

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND THE EFFECT OF THE
WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT
WITHIN A HUMAN SERVICE ORGANISATION

A thesis presented to Massey University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in
Psychology.

KIM SANDRA ALLEN

1998

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people - my supervisor Douglas Paton for the help and support during the last year.

I would also like to thank my family, Gary, Sandra and Kirsty Allen, for their patience, encouragement and support for the past five years.

At the present time, there is an increasing awareness of the risk of workplace violence that certain occupational groups face within their professions. This study investigated violence within a human service organisation responsible for looking after profoundly intellectually handicapped individuals with little chance of being mainstreamed into normal society. Three hundred and forty three employees responded to a questionnaire about incidents of violence encountered at work, stressors within their job, and their perceptions of social support and the work environment. The hypotheses were (1) that symptoms of stress and traumatic stress increase in frequency and intensity following involvement in a violent incident, and will be cumulative and additive following repetitive exposure (2) that positive perceptions of the working environment decrease the symptoms of stress and traumatic stress ; and (3) that higher perceptions of the effectiveness of social support decrease the symptoms of stress and traumatic stress. The results showed that violence affected employees mentally, emotionally and physically. Perceptions of the work environment was found to have an effect on responses to violence but social support was not. Recommendations made included reducing violence by redesigning the physical environment, or the use of training to help with stress management. These results could help with the investigation of violence within the health care field.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	x
List of Appendices.....	xi

CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Increasing violence within the work sector.....	1
1.2 Under-reporting of violence.....	2
1.3 Why is violence increasing in the workplace ?.....	4
1.4 Model of violence within the workplace.....	8
1.4.1. The Assailant.....	10
1.4.2. The Employee.....	11
1.4.3. Factors related to psychological response to violence.....	13
1.4.4. The Working Environment.....	16
1.4.5. Social Support.....	19
1.4.6. The Outcome.....	23

1.5 Hypotheses.....	28
---------------------	-----------

CHAPTER TWO : METHOD

2.1 Subjects.....	30
-------------------	-----------

2.2 Data Collection.....	31
--------------------------	-----------

2.3 Measures

2.3.1. Demographic Information.....	33
-------------------------------------	-----------

2.3.2. Job Demands and Violent Episodes defined as Traumatic Stressors.....	33
--	-----------

2.3.3. Job and Traumatic Incident Stressors.....	34
--	-----------

2.3.4. Outcome Measure : The Impact of Event Scale (IES).....	35
--	-----------

2.3.5. The Working Environment.....	36
-------------------------------------	-----------

2.3.6. Social Support.....	37
----------------------------	-----------

2.4 Data Analysis.....	40
------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER THREE : RESULTS

3.1 Investigation of the Traumatic Stressor Measures.....	43
---	-----------

3.3.1. Initial Analysis of the Measure.....	43
---	-----------

3.3.2. Reliability of the Measure.....	45
--	-----------

3.3.3. Factor Analysis of the Measure.....	46
--	-----------

3.3.4. Comparison with other Measures.....	46
3.2 Traumatic Incidents/Stressors.....	48
3.3 The Working Environment.....	58
3.4 Social Support.....	63
CHAPTER FOUR : DISCUSSION	
4.1 Discussion of Hypotheses.....	66
4.2 Investigation of other Results.....	70
4.3 Implications of Results.....	75
4.4 Methodological Considerations.....	79
4.5 Limitations.....	81
4.6 Future Plans.....	83
4.7 Conclusions.....	84
REFERENCES.....	85
APPENDICES.....	108

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 : Correlation matrix of the variables used in the regression analysis.....	42
Table 2 : Correlations between number of traumatic incidents and subgroups of traumatic stressors.....	47
Table 3 : Average number of traumatic incidents for male and female participants.....	49
Table 4 : Mean number of traumatic stressors for male and female participants and the mean combined scores (MSCORE).....	50
Table 5 : The mean IES scores for each gender group and the mean combined score (MSCORE).....	51
Table 6 : Stepwise Regression analysis results of the influence of the working environment (TOTWEN), and gender (SEX) on post trauma stress reactions (TOTIES).....	53
Table 7 : Variables not included in the post trauma stress regression analysis.....	53

Table 8 : Correlations between the number of traumatic incidents and the post trauma stress reactions (TOTIES).....	54
Table 9 : Correlations between the traumatic stressors and the post trauma stress reactions (TOTIES).....	55
Table 10 : Mean traumatic stressors score for the exposed (EXPOS) and nonexposed groups (NONEXP) and the mean combined score (MSCORE).....	56
Table 11 : Mean IES scores for the exposed (EXPOS) and nonexposed (NONEXP) groups, and the mean combined score (MSCORE...).....	56
Table 12 : Mean OCQ scores for male and female participants, and the mean combined score (MSCORE).....	58
Table 13 : Correlations between the OCQ scores and the number of traumatic incidents (INCNO), traumatic stressors (TOTALTS), and post trauma stress reactions (TOTIES).....	61
Table 14 : Mean OCQ scores for the exposed (EXPOS) and nonexposed groups (NONEXP) and the mean combined score (MSCORE).....	61

- Table 15 : Mean social support effectiveness scores
for male and female participants and
the mean combined score (MSCORE)..... **63**
- Table 16 : Mean social support amount scores
for male and female participants and the
mean combined score (MSCORE)..... **63**
- Table 17 : Mean social support scores for the exposed
(EXPOS) and nonexposed (NONEXP) groups..... **65**

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 : The Three Levels of Violence.....	5
Figure 2 : The Model of Violent Assaults at Work.....	9
Figure 3 : A Model of the Factors related to the Psychological Response to Violent Incidents.....	14
Figure 4 : Percentages of Participants Exposed to Traumatic Incidents.....	48

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
Appendix 1 : Questionnaire.....	108
Appendix 2 : Grouping of the Traumatic Stressor Measure...	120