

## Workplace Violence and Ergonomic Involvements

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### Introduction

Violence at workplaces has become an alarming phenomenon worldwide and even the real size of the problem is largely unknown. The literature on workplace violence shows that the current knowledge is only the tip of the iceberg [1]. Workplace violence involves multifaceted and multicausal problems and creates public health, social and legal issues facing all occupations worldwide [2-7]. It is also considered to be a reflection of the level and wave of violence suffered in the whole industry.

Workplace violence is an everyday reality for many workers, substantiating the prevalence as an epidemic in all continents of the world [8,9]. Workplace violence is definitely unfavorable to both employers and employees [10] and causes decreased worker productivity which results in monetary losses for the businesses and the worker.

The extents of the workplace violence problem and its impacts on individual workers and industries have led to a considerable body of epidemiological studies that have investigated risk factors for workplace violence. Much of the literature on workplace violence have dealt with descriptive epidemiology issues focusing on specific industry sectors, with few studies considering broader systemic concerns or focusing in more depth on risk factors and preventive measures for the violence of workplace [11]. However, rather less research attention has been conducted on preventing workplace violence [12-14].

Whilst ergonomists and ergonomics research have significantly contributed to the literature on other psychosocial concerns, industry risks, and injury preventions in the context of musculoskeletal disorders, notable stress, and working hours and fatigue [15-22], the ergonomics literature has largely ignored the problems of workplace violence to date [23,24]. The absence of a contribution to the field by ergonomists is surprising so that it is urged to investigate the extent and the nature of workplace violence and its resultant problems and impacts on the industry. Hence, it is necessary to develop systematic tools that can assist government and industry to monitor the workplace violence problem, identify key areas of the risk, and build intervention programs that target these areas from a viewpoint of ergonomics.

Like other occupational safety and health risks, violence in the workplace is related to the broad work system (rather than being a strictly interpersonal conflict problem) and can be understood in terms of interactions amongst individuals, tasks, environments, and organizational work system elements. Moreover, the analysis and design of these system components seem to be a key factor for an effective initiative of workplace violence prevention.

Violence in the workplace may never be eliminated, but steps can be taken to hinder the problem from growing [10]. Therefore, development of prevention strategies that incorporate ergonomic concepts and principles may reduce the incidents of workplace violence and accordingly increase work productivity and job satisfaction in any type of industry.

### Violence at Workplace and Ergonomic Concerns

#### Workplace Violence and Its Impact on Industry

Workplace violence is defined as “violent acts, including assaults and threats of assault, aimed at a person or people at work or on duty” [25]. Violence includes both physical and non-physical aggressions and can be described as being destructive towards another person. It finds its expression in right physical assault, homicide, verbal abuse, bullying, sexual harassment and threat. Specifically, it may include beating, rape, shooting, stabbing, suicide, near suicide, and psychological traumas such as threats, offensive phone calls, intimidating behaviors, and harassments of any nature like swearing or shouting [26].

Violence at work is often considered to be just a reflection of more general and increasing phenomenon of violence in many areas of social life which has to be dealt with at the level of the whole society [1]. But, its occurrence has continuously increased at the workplace. Employers and workers are equally interested in the prevention of violence at the workplace [1]. Hence, our society on a large scale needs to pay extra attention to prevent violence spreading to working life and recognize the potential of the workplace violence by removing such obstacles to improving safety, productivity, and wellbeing.

Violence at workplace causes decreased worker productivities which result in financial impacts for businesses of the industry and job satisfaction and security of the workers. For example, increased sick days, absenteeism, health care costs, and decreased outputs cause extra monetary losses. Above all, economic burdens of the workplace violence associated with fatal or non-fatal assaults largely affect industries, directly and indirectly, costing billions of dollars in terms of lost wages, medical bills, insurance claims, support costs, lawsuits, etc [26,27]. Furthermore, workplace violence has enormous psychological and physical shocks on the victims, their families, and co-workers. As a result, the incidents of workplace violence have raised great concerns amongst employees against the organization's commitment to safety on the job [28].

#### Ergonomic Concerns for Workplace Violence

Understanding workforces that are aware of what to look for in order to prevent workplace violence will greatly benefit to the industry business. To effectively prevent workplace violence, it is important to

fully aware of multiple aspects of risk factors for the incidents of workplace violence. Hence, it is essential to develop a system model to determine the relative contribution of threat causes in the experience of workplace violence.

Besides, any attempted model should include key control elements that may be available as a violence control measure to the industries across different sectors and branches. It is crucial that this should be compensated by improved work measures and focuses on a positive safety and health practice with regard to violence prevention within the workplace [11]. This is the area in which ergonomics can perhaps have the greatest impact, through analysis of weaknesses in work systems concerning violence, and particularly those features of tasks, environments, and logistic designs that create violence risks, and the development and evaluation of interventions to prevent workplace violence which accounts for the interacting work system factors [11].

Ergonomics research needs to concentrate on control efforts and the evaluation of effective averting programs across high-violence risk sectors in workplaces and industries. The adoption of systems perspective to the workplace violence problem is important as it ensures narrow interpersonal interpretations of violence risks, and encourages control strategies to address the full range of interacting work system factors contributing to the workplace violence [11]. Further research also requires examining in detail the interactive contribution of risk factors to actual violence cases across a range of different types of industries and business sectors. In this regard, ergonomic involvements have much to offer towards an improved understanding of workplace violence and measures for its prevention [11].

## Conclusion

There is a growing problem of violence in the workplace that should not be ignored. Workplace violence is damaging to both employers and employees [10]. Workplace attacks range from simple assault to aggravated beating, verbal abuse, bullying, robbery, homicide, sexual harassment, and threat. And, incidences of domestic abuse are being carried over into the workplace where coworkers can be caught in the middle of violent attacks. Violence in the workplace may never be eradicated, but protective steps can be taken to hinder the problem from cultivating. Hence, it is necessary to develop a system model to determine the relative contribution of risk factors in the experience of workplace violence.

Despite a growing interest in this psychosocial phenomenon from researchers and international and national bodies concerned with industry safety and injury prevention, the ergonomics literature has largely ignored workplace violence to date. The absence of a contribution to the field by ergonomists is alarming so that it is urged to investigate the workplace violence problem and develop systematic tools that can assist government and industry to monitor the workplace violence issue, identify key areas of risks, and develop intervention programs.

Development of such prevention programs and intervention strategies for the workplace violence should address and incorporate ergonomic notions that can increase work productivity and job satisfaction. It is suggested that any endeavoured model to measure workplace violence should consider the following key matters stating the extent and nature of workplace violence against variety types of industry sectors; recognizing the major causes of violence for participating industry sectors; uncovering key risk factors for

workplace violence from the viewpoint of different industry areas and regions; and evaluating workplace violence control measures employed by participating industries and relating these measures to a systems control model.

Having a workforce that is aware of what to look for in order to prevent workplace violence will greatly benefit to the workplace and industry. Once everyone realizes that violence escalates due to situational pressures, employers and employees may all approach work a little differently. Encouraging workers to talk through their differences, seeking out helps when needed, and supporting each other to find solutions for problems will make our workplace happier, healthier, and safer [29]. To prevent workplace violence and make workplace secure from violence, the following actions are suggested to be considered [29].

- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy regarding workplace violence. Require all violence and violence-related incidents to be reported to management and make it clear that no threat will be tolerated.
- Become an “activated witness” by learning what to look for, then addressing the problems to discover. Teach employees to be a motivated witness as well.
- Educate workforce regularly through holding seminars during lunch times, distributing information with paychecks, or simply hanging up a poster by the time clock or in the break room. Include places employees can go, or numbers to call, such as a community sponsored crisis center or abuse hotline, where they can get help.
- Start an employee assistance program where employees can receive counseling, talk through problems with coworkers, or get help leaving a violent relationship. Employees may be able to team up with other companies in workplaces to share the cost. Make counseling services an additional benefit in compensation packages.

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