

# Understanding and Managing Job Stress: A Vital Dimension of Workplace Violence Prevention

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## Abstract

*This paper presents a comprehensive overview of the causes and consequences of job stress, and of various coping mechanisms; ultimately it aims to promote early detection of mismanaged stress, and thereby to prevent workplace violence. In the 1980s, public health literature devoted significant attention to job stress. In the 1990s, however, concern has shifted to workplace violence. But the two issues are related: to decrease the risk of job violence, employees and organizations must manage work stress effectively. Recognizing the complexity and depth of the problem of workplace violence, it is important to put the issue in a public health perspective and focus on prevention. Many incidents of workplace violence result from mismanaged work-related stress. However, both job stress and the potential for violence are recognizable, predictable and preventable. A critical examination of literature provides a conceptual framework for understanding the causes of job stress, including individual, occupational, and organizational factors. Analysis of the consequences of mismanaged stress demonstrates how it may contribute to workplace violence. This paper asserts, with support from a substantial body of scientific evidence, that employers and employees share responsibility for identifying early signs of stress, and developing effective coping mechanisms. Such cooperation can assist in preventing a clearly urgent problem -- workplace violence.*

## Introduction

As workplace violence escalates, employers are increasingly liable for recognizing and averting potentially violent situations (Sandler, 1994). Many incidents of workplace violence result from work-related stress; as such, they are predictable and preventable. Recognizing early signs of mismanaged stress allows employers to intervene to prevent workplace violence (Dickson, 1994; Genasci, 1995; Stouffer & Varnes, 1998).

Job stress is one of the top ten work-related health problems. Stress disorders cost organizations over \$150 billion in lower productivity, absenteeism and disability (Blix, Curise, Mitchell & Blix, 1993). Stress can lead to physical, psychological, and behavioral difficulties. Increasingly, health education professionals confront statistics indicating that job stress can prove life-threatening. Today, in a rapidly-evolving and diverse society, workplace changes occur virtually overnight. Many employees accept tension and disregard its long term effects; those who are aware of their tension levels may not cope effectively (Walcott-McQuigg, 1994).

At the same time, workplace violence has increased with a cost of over \$4 billion in a year in lost work and legal expense (Anfuso, 1994; Mattman, 1998). The cost in lost wages alone came up to \$55

million in 1994 (Keim, 1999). However, the cost of workplace violence is extremely high when taking into account the human factor of loss and suffering.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, between 1987 and 1992 one in six violent crimes occurred in the workplace; between 1992 and 1993, one out four full-time workers in America was harassed, threatened or attacked on the job (Anfuso 1994; Containing Workplace Violence, 1994; Yarborough, 1994). In addition, the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety reports that workplace homicide has increased in the 1990s to a point that it is the third leading cause of death on the job (American Public Health Association, 1996; Fingeret, 1994; Johnson & Indvik, 1994). In the 1980s, public health literature devoted significant attention to job stress. However, in the 1990s, concern has shifted to workplace violence. But the two issues are related: to decrease the risk of job violence, employees and organizations must manage work stress. The purpose of this article is to explain causes and consequences of job stress, describe coping strategies and encourage effective stress management as a prevention method of workplace violence.

## Workplace Stress

Rapid technological and social change have created highly stressful lifestyles. In fact, statistics indicate an increase in general psychological tension, and a

dramatic rise in such stress-related diseases as hypertension and coronary disease (Levi, 1981; Schnall et al., 1990; Woolfolk & Richardson, 1978). Chronic stress is known to cause a host of physical, psychological, social and behavioral ills (Brief, Schuler, & Van Sell, 1981; Quick, Bhagat, Dalton, & Quick, 1987). Most adults spend about half of their waking lives in work-related activities, therefore, work conditions significantly influence their health. When properly handled, work stress can be positive and energizing; however, overwhelming job stress can cause a staggering array of problems for individuals and organizations (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Brief et al., 1981; Jean, 1993).

In addition, certain occupations are especially stressful. People whose positions involve interpersonal contact typically show increased pulse rates, higher diastolic blood pressure, and among smokers, increased smoking (Forbes, 1979; Pelletier, 1985; Schnall, et al., 1990). Many stress-related disorders also result from environmental factors such as crowded work areas, noise, inadequate light and poor ventilation; and from psychological stressors, such as aggressive or absent communication between employees and management, rush deadlines and job insecurity (Pelletier, 1985). The Holmes and Rahe (1967) scale of major life events, which includes a significant number of items related to work, is accepted as a reasonably accurate predictor of illness. Lazarus (1981), however, has suggested that major life events may not be the best indicators of stress levels. Rather, he argues that everyday hassles and annoyances contribute more to stress, illness and depression. Such a proposition suggests the person-environment theory as a strong conceptual framework for understanding stress at work.

### **Person-Environment Fit**

Several conceptual frames can help to explain the complex factors which create a continuous source of tension which can, in turn, lead to violence. Of these, one of the most widely used is the person-environment fit theory. This model examines how stress results from a mismatch between an individual's abilities, needs, motives, goals, and behavior patterns, and a given job's demands, resources, opportunities, and rewards. Studies have found that when an employee's job offered either too much or too little complexity, the employee reported more stress than individuals who were well-matched to their job (Blix et al., 1993; Chemers, Hays, Rhodewalt, & Wysocki, 1985).

The person-environment theory assumes that individuals vary in their needs and abilities just as

organizations vary in their demands and incentives. Occupations involve an interplay between employee expectations and job demands. This model highlights the importance of considering the characteristics of the job and the individual in relation to each other (Blix et al., 1993; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Harrison, Moss, Dielman, Horvath, & Harlan, 1987).

### **Job Characteristics**

Although stress experience is individualized, certain stimuli are almost universally considered unpleasant. The job characteristics approach holds that aspects of the job itself cause work stress. Though this approach does consider how personality moderates or heightens stress, it asserts that job characteristics are the dominant cause of stress (Beehr, 1985; McDonold & Korabik, 1991).

#### *Intrinsic Characteristics and Task Demands*

Intrinsic characteristics are properties inherent in a job's function, technology, or materials. Police officers, for example, risk criminal attack; assembly line work is repetitive; and air traffic controllers are responsible for people's safety. Intrinsic factors can be modified through technology, reduced exposure, or improved employee coping (Duncan, 1995; Kahn, 1987).

To identify differences in work stress, Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison and Pinneau (1980) compared four types of jobs: unskilled blue-collar, skilled blue-collar, white-collar non-professional, and white-collar professional. Complaints of boredom, depression and illness were most common among unskilled blue-collar workers, while professionals, administrators and supervisors experienced more stress according to physiological measures like blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol level.

#### *Role Demands*

Role demands, particularly role ambiguity and role conflict, have been linked with increased employee stress. Role ambiguity is an objective situation in which the individual has inadequate or misleading information about how a job should be done. This results in job dissatisfaction, high tension levels, and low self-confidence. Additionally, increase in blood pressure, pulse rate, depression, and employee turnover have been associated with role ambiguity (Beehr, 1985; Kahn, 1987). Role conflict, however, refers to either conflicting demands or pressures to behave in ways that cause discomfort. For example, a middle manager may experience stress when conveying orders from upper management that conflict with the manager's personal beliefs (Beehr, 1985; Kahn, 1987).

### *Other Organizational Stressors*

Over- and underwork can cause job stress as well (Levi, 1981; McDonald & Korabik, 1991). Quantitative work overload results when an individual simply has too much to do. This stressor is particularly prevalent during economic depressions, when employees may carry the equivalent of 1.5 to 2 jobs. Qualitative overload, on the other hand, occurs when an individual lacks necessary skills or knowledge. A third form of workload stress is underutilization, which occurs when job scarcity forces skilled workers to accept unskilled positions (Beehr, 1985; Jick, 1985; Quick & Quick, 1984).

Beehr (1985) also found that workplace stress results when employees are not included in problem solving and decision making. In this situation, individuals may not know the organization's policies and priorities, or what level of performance their employers expect. In contrast, employees with opportunities to solve problems and make decisions are more likely to understand and meet expectations, and to report greater job satisfaction.

Job insecurity and loss are undeniable components of work stress. Studies on stress resulting from fiscal cutbacks suggest that economic changes tend to increase health problems among employees. In addition, corporate cutbacks exacerbate other stressors (Kahn 1987; Wilson, Larson & Stone, 1993). For instance, vulnerability to termination increases anxieties about a poor job market.

Even if no layoff risk exists, a performance evaluation can be a stressful event. Employees have reported experiencing "test anxiety" during evaluations. It is rare for individuals to respond constructively to employer criticism. Employees usually behave defensively when discussing areas that need improvement. Therefore, negative performance feedback serves as a stressor. Also, anticipated defensiveness can cause stress in the evaluating supervisor (McLean, 1979; McDonald & Korabik, 1991).

Interpersonal relations are a frequent source of stress at work, just as they are in family life. Here, stress can arise from isolation or from conflict. In the latter case, it can stem from rejection by co-workers, or from perceived discrimination. Contact with the public can also create stress, especially when it involves prejudice, hostility, or physical danger (Warshaw, 1979; Walcott-McQuigg, 1994).

### **Individual Characteristics**

Individual characteristics are primary factors in each worker's unique response to stress. Studies pair such characteristics into opposing traits, such as extroversion and introversion. Extroverts tend to be active, outgoing, and less stressed. Introverts, on the other hand, are self-oriented, and experience stress when they must interact with others. Another key comparison can be drawn between flexible and rigid personalities. Despite the common perception that rigid people are more stressed, their stability and determination result in less stress, while flexible people frequently lack the ability to say "no" (Brief et al., 1981).

Internal and external control also are important stress-related personality characteristics. Internally oriented individuals believe that they control their lives, and that rewards result from their own behavior; externals believe in fate and luck. Externals tend to respond with increased stress when confronted with similar stressors (Brief et al., 1981). These reports suggest that rigid, extroverted internals are less likely to experience work stress than those with the opposing personality structure.

Two cardiologists, Friedman and Rosenman, discovered in the late 1950s that heart patients which they termed type A's tend to share certain characteristics, including excessive competition, devotion to work, and time urgency; absence of these characteristics was called type B behavior. Studies suggest that type A's report higher levels of stress than type B's on every indicator (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974; Quick et al., 1987). However, controversies surround these issues and type A behavior is often not seen as a problem since it reflects the western work ethic. Type A individuals often rise to higher occupational levels, which results in time pressure, conflicting demands, and heightened responsibility (Chesney & Rosenman, 1980). While type A personalities show an increased risk of CHD, one must resist stereotyping work behaviors as either good or bad. On the continuum of work-related behavior, with type A and B representing two extreme poles, there are many effective work styles (Pellitier, 1985).

### **Consequences of Job Stress**

Employee distress costs organizations directly and indirectly. Direct costs come from absenteeism, tardiness, sick leave, and court-ordered compensation. Indirect costs include poor communication, decreased productivity, job dissatisfaction, and poor performance (Alluisi & Fleishman, 1982; Nelson & Elsberry, 1993).

Numerous studies demonstrate that stress alters mental and physical health. Job stress can lead to a staggering array of health problems, including heart disease, stroke, gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory problems, backache, headache, diabetes, liver cirrhosis, skin disease, and fatigue (Brief, 1981; Quick & Quick, 1984; Quick, Horn & Quick, 1986).

Research findings demonstrate that work stress is associated with a number of negative psychological states. Depression, the most common and significant, varies from mild to severe which can lead to suicide. Anxiety, a well-known consequence of work stress, often accompanies depression (Brief et al., 1981; Caplan, Cobb, & French, 1975). Other consequences include sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, tension, boredom, fatigue, feelings of futility, inadequacy or alienation, and loss of concentration (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Brief et al., 1981; Quick et al., 1986).

Quick et al. (1986) stated that disordered behavior constitutes the earliest sign of increased stress. Behavioral effects of work stress include drug use and abuse, over- and under-eating, poor interpersonal relations, accident proneness, abusive behavior, and violence. In addition, McDonald and Korabik (1991) enumerate a series of behaviors used to deal with job stress; these include action, humor, avoidance, withdrawal, anger, and seeking revenge. Clearly, the less adaptive responses on this list can end in violence. Unresolved job stress spills over into family relations as well. Rook, Dooly, and Catalano (1991) and Wilson, Larson & Stone (1993) stated that stress resulting from job insecurity directly affects both family function and the spouse's emotional well-being. In fact, job stress strains marriages and families, reducing the social support available to stressed employees. These behavioral consequences, if left unattended, can produce violence.

Characteristic symptoms generally precede violence. Violence-prone individuals may complain chronically, show difficulty relating to others, and cast blame. They are likely to become suspicious and to resist help. As their frustration grows, they become more aggressive, uncooperative, and abusive; their behavior may be marked by emotional outbursts, hyperactivity, and mood swings, and they may condone physical abuse or carrying weapons. Often, offenders were known as problem employees; many had grievances or disciplinary actions pending at the time of their attacks (Duncan, 1995; Lambert, 1994; Sandler, 1994).

### Managing Stress at Work

Since stress results from both a given environment and individual appraisals of that environment, individuals and organizations must collaborate to manage stress. Coping strategies are not a stable personality characteristic; rather, individuals modify coping strategies according to the nature of the stressor and experiences during and between stressful episodes (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). This indicates that employees can learn to manage stress effectively.

#### *Individual Coping Strategies*

It is important to note that there are methodological concerns connected with the study of coping. Coping commonly is perceived as a positive, health-enhancing activity. However, coping behaviors are generally unhealthy involving drinking, smoking, and getting sick. Therefore, it can be difficult to identify coping activities and to determine their effectiveness (Murphy, 1985). Also, coping is often used in an intuitive sense, and adequate scientific definitions are scarce and controversial. Murphy (1985) defined coping as any cognitive, behavioral, or somatic response to stressors. When used in this sense, coping includes eliminating or reducing stress, modifying one's appraisal of stressors, or managing discomfort. Coping is distinguished from defensive behavior, in that coping is flexible, purposive, reality-oriented, and differentiated, while defensive behavior is rigid, reality-distorting, and undifferentiated.

To assess coping styles and study their consequences, new research is needed to create a broad system of classification detailed enough to contain individual patterns within each main category. This system must be theoretically coherent, linking observable antecedents and measurable responses. Although no adequate system presently exists, schemes with varying mixtures of theoretical and empirical support have been offered.

Menaghan and Merves (1984) studied the effectiveness of four occupational coping efforts: direct action toward resolution; optimistic comparisons to the past or to peers' situations; concentration on positive features; and restricted expectations for job satisfaction, combined with a focus on monetary rewards. It was concluded that restricting expectations heightens distress, and optimistic comparisons reduce it.

Latack (1986) indicated that it is necessary to categorize coping tactics empirically. The three elements identified were coping, escape, and symptom management. The first two consist of cognitive appraisals of stressful situations followed by either a proactive response or escape. Symptom management



consists of activities intended to manage existing stress, such as exercise.

A variety of programs exist to help individual employees cope with stress. The most common approach, the medical model, aids individuals already suffering from stress. Such programs evaluate symptoms, diagnose causes, and offer treatment. This model generally takes a curative approach, using medication to alleviate symptoms such as high blood pressure. Another large group of programs aims to reduce individual vulnerability to stress. These programs help individuals to identify and control stress by teaching meditation, relaxation, developing positive attitude, improving exercise and diet (Benson, 1975; Warshaw, 1979, 1984).

### *Organizational Coping Strategies*

Without a wider consideration of the organizational factors, focusing on individuals is insufficient in dealing with work related health problems (Cox, 1997). In accordance with social norms emphasizing individualism, the clinical approach focuses on individuals. However, since stress often stems from employment trends, companies, too, must labor to alleviate stress. Cautious hiring and retention can avert problems; other helpful strategies include identifying employee concerns, restructuring jobs, and intervening in employee relations. Dysfunctional organizations burn out employees (Kets de Vries & Miller 1984); therefore, it is important for organizations to encourage employee involvement and discourage overwork (Brott, 1994). Stress management is part of good company management (Johnson & Indvic 1994; Warshaw 1979, 1984). Additionally, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration General Duty Clause requires employers "to provide a safe and healthful working environment for all workers covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970" (Fingeret, 1994, p.1).

By the year 2000, the majority of workers will be women and minorities. It is therefore essential that organizations equip themselves with information on gender, ethnic and cultural differences (Barr, 1993; Walcott-McQuigg, 1994). This is particularly important since women of color face a greater risk of workplace violence than others, according to the Center for women in Government and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (Office of Minority Health, 1996).

Organizations can also alleviate work stress by providing appraisal, informational, instrumental and emotional support (Cohen 1990; Dewe & Guest, 1990). Appraisal involves expressing respect, support, and

encouragement to employees. Emotional support offers a sense of trust and care by allowing employees to discuss problems and solutions, while information and instrumental support include advice and referrals. Finally, worksite health promotion programs are recommended for effective management of stress related behaviors and prevention of violence (Stouffer & Varnes, 1998).

## Workplace Violence

Incidents of workplace violence have often been the focus of national news during the 1990s and into the new millennium. Although profiling more prominent ones, incidents of workplace violence are not limited to the isolated events that catch the attention of the media but are a widespread problem in all sectors of the labor force in the United States.

### *The Increasing Prevalence*

Statistical reports and data from various sources paint a grim picture indicating that acts of violence have increased significantly. Mattman (1998) reported that in 1992, 15% of the workplace violence victims were physically attacked and 18% were attacked with a deadly weapon. Between 1993-1995, the rate of homicide increased by 19% and in 1996, 14% of workers death was due to workplace violence. The rates indicate epidemic proportions, as one in six violent crimes in the nation occur in the workplace (Yarborough, 1994). Neuman and Baron (1998) state that a recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 45% of the employees were concerned that violence could occur in their organization. Mattman (1998) states "few would argue that over the past ten years, violence has become a serious problem facing workers and employers alike" (P.1).

Many other reports have addressed work violence as an ever increasing phenomena. This is despite the fact that sources of workplace violence statistics are generally limited to compensation cases, medical examiners, occupational Safety and Health Administration files and the press (Keim, 1999). These figures are, in fact, too conservative since they do not take into account violent behavior outside, but originating inside, the workplace (Mattman, 1998).

Violence occurs in variety of work settings and locations. Higher levels of risk are particularly associated with organizations with authoritarian management and policies. Generally, in such places, if violence does not result in loss of work, it may not be reported to a supervisor or public authorities. Therefore, such related incidents may never be tracked

and the problem may never be recognized or addressed at all (Johnson & Indvik, 1994; Keim, 1999).

The available data is more alarming considering the fact that about one third of the victims do not report the incidents to their employer, and about half of the incidents are never reported to the law enforcement. This is due to such factors as the acceptance of violence at work, fear of retribution, and lack of support by employers (Nigro & Waugh, 1996; Warshaw & Messite, 1996).

### *Issues of Definitions and Profiles*

Many violent behaviors go under-reported due to the conflicting definitions for workplace violence. The spectrum of workplace violence ranges from offensive language to homicide. However, violence is typically considered or portrayed in the context of acts of homicide carried out against supervisors and peers by disgruntled workers. An examination of the current data reveals that such sensationalized incidents are rare occurrences in acts of workplace violence. The definition must also include both actual behaviors and threats to commit violent acts such as physical and verbal assault, intimidation, harassment as well as property destruction (Keim, 1999; Stouffer & Varnes, 1998). However, various definitions result in difficulty in tracking and addressing the issue effectively.

The perpetrators of workplace violence include co-workers, bosses, and former employees as well as those outside of the company such as hostile customers, angry family members, and criminals (Anfuso, 1994; Stouffer & Varnes, 1998). Keim (1999) states that it is important to distinguish between an act of violence committed by an employee and non-employee such as a client, customer or patient.

The victim is generally profiled as a female since homicide continues to be the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. The perpetrator's profile, in most cases, is a Caucasian male, in mid 30s-40s with limited social support, externalizing problems, preoccupied with weapons, and identifying strongly with work (Keim, 1999; Mattman, 1998). However, describing perpetrators of workplace violence as "loners" or providing profiles of the "typical" perpetrators has complicated the situation as these stereotypes can potentially be misused in the workplace.

To clarify, Newman and Baron (1998) suggest that workplace violence can be renamed as workplace aggression with a broad definition including any worker's act intended to harm another worker.

### *Contributing Factors*

When addressed as workplace aggression, the violent behavior of the worker stems from the interplay of a wide range of social, situational and personal factors (Neuman & Baron, 1998).

Social factors are related to another person(s) acts involving provocation, frustrating events, unfair treatment, increased diversity and aggressive norms. Situational factors refer to events or environmental factors such as layoffs, downsizing, reengineering, restructuring, computer monitoring, physical environment and organization culture and climate. Personal determinants are related to the individual factors influencing the perception of the social and situational factors including type A behavior, self-monitoring behaviors and hostile attributional bias.

According to Neuman and Baron (1998) the above three factors may evoke unpleasant feelings or hostile/aggressive thoughts. Such an internal state is followed by the individual's cognitive appraisal of the situation, what could be done about it and an assessment of the consequences of an action. The outcome, therefore, can be an aggressive or non-aggressive response.

Other contributing factors for workplace violence include personality conflicts, drug and alcohol abuse, job terminations and poverty. The accessibility of guns and excessive violence portrayed in media have also been associated with workplace violence. Among ethnic groups such issues as language differences, racism and discrimination have been noted to give rise to violent behavior (Labig, 1995; Mattman, 1998; Smith, 1994).

### *Warning Signals*

A review of the description of workplace violence incidents reveals some commonalities in the behavioral patterns that can forecast potential violence at work. The perpetrator of workplace violence often provides such warnings as a history of intimidation, holding a grudge, verbal threats, decreased work performance, erratic attendance, along with symptoms of paranoia and depression. The warning signals may also include changes in the workers appearance, attendance or hygiene. Other signs noted as obsessive involvement with work coupled with little involvement with co-workers, except in the case of a romantic interest in a fellow worker (Baron, 1993; Kelley 1995; Mattman, 1998; Speer, 1998). Personality conflict is a major warning to anticipate problems among the workers (Armour, 1999). Many times, family disputes and violence spill over to the workplace as well (Company Programs Can Prevent Violence, 1995)

### *Recommendations*

Recent studies indicate that most employers are unprepared to deal with workplace violence. When faced with a violent situation, their approach is generally reactionary in nature. However, effective strategies to reduce violence at work must focus on prevention. An examination of workplace violence and stressful conditions that create them (Armour, 1999, Baron, 1993; Kelley, 1995; Mattman, 1998; Speer, 1998) suggest the following:

- Fostering a work environment which is supportive, harmonious and a culture of mutual respect and understanding among all workers.
- Developing proper screening procedures for the hiring process to identify and defer potentially violent individuals outside of the organization.
- Dealing with conflicts inherent in work relationships through encouraging open discussion, effective communication and conflict management skills.
- Developing and implementing effective policies and evaluation process to clearly address unacceptable behaviors.
- Employing effective procedures for handling grievances and ensuring confidentiality and productive outcome.
- Addressing problems in work attitude or performance and referring the worker to personal counseling or employee assistance program.
- Providing counseling for those who are laid off or terminated to ensure a caring process and preserving worker's dignity in such a traumatic experience.
- Establishing safety and security systems for a timely warning of a violent act and properly reporting it to the authorities in and out of the workplace.
- Establishing programs for crisis intervention to effectively deal with an incidence when it happens.
- Providing meaningful data which can assist in research and program development for advancing the understanding of the workplace violence.

### **Stress and Violence**

Stress appears to be a common denominator in the description of contributing factors to workplace violence. Mattman (1998) states "as companies downsize, reorganize, reengineer, and demand more of each employee, stress levels increase to the breaking point, causing work related violence to escalate" (p.1). High levels of tension are inherent in the Neuman and Baron (1998) description of the range of aggressive behavior at work, including lack of cooperation, spreading

rumors or gossip, arguing, belligerency and the use of offensive language. As the stress level increases so does the levels of aggression involving verbal threats, feeling of prosecution, sabotage, destruction of property, physical fights and the use of weapons.

Everyday interpersonal work relations may also breed hostility, aggressive behavior and high levels of tension. In addition to the competitive nature of work, other reasons for high stress are reported as: unreasonable expectations in work accomplishments, authoritarian management, hopelessness about economic conditions, downsizing, mergers, and layoffs. Highly stressed workers have been found to be particularly prone to violence. Under continuous pressure and intimidation, they may reach a breaking point and retaliate to what they believe as unfair treatment (Johnson & Indvik, 1994; Labig, 1995; Nigro & Waugh, 1996; Warshaw & Messite 1996).

Contemporary technological business practices involving the use of computers to monitor employee productivity potentially add to the stress at work (Neuman & Baron, 1998). In addition to the increasing speed of work demands, computers have resulted in a more alienated work environment. Overworked in a depersonalized work environment, many workers bottle up high levels of stress as a normal part of everyday work. Mismanaged stress and accumulated tension do not go away over-time but become a potential threat for more damaging consequences.

Stress management can be a cornerstone of violence prevention efforts in organizations. Identification of stress inducing factors have been noted as essential for risk management in violence prevention. Assessment of stress-related factors such as workload, management style, economics, work environment and culture, and degree of support for prevention programs can identify the stress levels experienced by the workers. Assisting employees to avoid high levels of tension can prevent an outburst of workplace violence (Manigan, 1994; Warshaw & Messite, 1996).

### **Conclusion**

Workplace violence takes a significant toll on American health and wealth; many acts of violence result from accumulated work stress. Despite the complexities of the subject, accumulation of mismanaged stress is a common factor of workplace violence. Examination of job stress suggests that daily work stress is complex, and relieving it requires commitment from both employees and employers. A system combining early identification, intervention, and open communication can alleviate job stress and avert

violence at work. Together, employers and employees can prevent terrifying incidents of workplace violence, a very real threat to the health of people at work.

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