

Understanding Workplace Violence

Introduction

To be able to handle potential or actual incidents of workplace violence, supervisors and coworkers must understand what workplace violence is, why it may occur, and who may perpetrate it.

Self-test

How much do you really know about violence in the workplace? Take this quiz to assess your understanding. On a separate sheet of paper, write "True" or "False" for each statement. Then compare your answers with the answers below.

Statement	True or False
1. Cracking down on employees is the best way to prevent workplace violence.	
2. Drug and alcohol use can be a warning sign of workplace violence.	
3. Employees who commit a violent act give up all their rights as employees.	
4. It is impossible to tell which employee might suddenly snap and become violent.	
5. People who work with the public are at greater risk for workplace violence.	
6. Poor management styles can trigger an increase in workplace violence.	
7. You should always try to disarm a person who has a gun or weapon.	
8. Proper hiring procedures are an important factor in controlling workplace violence.	
9. The best way to respond to a potentially violent situation is to wait and allow a cooling-off period for a few days.	
10. Training people about workplace violence may encourage the potentially violent employee.	
11. Workplace violence is defined as any behavior that results in a person being injured.	
12. Workplace violence is the number one, non-medical, cause of death for women in the workplace.	

Answers to self-test

Statement	True or False
1. Cracking down on employees is the best way to prevent workplace violence. <i>Violence is more likely to erupt where management is authoritarian and unresponsive to employee needs or where other bad management practices are present.</i>	False
2. Drug and alcohol use can be a warning sign of workplace violence.	True
3. Employees who commit a violent act give up all their rights as employees. <i>Even violent employees have rights.</i>	False
4. It is impossible to tell which employee might suddenly snap and become violent. <i>There are almost always warning signs.</i>	False
5. People who work with the public are at greater risk for workplace violence.	True
6. Poor management styles can trigger an increase in workplace violence.	True
7. You should always try to disarm a person who has a gun or weapon. <i>Never expose yourself to danger. Don't be a hero. Hide and call 911 or security personnel when it's safe to do so.</i>	False
8. Proper hiring procedures are an important factor in controlling workplace violence.	True
9. The best way to respond to a potentially violent situation is to wait and allow a cooling-off period for a few days. <i>Always respond to problem situations immediately.</i>	False
10. Training people about workplace violence may encourage the potentially violent employee. <i>Proper training is an essential element of violence prevention in the workplace.</i>	False
11. Workplace violence is defined as any behavior that results in a person being injured. <i>Workplace violence also includes any behavior or actions that threaten other people or property, or that cause another person to feel unsafe.</i>	False

12. Workplace violence is the number one, non-medical, cause of death for women in the workplace.	True
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Common myths

The following are some common myths about workplace violence:

- Workplace violence is committed by people who suddenly snap under pressure.
- Most workplace violence is committed by disgruntled employees.
- Most situations will resolve themselves if given a cooling off period.
- If we learn to recognize the potentially violent employee, we can stop workplace violence.

Effects of stress

Workplace violence is the ultimate expression of occupational stress, and experts agree that warning signs that go unrecognized precede most incidents of workplace violence. While it may not be possible or appropriate to know what personal problems may be affecting workers, we all have a general understanding of life's stresses and demands. Whether they are related to personal relationships, family issues, economic hardships, or problems at work, people don't leave these issues at home when they come to work, and they do not leave their work-related problems in their desks or lockers when they go home.

National statistics

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found the following:

- An average of 20 workers are murdered each week in the United States (U.S.).
- In addition, an estimated 1 million workers are victims of nonfatal workplace assaults each year.
- Homicide is the second leading cause of death on the job, second only to motor vehicle crashes.
- Homicide is the leading cause of workplace death among females.
- Coworkers or former coworkers commit 9 percent of workplace homicides.
- 76 percent of all workplace homicides are committed with a firearm.