

# A Pilot Study on the Perception of Workplace Violence by Employees of Different Organizational Sectors

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**Abstract:** Many studies have conducted on the effects of perceived control on the outcomes of workplace aggression and violence. However, very few studies have been done to identify the parameters of workplace violence. Particularly in India, there is a scarcity of research in this area. Thus, the present study intends to understand and conceptualize the workplace violence and how it is perceived by professionals belonging to different organizational sectors and also to identify the percentage of the professionals who had experienced different forms of violence at their workplace. For the purpose of collecting data, an open ended questionnaire was developed to explore the professionals' experience of workplace violence. The questionnaire was piloted using a reference group and changes were made accordingly. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 professionals working in different organizational sectors such as health sector, law enforcement sector, corporate sector and finance sector. This study lays the foundation for further studies investigating the professionals' experience of workplace violence. The result of the study lays the foundation for further studies in investigating the professionals' experience of workplace violence. This study demonstrated that workplace violence is prevalent for all the professionals working in different organizational sectors and also highlighted the need for prevention and education within the professionals.

**Key Words:** Violence, Organization, Job Insecurity, Workplace Discrimination.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Most people think of violence as a physical assault. However, workplace violence is a much broader problem. It is any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted in his or her employment. The worker at all levels of society does work to integrate with the demands of family life by compartmentalizing his personality into 'work' self and 'family' self. So, the behaviour a man behaves in his family reveals how well his needs are being satisfied at work and thus this paramount roles play by him is often related with tensions and frustration causing to a reduction in the quality of interpersonal relationships with his family and co-workers. It is with this aspect the family environment and job-related tensions mutually affect each other. Thus, the spectrum of workplace violence ranges from offensive language to homicide, and a reasonable working definition of workplace violence are as follows: Violent act including physical assaults and threats of assault, directed toward persons at work or on duty.

An elaborate literature survey had been conducted in order to gain some detail insight into the subject matter. This review not only helped to identify the present problem but also became a solid background to further strengthen the issue at hand. In this purpose, various books and articles were reviewed which were in other way relevant to the present study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Menckel, Carter and Viitasara (2000) found that violence towards caregivers of persons with developmental disabilities is a significant problem. Such acts of violence were associated with a small minority of individuals. Violent and disruptive incidents directed towards personnel were both frequent and common, although the degree of severity was low, as none of the 3000 incidents recorded during the six week study required sick leave.

Toscano and Wever (1995) cited in Braverman (1999) reveals that in the U.S., a high profile has been given to those incidents where a person has been murdered by fellow worker.

Chou & Choi (2011) on the prevalence and correlates of perceived workplace discrimination among older workers in the United States of America, reported that 81 per cent of the older workers encountered at least one workplace discriminatory treatment within a year. Prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination differed with age,



gender, education, occupation and wage. The study further revealed that, younger ages and being male were positively associated with perceived workplace discrimination. In examining the roles of supervisor and co-worker support, the study discovered that supervisor support was negatively associated with workplace discrimination. Finally, this study revealed a non-linear relationship between wages and perceived workplace discrimination with the mid-range wage group experiencing the highest level of workplace discrimination.

Grunberg, Moore and Greenburg (1996) conducted a study to test the proposition that promoting worker involvement and participation in reporting schemes would reduce under reporting. This was thought to arise through a mechanism of increased control. The authors explored whether mills with 'high worker control' might have fallen behind the conventional mills in such things as safety training, the installation of machine guards, another safety related improvement due to their vulnerable economic nature. These workers felt greater insecurity and powerlessness, and had the lowest levels of job satisfaction. Powerlessness and job insecurity are significantly associated with days missed due to injuries; this creates additional work tensions on the job and less attention to safe working practices, and thus may result in higher accidents and injury rates. The study concluded that the different injury rates were a result of both reporting and actual safety conditions.

Schat and Kelloway (2002) conducted a study on the effects of perceived control on the outcomes of workplace aggression and violence to examine whether perceived control reduces the fear and other negative outcomes that are associated with exposure to violence. For the purpose of the study, a three-dimensional measure of perceived control consisting of understanding, prediction and influence was developed and sustained. The results showed that the adverse effects of both the direct and vicarious violence are mediated through fear of future workplace violence. Therefore, fear was hypothesized to be the primary direct consequences of workplace violence.

Hall and Spector (1991) suggested that employees who do not actually experience workplace violence, but who do perceive a threat of such violence, demonstrate many of the negative consequences as do direct victims. (Anxiety, illness symptoms and negative occupational outcomes).

Withey and Cooper (1989) has found out that employees who are dissatisfied with their job conditions tend to exhibit more neglect than those who are satisfied, although in the study responded to their dissatisfaction in other ways such as leaving the organization.

Therefore, on the basis of the review of literature done on the workplace violence, it can be concluded that workplace violence has been studied on the context of parameters such as powerlessness, job dissatisfaction, Job anxiety, Interfering with activities important to the target etc. The objective of the study is to understand how different professionals conceptualize and perceive violence at workplace.

### **3. MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

#### **Sample Description**

A pilot study was carried out to get an insight of how employees, belonging to different organizational sectors, conceptualize and understand violence at workplace. For the purpose of the study, the data was collected from four organizational sectors namely, corporate sector, Finance sector, Law enforcement and Health sector. The sample size consisted of 100 professionals such as Doctors, Nurses, Bank Staffs, Police Inspectors, Constables, Assistant Sub-Inspector, Sub-Inspector, Head Constables, Executive Managers, Managers, General Managers, Assistant Manager, Technical Staffs, Clerks etc. from in and around Vadodara district.

#### **Procedure**

The researcher had taken prior permission from the respective authorities of the organization and had spent 30-40 days with them. During this process, the researcher had observed the organizational processes and assessed how the workplace violence is understood by the employees. A structured interview schedule was used to take open-ended response from these professionals working in different professions. The questionnaires were constructed as part of the research study and it was self-explanatory. They were constructed on the basis of review of literature done. The questionnaires were in English, Hindi and Gujarati version to reach all the sections of the society including those who speak vernacular language. The review of literature examined was gathered from published materials, books, periodicals, pamphlets, annual journals, newspapers etc.

### **4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:**

The findings of the analyses of pilot study, performed on the data of 100 professionals were content analyzed to find out the parameters of workplace violence. The results of the study are further discussed here:

The existence of physical violence at the workplace has always been recognized, the existence of psychological violence has been underestimated and it is receiving due attention. It is recognized that psychological violence is often perpetrated through repeated behavior, often consists of unwelcome, unreciprocated and imposed action which may have a devastating effect on the victim. Physical and psychological violence often overlap in practice.



The professionals belonging to four different sectors have their own experience in conceptualizing violence such as in the form of discrimination on the basis of religion, finding fault, not giving incentives, pressure of target achievement, imposing work beyond the employee's capacity, demanding unreasonably long working hours, not getting earned leaves. The result of the study stated that 48% of the police officials encountered violence at their workplace but the rest 52% asserted that their colleagues never experience violence their workplace. 56% of the employees of the health sector encountered that their colleagues and friends experienced violence in the form of intimidation, unreasonably changing of wards etc. 87% of the employees in the finance sector experienced violence psychologically more than physically. They experienced exploitation in terms of working hours, wages etc. 72% of the employees of the corporate sector encountered violence in the form of professional jealousy, intimidation, passing comments etc.

Regarding the frequency of violence experienced by the professionals in their workplace, corporate sector experienced the violence the most whereas finance sector ranked second. 77% of the respondents of the health sector reported that violence occurs in their organization very rarely.

When the professionals were asked about the strategies they adopt to handle the violence situation at the workplace, they responded that they face violence without fear and with full confidence, getting the cause under disciplinary action. The employees of different professions found that use of force or assault should be taken seriously and the guilty must be punished after inquiry, encouragement is given for co-operation and team work and there should be legal procedure to iron out the differences among the employees. The health, finance and corporate sectors feel that to settle to disputes, they must inform the union to handle the situation, however, the police officials responded that they handle the situation bravely. All the professionals working in different professions asserted that any form of workplace violence affects the performance of the employees. They also further stated that when there is any form of violence in the workplace, a person's output reduces tremendously because they spend more time in quarrelling and abusing which in turn leads to an atmosphere of distrust and performance also gets deteriorated. So, it can be said that the lesser the violence, the better will be the performance.

The result of the present study also found out that female police personnel and nursing staffs are exposed to workplace violence as they are naïve, weak and cannot speak against the perpetrators and they generally don't have the power to say 'no'.

The professionals working in different professions agree upon the same view that people who are in the need of a job and cannot afford to lose it mostly become the victim workplace violence.

When the different professionals were asked about the personality of the perpetrators, 100% of the police officials stated that the personality of the perpetrators has a relationship with workplace violence. 69% from the health sector stated that there is relationship between the perpetrators and the workplace violence but 31% claimed that they don't have any idea regarding this. 92% of the corporate employees asserted that there is, but the rest 8% argued that there is no relationship between the perpetrators and the workplace violence. 54% of the finance sector workforce claimed that there is, but 8% disagreed at the view. From the data gathered it is found that most of the respondents from all the four groups asserted that psychological violence is very common in workplace and the sexual violence follows it, however, physical violence is quite uncommon when we compared with the psychological and sexual violence. Apart from the nature of violence given above, there are other exceptions also and they are - competing non beneficially, gossiping about co-workers, fighting, unnecessary work pressure such as sales pressure, mistreatment, coercion, late night work, intimidation, mocking, getting transfer to unwanted place and above all placing own job to the subordinates are so common.

In order to prevent violence in the workplace, necessary steps should be taken up. Employee should put their best possible efforts in the functioning of the organization. It includes Proper HR policy, good teamwork for a healthy work culture, proper ethics, reducing bias or favor, employees should not be suppressed by the aggressive nature of the employer, good teamwork for a healthy work culture and overall special workshop should be organized for boosting the employees confidence are some of the preventive measures for violence at workplace.

Above all, paying full concentration on the given job, spreading the outcomes of violence, training for being mentally stable and to be polite and well-mannered and to be selfless are the primary conditions to stop workplace violence.

Concerning about the right of the employees, the employees particularly those belonging to police system, health, finance and corporate sector agree upon the view that they should have a full security in their workplace, fixed working hours and above all, they should be respected and the respondents belonging to the health sector specified that there should be proper and well organized rules and procedures to deal with the cases of workplace violence. The respondents from the corporate and service sector believe that the demand of the employee should be considered on priority basis; they should not be suppressed by the aggressive nature of the employer and should stop exploiting the employee, and proper code of conduct should be followed.

Most of the professionals belonging to the four sectors reported that workload, job dissatisfaction, sadistic behavior, personality clash, weak feedback channel, poor administration and jealousy are the leading factors of



workplace violence. Those exceptions causing violence in the workplace are wasting resources, leaving early, delaying, and stealing from company, sabotaging equipment, lack of understanding, unenthusiastic, care less about accomplishment, those who do not put forth high effort, setting target beyond the capacity of the employees, old method of working, less wages, non-friendly climate, low morale among employees.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

Findings of the pilot study reveal that the perception of workplace violence differs among professionals working in the four organizational sectors, i.e. Police System or Law Enforcement Sector, Health Sector, Finance Sector and Corporate Sector. It has been found out that police officials' experienced more physical, psychological and sexual violence than their counterparts at other three sectors. However, employees of the corporate sector and finance sector experienced more workplace bullying. In terms of sexual violence, the employees belonging to finance sector experienced sexual violence. It has also been found out that the frequency of violence at workplace is more in the corporate sector. Further, it has been found out that workplace violence affected the performance of the employees belonging to the law enforcement and finance sector. The employees of the finance sector perceived psychological violence as general forms of violence prevalent at the workplace of violence. The employees belonging to the finance sector strongly feels that workload, weak feedback channel, job dissatisfaction and jealousy are the main factors that lead to violence at workplace. In terms of taking immediate reaction against violence at workplace, different professionals of different organizational sectors have their own viewpoints. The employees of the law enforcement sector have their opinion that they would try to defend themselves and face the situation bravely, whereas the employees from the finance sector believed in listening to the situation and act accordingly, the corporate sector's employees will try to object such violence and take it to the higher authorities so do the employees from the health sector. Thus, in this way, different professionals belonging to the different sectors have their own perception and understanding of workplace violence.

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