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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

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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.
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