

PR WEB

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Recent Domestic Violence Murders in the Workplace Illustrate a Common Scenario According to New Study

A new study of 155 domestic violence assaults that occur in the workplace reveals trends and risk factors that may guide security planning. Two recent workplace murders of women by their husbands occurred at the same time and day. As revealed in most of these cases, they both were shot in the parking lot, just before they entered their workplace.

Raleigh, NC (PRWEB) December 15, 2004 – On November 29th, two women were murdered at work by their husbands at almost the exact same time though they were a world apart. Shennel McKendall of Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Dikeledi Onica Nkatingi of Pretoria, South Africa share more than a tragic death; the factors that characterize their homicides fit the most common scenario surrounding this type of workplace violence. A new study by Peace at Work has discovered disturbing trends in its research of 155 cases of domestic violence assaults in the workplace. The majority of the cases (31%) occur in the parking lot and at the beginning of the workday, just as both McKendall and Nkatingi were confronted by their killers before they began their day as receptionists.

Just as 25% of other victims who were assaulted on the job had done, both victims had attempted to protect themselves by obtaining restraining orders. In these recent cases, both abusers had violated the order but were released from jail when they committed their final act of control. Just as 77% of these crimes are carried out with a fire-arm, both of these suspects used a handgun, despite a US federal law banning gun possession of anyone who has a restraining order placed against them.

If a piece of paper could not stop these perpetrators, would other security measures? It is clear

that most of these offenders are not trying to escape nor do they avoid being caught by the authorities. 42% commit or attempt to commit suicide while an additional 11% even turn themselves over to the authorities. In a dramatic example last August in Montana, Carl Yetman murdered his young wife (again, in the parking lot as she arrived at work) and then drove to the county courthouse, waiting for the doors to open in order to confess. McKendall's husband killed himself while Nkatingi's murderer surrendered to the police after the shooting.

Aside from the trauma of witnessing the shooting, no one but the victim was injured in these cases, similar to 75% of the incidents noted in the research. John Lee, the founder and director of the non-profit agency that produced the study, states that this may dispel a common fear that employers and supervisors may harbor. "While some supervisors may fire the victim of abuse in fear that they or other workers are endangered as well, this may actually lead to greater risk. Employees will not disclose about potential threats and concerns in order to keep their jobs."

As with other domestic violence statistics, the vast majority (94%) of victims are female with their male (ex-) partner committing the crime. Interestingly, when the victim in the relationship is male, 75% percent are assaulted by either the woman's boyfriend or even a hit man. These cases are not the typical domestic violence situation whereas the victim is living in fear. Often, these men apparently had no indication that their life was in danger.

In this study of workplace incidents of domestic violence, 88% occurred in the United States with the remainder mostly being in Canada and the UK. 79% occurred since the year 2000. While further research is needed, some surprising figures arise when the details of the case are known. Only 8% of the businesses reported to take any precautions though in 23% of the cases, there were clear pre-indications or signs such as direct warnings from the employee victim or prior threats and disturbances at the workplace committed by the abuser.

Lee states there are several implications that the study provides for businesses trying to prevent a similar tragedy at their workplace. As so many perpetrators are not trying to escape, companies cannot rely solely on the traditional security measures such as increased lighting or surveillance cameras. It is vital to "target-harden" the victim, moving their work station, job site or at the very

least, their parking space to reduce their exposure to risk. As local law enforcement should be notified and consulted for their support, requests can be made for patrols during shift change if that service is limited to only certain times. Warning signs such as repeated visits, disturbances, threats and the stated or observable fear of the victim needs be addressed with an immediate response. Once a threat has been identified, management needs to pull together their internal resources such as human resources, security, employee assistance, legal consul, etc. and also community services including domestic violence agencies, law enforcement or a security consultant to assess the risk and implement protective measures.

However, true prevention starts with a workplace violence policy that demonstrates support and protection for victim employees. Next, all employees need training on recognizing the warning signs and dynamics of domestic violence, how to refer to available services and the importance of notify a supervisor if there is a potential danger. “If an employee sees their workplace as a source of support,” states Lee, “they are more likely to disclose their predicament and the potential threat to management. This initial warning is the vital first step to any security planning.” It is unknown whether the employers knew about the risk posed to McKendall or Nkatingi. However, this type of forewarning could have prompted an intervention that may have prevented their murder. When a victim has left the abuser, the one place that they can easily be found is at the workplace. That is why is crucial for companies to be informed and prepared to prevent this spill-over threat to their businesses.

About Peace at Work

Peace at Work is non-profit based in North Carolina that is dedicated to workplace violence prevention. Providing consultancy and training services for government and the private sector, its focus is on the development of safe and healthy workplaces while providing the skills and tools to prevent violence. Along with confronting the threat of domestic violence in the workplace, issues such as hostile clients, ex-employees and robberies are also addressed to ensure the safety of all employees. John Lee, the Director, is the former Workplace Violence Specialist for the North Carolina Office of State Personnel and has a book coming out in early 2005 on Domestic Violence in the Workplace.

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