dollars to help protect the industry. by putting in partitions and or cameras and making it law that one of these two items has to be in these cars. Today armed robberies are down from 2500 a month to maybe 2 or 300 hundred a month, murders are down from 25 a year to maybe 1 or 2 a year

[NARRATOR]

Administrative controls are workplace policies and practices designed to reduce the risk of violence. Administrative controls include appropriate staffing. Security experts recommend the use of guards or receptionists to screen visitors and otherwise control access to work areas. In retail, service, and health care settings, increasing the number of workers on duty at certain times should be considered. Work practices that increase the risk of assault on workers should be thoroughly examined and revised as needed. These practices include carrying money or valuables and disposing of or storing materials in outlying areas of the worksite.

Employers should develop an overall policy on workplace violence that has a clear message: violence will not tolerate and is never a part of doing business. This policy should provide for reporting violent incidents and threats, and behaviors whether they originate outside the organization or within. Methods for defusing potentially violent situations and instruction on how to use security devices should also be covered. In addition, violence policies should include provisions for medical care and psychological support following a violent incident, as well as training . . .

. . . which brings us to the third violence prevention strategy: behavioral.

Providing employees with training in nonviolent response and conflict resolution is believed to reduce the risk that volatile situations will escalate to physical violence. An effective training program will address hazards associated with specific tasks and appropriate prevention strategies. Ensuring that all employees know how to use safety devices properly is also critical. Increased employee knowledge and adherence to administrative controls will result in behavior that contributes to a safer workplace.

[TINSLEY]

I really think it is important for all of our employees to be educated on it because I know that if it was one of my family members or one of my friends that was hurt for that case even murdered on the job it would devastate me and I want everybody else to understand that.

[NARRATOR]

Any program for preventing workplace violence should incorporate these three strategies.

A successful program also requires a commitment by management and active employee involvement. To learn what some people are doing to prevent violence at work, check out the case study, accessible through the main menu. When addressing workplace violence or any other safety issue, prevention is the ultimate goal.

Any threats of violence should be reported and dealt with right away. Ignoring potential problems or failing to take them seriously can have deadly consequences.

And in case violence does occur, employers should be ready to utilize all available internal and community resources to minimize its effects.

Most important, remember that workplace violence can be prevented with appropriate policies and controls.

It's definitely not something that workers should have to live with. Just hope never happens to them. A safe workplace doesn't happen by accident.

It requires that we take action to protect ourselves and others.

I'm Ken Strunk. Stay safe.