

HUMAN RISKS | MAKING
SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT
SMARTER

Threat Template:

Workplace Violence

Threat Category: People (HR)
Author: Human Risks
Date: July 2023

Threat Description:

Workplace violence can happen as a result of disagreements based on religious, political or other differences. It includes disagreements within the workforce or between the employees and management as a result of internal changes or delegation of resources in an organisation i.e. promotional decisions, terminations etc., or misunderstandings concerning external actors, such as disgruntled clients or violent members of the public.

The scenarios are different in nature depending on whether the violence comes from within the organization or outside of the organization. The treatments should counter:

- internal physical assaults on colleagues and/or managers
- internal assaults, which include the use of weapons or firearms against employees
- external assaults on the employees dealing with the public

Risk Factors:

Several social and organizational factors may foster the outburst of violent incidents at work:

- the increasing uncertainty of employment
- being a part of a marginalized social group
- managerial practices aimed at downsizing, which results in heavier and more intensive workloads

For employees dealing with the public, risk factors from external sources are more numerous:

- being in direct contact with the public (restaurants, retail stores, airports, etc.)
- serving alcohol (bars, clubs, etc.)
- tending long customer queues
- handling money (cashiers, bank clerks, security guards) or items of value (jewellery stores, art galleries)
- working alone or in small numbers (convenience stores)
- taking care of unstable persons, sometimes through close physical contact (hospitals, shelters)
- handling a violent or tense clientele (prisons, emergency rooms, etc.)
- training or teaching people (teachers, coaches)
- working at certain times of the day (late at night, early morning, change of shift)
- dealing with passengers (flight attendants) or vacationers
- delivering mail, packages or merchandise (post office, messenger services)
- having a mobile workplace (taxicabs, bus drivers) or making house calls (police patrols)
- working in violent neighbourhoods or in poorly lit open spaces (underground parking)

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Recommended Treatments:

- vetting procedures including screening of criminal records, social media behaviour and references
- robust standard operating procedures that provide clear guidelines for the staff on how to react and respond to these situations
- professional training on the workplace violence scenarios
- conflict management courses and ethical behavioural guidelines that are addressed by management and included in the assessment processes are also effective ways to avoid the escalation of conflicts to physical violence

Threat Rating:

Likelihood - X/5 RATING

Physical assaults are not common in working environments but do exist. This is a potential scenario that can be prevented by relatively small measures.

Consequence

Human X/5 Operations X/5 Reputation X/5

The potential consequence of physical assaults and workplace violence in general is worst case fatal and can deteriorate the general work environment leading to other internal issues as low performance, absence, theft, vandalism, resignations (low employee retention levels) and a bad reputation among potential employees, customers and partners.

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C.A. Olesens Gade 4, 9000 Aalborg | CVR 36955910 | e: info@humanrisks.com w: www.humanrisks.com

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