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## Violence at Work: Causes, Patterns and Prevention

edited by Martin Gill, Bonnie Fisher and Vaughan Bowie

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### *Reviewed by Diane Beale*

Aggression and violence related to work are problems attracting increasing international attention and sharing of ideas. This book, with editors from the UK, the USA and Australia, provides a collection of chapters by contributors from these same corners of the world, plus Canada. The chapters cover a wide variety of topics and perspectives, with the aim of encouraging innovative thinking about the causes of, and approaches to, reducing and preventing different types of violence at work. The diversity of its content is one of the book's assets, although this also leads to some lack of cohesion.

A welcome emphasis of the book is the role that organisations play both in causing violence and in reducing it. The influences of organisational culture, systems and actions are considered by most contributors. Vaughan Bowie's opening chapter effectively raises awareness of the diversity of work-connected violence, which goes beyond the traditional confines of workplace violence. Constructing a new typology, however, is open to pitfalls. The widely used Cal/OSHA typology should undoubtedly be expanded to distinguish between violence from a co-worker and violence from an acquaintance or family member, since these are very different phenomena for an organisation to manage. Making a more complex typology with overlap between the categories risks sacrificing the practical nature of a classification scheme designed to be used operationally by non-specialist staff within health and safety management. Including organisational violence as a separate category may actually disguise the significant contribution of organisational factors to most incidents of work-related violence.

Some of the chapters from the American contributors reveal the prevalent US focus on the violent employee within the study of workplace violence. However, writing from the trade union point of view, Anthony Pizzino criticises this narrow focus as failing to address the root causes of the problem. He cites frontline public service employees' lack of control over decisions and organisational aspects of their work, which puts them in the position of denying service and so leaves them vulnerable to abuse. He advocates a comprehensive violence prevention programme, designed with meaningful worker participation and with strong employer commitment to the process.

Other useful chapters include Oonagh Barron's on the similarities and differences between workplace bullying and workplace violence. Bullying is the more difficult phenomenon to identify and to manage but shares some of its underlying risk factors with workplace violence between co-workers. Raymond Flannery's and Noreen Tehrani's chapters provide good examples of trauma care systems implemented in very different organisations, demonstrating the necessity of tailoring such systems to the particular circumstances and the need for long-term evaluation.

A highlight of the book is the chapter by Mark Braverman, which looks at the management of violence using a systems approach. One of the most intractable problems in reducing the risks

from work-related aggression and violence is that of convincing senior management a) that there is a problem for the organization as a whole, and not just for individuals or teams, and b) that they have to take a lead in providing an integrated and broad-based approach to reducing the risks. As Braverman states:

Safety and health in the workplace can no longer remain the province of mid-level managers responding to government regulations and compliance standards. (p 121)

He sums up a very real problem for those of us committed to reducing the risks from work-related violence and at whom this book is aimed:

Even when employers, recognizing the hazard, take steps to implement systems for violence prevention, these solutions may have limited effectiveness. This is because employers do not consider the sources of stress leading to a climate of violence or hostility in their workplaces, or do not attempt to confront the system deficiencies that allow violence or threats to go undetected. (p 122)

This book goes some way to addressing this important issue.

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