



**Detailed Overview of
Risk Assessment
Instrument Design and
Creation**



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Overview of the WPV Risk Assessment

Between the period of 2014 and 2017, WPV developed a comprehensive risk assessment. In doing so, we looked for not just the symptoms of workplace violence, harassment and sexual harassment but what were the leading indicators that identified the risk of both physical and psychological harm within the workplace. The basic framework we worked with was how to identify the risks of workplace violence, harassment and sexual harassment so that organizations can be proactive and not reactive.

The question with any measurement or risk assessment is, “Am I measuring the right things?” In order to determine what to measure, we used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative studies. The research consisted of the following:

- Academic studies and articles published in peer-reviewed journals
- Data from recognized government authorities (i.e. Dept. of Labor, EEOC, StatsCan, etc.)

The full list of sources is referenced below in the Citation of Sources section.

Through examination of the material, we divided the risk into 4 major categories with each category having 3 subcategories. They are:

Policies and Procedures

- Does the organization have policies and procedures, including a zero tolerance policy toward all forms of workplace violence?
- Does the organization communicate these policies and procedures to its employees so that everybody is aware of them?
- Does the organization enforce its policies throughout the organization at all levels?

Culture

- Are leaders bullies and harassers? Do they condone or condemn that behavior in actions and not just words?
- How are people punished or rewarded? Are they punished for inappropriate behavior or is it overlooked as long as the “hit their numbers”?
- Does the culture tolerate workplace violence and inappropriate behavior? Are people punished or isolated if they object to that type of behavior?

Workplace

- Is there security in place to protect people if people are threatened? Is the physical workplace safe from potentially dangerous situations or people?
- What is the emotional environment like? Is it so stressful that somebody could “go postal” at any moment?
- If people have to go offsite, are they at danger? Do people know who to do if they feel threatened at client locations?



Supports

- Is there security in place in the workplace or at client sites?
- Are there emotional supports available to help decrease stress or deal with personal situations that can lead to workplace violence (i.e. domestic abuse)?
- Are people trained how to recognize potentially dangerous situations? Is there training to help people identify harassment and how to handle the situation when it arises? Do people know what to do when they face a dangerous situation to defuse it?

Methodology on Risk Assessment Creation and Validation

Using the research, we developed a risk assessment tool. The risk assessment tool is a survey of 65 questions. To create the questionnaire, we created a series of statements that were rated on a 1 to 5 scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). In order to ensure validity of the responses, questions were posed both negatively (i.e. 1 being the best) and positively (5 being the best). The questions were then grouped to correspond with the risk subcategory we were measuring. We also used multiple questions for each subcategory to ensure greater accuracy. The questionnaire was created in conjunction with St. Mary's University of Halifax under the supervision of [Dr. Kevin Kelloway](#).

Once the questionnaire was completed, it was tested on 315 individuals to determine its validity. This was done with follow up interviews conducted to ensure accuracy. Through this validation process it was determined that the survey could predict the risk of each category with a +/- of 3% accuracy. In other words, the risk assessment has anywhere from a 94% to 100% accuracy rating in predicting each subcategory of risk.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a high level overview of the research that was done to create the risk assessment. For more detailed information on the calculations regarding the accuracy of each question and corresponding behavior, we are happy to provide the **Factor Analysis Report**.

Abstract

Workplace violence is defined as any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs within the workplace and work-related functions. It ranges from threats, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse to physical assaults and derogatory comments regarding a person's race/creed/religion/nationality or sexual orientation. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors.

Workplace violence includes both physical (i.e. assault) and psychological (i.e. harassment and sexual harassment) violence. Over the past 30 years research has indicated that it has significant impacts on productivity, worker health and attraction and retention of talent. This has also had a significant impact on organizational resources as settlements, insurance premiums and compliance laws in these areas have grown dramatically.

The purpose of the development of the risk assessment and technology is to go beyond simple compliance and look for ways to prevent workplace violence, especially harassment and sexual



harassment, from taking place. According to research conducted by the International Center for Research on Women:

... most corporate responses have focused on reducing legal liability for harassment. Such an approach does not reduce the incidence of sexual harassment in companies, which remains entrenched and largely unchallenged. Estimates range from half to 71% of working women experiencing some form of sexual harassment in the workplace depending on the industry. Since sexual harassment reduces employees' productivity and drives employees out of companies regardless of whether the company is legally liable, the cost to companies is not trivial. One estimation model for calculating the costs associated with sex-based harassment found that the annual cost of sexual harassment due to absenteeism, lost productivity and turnover exceeded \$6 million per Fortune 500 company, far more than the few thousand dollars companies are likely to pay in most settlements or for liability insurance.

Summary of the Research

Policies and Procedures

According to a study done by Einarsen, K., Salin, et al, the level of high-quality HRM practice predicted the existence of an ethical infrastructure against workplace bullying, particularly informal systems represented by a strong conflict management climate. The study further found that while most large organizations had policies and procedures in place regarding harassment and workplace violence, there was a direct correlation between the size of the organization and having policies and procedures in place toward workplace violence. This was especially true of organizations with <200 staff. Without policies and procedures in place, staff had no framework to understand expectations of acceptable behavior. Furthermore, without proper policies in place regarding workplace violence, there were challenges in punishing individuals who displayed inappropriate behavior.

According to Williams, et al, even when organizations had policies in place regarding workplace violence and harassment, many employees were unaware of the policy or could not recall what it was. This had the same effect of not having a policy.

According to a paper done by the International Center on Research for Women on sexual harassment, even when companies were focused on reducing legal liability and legal compliance, it did not reduce the incidence of sexual harassment. Simply having these policies and procedures in place, even when people knew them, had a negligible impact on rates of sexual harassment. The determining factor was that the policies were enforced at all levels of the organization, regardless of the person's position or performance.

The Culture Triangle

According to Williams, et al, research demonstrates that an organizational climate tolerant of sexual harassment directly contributes to the occurrence of harassment and negative psychological, health-related, and job-related outcomes for employees. Culture is one of the key indicators of all three types of workplace violence (harassment, sexual harassment, physical assault). Culture exists not simply at



the organizational level but also at the team level. In fact, large organizations are made up of a number of smaller units that each has their own culture.

According to Offermann, et al, leadership mediated the relationship between organizational policy and outcomes, supporting the view that a key role for leaders is establishing an ethical organizational climate that reinforces formal harassment policies through actions. Further research has indicated that leaders made honest efforts to stop harassment felt significantly freer to report harassment, were more satisfied with the complaint process, and reported greater commitment than did those viewing leaders as more harassment tolerant.

Multiple research provides evidence that a key component of behavior modification is through the use of rewards and punishments. The “carrot and stick” theory incentivizes people for behaviors that the organization wants to reward and punishes people for behaviors that are negative.

Used correctly, rewards and consequences can play an important role in creating a high performance culture. Used incorrectly (think Wells Fargo sales scandal), rewards and consequences can create undesirable behaviors and outcomes. The research done by O’Hare, et al, indicates that a key risk factor is when sexual harassment is tolerated when other behaviors (i.e. ‘hitting their numbers’, etc.) are given priority.

Timmerman, et al defines culture as the collective attitude of the employees. This collective attitude creates team ‘norms’ that punish those who stray outside its orthodoxy. When a person goes outside the organizational norm, they are often isolated and put at risk of harassment and bullying.

[The Workplace Triangle](#)

By examining all aspects of the workplace, both psychologically and physically, we can bring greater clarity to our understanding of the predictors of workplace aggression. (Kelloway, et al). By constructing a multi dimensional model of the workplace, we can understand start to predict the risk of both workplace violence and harassment.

The physical work environment also has a direct correlation to workplace violence. According to the study conducted by Kelloway, et al, things like security and the physical environment (i.e. location, facilities, etc.) also had a direct impact on stress levels. The elevated stress levels also lead to other forms of workplace violence such as harassment. This was also the case in workers whose job entailed going to client sites or other company-related functions outside of the physical work space.

According to a study completed by Dr. Nicola Magnavita, job strain and lack of social support were predictors of the occurrence of nonphysical aggression during the ensuing year (i.e. harassment). The study, which took place from 2003 to 2009, found that there was a direct correlation between stress and other emotional factors and the risk of both workplace violence and harassment.

[The Supports Triangle](#)

A study conducted by Drs. Schat and Kelloway examined the buffering effects of 2 types of organizational support--instrumental and informational--on the relationships between workplace violence/aggression and both personal and organizational outcomes (Schat, A.C.H. and Kelloway, E.



Kevin). Instrumental supports included emotional supports that allowed people to de-escalate and reduce stress, physical security (especially in healthcare settings) which could be accessed by the public.

According to the Department of Labor, 17% of all workplace violence incidents involve domestic abuse. According to Profs. Johnson and Gardner, workplace violence could be significantly reduced when people are trained on how to both notice the signs of domestic abuse as well as what to do when domestic abuse is suspected. In addition, there are some professions (i.e. healthcare, hospitality, etc.) that are inherently at greater risk of both workplace violence and harassment (especially sexual harassment). Knowing both how to recognize it and what to do when it happens has been found in numerous studies to help create deterrents to and limit the damage of workplace violence and harassment.



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