

# Education of entrepreneurs about importance of recognition and prevention of workplace violence as an important uncertainty reduction factor in the business enterprise

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## Abstract

Recent data about workplace violence are unfortunately showing an alarming increase. Workplace violence can take different forms, such as abuses related to work assignments, social isolation, verbal assault, and attacks directed to employee's private life, insults and physical violence. In this paper focus will be placed at wider aspect of violence, encompassing all kinds of unwanted workplaces behaviour, since personal and organizational consequences of either workplace mobbing, sexual harassment, abuse, physical or psychological violence are very serious and significant.

Also, the most of researches that are dealing with workplace violence are suggesting an education, as the first and the most important measure that helps in early recognition and prevention of these negative behaviours. Since there are very clearly suggestions in existing literature that there is a correlation between workplace violence and occurrence of higher rate of absenteeism caused by employees physical and mental illnesses, as well as frequent changes of jobs, early retirement, greater inclination of leaving the organization, a workplace violence proactive educational policy can play significant role.

Conducted secondary research using the method of abstraction, description, comparison and classification, showed that there is a relationship between employees exposure to workplace violence and existence of educational policies that contain formal workplace violence procedures in the direction that companies that have educational policies that ensures higher awareness, better employee's education and documented formal workplace violence procedures, have less rate of occurrence of workplace violence.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of including of workplace violence procedures in entrepreneur's educational policies, as the factor that significantly contributes to workplace violence prevention, as well as positive outcomes that comes out as indirect benefits of this type of education. Additional aim is to increase general awareness of this problem and its considerable personal and organizational damaging consequences that any entrepreneur should not ignore.

**Key words:** *Entrepreneurship educational policy, workplace violence*

## 1. Introduction

The recent data are showing an alarming rise of workplace violence, no matter what type of company is in question. There are different types of workplace violence happening, from physical to different forms of psychological violence that are coming from company, itself. The problem is that workplace violence consequences are numerous and severe. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that workplace violence prevention has extremely important role in company's success since it prevents damaging of very important success factor - the human capital. This paper com-

prises wider aspect of the workplace violence, comprehending the violence, as all kinds of mutually unwanted behaviour (Parker & Griffin, 2002), no matter if there is a physical, psychological, workplace mobbing or sexual harassment in place. The main focus of this paper is placed on prevention of workplace violence through an education, since the most of this type of violence, except of violence cause by clients, that are coming out from the company itself, especially from the dominant organizational culture, as well as its successful control implementation. The education about this problem should be an economical tool prevention of this phenomenon, as well as an indirect tool for reduction of uncertainty, that is constant factor in today's business reality.

### **1.1. Subject and purpose of paper**

According to the Workplace Bullying institute, a non profit organization from Washington (The Workplace Bullying Institute, 2003, 37% of employees stated that they were workplace mobbing victims and 49% of them were witnessing to workplace mobbing. Exposure to workplace mobbing and violence in general in European Union, as well as in Croatia, is extremely upsetting (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010.). Namely, it is broadly existing problem (Quine, 1999) that deserves devotion of serious attention. Also, the damaging consequences on employee's health and on the organization itself are very severe. It is a fact that this is the problem that deserves proper attention (McPhail, 1996). Taking mentioned into consideration, there is a question arising – Can an entrepreneur afford not to conduct workplace violence preventing measures? The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of creating entrepreneur's educational policies that are dealing with workplace violence as well as increasing of workplace violence awareness, which will not only prevent personal and organizational damaging consequences, but produce other positive outcomes, too.

### **1.2. Hypothesis**

Due to aim to define the basic problems inside researching topic, the following hypotheses were set:

H1 There is correlation between educational policy and workplace violence phenomena in direction that proactive educational policy that contains detailed workplace violence preventing and controlling measures influence to lower rate of workplace violence.

H2 There is correlation between existence of workplace violence and absenteeism rate and an inclination of leaving the organization due to number of damaging consequences in direction that higher rate of workplace violence influence to higher rate of absenteeism and greater inclination of leaving the organization.

In order to proof or disproof of defined hypotheses, as well as to make additional argumentation for their determination, there are statistical overviews shown and some graphical analysis in order to better comparability and more understandable interpretation.

### **1.3. Methods**

The secondary researches were conducted by collecting the data from different professional books, papers, official documents and online databases. Also, methods of abstraction, description, comparison, classification, as well as method of analysis and synthesis were used.

## 2. Results and discussion

### 2.1. The workplace violence phenomenon

There are many definitions of workplace violence and they differ depending on author (for example: Barling, 1996; Bulatao and VandenBos, 1996; Lanza et al., 1991; McPhail, 1996; Mullen, 1997; O'Leary-Kelly et al.1996). The main distinction is in differently focused point. For example, some authors concentrate on violence and aggression that are motivated from organizational sources and others are making clear differentiation of violence and aggression itself. Beside mentioned authors, it is interesting to see a definition of workplace violence from U.S. Department of Labour Occupational Safety and Health compared to one produced and accepted by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work:

- “Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers.” (U.S. Department of Labour Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2002).
- “Incidents where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, including commuting to and from work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being and health (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2009). The second definition is widely accepted in European Union institutes, since it contains three important elements: abuse<sup>1</sup>, threats<sup>2</sup> and assault<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, The World Health Organisation uses a wider definition of workplace violence: “An intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in, injury, death, psychological harm, wrong development or deprivation.”(Krug et.al., 2002).

Generally speaking, there are a few types of workplace violence: violence related to the work assignments, social isolation, private life attacks, verbal threats and insults in front of other people and physical violence (Zapf, 1999). Some authors have developed different classifications. So, Mayhew (Mayhew, 2003) is giving three categories according to the source of violence: external violence, client-initiated violence and internal violence. Similar categories are given by Californian Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Californian, Department of Industrial Relations, 1995): planned robbery, events involving assault by someone who is either the recipient of the object of a service provided by the affected workplace or the victim; and incidents involving assault by another employee, a supervisor, or an acquaintance of the worker.

In this paper focus is placed mostly at third category, violence that comes out from company itself as well as at wider aspect of violence encompassing all kinds of unwanted workplaces behaviour (Parker and Griffin, 2002), since personal and organizational consequences of either workplace mobbing, sexual harassment, abuse, physical or psychological violence are very serious and significant. Some workplace violence literature comprise an aggression only (for example

<sup>1</sup> „Abuse: Behaviours that depart from reasonable conduct and involve the misuse of physical or psychological strength. Abuse covers all forms of harassment, including sexual and racial harassment, bullying and mobbing.” (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> „Threats: The menace of death, or the announcement of an intention to harm a person or to damage their property”. (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Assault: Any attempt at physical injury or attack on a person including actual physical harm

Keashly and Jagatic, 2003), excluding all other violence behaviours in the workplace. It also should be noted that there is a literature (example Bacharach et al., 2007 or Lim and Cortina, 2005) which are, when speaking about workplace violence, using the term "sexual harassment", which means that they are including sexual assaults as well. It is particularly important since these assaults are affecting significant number of employees and company that tolerates sexual discrimination encourage the perception that sexual humour is acceptable one Boxer and Ford, 2010).

There are theories – The Social Information Processing Theory (Salancik, 1978) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1976), which are stating that people use behaviour that are seeing in their environment as a key for their own behaviour pattern. Consequently, employees are accepting values and norms by watching other employee's behaviour (Argote and Ingram, 2000).

It means that cultures that accidentally reward aggressive behaviours, actually encourages the future aggression as well O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). Even behaviour that comprises smaller disregard of civility norms can cause considerable consequences on memory worsening, reduced ideas creation and lowering of verbal assignments execution (Porath and Erez, 2009). It also can produce greater absenteeism and reduced working efficiency (Sliter et al., 2012). Researchers are confirming that violation of equality, security, respect, and civility norms are lowering company's productivity and employees well being (MacKinnon, 1994; Carter, 1998). Since the organizational culture includes values, believes and custom system inside some organization, and this system are interacting with formal structures producing behaviours norms (Sikavica and Novak, 1993), there are many researchers conducted that are implicating relationship between organizational culture and frequency and severity of workplace violence phenomena (Boxer and Ford, 2010; Einarsen, 1999; Rayner et al., 2002; Sutton, 2007). An important thing is that these behaviour norms are mainly influenced and created in accordance with existing company's policies, existing or non-existent practice of education of entrepreneurs and employees as well.

The importance of workplace violence is recognized by European Union by conducting several measures as Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (Eurofond, 2006) that was published by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC, on 26.04.2007., and it undoubtedly condemn all types of abuse and violence and makes reference to national laws and European Union's directives that are brought out in previous years.<sup>4</sup>

The reason for this awareness could be extremely upsetting data about workplace violence victims recorded in European Union, as well as knowledge about damaging consequences on employee's health (Table 1) and on the company in general. It has been proved that workplace bullying directly influences to company profitability, which means that solving, i.e. preventing and controlling of this problem should be very important issue for any entrepreneur in accomplishing his business goals as well (Keashly and Jagatic, 2003).

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<sup>4</sup> The Directive 2000/43/EC about implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, dated 29.6.2000.; The Directive 2000/78/EC about establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, dated 27. 11.2000.; The Directive 2002/73/EC about on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, The Directive 89/391/EC about improvements in the safety and health of workers at work).

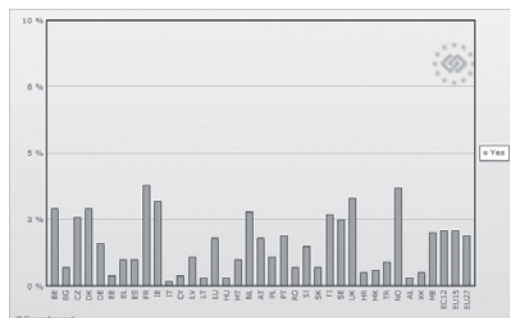
**Table 1.** Individual consequences related to workplace bullying

Physical consequences	Emotional consequences	Work related consequences
psychosomatic symptoms sleep Disorders appetite disorders changes in body weight alcohol sedatives	anger anxiety confusion fear depression loss of self-esteem helplessness self blame shame	loss of interest in work delay absences sickness the poorer performance the negative working atmosphere

Reference: Budimir Šoško et al. (2013)

Results from the research conducted in 2005. In EU countries (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010) are also confirming bed trend of workplace violence phenomenon (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Responses distribution to the question: “Were you exposed to the physical violence in your workplace, during the last 12 months?”



Reference: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010.

Responses from Republic of Croatia are showing that only 0.5% respondents answered that they were exposed to the physical violence in their workplaces, during the last 12 months. However, 6,1% respondents stated that they were discrimination victims at their workplaces, which is EU average. Furthermore, women in Croatia are twice more discrimination victims than men, which are not the case in European Union (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010.).

Statistical data form United States of America, too, are showing worsening trend. So, in year 2007, there is 13% increase in number<sup>5</sup> of homicides in the workplace compared to the previous year United States Department of Labour, 2008). Some form of abuse in workplace has experienced over 53% of employees (Rayner, 1997) and they have over fifty thousand cases of rape and sexual harassment in the workplace (Lee and Kleiner, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> There is total of 610 murders in the United State at workplace in 2007.

It is interesting, that there is a correlation between great costs and work related consequences. European commission is warning about this disturbing amount. It is estimated that these costs are 20 billions EUR (European Working Conditions Observatory, 2010).

## 2.2. Uncertainty and stress as factors that contribute to workplace violence

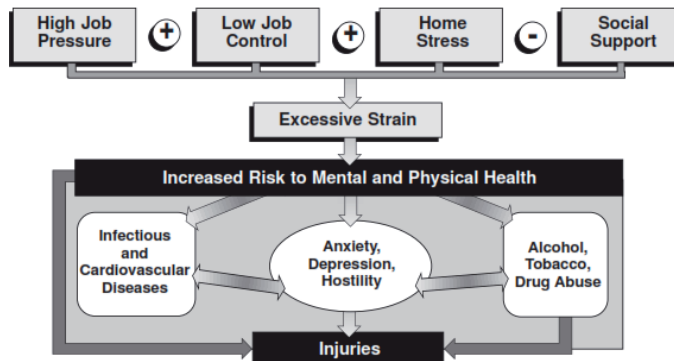
Although, physical violence is present and it should not be ignored, psychological violence, in a form of workplace mobbing is according to some data (Wilson, 1991) the highest stressor in the workplace environment, and it is believed that happens three times more than sexual harassment (Namie, 2003).

Results from research about working condition that was conducted in some European union country in 2010, more precise in Greek, Luxemburg, Sweden, Finland, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, Portugal and Ireland (European Working Conditions Observatory, 2010), are showing that 28% of employees believes that they have consequences regarding their health caused by work related stress. Almost the same percentage, 28,4% of employees from countries that at that time were candidates<sup>6</sup> for entering in European Union, also claimed the same.

The stress and the workplace violence are connected in many ways. Actually, the workplace violence as a major cause of stress, significantly contributes to unhealthy working environment. Vice versa, stressful working environment can cause aggressive behaviour of employees and other types of workplace violence. There are some researches that proved that some stressors are more damaging than the others. The Karasek – Theorell's „*The Demand/Control Model*“ (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), shown in Figure 2, Siegrist's „*The Effort/Reward Imbalance Model*“ (Siegrist, 1996) and Shehadeh-Shain's „*A General Model of Influences on Wellness in the Workplace*“ (Shehadeh and Shain, 1990) are studying that type of stressor and their influence to the health and safety of employees. All of mentioned models are determining working conditions, as the main factor that contributes to the stress creation and potentially, workplace violence. They think that combination of low job control and high job pressure represents especially strong cause of stress (Leymann, 1990; Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel et al., 2001). The Karasek-Theorell model was tested in just a few empirical studies regarding the workplace violence (Rodriguez-Muñoz et al., 2009; Tuckey et al., 2009; Baillien et al., 2011), but their results are supporting this model, as a good framework for studying of this subject.

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<sup>6</sup> Cyprus, Rumania, Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia, Check Republic, Latvia, Bulgaria and Malta

**Figure 2.** The Karasek–Theorell The Demand- control model

Reference: Karasek and Theorell, (1990).

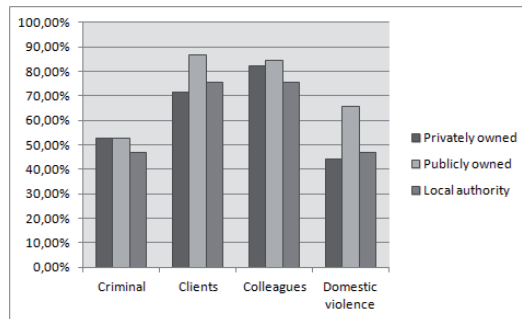
Karasek – Theorell model defines „High Job Pressure“ as overwhelming work quantity during long period of time with constant imposing of deadlines. “Low Job Control” relates to the situations when employee has little or no control at daily organization of his own work. “Home stress” comprise sum of cumulated demands, challenges and changes in private life of employee, and “Social Support” includes at least one person that employee can rely on, when he is upset or unhappy (Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

Entrepreneurs should keep in mind that workplace violence is not the problems of large companies. It can be said that smaller companies are even in bigger dangers, considering the fact that it strongly influence on negative working atmosphere, culture and working productivity. Employees of larger companies if exposed or witnessing workplace violence have more space for avoiding of it or have better level of protection at company level, which is not the case with employees of small or medium companies.

### 2.3. Importance of education of entrepreneurs

There are some statistical data from the year 2005 (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2006) that are showing that although only 14% of large companies<sup>7</sup> in USA don't have formal workplace violence policy, 34% of them in one year period prior to the survey, reported the incident of violence workplace among employees. So, the fact is that the most of large companies do have a formal policy that aims to reduce these problems. However, the problem is in insufficient researches who would research actual effectiveness of these workplace violence interventions (LeBlanc and Barling, 2004). On the other hand, this research showed that there are 70% of actual working places that are not protected with even formal workplace violence program or policies. Also, this research showed that privately owned companies that do have workplace violence policies or programs or the most commonly reporting violence among colleagues (82%), followed by violence by clients (71%), as shown in Figure 3.

<sup>7</sup> Companies that are employing minimum a thousand employees.

**Figure 3.** The incidence of violent behaviour by types

The reference: Budimir Šoško et al. (2014)

Among the factors that are contributing to increased number of workplace violence incidents are outsourcing, reorganizing, downsizing, underpaid and underappreciated employees, shortly situation when employees are exposed to more stress than support (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2002). So, it is crucial for entrepreneur to understand that stress and anger of employees can erupt in workplace violence, if not recognized and prevented in time. Every company, no matter what size it is, should invest effort to ensure healthy working atmosphere and environment. That, of course, includes efficient workplace violence programs and policy as a regular education employees and managers, as well. It should not be ignored the fact that researches confirmed that unfair treatment of employees is connected with conflict and theft by employees (Greenberg, 1993), as well as with aggression at workplace (Hoad, 1993; Geddes, 1994; Argote and Ingram: 2000). Also, as aggression is very often connected with deliberate provocation perception (Törestad, 1990; Mantell, 1994) and feeling of being exploited (Hollinger and Clark, 1982), it would be useful to create and conduct company policies that will ensure minimal possibility for creation of these types of perceptions. The most important parts of every good prevention program should include fairness and respect of every employee.

### 3. Conclusion

The workplace violence became a significant problem, and trends are showing its increase. In this paper a focus is placed at wider definition of workplace violence, especially at violence that comes out from company itself, encompassing all kinds of unwanted workplaces behaviour. Individual consequences as well as company related consequences of workplace mobbing, sexual harassment, abuse, physical or psychological violence are very serious and significant. It is important to emphasize the multiple relations between the work related stress and workplace violence. For sure, situations when employees are exposed to more stress than support can lead to workplace violence, and workplace violence will increase the employees stress levels.

Entrepreneurs should keep in mind that workplace violence is not the problems of large companies, since employees of larger companies if exposed or witnessing workplace violence have more space for avoiding of it or have better level of protection at company level, which is not the case with employees. It has been showed that there is correlation between educational policy



and workplace violence phenomena in direction that proactive educational policy that contains detailed workplace violence preventing and controlling measures influence to lower rate of workplace violence, as well as existence of correlation between existence of workplace violence and absenteeism rate and an inclination of leaving the organization due to number of damaging consequences in direction that higher rate of workplace violence influence to higher rate of absenteeism and greater inclination of leaving the organization.

Finally, in order to reduce these uncertainty factors, every entrepreneur should invest time and resources in educational measures that will ensure timely recognition and prevention of workplace violence. These educational measures should include regular training and education for all employees and managers, effective workplace violence prevention policies, efficient system that timely discover risk factors that cause workplace violence through early warning signs and detailed prepared response plan for as many situation as possible. Quality of education and its results are crucial for preventing and controlling of behaviours that at the end have multiple damaging effects, for employees and company's business results.

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