A Review of the Causes of Workplace Violence and its Preventive Measures - The Management Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the recent past, workplace violence has gained a lot of attention for business managers and academic researchers alike. This paper will highlight and discuss some of the causes for workplace violence along with some possible remedies based on the review of available literature and empirical analysis. The identified factors are divided into three categories i.e. Societal, economic and management related. Provide Coaching or Counseling, taking disciplinary action and to establish a violence-protection policy are among some of the possible remedies and strategies to prevent or deal with the workplace violence.

Indexing terms/Keywords

Human resource management, Workplace violence, workplace bullying, workplace aggression, organizational behavior.

Academic Discipline And Sub-Disciplines

Psychology; Human Resource Management;

SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION

Organizational Behavior; Workplace Violence

TYPE (METHOD/APPROACH)

Empirical Analysis; Literary Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace violence is becoming a shocking phenomenon throughout the world. [1] It includes both physical and non-physical violence.[1] [3] The enormous cost of violence at work for the individual, the organization and the community is becoming more and more apparent. [1] [2] This has resulted in attracting attention of an increasing number of academic researchers for workplace violence.[4] Incidents of violence occur in all types of organizations; but some work environments are more prone to workplace aggression. [1][5]

The existing literature associates causes of workplace violence with job roles and characteristics such as workload and autonomy [6] [7] as well as with work-related strain [8][9]. This research paper is divided into 5 sections. Section 1 gave the the introduction to this paper. Section 2 will throw light on various definitions of workplace violence in order to better understand its causes and remedial measures. Section 3 will discuss some of the causes of workplace violence. Section 4 will explore possible remedial action that can be taken to deal with workplace violence. And the last section will conclude the paper.

2. WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Violence is defined as being destructive towards another person. It finds its expression in physical assault, homicide, verbal abuse, bullying, sexual harassment and threat. Violence at work is often considered to be just a reflection of the 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. Its prevalence has, however, increased at the workplace, traditionally viewed as a violence-free environment. Employers and workers are equally interested in the prevention of violence at the workplace. Society at large has a stake in preventing violence spreading to working life and recognizing the potential of the workplace by removing such obstacles to productivity, development and peace.

While workplace violence is indisputably a global issue, various cultural differences among countries must be taken into consideration in order to accurately understand the concept of violence on a universal level. [3]

3. CAUSES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Workplace aggression and violence is increasingly being recognized as a serious problem in the society. [10] There are numerous factors identified in literature that give rise to violence at the workplace. We have categorized those factors in the view of management perspective which are as follows:

3.1 Social Factors

Nowadays, most of the third world countries and also some of the developed nations, violence has become a prevalent element in the media, which leads to an implied approval of that particular violence. Movies, TV serials, newspapers, cartoons etc all showing of ways of being violent and some of them even show violence as being brave or superior to others giving rise to the working young population into being violent at workplace .Weapons are increasingly available, and there is a growing fascination with weapons as tools of power. These social behaviors give rise and become the cause of increasing aggression and violence at workplace.

3.2 Economic Factors

Today's eroding economic climate, with small salaries and fewer benefits which are not enough for the employees to survive, has become a reason of many of the working individuals into go into state of being discontented, unhappy and dissatisfaction. Even stable companies are victims of downsizing, re-engineering and increased use of sub-contractors rather than full-time employees. There is often a lack of re-entry opportunities for laid-off employees. These factors give rise to workplace violence.

3.3 Management-Related Factors

At times, when firms and organizations employ outdated and impersonal methods to deal with employee complaints, disillusionment and a lack of trust toward management may develop. Wrongful discharge cases can stretch over years, allowing anger to build. This can serves as a slow poison that can aggravate emotions which then results into workplace violence.

4. PREVENTIVE ACTIONS

There are and can be a number of ways, workplace violence and aggression can be prevented. Some of the major actions that can prevent workplace violence as as follows:

- Assemble a Crisis Management Team
- Mobilize Professional Advisers
- Create a Crisis Management Plan
- Establish a Violence-Protection Policy

- Know Your Employment Laws
- Use Proper Employee-Selection Techniques
- Recognize Signs of Trouble
- Provide Coaching or Counseling
- Take Disciplinary Action

Implementing above measures would enable organizations and its managers to:

- Gain better understanding and perspectives of their employees.
- Identify potential problem areas that can lead to violent action from employees.
- Effectively resolving situations that warrant attention before serious incident occurs.
- Communicate to employees the decisive and obvious stance of senior management on violence in the workplace.
- Educating employees about violence in the workplace and the nature and availability of company's program in this area.
- Seek criminal history information.
- Conduct employee attitude surveys to uncover potential problems or risks, and then address the issue.
- Develop a confidential process for employees to report threatening conditions or circumstances to management.
- Identify proactive options & avenues of action prior to occurrence of problem situation.
- Develop a company wide memorandum and update company polices and employee handbooks and a committee should be created to deal with these issues.

CONCLUSION

These results suggest that workplace violence can be reduced by good job design, that is, by limiting the job demands and increasing job resources. Particular prevention plans may be developed for exhausted employees, as they are vulnerable to workplace bullying, in terms of both becoming perpetrators and victims. [2] The authors believes that if appropriate preventive measures are being taken, the workplace violence can be greatly reduced and prevented.

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Authors biography with Photo

Syed Rahat Ali is an admin and HR professional with over 25 years of working experience in various organizations in Pakistan & UAE. He has done his MBA in HRM from Preston University, USA and another MBA in general management from University of Atlanta, USA. Currently he is enrolled in PhD Management Science program at Monad University, India. Also he is working as adjunct faculty member at The Cyprus institute of marketing. His research interest includes organizational behavior, organizational psychology, human resource management.

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