

Some Predictors of Workplace Violence

Violence is a part of life that everyone will either prepare for, or suffer the consequences for being unprepared. While violence can be observed at bars or nightclubs on a regular basis, some may consider it shocking that violence could ever occur at the workplace. This short commentary highlights the role stress plays in acts of violence in the workplace and emotional signals of potential violence. It also emphasizes the importance of employee training on workplace violence to mitigate the risk.

Andrew K. Cowie

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According to David and Ella Van Fleet (2007) in *“Preventing Workplace Violence: The Violence Volcano Metaphor”*, a person's emotional wellness plays a significant role in one's aptitude to commit an act of violence. The authors say that negative emotions can build up like a volcano, and advocate that if organizational members understand the warning signs and are equipped to intervene, the risks of workplace violence can be mitigated. However, most managers and employees do not know how to recognize early warning signs of possible violence.

There are physical signs that can show a person's emotional state. When people are sad they may be frowning or crying, or even may be just quiet or not very willing to talk. These physical expressions are signs that a person may be upset about something. These are only a few indicators that co-workers, supervisors and managers can look for, and when observed, can take measures to speak with whoever is showing such signs, to prevent their emotional state from becoming worse (Kansagra, et al., 2008).

Other significant signs that can be observed are emotional distress, stress in general, and a significant inability to fit in with one's social group (Christine, 1994). Employees suffering from

discrimination, hostility, or ostracism by coworkers should be of particular interest to supervisors and managers looking to prevent workplace violence. When employees make any type of complaint or grievance against another employee, such matters should be addressed immediately and without delay. Instituting an open door communication policy where employees can freely talk with their supervisor or manager without reservation or fear of punishment is critical to relieve the stress caused by coworker hostility or ostracism (Reilly, 2010).

People experience stress and react to stressful situations differently. Despite significant differences in how people choose to deal with stress, there are a few things that many people agree are common stressors in their lives such as work, finances, relationships, and role conflict or role ambiguity at work. Understanding common stressors among people and recognizing stressful indicators can help managers and supervisors in possibly preventing employees from becoming over stressed. It can also be important for managers and supervisors to be aware of how their subordinates are performing; too much stress can lead to a drop or decrease in performance. When managers observe a drop in performance on an individual or group level, the

group or employee may be struggling with stress. This information can be used by businesses to formulate plans to reduce stress in the work environment and thereby decrease the possibility of workplace violence (Aamodt 2010).

Employers can implement measures in attempts to deter workplace violence such as conducting background checks on newly hired employees, establishing a zero tolerance workplace violence policy, and educating managers, supervisors and employees about the warning signs of workplace violence. Information and education can often be the most effective tool for preventing workplace violence. Many employees may not be aware that violence could manifest itself anywhere. Such information need not to be given in a way to scare employees but rather to inform employees that violence, in most occasions, does not spontaneously occur but rather follows clear signs of emotional trouble or turmoil. Educating employees about violence in the workplace will enable employees to better understand the warning signs. Despite what education and training employers may give to employees, employers bear a larger responsibility to ensure that employees have a safe working environment that is also free of any form of discrimination (Dillenberger 2010).

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About the Author

Andrew K. Cowie is a student at Vanguard University of Southern California Master of Science Program in Organizational Psychology.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to andrew.cowie@vanguard.edu