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**Workplace Violence Prevention Model: An
Assessment of Travis County Department of
Transportation and Natural Resources' Workplace
Violence Prevention Program**

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**Workplace Violence Prevention Model: An Assessment of Travis County
Department of Transportation and Natural Resources' Workplace Violence
Prevention Program**

By

Valerie Marie Boyce

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Valerie Boyce obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Therapeutic Recreation from the University of St. Francis in Joliet, IL in 1983. After relocating to southern California in 1984, Valerie began a twenty-seven year career providing services to mentally ill adults, adolescents and children. It was during her employment that she became interested in learning more effective ways to deal with potentially violent individuals. Valerie was provided with non-violent crisis intervention training through her employer. She attended instructor training through the Crisis Prevention Institute in 2001 and provided many hours of training to the employees of the Mental Health Unit, Safety and Security Department and Emergency Services Department at her place of employment. She also served as the Unit Safety Officer for three years and was an active participant in the Hospital Falls and Restraint Committee.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION MODEL: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRAVIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES' WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM

by

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research is threefold. The first purpose is to develop an ideal model of effective workplace violence prevention plan based on the findings from scholarly works. The second purpose is to examine the current workplace violence prevention program utilized by Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources to determine how close their program is to the ideal model program. Finally recommendations will be provided to Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources, based upon the findings of the comparison. A conceptual framework was developed that contains four essential components of an ideal workplace violence prevention model. These four components are physical/occupational risk factors, hiring/screening processes, workplace environment and professional development and resources.

Methodology: The research design in this research was a case study. Methods of research data collection used were structured interview, survey, direct observation and document analysis.

Findings: At this point in time, TCDTNR does not have a comprehensive workplace violence prevention program in place. Some elements of the four components of the ideal workplace model are incorporated in Travis County's general employee policies and procedures. Results of the employee survey indicated the employees' perception of some degree of organizational injustice and inadequate conflict resolution processes. Despite the minimal security features in place, employees indicated that they perceived their workplace as safe and were familiar with workplace violence policies and procedures.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Workplace violence is any situation when an employee feels he or she has been intimidated or threatened. Workplace violence can take the form of physical and/or psychological abuse. The perpetrator can be from within the organization or external sources. There are three types of perpetrators; one type has no connection with the organization or its employees (e.g. in the case of a random burglary). The other two types of perpetrators are current or former employees, customers or the significant or former significant other of an employee.

Unfortunately, workplace violence happens frequently. One reason may be that perpetrators carry out their abusive behaviors without being detected by management. This is especially true of a large bureaucracy, such as a government agency, where managers cannot possibly keep up with everything that goes on within their departments.

It is surprising to learn that there is still little research currently being done in the area of workplace violence, with mass killings occurring to employees, such as 911, the Oklahoma City bombing and many other situations which have made the front page of the news. “The lack of research-based violence prevention standards from which to work has left thousands of nurses working in hazardous conditions with few reliable resources at their disposal to prevent and effectively manage violence toward themselves, their coworkers or patients in health care settings” (Morrison & Love 2003, 146).

Although the primary focus of this research lies in the workplace violence which occurs at the hands of a Type III perpetrator, such as a disgruntled employee, it is important to be familiar with all types of perpetrators. All of the components of the ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program designed by this research pertain to any type of perpetrators.

Research Purpose

How can the incidence of workplace violence be reduced? One possible solution is for employers to take a more pro-active approach. In order to determine how one takes a “pro-active approach” toward workplace violence, it is necessary to determine the key components of an effective workplace violence program. These components have been derived from a careful review of scholarly works pertaining to workplace violence. According to Shields and Tajalli (2005, 324), the practical ideal type of research augments Earl Babbie’s research purposes; exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. In the practical ideal type of research, the purpose is more of a question of what *should* be done, based upon a comparison to what is realistically *being* done and what could *ideally* be done. The ultimate goal of the practical ideal type of research is to provide useful feedback to the subject of the comparison.

The purpose of this research is threefold. First, to develop an ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program based upon a review of literature. Second, to gauge how closely the workplace violence prevention program used by Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources (TCDTNR) meets the standards

presented in the ideal model. Finally, to make recommendations to TCDTNR based upon the findings of the comparison.

Preview of Chapters

This applied research project consists of six chapters. Chapter two reviews the scholarly literature on the issue of workplace violence and develops an ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program. Chapter three describes the case study of this research – Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources. Methodology of collecting and analyzing data is presented in chapter four. The findings of the research are discussed in chapter five. Chapter six will provide recommendations to TCDTNR based upon these findings.

Chapter II Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the components of an ideal workplace violence prevention program, through an examination of literature. The literature strongly indicates selected risk factors as contributing to the occurrence of workplace violence. These risk factors are: environmental and occupational risk factors, ineffective hiring and screening procedures, ineffective management interpersonal skills and inadequate employee training and resources. This chapter reviews the existing literature pertaining to these risk factors. The conceptual framework developed at the end of this chapter will relate these risk factors to the literature which provides evidence for them. These contributing risk factors have been identified and incorporated in the conceptual framework which represents an ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program. This ideal model will set a standard, to gauge the effectiveness of the workplace violence program used by Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources.

Introduction

Workplace violence has been on the rise since it was first acknowledged in the 1970's. Although workplace violence has occurred for decades, it has only surfaced as a public issue in the last 20 to 30 years. Incidents of workplace violence could be reduced if private and public enterprises exercised a more proactive, rather than reactive approach. There has been minimal research devoted to the study of workplace violence.

Workplace Violence

Workplace violence takes a variety of forms; it can be physical or psychological. It can be as subtle as spreading rumors about a co-worker or as overt as physical aggression. It is any act which creates an intimidating or hostile work environment. The term workplace violence refers to physical and psychological acts which are performed with the intention of causing harm to another person or create a hostile work environment. No matter what form workplace violence takes, the results can be devastating to the targeted employee and the workplace. Chronic workplace violence can contribute to higher absenteeism, higher recidivism, lower productivity, and criminal acts, such as assault and theft. Workplace violence that falls under the category of a physical act can be described as either workplace aggression or violence. Aquino and Bradfield (2000) identify aggressive action as interpersonal behavior which causes any physical damage, harm or distress to the victim.

When people talk about workplace violence they may be referring to a range of hostile acts—from threats and intimidation to homicide. Workplace violence includes acts such as physical assault, arson, bombing, sabotage, and hostage taking. Workplace aggression includes violent acts as well as nonviolent acts such as harassment, intimidation, and threats that create a hostile work environment (www.orosha.org).

More subtle forms of workplace violence fall under the classification of psychological abuse. Some examples of psychological abuse include spreading rumors about or withholding vital job related information from a co-worker. Although the abuse may not be physical in nature, the resulting injuries may be physical and emotional. For

example, a targeted employee may suffer from insomnia, migraine headaches or high blood pressure due to a chronic stressful work environment. Regardless of the nature of the workplace violence, damage to the workplace environment is inevitable.¹

In 2005, the Bureau of Labor Statistics conducted a survey of workplace violence prevention. According to the results of this survey 32% of state government agencies reported some form of workplace violence, which exceeded the results of local government and private agencies. Those individuals providing public services experienced a significantly higher number of workplace violence incidents than those persons working in a non-service related field (U.S. Department of Labor 2006). Often employees are unsure as to whether an incident is of a personal or professional nature and therefore do not report many occurrences of workplace violence. For example, Doody (2003, 32) reported, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, each day, over nine thousand health care providers are assaulted at work.

Perpetrators of Workplace Violence

According to Mattman (2008) perpetrators of workplace violence can be categorized into three types. Type I consists of those perpetrators who have no relationship with the place of business or employees. The perpetrator's primary motive is robbery. Eighty percent of workplace homicides occur at the hands of Type I perpetrators (Atkinson 2000, 15). The Type II perpetrator is usually a former patron or client of the organization and often known by the victim. Workplace violence delivered by a Type II perpetrator usually occurs at a human service organization. Type III

¹ Personal work related experience has demonstrated this concept to be true.

perpetrators are either currently or formerly employed by the organization or were involved in a personal relationship with one of the employees. According to a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, 9 percent of Type III perpetrators are the spouse, former spouse or significant other of an employee (Atkinson 2000, 15).

Many cases of workplace violence by a Type II or Type III perpetrator can be prevented. Rarely does an employee become violent without precipitating events. Generally the Type II or Type III perpetrator has either verbalized a threat or given some indication that they may become violent, prior to acting on the threat. “It has been suggested that, in the workplace, violence is rarely a spontaneous act but more often the culmination of escalating patterns of negative interaction between individuals” (Andersson et al. 1999, 454). It is important for administrators of an agency, to encourage employees to take all threats seriously and to report these threats to their supervisors. A potentially violent situation may be de-escalated with proper intervention.

Components of an Ideal Workplace Violence Prevention Program

The purpose of this research is to develop an ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program based upon a review of scholarly works. In their website, <http://www.workviolence.com>, Kauffer and Mattman recommend “an effective workplace violence prevention program includes physical security, pre-employment screening, good termination practices, employee assistance programs, out placement and a host of other options.”

The conceptual framework presents the following four components of a workplace violence program; physical/occupational risk factors, hiring/screening processes, the workplace environment, and workplace violence professional development and resources.

Risk Factors

Physical facility deficits, such as poor lighting and inadequate security systems, put employees at a higher risk of being victims of workplace violence. Many persons employed in the public sector provide services in a mobile workplace, or in a community-based facility situated in a high crime area (Labor Month in Review 2006).

Physical Environmental Risk Factors

Employers must carefully survey the physical environment of the workplace to ensure safety to its employees. Employers can keep employees safer, by utilizing physical security features and devices such as; proper internal and external lighting, glass partitions designed to provide protection to employees who exchange money with customers, adequate staffing ratios, security staff, alarm systems, and video surveillance cameras.²

The concept of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design emphasizes control over the environment “through the use of four elements: (1) natural surveillance; (2) access control; (3) territoriality; and (4) activity support” (Nigro & Waugh 1996, 330). Natural surveillance enhances visibility for employees as well as security or police personnel. The use of access control provides a barrier to limit consumer accessibility to

² Personal work experiences through my role as Unit Safety Officer taught me the value of monthly physical facility safety inspections in order to mitigate any negative occurrences.

select areas in the workplace. Territoriality refers to the design and layout of the workplace that provides employees with control over their physical environment. The final element, activity support encourages an ongoing flow of employee traffic throughout the workplace and the presence of available personnel and support to employees (Nigro & Waugh 1996).

In addition to the four elements described by Nigro and Waugh, other security features such as panic buttons (both remote and permanently installed), two-way radios, security cameras, security mirrors, overhead communication system, metal detectors and one-way glass windows are some examples of other devices which can affordably enhance the security of a workplace. An overhead communication system, allows employees to quickly communicate a dangerous situation and identify the area using coded messages. Many hospitals use 'color' code words, such as code blue, to identify a situation. Each color code coincides with a particular emergency situation. The location of the emergency must be communicated as well.³

In addition to these aforementioned strategies, management must support a violence prevention program by creating effective policies that include adequate staffing ratios, employee education, visible signage, effective cash management and a specific procedure and plan in place, in the case of workplace violence. Physical safety mechanisms, such as bulletproof glass, adequate lighting and surveillance equipment provide added protection to employees (Nigro & Waugh, 1996).

³ Through my personal work experience in working at a large hospital, I became trained in emergency preparedness, emergency hospital codes, etc. through my orientation and semi-annual disaster drills.

Occupational Risk Factors

There are a number of occupational risks associated with workplace violence. Some occupations which fall under this higher risk category are: law enforcement personnel, taxi drivers, retail clerks, security guards-especially those protecting valuable property, health care professionals, social service professionals, bartenders, and convenience/gas station attendants (U.S. OSHA 2008). Social service professionals are at a particularly high risk, as they are often involved in decision making which may affect welfare monetary awards or the loss of custody of a child or children (Fox & Harmon 2008). Employees, who work at night or in the early morning hours, handle money, work in a high crime area or guard valuable property, are also at a higher risk.

Employers can provide added safety by equipping high risk employees with portable safety devices such as two-way radios and remote panic buttons. Employees who work alone in the community can help protect themselves by carefully assessing the situation in advance and arranging for additional staff or police escort if necessary.⁴

The modern workplace tends to be more unstable than those in the past. What was once common practice to stay with one company for an entire career now is the exception. Workers are facing tougher job markets, dire economic conditions and are competing for fewer available positions. These stressful conditions create new levels of frustration which can lead to a breakdown in communication, a lack of motivation and poor work ethics. It is more important than ever for managers to be sensitive to the

⁴ Through my personal work experience as being Unit Safety Officer, unsafe situations were brought to my attention and discussed and resolved at monthly Safety Meetings and Unit Meetings. Solutions such as the use of remote panic alarms for employees who were often in isolated areas alone with mental health patients came out of such a meeting.

physical and emotional environment of the workplace in order to provide a safe and productive place for employees to work.⁵

Hiring/Screening Processes

Negligent hiring practices can result in expensive civil or criminal litigation costing thousands of dollars (Atkinson 2000). Legally an employer has an obligation to its employees and stakeholders to conduct a reasonable investigation of potential job candidates. By implementing consistent hiring practices, employers can take a proactive stance in reducing the potential for workplace violence (Castex-Tatum 1997). On the other end of the spectrum, an employer, who terminated an employee based upon violent behaviors, runs the risk of legal implications by giving that employee a positive reference to a future employer (Atkinson 2000).

Negligent hiring is an increasing concern in regards to how it affects workplace violence. “Negligent hiring is more frequently being viewed as one source that generates workplace violence” (Kondrasuk et al. 2001, 187). Employers must operate within a fine balance of gaining enough background information about a potential employee without violating the candidate’s privacy (Atkinson 2000). Thorough background checks are of particular importance when the nature of the employment involves the supervision of minors, the elderly or dependent adults, the handling of a firearm or weapon or substantial contact with the public (Castex-Tatum 1997).

Negligent hiring practices can cost a company financially and, in a public agency, can cost taxpayers as well. Litigation can be the end result of an incident of

⁵ I have observed these trends and changes in attitude through my personal work experiences.

workplace violence. Employers must work carefully to screen candidates within the confines of the law, particularly when these candidates might potentially provide care for others (Kondrasuk et al. 2001). In order to screen candidates, it is prudent for employers to conduct a thorough investigation of an applicant's job experiences and educational background.

To provide equal opportunities for employment, the federal government has instituted laws which provide every person with protections from discrimination based upon religious affiliation, sex, age, cultural background, and physical/mental disabilities. Job screening procedures must be appropriate to the nature of the job. "Employers should avoid unfairly discriminating in any employment decision" (Kondrasuk et al. 2001, 191).

It is imperative that "the employer should have a legally-sufficient, signed release from the job applicant before it investigates a candidate's background" (Kondrasuk et al. 2001, 191). Employers must be knowledgeable of privacy laws in their states prior to developing hiring and screening policies (Kondrasuk et al. 2001). Outsourcing background investigations is one way agencies can affordably accomplish necessary screening practices. "Public employers must balance the ethical and legal employment issues in today's workplace, as they both give and seek background information" (Kondrasuk et al. 2001, 192).

Hiring and screening guidelines are important because employers may be held responsible for the acts of employees that occur during working and non-working hours. For example, a furniture delivery person accosted a female customer at knifepoint, after working hours. The employer was held liable as he had not conducted a criminal

background check on the employee, which would have exposed the man's violent criminal history (Connerly et al. 2001).

Verifying inconsistencies in the employment and educational backgrounds of job candidates can present a 'red flag'. When considering an employment candidate, employers should check additional public records of vital information. Employers should carefully scrutinize information on the employment application and notify potential employees of random drug screening as a condition of employment (Kauffer et al. 2008).

Workplace Environment

By maintaining a sense of equality in the workplace, managers can reduce work environment stress. Managers who make unfair decisions pertaining to employees may be contributing to feelings of injustice among the employees, which can then lead to feelings of anger and resentment (Greenberg 2004). The justice perspective is arguably the most promising approach to the study of aggression. For instance, several researchers have argued that the motivation for revenge is often rooted in the perception of undeserved harm and feelings of injustice (Jawahar 2002, 811).

Ineffective Management

Inept managers can create a workplace climate which condones bullying and other aggressive behaviors. This environment provides perpetrators with opportunities to harass and bully targeted employees without fear of being detected. Some examples of bullying behaviors are excluding the targeted employee from social invitations for events occurring during and after work hours, withholding pertinent job-related information

from the targeted employee and other subtle behaviors which may lead to a hostile work environment (Salin 2003).

Many managers fail to provide the necessary leadership to manage on-going employee conflicts. Unresolved conflicts may go on and result in a strained, uncomfortable, or hostile work climate. Unresolved issues may lead to hostile behavior and without appropriate interventions; employee behavioral problems may escalate to workplace violence (Johnson & Indvik 2000).

Organizational Justice

There are three forms of organizational justice; distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. Distributive justice occurs when employees feel that monetary compensation, such as bonuses or salary increases have been given out fairly (Greenberg & Barling 1999). An example of distributive justice could be a case when two employees perform the same job, but receive different pay. Lack of distributive justice can lead to negative behaviors such as theft, which employees justify as correcting an unfair management decision. Employees may use theft to try to bring a sense of equilibrium to an unjust work environment (Greenberg & Barling 1999). “Workers who feel unjustly treated may not take a direct or confrontational action to remedy the situation, they may take covert retaliatory action, such as theft or sabotage, in an attempt to ‘get even’ or balance an apparently inequitable situation” (Fitness 2000, 149). Results of a study conducted by I.M. Jawahar, determined “that victims of violations of distributive justice and interactional justice are likely to engage in expressions of hostility

and obstructionism behaviors toward the source of interactional injustice” (Jawahar 2002, 827).

Greenberg (2004) explains how distributive injustice impacts employees by applying the cognitive appraisal model. In essence, an individual associates an event with a stress level and coping strategies. Cognitive appraisal takes place when one thinks about how a situation affects him or her personally. Initially one will either perceive an event as a stressor or non-stressor through the cognitive appraisal process. A secondary step then occurs when the individual assesses the situation to determine how he or she can take control to “deflect the harm”.

Procedural justice describes how equitably managers enforce policies and carry out procedures. Procedural justice may also refer to the employees’ perception of a sense of fairness. For example, two employees do the same work, but for different pay. The manager pays one of the employees based upon the fact that this particular employee has been doing the same job for ten years, compared to the lower paid employee who has only been doing the job for one year. Initially this situation may have seemed unfair, but once the equality of the procedures were explained, the outcome seems just. Generally, if employees have an understanding of how a decision was made, they are more accepting of the outcome (Jawahar 2002). When a seemingly unfair decision has been made, an employee may seek justification. Greenberg (2004) defines the primary appraisal process as one’s perception of how a decision was made. The primary appraisal process determines whether or not the individual will feel he or she has been treated justly in a given situation. Employees who perceive organizational injustice often experience

feelings of anxiety and depression. When a person is able to examine not only the outcome of a decision, but the process of how the decision was made, he or she will experience less stress about the overall situation, regardless of whether the outcome is in their best interest.

Interactional justice “refers to the fairness of the interpersonal treatment given in the course of explaining procedures and outcomes” (Greenberg 2004, 357). Two important components of interactional justice are the logic and rationale by which a decision was made and the way the decision has been explained to all affected parties (Jawahar 2002). When an employee understands of how a supervisor came to a decision, even if it is not in that particular employee’s best interest, the employee better accepts the decision. With no explanation, employees may feel unfairly treated, and feelings of anger and or hostility can arise (Jawahar 2002).

Greenberg (2004) identifies an inter-relationship between distributive, procedural and interactional justice, known as the “justice salience hierarchy”. Greenberg conducted a study on nurses who perceived themselves, to be victims of distributive, procedural and interactional injustice. Because these types of perceived injustices often manifest in sleep disruption, Greenberg instructed the nurses of four hospitals to keep records of their sleep patterns over several months. Initially, all of the nurses in the study reported to have normal sleep patterns and perceived their work environments to be fair. Hospitals initiated a change to their pay scales which resulted in nurses at two of the hospitals to perceive that they were being underpaid. These nurses were re-classified from being non-exempt to exempt, which meant they were now salaried and did not receive pay

based upon the hours they worked. As anticipated, the nurses who felt they were underpaid experienced significant sleep disturbances. The nurses also indicated that their supervisor's communication techniques directly impacted their stress levels. At one of the two hospitals where the nurses felt they were underpaid, the supervisors received training through lectures and exercises about positive communication techniques that promote respect and dignity to their employees. At the other hospital, no training was provided to the supervisors. Those nurses who were given pay decreases experienced significantly less sleep disturbance when their supervisor provided fair interpersonal communications than those who received communication from untrained supervisors (Greenberg 2004).

These findings are noteworthy insofar as they reveal not only that procedural changes in pay can lead to a particularly important stress reaction (sleeping problems), but also that these can be mitigated by the use of interpersonal justice. Importantly, although the supervisors could not do anything to change the hospital's pay system, they were able to get their subordinates to interpret those changes as being less stressful. This occurred in a simple and inexpensive fashion by training supervisors to treat the nurses in their charge in an interpersonally fair manner. This intervention clearly had a dramatically beneficial effect (Greenberg 2004, 359).

In addition to organizational injustices, a poorly designed work environment that underutilizes its employees' strengths and skills, can lead to a stressful workplace (Calendar et al. 2004). This type of environment may lead employees to feel they have little control over their work environment and they may exhibit aggressive behaviors in an effort to gain some control. A correlation exists between an employee's perception of

being treated unfairly and then acting out with aggressive behaviors (Greenberg & Baling 1999).

Organizational injustice can directly impact more than just the affected employee. When an employee feels that he or she has been treated unfairly and given no reasonable explanation as to why, that employee may discuss the situation with co-workers. It is not uncommon for employees to discuss amongst themselves, injustices they perceive in their place of employment. Often one employee will take on the views and perceptions of other employees, creating an “aggregate” perception of inequity (Spell & Arnold 2007), which can contribute to a stressful work atmosphere.

Organizational Climate

Organizational justice has been found to have a direct impact on employees’ overall mental health, which in turn can affect the organizational climate (Spell & Arnold 2007). Organizational climate reflects the degree of formality found within an organization. This degree of formality is evidenced by the dress code and the manner in which employees address one another. “Organizational climate refers to the observable practices and procedures that compose the surface of organized life” (Anderson et al. 1999, 464).

Through changes in the organizational climate, dress code, and the interpersonal relationships between the staff, many organizations are becoming more casual or informal. Andersson et al. (1999) indicates that casual work environments provide an atmosphere which can result in a disregard for professional courtesies and respect. This

occurs when employees relate on a personal level and ignore professional boundaries.

“In an informal setting, it is more difficult for employees to discern acceptable behavior from unacceptable, both in others and in themselves, thereby creating greater potential for misinterpretation and subsequent deviant behavior” (Andersson et al. 1999, 465). By allowing “overly familiar” relationships, an employer is giving consent to unhealthy boundaries, which can lead to deviant behaviors.

Conflict Resolution

Effective and timely conflict resolution is an essential element of a healthy workplace. When employees utilize the appropriate chain of command to report a grievance and no action is taken to address the complaint, they may feel compelled to take matters into his or her own hands, resulting in workplace violence.

Conflicts can take two forms; covert or overt. In covert conflict, the parties do not openly discuss the problem(s). Because the situation is never resolved, anger and resentment may build, culminating in workplace aggression. In an overt conflict the parties openly dispute the issue and may even become confrontational. The advantage of an overt conflict is that the situation is out in the open and each party is aware of how the other party feels about the issue. This allows for an opportunity to resolve the issue (Fralix 2007).

Conflict resolution should be an ongoing process in the workplace. It is a powerful tool to preserve open lines of communication and productivity among employees. To prevent a hostile work environment, employees should be encouraged to work out differences in a mutually agreeable manner. A manager skilled in conflict

resolution/interpersonal skills can guide employees through the resolution process.

Before beginning any type of conflict resolution, it is important for managers to observe what type of communication style each of the parties use. People generally fall into one of two categories of communication; indirect or direct. An indirect communicator is one who softens the message, while a direct communicator is more to the point. In productive conflict resolution, all parties should be made aware of which communication style the other party is using (Fralix 2007).

Fralix (2007) identifies three steps in positive conflict resolution. In the first step both parties must focus on the desired outcome of the conflict resolution. It is imperative to reconcile the parties' differences while still preserving their relationship through the conflict resolution process. Secondly, each should use the communication style of the other party, in order to avoid confusion. Last, it is important to clarify the other party's perception and goals for the interaction. This can be accomplished by actively listening to hearing the "real message" and asking questions for clarification (Fralix 2007). In a successful conflict resolution it is important for the participants to remain nonjudgmental, by seeing the situation from the other party's perspective.

Workplace Violence Professional Development and Resources

Many incidents of workplace violence can be eliminated by implementing proactive measures. At a North American Association of Christians in Social Work Conference, author Gary Deckert stipulated that situations of workplace violence take three forms; those one can influence, those one can control, and those one has no control over (NACSW Convention 2006). By taking preventative and/or corrective measures to

prevent those situations of workplace violence over which there is some degree of control or influence, the overall occurrences may dramatically reduce. “An effective workplace violence prevention program includes physical security, pre-employment screening, good termination practices, employee assistance programs, out placement and a host of other options” (Kauffer & Mattman www.workviolence.com). On-going training helps provide employees with the tools needed to de-escalate a potentially violent situation and to maintain a safe work environment.

Workplace Violence Prevention Policies and Procedures

The establishment of pertinent and reasonable policies and procedures is an essential component of a successful workplace violence program. Policies and procedures clearly define acceptable and unacceptable employee conduct and behavior. In order for any policy to be effective, managers must enforce the policies with appropriate disciplinary action. As an example, the state of Oregon has taken a proactive stance in the prevention of workplace violence with a guide they have made available online, in which Oregon’s Department of OSHA provides their workplace violence prevention policy.

A reporting mechanism for employees to file grievances pertaining to instances of workplace violence should be in place and readily available to all employees. Managers must let employees know that they take workplace violence seriously and will take disciplinary actions against violators of workplace violence policies. If employees know that management is serious about upholding policies and procedures, they will be less inclined to violate them. Managers should have an open door policy with their

employees, in order to make employees feel safe and comfortable coming forth to discuss possible breaches of workplace violence policies.⁶

Workplace Violence Threat Assessment Team

A workplace violence threat assessment team is comprised of the organization's risk manager, safety officer, department supervisors and frontline employees. Carroll (1999) identifies responsibilities of this team as: threat assessment, employee training and crisis intervention. According to U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2008), the 'threat assessment' team can analyze documents pertaining to workplace violence, such as employee injury reports, incident reports, police reports, and employee grievance reports, to look for any patterns or trends in the occurrences of workplace violence at the facility. In addition to document analysis, the threat assessment team should conduct routine physical inspections to determine potential vulnerabilities which may enable violent behaviors. OSHA further recommends that employees be surveyed bi-annually to determine any other sources of vulnerability or weakness within the organization.

Workplace Violence Prevention Training

Managers must decide which staff members are to receive the training and how often, when developing a staff training program. Trainers can be internal to the organization or external contracted instructors. Training programs should be provided consistently, in a casual, non-intimidating format, in order to put employees at ease. A

⁶ Personal work experience has taught me that management's inconsistencies with regard to the enforcement of policies and procedures can lead to non-compliance by employees.

number of private organizations provide training to in-house trainers, or will provide the training directly to the staff of an organization. Some form competency, such as a physical demonstration and a pre and post test will ensure that the employees have learned the essential concepts presented.⁷

Workplace Violence Employee Resources

In addition to policies and procedures, grievance protocol, and training, a supportive staff, such as human resources' personnel and managers, should be readily available to assist employees who are the target of, or are aware of workplace violence situations. Putting helpful resources within easy access of employees may encourage the reporting of workplace violence.

Conceptual Framework Demonstrating Components of an Ideal Model of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program

The four necessary components of an ideal workplace violence prevention program have been devised as the categories of the conceptual framework and linked to the supporting literature in Table 2.1. The literature suggests that these components are essential for any successful workplace violence prevention program.

⁷ I have learned this from my personal work experiences as a Non-Violent Crisis Intervention instructor.

Table 2.1: Conceptual Framework Linked to Literature – Ideal Model Type of Workplace Violence Prevention Program

Components of Workplace Violence	Supporting Literature
<p>I. Risk Factors</p> <p>A. Environmental Factors</p> <p>B. Occupational Factors</p> <p>C. Ineffective Management Interpersonal Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.osha.gov, Nigro & Waugh 1996 • Nigro & Waugh 1996, Castex-Tatum 1997, Labor Month in Review 2006 • www.osha.gov, Fox & Harmon 2008, Morrison & Love 2003, Deckert 2006 • Salin 2003, Johnson & Indvik 2000, Callender et al. 2004
<p>II. Hiring/Screening Processes</p> <p>A. Background Check Process</p> <p>B. Reference Check Process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Castex-Tatum 1997, Atkinson 2000, Kondrasuk et al. 2001 • Atkinson 2002, Connerly, Arvey & Bernardy 2001, Kauffer & Mattman (www.workviolence.com) • Atkinson 2002, Connerly et al. 2001, Castex-Tatum 1997, Kauffer & Mattman (www.workviolence.com)
<p>III. Workplace Environment</p> <p>A. Organizational Justice</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distributive Justice 2. Procedural Justice 3. Interactional Justice <p>B. Organizational Climate</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dress Codes 2. Employee Relations <p>C. Conflict Resolution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salin 2003, Johnson & Invik 2000, Callender et al. 2004 • Jawarah 2002, Greenberg & Barling 1999 • Jawahar 2002 • Greenberg & Barling 1999 • Greenberg 2004, Jawahar 2002 • Andersson & Pearson 1999, Greenberg 2004, Spell & Arnold 2007, Jawarah 2002 • Greenberg & Barling 1999 • Greenberg 2004 • Andersson & Pearson 1999, Fralix 2007
<p>IV. Workplace Violence Professional Development and Resources</p> <p>A. Workplace Violence Policies and Procedures</p> <p>B. Threat Assessment Team</p> <p>C. Training</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management 2. Employees <p>D. Workplace Violence Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.osha.gov, Atkinson 2000, http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/osha/educate/training/pages/120..., Deckert 2006, Kauffer & Mattman (www.workviolence.com) • www.orosha.org, Atkinson 2002, Deckert 2006 • Carroll 1999, www.osha.gov • www.orosha.org, Atkinson 2002, Doody 2003, Callender et al. 2004 • Salin 2003, Johnson & Indvik, 2000, www.orosha.org http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/osha/educate/training/pages/120... • Atkinson 2002, Fox & Harmon 2008, www.osha.gov.

Conclusion

It is possible to provide a safe and productive workplace for employees. To develop an effective workplace violence prevention program, a thorough understanding of what constitutes workplace violence and contributing risk factors is essential. Employers must explore a facility's areas of vulnerability and formulate a plan of action to eliminate or reduce these weaknesses. This can be accomplished by making the necessary physical safety modifications, providing an atmosphere of workplace justice and implementing an effective workplace violence prevention training program. Managers must provide an organizationally just workplace, by consistently adhering to policies and procedures.

This research will evaluate Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources, as a case study. Chapter 3 presents a brief overview of Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources to provide an understanding of the type of services which are provided by this agency.

Chapter III

Institutional Setting

Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources is the subject of a case study to obtain data for this applied research project. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief description of TCDTNR to include its purpose, history, function, and demographics. Additionally, an explanation providing the rationale behind the selection of this agency, as the subject of the case study will be provided.

TCDTNR's Function and History

TCDTNR provides a variety of services which include the maintenance, management and oversight of Travis County parks and roads, regulatory functions to include building inspections, permits, and septic permits, as well as the power to exercise eminent domain. TCDTNR began as a small operation. Over time TCDTNR grew into a department employing over five hundred employees.

Based upon the type of services provided by TCDTNR, emotion and passion are often a part of the interactions the department has with stakeholders. There is a risk of potential workplace violence because of the nature of department operations. Internally there are interpersonal dynamics among the employees that have the potential to be equally violent.

TCDTNR's Demographics

The interpersonal dynamics represented by TCDTNR employees is very complex. The staff consists of 80% males, some employees working with family members, lower

educated and skilled workers, generational diversity, cultural diversity, and ex-offenders from an inmate rehabilitation program.

Family members working together often bring unresolved family conflicts to work. Due to the familial ties that bind some employees, work occurs on a much more personal level than at a traditional workplace, blurring professional and personal boundaries.

The requisite job skills and education are minimal, as the primary work done by the department is construction. These types of worker generally communicate and handle conflict in a very direct manner. Drug and alcohol use are prevalent in any construction related industry and TCDTNR is no exception. Travis County policies and procedures clearly communicate a “zero tolerance” for the use of or being under the influence of illegal substances during working hours. TCDTNR is an employer of “second chances” and will give an employee one chance to redeem him or herself, if caught under the influence or in the possession of alcohol or drugs while on the job.

During the summer months, when high school students are hired, there are often five generations of employees working together. Sometimes, a younger employee will refer to an older employee in a familiar manner, which the older employee may find offensive and disrespectful. This can create an atmosphere of tension and stress between the two employees which affects the entire work environment.

TCDTNR currently hires former convicts in an effort to provide rehabilitation opportunities for ex-offenders. Inmates, who have served time for a variety of offenses from driving under the influence to murder, are employable through this program.

Having been through the prison system, these employees bring with them aggressive methods of handling conflict, which are often inappropriate for the workplace.

Supervisors and human resources personnel provide coaching and training, as well as referrals to anger management classes, to help these employees make the necessary transitions, to be successful in the workplace. There are some sensitive positions, as in the finance and parks departments, which require specific criteria pertaining to acceptable criminal backgrounds.

Because TCDTNR performs regulatory functions, it has a great deal of control over the lives of the stakeholders it serves. The department can approve or disapprove whether a particular business can come into a neighborhood. TCDTNR can issue building permits and septic permits for residential structures which are outside of the city limits. By its power of eminent domain, TCDTNR has the authority to buy a property if it is located in a flood plain. This can be an emotionally charged experience for the citizens who live there.

According to a study conducted in 2004, by the U.S. Health and Safety Administration, 48% of non-fatal workplace violence is inflicted on social workers and other human services employees (Fox et al. 2008). There has been little research conducted in the area of workplace violence in general, particularly in the area of human service providers. "It is embarrassing and tragic that we are only now discussing expenditures and actions to afford the same protection and dignity to our dedicated workers that we attempt to provide for those whom they serve" (Fox et al. 2008, 12).

Due to the type of services provided, and the type of employees working for TCDTNR, the potential risk of workplace violence is higher than in a non-service organization. It is virtually impossible to provide a structurally secure environment for all TCDTNR employees as much of the work is located out in the field, making repairs on county roads or in county parks.

TCDTNR is in the process of exploring an effective workplace violence prevention program. Recommendations can be made, by comparing the workplace violence prevention program this agency is currently using with the ideal model which has been developed. Chapter IV will discuss the methodology used to collect data for this research.

Chapter IV

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used for the collection and analysis of data. The research design utilized in this applied research project is the single case study. This research will compare the ideal model of a workplace prevention program with the workplace violence prevention program currently used by TCDTNR.

Methods of Data Collection

In order to collect information, four different methods of data collection were used: personal structured interview, employee survey, direct observation, and document analysis. It is important to use a variety of research methods of data collection methods, in conjunction, when using the case study design for research. The researcher can achieve valid information and results through the use of multiple research methods (Yin 2003).

Structured Interview

According to Earl Babbie, a personal interview form of survey is much more effective than a mailed or computerized interview survey. The strength of the structured interview comes from the ability to collect complete information. If an interviewee provides an incomplete or illogical response to a question asked personally by the interviewer, the interviewer can obtain additional information to clarify the original response through the use of a probe. Probing is more commonly done during an interview using open-ended questions, rather than closed-ended questions. It is

imperative that the interviewer does not influence the interviewee when conducting a probe, in order to provoke a valid response (Babbie 2007).

For the purpose of this study, a personal structured interview was conducted with Donna Holt, SPHR, and Division Director of Administrative Services of Travis County. Ms. Holt oversees the human resources operations at TCDTNR. The structured interview was conducted using a series of twenty-four questions which were formulated based upon the model of an ideal workplace violence prevention program. The primary goal of this interview was to determine the depth of professional development pertaining to workplace violence prevention, including: employee training, policy and procedure development and adherence, employee resources available, and the presence and scope of a threat assessment team. Additionally, other components of an ideal model, such as risk factors and remedial measures; hiring/screening processes and workplace environment to include conflict resolution processes; were addressed through the interview.

Survey

A survey of TCDTNR employees was used as a form of data collection in this study in conjunction with the structured interview. The purpose of the survey was to determine the perceptions of the general staff about the overall safety of the workplace environment, the effectiveness of the workplace violence prevention professional development, the current protocols for dealing with a potentially violent situation and the employee's overall perception of the workplace environment. The questions were geared toward obtaining information pertaining to these key components based upon the staff's perceptions.

Babbie (2007) points out that a survey presents information which a researcher can generalize about a larger population. In order to produce valid results, surveys must be constructed in such a way that the questions are easy to understand and do not influence the respondent. A neutral introductory comment and concise instructions accompanied the self-administered survey. There were no open-ended questions however; there was a space at the end of the survey designated for optional comments.

Direct Observation

Another method of data collection used in this study was “direct personal observations.” The researcher conducted a physical site visit to the downtown Austin office. Observations pertaining to the physical facility security features were conducted in order to identify areas of vulnerability which might increase physical/occupational risk factors.

Document Analysis

Finally, the author examined pertinent documents to assess the extent to which TCDTNR adheres to the ideal components of workplace violence prevention. Travis County employees received two Code books; (Chapter 9 and Chapter 10.) The employees working for the Department of Transportation and Natural Resources receive an additional booklet providing administrative procedures pertaining to their department. These booklets gave the researcher additional resources by which to evaluate the components of Travis County’s workplace violence prevention program.

Unit of Analysis

Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources' employees were selected as the unit of analysis for this study. This research targeted non-management employees to determine the average worker's perspective on the safety and organizational justice of their workplace.

Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework

In the operationalization of the conceptual framework table, the components, of an ideal workplace violence program are applied to the structured interview, employee survey questions, direct observation and document analysis. (See Table 4.1) The purpose of the structured interview questions was to obtain information from the division director pertaining to the administrative functions of the Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources. The employee survey was designed to obtain the staff's perceptions of the organizational justice, hiring/screening practices, and workplace violence prevention program. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, based upon the structured personal interview, employee survey, direct observation of TCDTNR main downtown facility, and document analysis reviewing all policy and procedural information provided to the staff.

Table 4.1: Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework

Components of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Interview Questions	Employee Survey Questions	Direct Observation	Document Analysis
<p>I. Risk Factors</p> <p>A. Environmental Risk Factors</p> <p>B. Occupational Risk Factors</p>	<p>Q.1: What are some general risk factors which may contribute to workplace violence at your agency?</p> <p>Q. 2: What type of lighting and other security features are utilized at your agency, both internally and externally?</p> <p>Q.3: If employees exchange money with the public at your agency, what type of protective barrier separates the employees from the public?</p> <p>Q. 4: What are some occupational factors present at your facility which may put certain employees more at risk for workplace violence?</p>	<p>Q. 6: I feel safe and protected at my job.</p>	<p>I.</p> <p>A. Site Visit</p> <p>B. Site Visit</p>	
<p>II. Hiring/Screening Processes</p> <p>A. Background Check Process</p> <p>B. Reference Check Process</p>	<p>Q. 5: Do all employees undergo the same application and screening processes at your agency? If not, what are the differences with the application and screening processes, and which employees would be treated differently and why?</p> <p>Q. 7: How does your facility conduct reference checks?</p>	<p>A. Q. 1: When I was hired, I was informed that I may be subject to random drug screening, as a condition of my employment.</p> <p>Q. 2: When I was hired, I gave my employer consent to run a criminal background check.</p>		<p>II. <i>Travis County Code for all Travis County Employee</i>; Chapter 15, Section B Subsection # 15.016</p> <p><i>Travis County Code for all Travis County Employee</i>; Chapter 10, Subsection # 10.024</p> <p><i>Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Employee Handbook for Administrative Procedures</i>, Chapter 2</p> <p><i>B. Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Employee Handbook for Administrative Procedures</i>, Chapter 2</p>

Table 4.1: Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework (cont.)

Components of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Interview Questions	Employee Survey Questions	Direct Observation	Document Analysis
<p>III. Workplace Environment</p> <p>A. Organizational Justice</p> <p>1. Distributive Justice</p> <p>2. Procedural Justice</p> <p>3. Interactional Justice</p> <p>B. Organizational Climate</p> <p>1. Dress Codes</p> <p>2. Employee Relations</p> <p>C. Conflict Resolution</p>	<p>Q. 10: How would you describe the overall atmosphere or environment at your facility?</p> <p>Q. 11: How does your facility determine how benefits such as promotions, salary raises and bonuses will be distributed? Is there a uniform criterion?</p> <p>Q. 12: How are disciplinary matters handled at your facility? Q. 18: Describe the grievance procedure at your agency.</p> <p>Q. 13: How are these decisions about raises, promotions, lay-offs, etc. communicated to the employees by management?</p> <p>Q. 14: What type of dress code does your agency have in place and is it applicable to all employees? If not, which employees are exempted from the dress code and why?</p> <p>Q. 15: How do employees address one another? (Formally or Informally?)</p> <p>Q. 16: What type of training do managers undergo in order to effectively handle conflicts and other interpersonal issues at your facility? Q. 17: How are conflicts among employees or conflicts between employees and stakeholders handled?</p>	<p>Q. 3: All policies and procedures are adhered to consistently by management.</p> <p>Q. 4: Decisions about promotions and the reasoning behind these decisions are communicated to employees by management.</p> <p>Q. 7: Conflicts among employees are quickly and fairly resolved in my department.</p>		<p>III.</p> <p>A. <i>Travis County Code</i>, Chapter A, Subsection # 9.002</p> <p>1. <i>Travis County Code</i>, Subchapter B, Subsection # 9.027</p> <p>2. <i>Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Employee Handbook for Administrative Procedures</i>, Chapter 2</p> <p>B.</p> <p>1. <i>Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Employee Handbook for Administrative Procedures</i>, Chapter 1</p> <p>C. <i>Travis County Code</i>, Subchapter F, Subsections 9.263.-9.300</p>

Table 4.1: Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework (cont.)

Components of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Interview Questions	Employee Survey Questions	Direct Observation	Document Analysis
IV. Workplace Violence Professional Development and Resources	Q.19: Describe the workplace violence prevention program your agency has in place.	Q. 8: I am satisfied with the way potentially violent situations are handled at my job.		IV.
A. Workplace Violence Policies and Procedures	Q. 8: Do all agencies within Travis County fall under the same policies and procedures which pertain to workplace violence?	Q.10: I am aware of how to access policies pertaining to workplace violence.		A. <i>Travis County Code for all Travis County Employee</i> ; Chapter 10, Subsection # 10.008 and Chapter 66
B. Threat Assessment Team	Q. 9: Are these policies and procedures readily available to all employees? If so, where are they kept?			
C. Training	Q.25: Who conducts assessments of potentially violent situations at your agency and makes decisions about the way they will be handled?			C. <i>Travis County Code</i> , Chapter 9, Subchapter D, Subsection # 9.154
1. Management	Q.20: What type of training is provided to managers at your agencies to better handle potentially violent situations? How often is this training provided? Who provides the training?			
2. Employees	Q.22: How often is this training provided? For employees? For managers?	Q.9: I have taken workplace violence prevention training at my job.		
D. Workplace Violence Resources	Q.24: What types of workplace violence resources are available for employees at your agency? Do you have an employee assistance program in place?			D. <i>Travis County Code for all Travis County Employee</i> ; Chapter 15, Subsection # 15.016, Section C

Human Subjects' Protection

This research project received approval from appropriate department heads at Texas State University--San Marcos, and the consent from Donna Holt, SPHR, Division Director of Administrative Services of Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources. This research falls under an exempt category of code 45 CFR 46.101 (b)-(5i). This exemption request #EXP2009U3905 has been granted by the Texas State Institutional Review Board.

Chapter 5

Results

The purpose of this chapter is to examine TCDTNR's workplace violence prevention program using the research results, to determine how closely the program resembles the ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program. This research was collected via four methods; a structured interview with the division director of administrative services, an employee survey, direct observation of the downtown facility, and document analysis of policies and procedures pertaining to workplace violence and employee expectations.

Structured Interview Results

In order to gain knowledge about TCDTNR's workplace violence prevention program, a structured interview was conducted with Donna Holt, SPHR, and division director of administrative services at TCDTNR. At the beginning of the interview, Ms. Holt described the general purposes and functions of the Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources.⁸ As mentioned in chapter 3, this agency performs regulatory functions through structure and septic inspections and permits; determines which properties fall within FEMA flood plain guidelines; and provides on-going maintenance of county roads and parks, and administration and management of county park programs.

⁸ Donna Holt, SPHR, Division Director of Administrative Services gave her consent to participate in the interview and to be referenced as a source for this research

Ms. Holt explained that, due to the nature and scope of the functions of her department, emotions such as passion and anger are often expressed by stakeholders during their interactions with TCDTNR employees. Even a sporting event can become a potentially violent situation when two teams argue over a practice field that both claim to belong to their team. Because they are dealing with public land, users often present an attitude of entitlement when asked to comply with county park rules. At times, politicians succumb to pressures from stakeholders and over-ride policies. This undermines the county employees' authority with the public and exacerbates the problem. According to Donna Holt, all Travis County departments must adhere to the same policies and procedures.

Not all conflicts and potentially violent situations come from external sources. There is often conflict between departments; as when one department dictates how something is to be done in another department, such as the finance department limiting expenditures in another department. The finance department has the overall budget knowledge and is aware of precisely of how much money is delegated to each department. The individual departments may become irritated if they perceive the finance department as being insensitive to the needs of their department and stakeholders.

Another internal source of potential workplace violence comes from the eclectic, diverse employees. The department started small and has grown to over five hundred employees. The atmosphere is still informal, as employees address each other by their first name, and many employees wear jeans or uniforms due to the nature of their work.

One of the problems with having an informal workplace is the ambiguous professional boundaries. This is especially true for some of the employees who work with relatives. . Generational differences also contribute to worker conflicts, especially when older employees feel that they have been treated disrespectfully by their younger co-workers.

Another social dynamic which contributes to the potential for workplace violence is the hiring of ex-offenders, who often bring with them a “prison mentality”. This “prison mentality” can have a negative impact on interpersonal relationships between employees.

When asked about hiring and screening procedures, Ms. Holt indicated that, due to the high number of ex-offenders working within her department, many employees have criminal records. She indicated that this is a concern only when filling positions in the finance or parks department. Those departments forbid hiring someone with a criminal record which indicates a history of bodily harm or theft. For example, it would be unwise to hire a person with a history of theft to work in the finance department. Ms. Holt indicated that background checks are conducted by an outside agency, which has a contract with the county.

In organizational justice, (e.g., the distribution of raises and promotions) there is a great deal of subjectivity as to the decisions made by TCDTNR. Some raises are structured, meaning that a governing body has determined that all employees will receive a specific percentage pay raise. Performance raises are more subjective, as supervisors score employees and determine if he or she will receive a raise and how much it will be.

Promotions are not always open to everyone; it depends upon the position and the location of the position.

Miscommunication can have an adverse effect on an organization. It can lead to avoidable misunderstandings and bad feelings between employees. Miscommunications are often spread through gossip or rumors among the staff. Due to the number of relatives working together within a department, gossip may be more prevalent at TCDTNR, than at other agencies.

TCDTNR uses no formal mode of mass communication, other than a newsletter. Each area within the department handles communication in a different way. Some areas have department meetings or safety meetings, while others have informal 'tailgate' meetings with a small a number of employees.

There is currently no formal workplace violence prevention program in place at TCDTNR. However, there is a clear policy of "zero tolerance" for violence. Ms. Holt indicated that although it is a fairly simple violence policy, employees are aware of how far they can go before "stepping over the line". In extreme cases, the employee is terminated immediately, while in less severe cases, there is a progressive, disciplinary process. Because of the nature of the work and the backgrounds of employees, at times managers may condone unconventional behaviors, such as yelling or cursing. The supervisors and human resources personnel provide coaching to the offending employee, in order to assist him or her in developing more appropriate work behaviors.

Supervisors receive core curriculum and compliance training, based on general Travis County policies and procedures, upon hire and every two years thereafter.

Occasionally, guest speakers provide information pertaining to workplace violence, such as the police department giving a presentation on specific identifiers of potentially violent behavior.

New employees attend an orientation to become familiar with expected workplace behaviors. In general, employees understand that they are expected to treat other employees with respect. Ms. Holt did indicate that it would be helpful if prison personnel could work with prisoners in the months prior to their release, to provide them with training to assist them in the transition to the workplace.

Supervisors and human resources staff provide coaching to new employees, as needed. When employees are feeling threatened at work, they are instructed to report the situation to their immediate supervisor. The supervisor will either resolve the situation or bring in the expertise of human resources personnel. Ms. Holt is a trained mediator and uses alternate dispute resolution techniques whenever possible to resolve employee conflicts. If the situation warrants an emergency intervention, local police are contacted. Ms. Holt stated that by providing employees with a wide range of services through the employee assistance program, many personal problems can be resolved, rather than affecting the workplace. If she is aware of a community resource which may be of benefit to an employee, she will provide the information to that employee.

Survey Results

A copy of a ten question survey was distributed to employees on-line and in person at two employee safety meetings. Out of over 500 employees, 156 employees responded to the survey. Survey questions were designed to gather information pertaining to hiring and screening practices, organizational justice and climate, conflict resolution processes, and workplace violence policies and procedures.

A total of 152 employees responded to the survey question pertaining to safety in the workplace. This survey question pertaining to safety and workplace violence found 83.6 percent of the employees reported they felt safe at work. (See Table 5.1)

Table 5.1: Risk Factor TCDTNR Employee Survey Results

Components of Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Employee Survey Questions	Employee Survey Responses
I. Risk Factors A. Environmental Factors	I. Risk Factors A. Q. 6: I feel safe and protected at my job.	I. Risk Factors A. 25.7% Strongly Agree 42.8% Agree 15.1% Somewhat Agree 13.8% Somewhat Disagree .7% Disagree 2.0% Strongly Disagree 0.0% Don't Know 152 Answered Question #6 4 Skipped Question #6

At the time of hire, 82.6 percent of the employees indicated that they had given consent for their employer to conduct a criminal background check. The results found that 71.4 percent of the employees indicated that they had been informed of random drug screening as a condition of employment. (See Table 5.2)

Table 5.2: Hiring/Screening Processes TCDTNR Employee Survey Results

Components of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Employee Survey Questions	Employee Survey Responses
II. Hiring/Screening Processes A. Background Check Process	II. Hiring and Screening Processes A. Q. 1: When I was hired, I was informed that I may be subject to random drug screening, as a condition of my employment. Q. 2: When I was hired, I gave my employer consent to run a criminal background check.	II. Hiring/Screening Processes A. 1. Drug Screening 71.4% True 19.5% False 9.1% Don't Know 154 Answered Question #1 2 Skipped Question #1 2. Criminal Background Check 82.6% True 7.1% False 10.3% Don't Know 155 Answered Question #2 1 Skipped Question #2

Survey questions geared toward assessing the employees' perceptions about overall organizational justice found 67.5 percent of employees perceive that management consistently adheres to policies and procedures. Fifty-four percent of the employees perceive opportunities for promotions as being fairly distributed to all employees and 57 percent of the employees indicated that management communicates the decisions and reasoning behind promotions to the employees. The employee survey results relate to Greenberg's concept of "justice salience hierarchy" which identifies a relationship between distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Greenberg's study exemplified the "justice salience hierarchy", as the lack of interactional justice had an impact on the nurses' overall perceptions of organizational justice (Greenberg 2004).

Only 59.8 percent of the employees agreed that conflicts among employees were quickly and fairly resolved. (See Table 5.3) Sixty-eight percent of the respondents

indicated that potentially violent situations on the job were handled in a satisfactory way. The percentage of employees who reported that they took workplace violence prevention training was 67.1 percent and 76.6 percent reported that they were aware of how to access policies and procedures pertaining to workplace violence. (See Table 5.4)

Table 5.3: Workplace Environment TCDTNR Employee Survey Results

Components of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Employee Survey Questions	Employee Survey Responses
III. Workplace Environment	III.	III.
A. Organizational Justice	A.	A.
1. Distributive Justice	1. Q. 5: Opportunities for promotions are given fairly to all employees.	1. 14.5% Strongly Agree 23.7% Agree 15.8% Somewhat Agree 23.0% Somewhat Disagree 2.6% Disagree 15.8% Strongly Disagree 4.6% Don't Know 152 Answered Question #5 4 Skipped Question #5
2. Procedural Justice	2. Q. 3: All policies and procedures are adhered to consistently by management.	2. 17.5% Strongly Agree 34.4% Agree 15.6% Somewhat Agree 16.2% Somewhat Disagree 3.2% Disagree 9.1% Strongly Disagree 3.9% Don't Know 154 Answered Question #3 2 Skipped Question #3
3. Interactional Justice	3. Q. 4: Decisions about promotions and the reasoning behind these decisions are communicated to employees, by management.	3. 12.8% Strongly Agree 26.8% Agree 17.4% Somewhat Agree 19.5% Somewhat Disagree 2.0% Disagree 16.8% Strongly Disagree 4.7% Don't Know 149 Answered Question #4 7 Skipped Question #4
B. Organizational Climate		
1. Dress Codes		
2. Employee Relations		
C. Conflict Resolution	C. Q. 7: Conflict among employees is quickly and fairly resolved in my department.	C. 15.1% Strongly Agree 29.6% Agree 15.1% Somewhat Agree 19.7% Somewhat Disagree 5.3% Disagree 11.1% Strongly Disagree 3.9% Don't Know 152 Answered Question #7 4 Skipped Question #7

Table 5.4: Workplace Violence Professional Development and Resources Employee Survey Results

Components of Workplace Violence Prevention Program	Employee Survey Questions	Employee Survey Responses
IV. Workplace Violence Professional Development and Resources	IV.	IV.
A. Workplace Violence Policies and Procedures	A. Q. 10: I am aware of how to access policies and procedures pertaining to workplace violence.	A. 20.1% Strongly Agree 45.5% Agree 11.0% Somewhat Agree 8.4% Somewhat Disagree 1.9% Disagree 4.5% Strongly Disagree 8.4% Don't Know 154 Answered Question #10 2 Skipped Question #10
B. Threat Assessment Team		
C. Training	C.	C.
1. Management		
2. Employees	2. Q. 9: I have taken workplace violence prevention training at my job.	2. 21.7% Strongly Agree 42.1% Agree 3.3% Somewhat Agree 5.3% Disagree 5.9% Strongly Disagree 14.5% Don't Know 152 Answered Question #9 4 Skipped Question #9
D. Workplace Violence Resources	D. Q. 8: I am satisfied with the way potentially violent situations are handled at my job.	D. 14.4% Strongly Agree 39.9% Agree 13.7% Somewhat Agree 12.4% Somewhat Disagree 0.7% Disagree 7.8% Strongly Disagree 11.1% Don't Know 153 Answered Question #8 3 Skipped Question #8

Results of Direct Observation

Many of the visitors to the TCDTNR's office are enraged about an issue, such as not receiving a building permit, having their home purchased by the county for demolition, or another situation which has the potential to bring out strong emotions.

Employees who have been terminated must go to the human resources department for their final termination process. These persons are not searched by security when they enter the downtown building. There are no partitions separating employees who exchange money with the public, such as in the office of county permits. Upon further investigation, this research discovered that there are no panic alarms, and few areas covered by security cameras or any other protective devices. This puts the personnel working in these offices in a very vulnerable position.

Results of Document Analysis

Each employee working at TCDTNR is given three booklets at the time of hire. Two booklets refer to codes pertaining to all Travis County employees and the third booklet is a handbook geared specifically toward employees of the Department of Transportation and Natural Resources.

In the first booklet, entitled *Travis County Code Chapter 9*, “The purpose of these policies is to provide a set of principles for establishing and maintaining harmonious and productive County-employee relationships in the conduct of County business.”⁹ There is not a section specifically designated to address workplace violence, however policies referring to drug and alcohol abuse and employee guidelines (acceptable social behaviors) are identified. Following these policies is a section entitled “Conduct Warranting Discipline,” which identifies unacceptable behaviors, such being under the influence of substances while at work; fighting; verbal abuse and theft; among others.

⁹ Information obtained from *Travis County Code for all Travis County Employees*, Chapter 9, Chapter 15 – 15.001-15.012. Content last revised: December 2, 2003 and printed: February 2004. Subchapter A. Statement of General Policies, section 9.001 (a).

This section is followed by procedures for disciplinary actions. This booklet also includes a section entitled “The Grievance System” which provides the purpose; objective; eligibility criteria to include actions and time limits for filing a grievance; an anti-retaliation provision; and the grievance resolution procedures.¹⁰

The second booklet which county employees receive is entitled, *Travis county Code for all Travis County Employees, Chapter 10, Chapter 15-15.013-15.030, Chapter 16, Chapter 30, Chapter 57 and Chapter 66*. Again, no section is specifically designated to address workplace violence, but there are pertinent policies which are pertinent throughout the booklet. An example of this is Policy 10.008 Firearms or Other Deadly Weapons referenced in Chapter 10 and again in chapter 66.¹¹

Commercial drivers, working for the county are subject to drug and alcohol testing at pre-employment; randomly, when involved in a motor vehicle accident and when there is reasonable suspicion. Travis County provides the testing. If the employee is under the influence of an illegal substance, the county will provide referrals to assist the employee in rehabilitation efforts. This coincides with the statement made by Ms. Holt indicating the county is “an employer of second chances.”

A section in the second booklet is designated to promotions and raises and provides general information that specifies a consistent protocol for pay raises, but not for promotions. This is inconsistent with Ms. Holt’s response that both promotions and

¹⁰ Information obtained from *Travis County Code for all Travis County Employees*, Chapter 9, Chapter 15 – 15.001-15.012. Content last revised: December 2, 2003 and printed: February 2004.

¹¹ Information obtained from *Travis County Code for all Travis County Employees*, Chapter 10, Chapter 15-15.013-15.030, Chapter 16, Chapter 30, Chapter 57 and Chapter 66. Content last revised: March 7, 2006 and printed: January 2007. Pp. 3-4 and 130

raises are periodically given subjectively rather than objectively, based upon input from the employee's direct supervisor. Some salary increases are based upon merit, which is subjectively determined by one's employer. Promotion opportunities are not always made known to the general employee population. Forty-six percent of the employees, who participated in the employee survey, perceived a lack of distributive justice. There was no section in the booklet designated to address any type of training programs specific to workplace violence prevention.¹²

The third booklet given to employees at the time of hire is entitled, *Travis county Transportation and Natural Resources; Employee Handbook for Administrative Procedures*. This procedural booklet specifies that an employee's professional dress should correspond to the nature of the work that employee performs. Policies in the booklet pertinent to a workplace violence prevention program reiterate general employee expectations and corresponding disciplinary actions. There is an emergency response team who make the decisions in the event of accidents, media involvement, and damage to county equipment or facilities. The members of this team include: the Transportation and Natural Resources Safety Officer, the immediate supervisor of the affected program, division director, Transportation and Natural Resources Executive Manager, administrative services (risk management), and executive liaison (to communicate with the commissioner). Many of the emergency response team staff could serve a dual role

¹² Information obtained from *Travis County Code for all Travis County Employees*, Chapter 10, Chapter 15-15.013-15.030, Chapter 16, Chapter 30, Chapter 57 and Chapter 66. Content last revised: March 7, 2006 and printed: January 2007.

by being part of a threat assessment team, which would be more specifically geared to incidents of workplace violence.¹³

TCDTNR has made a commitment to developing a workplace violence prevention program, by acknowledging there is room for improvement and demonstrating the willingness to make changes. The preliminary stage in making any improvements is to determine what the staff's perceptions are pertaining to their general work environment as it relates to workplace violence.

According to the staff's responses it is apparent that employees share a common feeling of being protected and kept safe at the workplace. Just a little over half of the staff perceived conflicts to be resolved fairly and in a timely manner. Roughly 60 percent of the staff perceived the workplace to be just and less than 60 percent feel that conflicts among staff are handled in a prompt and fair manner. Roughly 70 percent of the staff is satisfied with the way potentially violent situations are handled and are familiar with workplace violence policies and procedures.

Based upon the structured interview with Ms. Holt, there are environmental safety concerns which could be rectified through the implementation of safety devices and protocols, such as all visitors to the downtown office passing through a metal detector. It is interesting to note that despite the inadequate security protections to safeguard against risk factors, employees perceive their workplace to be safe. There is room for improvement in the areas of physical security features, interventions of potentially violent

¹³ Information obtained from *Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Employee Handbook for Administrative Procedures*, dated: July 1997.

situations, specific workplace violence prevention policies, procedures and training, organizational justice, conflict resolution, development of threat assessment team and communications between management and employees. Recommendations to assist TCDTNR in their efforts to develop a workplace violence prevention program follow in chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

The purpose of this chapter is to provide TCDTNR with recommendations to improve the current workplace violence prevention program in place, based upon an analysis of the data collected. The results reflected a moderate degree of similarity between the workplace violence prevention elements of the ideal model and those used by TCDTNR, with the exception of physical/occupational risk factors.

Risk Factors

Due to the unpredictable nature of the work that is done by TCDTNR employees, it is impossible to safeguard every aspect of the workplace. Most of the work is done out in the open, with no viable means of providing structural protection. One recommendation would be for all employees working outdoors to have an accessible two-way radio. If the employee is working alone in a remote area of a park alone and is injured or in danger, he or she could quickly contact others for support and assistance using a two-way radio.

For those employees working in the downtown office, the use of remote or permanently affixed panic buttons, security mirrors and a metal detection search in the lobby is recommended as preventative measures to reduce the potential for workplace violence. A remote or permanently affixed panic button can be extremely useful if an employee is alone with a threatening or violent individual and can't reach a phone to dial 'nine-one-one'. These devices are relatively inexpensive and can be very effective in

alerting others that someone needs help. The sound of the alarm may also deter the perpetrator from further physical action.

Another inexpensive recommendation for the employees in the downtown office is the installation of curved security mirrors. By their design, specific areas are reflected in the mirror, to allow an individual to see around the corner in an office, which may not be otherwise visible without actually walking into the office.

Hiring/Screening Processes

Many of the department's employees are ex-offenders so it is not uncommon to find that many have criminal records. Perhaps a condition for employment could be that those individuals, who have been charged with physically aggressive behaviors, be required to go through an anger management program during the first six months of their employment. Another suggestion is that ex-offenders complete a questionnaire which identifies their triggers of anger as well as effective coping strategies that have helped them in the past. Some individuals need space when they become frustrated. If a supervisor knows this about an employee who has a violent past, the supervisor can offer the employee an opportunity to take a brief time out, rather than force the person to continue working.

Workplace Environment

The results of the employee survey indicated that the majority of employees perceive their workplace environment to be equitable; however the results were not so significant, as to indicate that there is not room for improvement. Only 59.8 percent indicated they felt conflicts among workers were resolved quickly and fairly. Of those

employees responding to the survey, 54 percent indicated that they perceived promotions to be fairly distributed, with only 57 percent believing the reasons behind these promotions were communicated to them by management. Only 67.5 percent of the employees perceive policies and procedures to be consistently adhered to by management. These numbers leave room for improvement in the area of organizational justice. It is recommended that management communicate the rationale behind decisions, such as promotions in order to increase employees' perceptions of workplace justice. Often, employees performing the same job are not aware their co-worker may possess some extra education or job experiences. When that individual is promoted rather than the other employee, the other employee may feel that he or she has been discriminated against. Employees can usually accept management's decisions, even those which don't benefit that employee personally, when they have an understanding of how the decision was reached. Merit raises should be based upon a non-subjective point system, indicating whether an employee which either a meets or does not meet the expectation.

Consistent adherence to policies and procedures is imperative if employees are to meet employee expectations. An unpredictable work environment can produce stress and chaos, which in turn can raise the anxiety levels of some individuals. Employees depend on their supervisors to provide a safe, consistent workplace so that they know what to expect. On-going conflict resolution is important. A "peer mediation team" could be formed to alleviate some of the burden of conflict resolution from managers and human resource personnel. If conflicts are not resolved at this level, than the supervisor or

human resources personnel could intercede. If the conflict is volatile, it should immediately be referred to the employees' immediate supervisor.

Workplace Violence Professional Development and Resources

TCDTNR has some excellent resources in place through the employee assistance program it utilizes. So that employees have a clearer understanding of how to respond to a potentially violent situation, a more specific section devoted to workplace violence prevention policies and procedures should be developed.

Another component of the ideal model of a workplace violence prevention program lacking in TCDTNR is the use of a threat assessment team. A threat assessment team can provide the employees with cohesive leadership during workplace violence incidents. The employees will know precisely who to report to in the case of a potentially violent situation. The threat assessment team should be comprised of the division director of administration services, area supervisors, and a safety officer.

Currently new employees attend new hire orientation and core curriculums. Additionally managers attend refresher courses every two years. A non-violent crisis intervention in-service should be incorporated into the new hire core curriculums in order to provide employees with a solid understanding of how to deal with workplace violence. The Crisis Prevention Institute (C.P.I.) has a program which provides thorough training in non-violent crisis intervention. C.P.I.'s non-violent crisis intervention program is unique, in that it identifies the various stages of escalation, with appropriate, remedial responses. By using the "escalation continuum", C.P.I. assists trainees in learning the

best way to de-escalate a potentially violent situation, based upon where the agitated person is within the continuum (<http://www.crisisprevention.com/program/nci.html>).

Additionally, brief in-services pertaining to effective communication techniques and emergency situation role-playing and coping strategies should be provided to employees at the end or beginning of monthly safety and/or staff meetings on a regular basis as a refresher to principles taught during the initial core curriculum training sessions. By providing brief training sessions as a part of scheduled staff meetings, employees do not incur overtime while they receive consistent information and training pertaining to workplace violence. TCDTNR is currently seeking ways to increase the guaranteed safety of employees and stakeholders alike. With key personnel, such as Ms. Holt providing coaching and training to employees and supervisors, a foundation for workplace violence prevention has already been created. Employees must feel safe in reporting threats and other potentially violent situations to their immediate supervisors. Supervisors must assist employees in safeguarding against retaliatory behaviors of other employees by being aware of what goes on behind the scenes by making themselves visible and accessible. The more that basic information is practiced and discussed, the more readily available it will be to employees, in the case of emergency. This will ensure a more organized, unified response to emergency situations by employees.

Despite the generality of policies and procedures, employees seem to be aware of expected work behaviors and consequences for non-compliance. Out of the employees responding to the survey, 76.6 percent indicated that they were aware of how to access policies and procedures pertaining to workplace violence.

Conclusion

TCDTNR is committed to developing an effective workplace violence prevention program. All components of the ideal workplace model must be addressed in order to accomplish this. TCDTNR has the potential to decrease the occurrence of workplace violence by improving physical security, the hiring and screening process by being more aware of individual employee's needs, the overall workplace environment by improving organizational justice, conflict resolution and management's interpersonal skills and communication with employees, and workplace violence professional development and resources. Additionally, due to the unique demographics of the employees at TCDTNR, it is important for the prisons to provide, soon to be released inmates, with an occupational program to prepare them for the workplace.

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Appendix I

Travis County Employee Survey

I am a graduate student in a public administration program and I am currently working on an applied research project. I have selected your facility to take part in a brief survey I am conducting. If you would like to participate in the survey, please complete it and return it to me. This survey is completely anonymous and will only be used for the purpose of collecting data for this applied research project.

1. When I was hired, I was informed that I may be subject to random drug screening, as a condition of my employment.

True False Don't Know

2. When I was hired, I gave my employer consent to run a criminal background check.

True False Don't Know

3. All policies and procedures are adhered to consistently by management.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

4. Decisions about promotions and the reasoning behind these decisions are communicated to employees by management.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

5. Opportunities for promotions are given fairly to all employees.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

6. I feel safe and protected at my job.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

Appendix I
Travis County Employee Survey (cont.)

7. Conflicts among employees are quickly and fairly resolved in my department.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
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8. I am satisfied with the way potentially violent situations are handled at my job.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
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9. I have taken workplace violence prevention training at my job.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
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10. I am aware of how to access policies and procedures pertaining to workplace violence.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
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Please feel free to make any comments here.

This concludes this survey. Thank you for your participation

Appendix II

ARP Interview Questions

1. What are some general risk factors which may contribute to workplace violence within your agencies?
2. What type of lighting and other security features are utilized at your agencies, both internally and externally?
3. If employees exchange money with the public at any of your agencies, what type of protective barrier separates the employees from the public?
4. What are some occupational factors present within any of your agencies, which may put certain employees at a higher risk for workplace violence? What steps are taken to protect these risky positions?
5. Do all employees undergo the same application and screening processes at your agency? If not, what are the differences with the application and screening processes, and which employees would be treated differently and why?
6. What type of screening and/or background checks are conducted on applicants within your agencies? Are the background checks conducted by internal staff or an outside contracted service?
7. How does your facility conduct reference checks?
8. Do all agencies within Travis County fall under the same policies and procedures which pertain to workplace violence?
9. Are these policies and procedures readily available for all employees? If so, where are they kept?
10. How would you describe the overall atmosphere or environment within your agencies and why?
11. How does your facility determine how benefits such as promotions, salary raises and bonuses will be distributed? Is there a uniform criterion?
12. How are disciplinary matters handled at your facility?
13. How are these decisions about raises, promotions, lay-offs, etc. communicated to the employees by management?

Appendix II
ARP Interview Questions (cont.)

14. What type of dress code does your agency have in place and is it applicable to all employees? If not, which employees are exempted from the dress code and why?
15. How do employees address one another? (Formally or informally?)
16. What type(s) of training do managers undergo in order to effectively handle conflicts and other interpersonal issues at your agencies?
17. How are conflicts among employees or conflicts between employees and stakeholders handled?
18. Describe the grievance procedure at your agency.
19. Describe the workplace violence prevention program your agency has in place.
20. What type of training is provided to managers at your agencies to better handle potentially violent situations? How often is this training provided? Who provides the training?
21. What type of training is provided for employees to assist them in defusing potentially violent situations? Who provides the employee's training?
22. How often is this training provided? For employees? For managers?
23. Is the same training provided for all employees? If not, how does the training differ among employees and how is this determined?
24. What types of workplace violence resources are available for employees at your agencies? Do you have an employee assistance program in place?
25. Who conducts assessments of potentially violent situations at your agency and makes decisions about the way they will be handled?

Appendix III
Texas State Institutional Review Board Exemption Approval

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