

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AN “EPIDEMIC” SAYS STUDY

Waldthausen & Associates, Inc. is a Retained Executive Search firm with the focus on recruiting managers that influence a company's result and earnings. The firm focuses on recruiting professional managers for US subsidiaries with parent companies located in central Europe.

Physical and psychological violence in the workplace is on the rise worldwide and has reached “epidemic levels” in many industrialized countries, according to a study published recently by the International Labor Organization.

The study says violence at work, including bullying, sexual harassment and physical assault, may be costing anywhere between .05 and 3.5 percent of countries' gross national products in absenteeism, sick leave and lower productivity.

Professions once regarded as “safe”, such as teaching, social services, library services and healthcare, are now seeing increasing levels of physical violence in both rich and poor countries, the study says.

Moreover, “bullying, harassment, mobbing and allied behaviors can be just as damaging as outright physical violence,” say the authors, Vittorio Di Martino and Duncan Chappell. “Today, the instability of many types of jobs places huge pressures on workplaces, and we're seeing more of these forms of violence.”

The study says available data, though patchy, show a clear upward trend in bullying, harassment and intimidation of workers, affecting more than 10 percent of the European workforce, for example.

In developing countries, women, migrants and children are most vulnerable, with sexual harassment and abuse reported as a big problem in places as varied as South Africa, Malaysia and Kuwait.

At the same time, the study notes that physical violence declined in the US and UK in recent years. In the US, the number of workplace homicides has fallen from more than 1,000 a year a decade ago to about 630 in 2003.

In England and Wales, incidents of workplace violence dropped from 1.3m in 1995 to about 850,000 in 2002-03, according to the British Crime Survey.

While police and security personnel run the highest risks of physical assault, health workers and transport workers (including taxi drivers) are also particularly vulnerable, the study notes.

In terms of harassment and verbal abuse, call center workers are one largely unrecognized group at risk. For instance, a German survey found that three in four women workers reported sexually harassing telephone calls.

In developing countries, export processing zones are also often characterized by poor working conditions, including abuse, sexual harassment and physical aggression, the study says.

It also cites examples of good company practices to combat workplace violence of all types, focusing on action to provide a better working environment as well as codes of conduct and training on harassment and discrimination.

Violence at Work (third edition by Duncan Chappell and Vittorio Di Martino) Source, Financial Times

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