



A recent study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health indicates that between 1980 and 1985, homicide was the third most common cause of death in the workplace. For women, it is the most common cause of death at work.¹ So what is workplace violence?

Perhaps the most familiar example of workplace violence is the disgruntled employee who appears at work one day and begins shooting co-workers. While this is certainly the best known type of workplace violence, it is not the only one. In most cases, two victims of workplace violence emerge: either former or current supervisors, or domestic partners.² The latter stemming from the fact that a person who has ended an unpleasant relationship with a domestic partner may move out of the house and change phone numbers, but most likely s/he will not change his/her place of employment. Thus, an upset partner may appear at work to try and settle a dispute. A third variety of workplace violence involves employees who become the victim of an enraged client or customer.

While we often hear of such cases on the news, it is easy to dismiss them by asking, "Yes, but does it happen here, at Miami?" The answer is yes, it does. Although we have been fortunate in not having any homicides on campus, we do receive reports of threats made against employees, and sometimes have to respond to remove angry or belligerent people from an office or public service area. Whether it's a disgruntled former employee, an employee's ex-husband trying to confront her at work, or a dissatisfied patron threatening employees in an office, workplace violence is a very real threat, even here at Miami.

So who are the most common assailants in acts of violence perpetrated at work? A recent study indicates that the most common perpetrators of workplace violence are middle-aged men who have a history of frustrating life experiences.³ In cases where the perpetrator was a current employee, another study identified some characteristics that could serve as warning signs of future violence. These signs included a chronically poor work record, conflicts with supervisors and/or co-workers, unfounded grievances and complaints, abuse of sick leave, and the opinion that he is a victim.⁴

Preventing workplace violence is a difficult task, given that it can occur at any time, often without warning. A review of cases involving terminated employees showed the time frame between termination and violent action was from as little as five minutes to as long as three years.⁵ Some ways to prevent such violence is conducting careful background checks on new employees, and early management of problem employees.⁶ In addition, all threats should be taken seriously and promptly reported to police. The University Police cooperates with the Cincinnati Police to provide community members with an anonymous means of reporting information. The Crime Stoppers line is (513) 352-3040 and collect calls are accepted. Information reported to Crime Stoppers is then forwarded to Miami's police department. In addition, our web site at www.muohio.edu/police provides an anonymous means for e-mailing crime tips to police. In addition to these steps, arrangements can be made with University police to have uniformed or plainclothes officer(s) present at potentially volatile hearings or meetings. Finally, anyone who has reason to believe someone may try to confront or harm him/her at work should inform the police of the circumstances. This helps us in responding to your call later, if a problem does develop.

Workplace violence is a matter we, at the police department, take very seriously. All threats reported to us are followed up carefully and followed through to a proper conclusion. Unfortunately, we can do nothing about dangerous situations if we are not informed of them, so you should take workplace violence as

seriously as we do; remain alert to potential problems at work, and keep us informed of anything which may indicate future trouble.

¹ "Homicide in U.S. Workplaces," National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Morgantown, West Virginia, September, 1992.

² "Death In The Office: Workplace Homicides," The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, April, 1995, 21.

³ James Fox and Jack Levine, Mass Murder--America's Growing Menace, cited in "Worker's Despair May Fuel Killings," Sarasota Herald-Tribune, February 20, 1994, 10(A).

⁴ "Death In The Office: Workplace Homicides," 23.

⁵ "Death In The Office: Workplace Homicides," 24.

⁶ Supra note 4.