INTRODUCTION

When discussing victims of violence, it is important to point out that most violent acts against organizations originate outside of the organization. Therefore, in prevention and response planning, we need to be sure to include all potential victims. In any discussion of high-risk contributing conditions where violence is a factor of performing any particular activity or business, motion starts at the source for violence and moves inward. The focus of an evaluation should not be limited to internal sources of violent acts of persons known to the organization such as employees, vendors, or contractors. With any person or persons known to the organization, there are some additional strategies that should be used. However, once an incident occurs, whether by someone inside or outside the organization, the victim response plan should be similar even though the dimensions of the facts surrounding the event might differ. Both instances have victims that are directly or indirectly affected and must be identified and responded to in a methodical and respectful manner.

While addressing the issue of victim assistance and response planning, consider who within your organization is most likely to experience a deliberate act of violence. Begin your evaluation with possible external sources and move inward to internal sources. In the case of internal violence, there are warning signs that can help identify potential perpetrators. If you have a corporate security or internal security
organization, this group should have statistics or reports of incidences that will help map the most likely department or location where internal problems might occur. If the security personnel have records but have not had or taken the time to perform any trend analysis, then this information is essentially worthless. Further analysis is critical as the results of such analyses will expose risk points within your business. In the event that an external source is responsible for the violence, the motivation is often greed or an immediate need for money or property. According to the raw data, the majority of acts of workplace violence occur from external sources.

Robbery continues to be the primary trigger or cause of workplace violence. In instances of robbery, weapons are used to engage in these criminal acts by perpetrators who are at maximum energy levels which leads to the randomness of the violence. If a victim does not act exactly as the perpetrator demands or if a bystander enters the scene, the gun could easily discharge with tragic results. According to the National Victim Assistance Academy (2002), the following activities are common in the milieu that spawns violence (2002).

- **Contact with the public**—Individuals such as retail employees, taxi drivers, bartenders, and convenience store clerks, for example. The close proximity of the money to the door gives the robber the opportunity to get in and out before law enforcement can arrive on the scene.

- **Exchange of money**—Despite the frequency at which credit cards are used in purchase transactions, significant amounts of cash are often on hand at places like bars, convenience stores, and gas stations. Hotel front desk clerks and fast-food restaurants are easy and frequent targets.

- **Deliveries of passengers, goods, and services**—Pizza and food delivery services as well as the aforementioned taxi drivers have little physical security barriers to deter a robber or aggressor. Delivery drivers are focused on the task at hand and are, often, not trained to assess the surroundings or movement outside of their immediate area.

- **Having a mobile place of business like a police cruiser**—The riskiest jobs continue to be those in law enforcement.

- **Working with unstable persons**—Health care professionals are increasingly becoming a target of aggressive behavior from patients or family members of patients.
In emergency room settings, even the perpetrator may come to the health care facility to continue to finish the dispute.

- **Working alone or in small numbers**—If the individuals have ready access to the public domain or are close to the street or exits and have no associate to call for assistance, they are subject to increased vulnerability.

- **Working at night or late hours**—There will be fewer witnesses or traffic to slow the perpetrator’s escape. Also, the time of day or night may restrict law enforcement’s ability to respond in certain areas.

- **Working in a high crime area**—The problem here should be obvious. Awareness of how quickly certain neighborhoods or areas can change from seemingly safe to not-so-safe is important. Businesses should stay on top of criminal trends in areas where they have outlets, stores, or a physical presence.

- **Guarding valuable property or items**—There has to be a partnership between private security and law enforcement. This is often not the case with private security personnel who are, typically, lower paid and lack adequate training.

- **Working in a community-based setting**—Being located with other businesses where you can keep a watch on each other will deter violence. Camera systems and security from associated businesses may drive the problem to a solitary location.

All businesses and organizations should have deterrent and physical security plans, coupled with employee training. The training should include making employees aware of the risks associated with the particular type of business and location. Such training should also include information regarding law enforcement limitations. Part of a new employee’s orientation training should include dealing with anger and violence in the workplace. This should include a breakdown of both external and internal threats. A growing source of violence in the workplace stems from domestic violence. For example, a study by Body Shop in 1998 advised that 24 percent of domestic violence victims reported that violent incidences at home caused them to be late for work; 15 percent reported that the violence contributed to the
victim losing a job; 20 percent reported that they felt the violence limited their ability to advance in their careers.

If the organization is unaware of the violence at home, they will deal with the employee based on the result: tardiness, absenteeism, or poor performance. The children who are supported by the victim are victims themselves. Violence resulting from the loss of a job or curtailed career advancement and, not to mention, the trauma of possibly witnessing the act(s) will have impact on the perpetrator’s and victim’s families.

The Impact of Violence on the Victims

The most obvious victim is the person or people whom the violence is directed toward, or, in other words, the targets of the physical, emotional, and/or mental abuse, threats, assaults, acts of intimidation, etc. These individuals are often the ones whose names appear in the paper or media or are often associated with the victim in a direct way. In a best-case scenario, victims of workplace violence will be shaken up—physically, mentally, or both. Obviously, in a worst-case scenario, a life or lives can be lost. And, unfortunately, because of the media attention, the perpetrator’s name often lives on much longer than the victim’s.

In the introduction, the 1996 Centennial Olympic Park bombing is discussed. As mentioned earlier, most people associate the bombing with the falsely accused Security Officer Richard Jewell. Jewell was certainly a victim of media and law enforcement scrutiny. But he was not the perpetrator. Eric Rudolph was the bomber. One of the direct victims of the bombing included Alice Hawthorne, a bystander who was attempting to cross through the park and was within mere feet of the bomb when it exploded. There were 111 others who were wounded by shrapnel—including several police officers who are at the greatest risk of experiencing violence in the workplace. The police officers’ workplaces are the mean streets of America. They rush to protect and defend us—the citizens of the United States.

There are long lists of infamous perpetrators whose names will live on much longer than deserved while the
victims’ names will fade from our consciousness within days of the initial news report. For the surviving victims, their lives require action. Extreme action is often needed to recover from the trauma that accompanies the violence in the workplace. Victims require both immediate and possibly long-term physical and mental medical attention.

The less obvious victims are the witnesses or bystanders who may have seen the incident from a safe distance. These people may have encountered the perpetrator, and, for whatever reason, were bypassed. For instance, in the Royal Oaks Michigan Post Office shooting, the perpetrator Thomas McIlvane bypassed several individuals who were in his path only to kill and wound others. He reportedly looked them in the face. Although the targets in this circumstance appeared to be random, it is suspected that McIlvane had created a mental list of victims. This differs from Patrick Sherrel, the Edmond Oklahoma shooter, who shot every target he could see with deadly accuracy.

Yet another subset of victims is the families of the victims who watch in horror as their wives, husbands, sons, and daughters change before their eyes—often displaying irritability, lack of concentration, angry outbursts, withdrawal from social events, showing little interest or energy. Families very often will see alcohol and/or drug use and abuse begin to take hold as the victim attempts to self-medicate.

There are many films and training aids that have been created to assist in the prevention of violence. A film produced by Littler Mendelson, the largest law firm specializing in legal matters around employment and hiring, has a dramatic intro showing news footage of police responses to violent incidences. A particularly memorable scene shows a woman standing by herself with her hand up to her mouth visibly shaken. She is frantically looking for something or someone. She was not being interviewed by the police or newscasters. She was by herself in a remote part of a parking lot. She, too, is one of the most random of victims of violence. Was she out to lunch and stopped by police from going into a crime scene? Is she an HR manager who was in an adjacent building attending a meeting and was not there when the incident began, and, for whatever reason, was the real target of the perpetrator? — and the flood of horror is now hitting her
mind. This is unknown. What is clear is that she is also a victim of violence in the workplace and the symptoms of her trauma may take weeks, months, or even years to fully manifest.

In 1997, Werner Bergmann identified three basic groups of post-traumatic consequences of violence.

1. **Re-experiencing consequences** where the victim relives the incident in his or her mind generating fear or anxiety. This includes intrusive thoughts and nightmares.

2. **Withdrawal consequences** occur when a victim attempts to suppress the negative emotions and memories of a violent event with various strategies and tactics like overworking or not working at all. Depression and drug or alcohol abuse are often behaviors that are used to withdraw from family and friends.

3. **Other consequences** may include anger, irritability, sleep disorders, loss of concentration, and exaggerated responses to sudden changes or movement.

Some of the darker aspects of the response develop over time. These matters will worsen if the victim initially refuses assistance or denies the need to be debriefed altogether. This path can potentially leave a residual of negative emotions that will be felt long after the wreckage of the violence is cleared and the organization returns to its day-to-day activities. Therefore, it is vital that any WPV program contain a checklist of action items as part of the recovery response. This checklist should include information regarding how to identify and categorize victims, both direct and indirect. The key is to not assume that any particular population, within the organization, is in any way immune to violence in any of its ugly forms and the accompanying aftermath.

For example, the security team should be included. Unlike an incident on the street, there are personal relationships that may be involved. The security team may work closely with the victims as they may feel a sense of responsibility for the event. They may have been working on a complaint of veiled or real threats when the incident, that ultimately brought all kinds of focus, occurred. Therefore, security personnel should be debriefed along with all the other employees, witnesses, and bystanders.

A key stakeholder in this process is the HR professional who may be the administrator of the policies involving
violence or threats of violence. Therefore, they should be viewed as a possible victim. Like security, they may also have a personal relationship with the victim(s) or feel some sense of responsibility for the violent act. Many HR professionals enter the field of Human Resources to be of service to an organization’s employees or members. So they need to be debriefed as well.

It may be wise to bring in an objective party or parties to assist in these situations. If the incident occurs at a decentralized location, it might be best to send representatives from other locations to assist in the debriefing process. Employees from the corporate headquarters may be a good solution, but be careful not to use individuals as investigators as they may be perceived as blame finders.

Security professionals are trained to gather facts and oftentimes they are the best debriefing body. General counsel or outside counsel can also be a good source for gathering and debriefing. But again, perception is reality; so the use of a group that is perceived as impartial is critical.

Often, an outside resource can be used if there are no appropriate individuals or groups available from within the organization. These individuals, from outside of the organization, should have the ability to ask questions in a non-threatening and methodical manner. All interviews should be documented and reviewed with relevant stakeholders who have the opportunity to give insight and offer suggestions and historical context regarding the persons involved.

EAPs are a significant resource. This is especially true in the weeks and months following a significant incident. An EAP can help stabilize the workforce by offering confidential sessions with voluntary candidates. Normally, use of an EAP is not required in instances of WPV but is seen as a resource for referral. There is a delicate balance here, and EAP professionals know or should know the limitations of sharing information. Stakeholders can use the EAP resources to run hypotheticals of human response symptoms and advise of different things to look for in the weeks or months following an incident. The services provided by the EAP should also extend to family members of the employees, witnesses, and bystanders, if reasonable. The dollars spent here might pay untold benefits by avoiding excessive workers’
compensation claims, higher than normal turnover, absenteeism, and various sorts of legal actions including class actions. Use of an EAP might also reduce the perception of an uncaring corporate response. Be aware that the perception of a corporation, true or false, can quickly find its way to blogs, news articles, and various public web sites.

In a subsequent chapter, we'll discuss a crisis management tool, including effective strategies and tactics. Among many things, this tool will explain the roles that need to be filled by stakeholders. At this juncture, let's suffice it to say that a Crisis Management Team (CMT), which is a critical entity for a crisis management plan, should be the key decision-making team, and should also be the central clearing house for any information that might be of interest for the organization going forward. This extends to the debriefing process. There are many moving parts to be coordinated in the aftermath of an incident. Making sure all victims and potential victims are debriefed and offered assistance, including EAP assistance, is done as a part of the overall CMT plan.

There are specific industries and organizations that are feeling the aftershocks of violent events in the workplace as they seem to be the prime targets. For example, college campuses and hospitals are beginning to feel the overall effects of victims emerging as a group of workers who live in high-risk employee populations. As you can see from Figure 3-1, there

![Figure 3-1](image)

*Figure 3-1. Percent of establishments by selected potentially hazardous work environment characteristics. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2005.*
are several occupational categories that are highly compensated and highly trained, like health care, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. These sectors are prone to many of the aftereffects of incidences of violence that may have happened elsewhere, and the perpetrators and/or victims arrive on their doorsteps still displaying anger or violent behavior.

For example, in a recent Canadian news article, the health care industry was cited as a particularly risky area. The article estimates a staggering 34 percent of all nurses in the Canadian health system (Source: Statistics Canada) had been physically assaulted in 2005. A secondary source, 2005 National Survey of Work and Health of Nurses, cited similar findings after polling 19,000 nurses. They found that more than 25 percent of the polled nurses had been physically assaulted.

Linda Haslam-Stround, a registered nurse and president of the Ontario Nurses Association, reports that violence is probably underreported as some nurses have come to believe violence is part of their job. These statistics do not include the verbal abuse that is a daily occurrence in many areas of the medical facility, especially in the psychiatric wards and emergency rooms.

**Dealing with Victims or Potential Victims:**
**A Proactive Approach**

Probably the most valuable recommendation for the reader is to surface the issue of violence with their constituent group. Make sure they are made aware of the problem of violence in the workplace today. Make sure the group understands the particular risks in the industry in which they work, keeping in mind the risk categories discussed earlier. For example, if you have a retail outlet in a mall, what risks can be associated from external sources in that environment? Also, the employees should be aware of how to report both internal and external acts, issues, and concerns.

Acknowledge the fact that an event could occur within the wall of your workplace. Don't fall into the trap of thinking it could never happen at your location or within your business. Having a policy regarding violence or threats of violence, bullying, etc. should be openly discussed and
covered with all new and current employees on a reoccurring basis prior to a violent outburst. Prevention requires a proactive approach.

In the event an act of violence occurs in your workplace, acknowledge the fact that there will be short- and long-term effects that need to be managed within the emotional framework of the workforce. The effects of the event may surface during a company-facilitated discussion with the victims and bystanders, or it may be seen through the eyes of the family and friends of the victims. Despite what you may believe, talking the problem to death is actually necessary. Issues that remain in the mind can be blown out of proportion and result in mental and emotional challenges down the road. For the business, the result of this is delayed claims of stress-related illnesses, accusations of an uncaring corporate environment, and corporate management that only care about their own bottom line. So, providing a forum or forums to discuss the issues should be part of any response plan.

Discussion of what happened and what could have been done differently, without seeking or assigning blame, is also important. This tactic will mold a more effective program. For example, let’s assume there was an incident on the third shift of a manufacturing firm involving a threat or act of intimidation. Let’s suppose the supervisor was off duty that particular evening and the relief supervisor was new and had never received the WPV training which would offer the much needed training techniques to deal with the victim(s) of an event. A change in priority in training could be made as a matter of fixing a hole in the program. So, post-event debriefs are essential in a roundtable forum.

Determine what resources will be necessary to deal with the victim(s) when an incident impacts the entire business. If you have only one or two EAP response resources, determine what additional resources would be needed. Also, consider where additional resources would come from if a very serious act or acts of violence were to occur to properly handle the victims’ needs.

Don’t deny the need of post-event counseling and victim assistance. Regardless of whether or not you believe the trauma is real, your response plan of action should be executed based on worst-case scenarios. If a victim or witness
is having a difficult time coping, the difficulty is real. In other words, feelings and perceptions need to be treated as the reality. Employees will have positive feelings toward the company in the aftermath of an incident if they believe the organization is concerned about their short- and long-term care of the victims. Just because management wants to move on, doesn't mean an employee can or will. In the event of violence in the workplace, an organization will either “pay now or pay later.” Chances are, if an organization's response is delayed, the outcome could actually become more severe and result in greater long-term losses.

Legal and Ethical Responsibilities to Victims or Potential Victims of WPV

All who work within your organization have a right to a safe work environment. OSHA regulation 29 U.S.C. 654, § 5, states:

Duties:
(a) Each employer – (1) shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees; (2) shall comply with occupational safety and health standards promulgated under this Act.
(b) Each employee shall comply with occupational safety and health standards and all rules, regulations, and orders issued pursuant to this Act which are applicable to his own actions and conduct.

Your organization must adhere to these regulations to avoid tremendous liability. The spirit of this regulation is much more difficult to navigate. With that fact in mind, consider what is cost-effective and reasonable and how that will be interpreted within a legal context, potentially by a jury of your peers. However, the real ethical response is much more subtle and telling. Would you want your son or daughter to work at your place of business with the security and concern for victims of threats or incidents or actual violence? Would your organization do what is right and necessary to assist the victim recovering from an incident or, better yet,
have adequate policy, security, and response capability to thwart or respond quickly enough to curtail an escalation?

**Food for Thought**

1. If your organization has a violence deterrence, detection, and reaction program, is it externally or internally focused?
2. What is the biggest risk factor in your particular business? Public facing? Exchange of monies?
3. Do you have a crisis management strategy?
4. If you do, does it include a victim post-event strategy including debriefing of all affected employees, vendors, contractors, and bystanders?
5. Who within your business will lead the debriefing of victims?

**References**
