Nipping Mean Behavior Before It Starts: A Preventive Perspective

Liu-Qin Yang, Ph.D.
July 13, 2016
Overview of This Talk

• Define mean behavior or workplace mistreatment
• Scope of the problem
• Consequences of the problem
• Inhibitors of the problem
• How to manage and prevent the problem
What is Mean Behavior at Work?
Mean Behavior or Workplace Mistreatment

Different forms

• **Workplace incivility**:
  - Unfairness
  - ...

• **Workplace Aggression**:
  - Physical (e.g., pushed, shoved)
  - Nonphysical (e.g., insulted, sworn at)

1 Pearson et al., 2000
2 Yang et al., 2014
3 Neuman & Baron, 2005
Scope of Workplace Aggression

• Prevalent across all occupations & industries.
  • Most large-scale studies reported 6%-41% prevalence rate
  • In 2009: over .5 million occurrences of nonfatal violence

• Healthcare workers are particularly vulnerable to workplace aggression
  • Higher occurrence rates among nurses and in hospital settings
  • Using an Oregon-wide nurse sample, Yang & Caughlin (2012):
    • **12%**: Experienced aggression on a weekly basis
    • **5%**: Experienced aggression on a daily basis

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1 e.g., Keashly & Jagatic, 2011; Schat et al., 2006; US Dept. of Justice, 2011
2 Alterman et al., 2013; Gerberich et al., 2004; OSHA, 2015
3 e.g., Spector et al., 2014; Yang & Caughlin, 2016
Scope of Workplace Aggression (Con’t)

• What are the common sources of aggression at work?
  • Client/patient/patient’s family
  • Coworkers
  • Supervisors

• Among an Oregon-wide nurse sample, Yang & Caughlin (2012) found prevalence rates over 12 months:
  • 69%: Experienced physical aggression from patients
  • 90%: Experienced nonphysical aggression from patients
  • 12%: Experienced physical aggression from coworkers
  • 68%: Experienced nonphysical aggression from coworkers

• The prevalence rate would be even higher if we considered the underreporting issue.
“Umm I think working in the emergency room there is a lot of overt aggression from patients who are for example who are not getting the treatment that they want... a lot of time it’s with drug seeking behavior and will a lot of times assault nurses or be both verbally and physically requiring extra security or that sort of thing ... in addition, sort of less direct form of aggression is there’s just a lot of vehicle break-ins and theft in the hospital parking lot ...”
Another Quote

Please listen to this short excerpt of interview of a healthcare worker
What is reported in media...

Aggressive Behavior in the Workplace
by Ellie Williams, Demand Media

Aggressive behavior in the workplace puts employees at risk, hinders productivity and hurts the company's reputation. Even when aggression isn't blatant, it eventually erodes trust and morale and could lead to increasingly violent behavior. If employers want to prevent this, they must vigilantly monitor employee behavior and step in at the first sign of trouble.
When it comes to workplace bullying, we often focus on the hammers and not the needles.

Hammers are the obvious acts of oafish or even physically violent behavior, the situations where there’s little nuance and a person is clearly being victimized.

Needles are the small, repetitive acts that often go unnoticed, and unreported, the needling that can drive someone to dread going to work.

The shooting homicide in Virginia of two journalists on the air is a tragic reminder that workplace violence is real.

But Wednesday’s horrific crime is a rare type of event.

Often violence at work is psychological in nature.

The most common but least reported types of workplace violence are bullying, intimidation and threats.

“I doubt there’s a company with more than 10 employees that hasn’t had that,” said Joel Dvoskin, who runs the Threat Assessment Group, which offers workplace violence prevention services to Fortune 100 companies.

About 700 people a year are murdered on the job.
Consequences of Workplace Aggression

- Decreased employee health\(^1\)
  - Mental health: More anxiety, anger, depressive mood
  - Physical health: More psychosomatic symptoms, MSD symptoms

- Decreased employee productivity\(^2\)

\(^1\) e.g., Chang et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2012
\(^2\) e.g., Schat & Frone, 2011
Consequences of Workplace Aggression

- Decreased employee retention\(^1\)
- Decreased healthcare quality\(^2\)
- Annual cost of billions of dollars for US companies\(^3\)
  - Increased workers’ compensation claims\(^4\)

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\(^1\) e.g., Estryn-Behar et al., 2010
\(^2\) e.g., Lanza, 2006
\(^3\) e.g., Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005
\(^4\) e.g., Boyd, 1995
Consequences of Workplace Aggression
(Study 1: Yang et al., 2012)
Among a sample of 176 experienced hospital nurses

Fig. 1. The group classification and predicted consequences.
Consequences of Workplace Aggression
(Study 1: Yang et al., 2012)
Among a sample of 176 experienced hospital nurses

- **Findings**: exposure to physical assault is responsible for increased psychosomatic and musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) symptoms (e.g., headache, low back pain) in the recently assaulted group (G2). – stress reaction model

![Psychosomatic Symptoms graph](image)

1 Zapf et al., 1996
Consequences of Workplace Aggression
(Study 1: Yang et al., 2012)
Among a sample of 176 experienced hospital nurses

- **Findings**: reduced exposure (from assault to no-assault) contributes to lessened psychosomatic and MSD symptoms (G3). –biopsychological recovery model²

![Graph showing Low Back Pain over Time 1 and Time 2]

2 Merlin & Lundberg, 1997
Consequences of Workplace Aggression
(Study 2: Zhou, Yang, & Spector, 2015)
Among a sample of 346 newly graduated nurses

Political skills
- Astuteness
- Interpersonal influence
- Networking
- Sincerity

Aggression exposure
- Physical
- Nonphysical

Protection

Change in Employee and Organizational Outcomes
- Anger
- Job satisfaction
- Career commitment
- MSD symptoms

Time 1: Before graduation
Time 2: 6 months post graduation
Time 3: 12 months post graduation

Transactional stress model and proactive coping

1. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984
2. Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997
3. Ferris et al., 2005
Consequences of Workplace Aggression
(Study 2: Zhou, Yang, & Spector, 2015)

• **Finding:** Political skills have buffering/protection effects, such that negative consequences of exposure are lessened among more politically skilled new nurses.

**Political skills**
- Astuteness
- Interpersonal influence
- Networking
- Sincerity

**Aggression exposure**
- Physical (e.g., push)
- Nonphysical (e.g., yell)

**Protection**

**Change in Employee and Organizational Outcomes**
- Anger
- Job satisfaction
- Career commitment
- MSD symptoms

**Time 1:** Before graduation

**Time 2:** 6 months Post graduation

**Time 3:** 12 months Post graduation
Consequences of Workplace Aggression

(Study 3: Li, Wang, Yang et al., 2016)

86 team leaders and 351 team members across industries

Team/Group level

Psychological Distress
(Leader)

Team Performance
(Leader)

Abusive supervision
(Team members)

Psychological Capital
(Team members)

Protection

Individual level

Self-efficacy
Optimism
Hope
Resilience

Psychological Distress
(Team members)

Protection

Conversation of Resources Theory

¹ Hobfoll, 1989
So, workplace aggression is prevalent and consequential!

Then, what can be done to ameliorate this serious issue?
Would positive organizational climates/culture help?
Organizational Climate

*Mistreatment (inhibition) climates*: Employees’ individual or shared perceptions of organizational policies, procedures and practices focused on deterring mistreatment. Can occur at 2 levels.\(^1\)

- **Individual-level**: Unique perceptions
- **Unit-level**: Shared perceptions

Three forms (*different from safety climate*)

- Civility Climate
- **Violence Prevention Climate**
- Climate of Bullying

\(^1\)Yang et al., 2014
Violence Prevention Climate (VPC\textsuperscript{1})

- **Policies and procedures:** Are there any formal rules and regulations about preventing violence?

- **Practices and response:** How well does the management actually enforce such policies and do they respond to occurring incidents properly?

- **Work pressure against violence prevention:** How much are the prevention policies and procedures compromised to meet work demands?

\textsuperscript{1}Kessler et al., 2008
Inhibitors of Workplace Aggression

(Study 1& 4: Yang et al., 2012; Spector, Yang, Zhou, in press)
Among 176 experienced and 126 newly graduated nurses

- Building on theory and evidence on safety climate and organizational climate in general, we examine the “chicken and egg” situation.

![Diagram showing the relationship between change in violence prevention climate (VPC) and change in aggression exposure, with policies & procedures, responses & practices, pressure for unsafe practices, physical, and nonphysical aggression exposure over a 6-month timeframe.]

Time 1

Time 2

6 months
Inhibitors of Workplace Aggression
(Study 1& 4: Yang et al., 2012; Spector, Yang, Zhou, in press)

- **Finding**: violence prevention climate can be an organizational resource that curtails aggression, and fortunately exposure to aggression does not worsen climate.
So, positive organizational climate/culture seems to help.

Then, what management practices can foster such positive organizational climate?
Why Focus on Management Practices?

• Aligned with the context model and organizational learning theory, management practices should and have been shown to shape organizational climate.¹

• *Negative* leadership in general are consistently linked to employees’ exposure to workplace mistreatment,² yet positive leadership is understudied in this context.

• Supervisor and manager training can improve safety performance and employees’ health, retention, and productivity.³

¹Argyris & Schön, 1996; Johns, 2006; Zohar & Luria, 2004
²for a review, see Barling et al., 2009
³Hammer et al., 2011; Sivanathan et al., 2005; Zohar & Luria, 2004
What Management Practices to Focus on?

- **Aggression-Preventive Supervisor Behavior**: specific behaviors that line supervisors demonstrate to directly or indirectly help their employees to prevent exposure to aggression\(^1\)
  - **Declarative practices**
    - Describe policies available in the organization for preventing coworker- or patient-initiated aggression incidents
  - **Active practices**
    - Encourage employees to update him/her regarding signs of potential coworker- or patient-initiated aggression
  - **Proactive practices**
    - Employees who get along are assigned to work together.
    - Employees are assigned to work with patients whom they get along with.

\(^1\) Yang & Caughlin, 2016
Aggression-Preventive Supervisor Behavior (APSB)

Context-specific behavior

APSB-Coworker

Declarative
Active
Proactive

APSB-Patient

Declarative
Active
Proactive

1 See the full scale in appendix

2 Full scale available from the presenter
Inhibitors of Workplace Aggression
(Study 5: Yang & Caughlin, 2016)
Interview and survey methods;
20 healthcare workers and 574 experienced nurses (2 samples)

Unit/Group level

**Aggression Preventive Supervisor Behavior (APSB)**
- Unit-level average

**Violence Prevention Climate**
- Unit-level climate

Individual level

**Aggression Preventive Supervisor Behavior (APSB)**
- Individual occurrences

**Violence Prevention Climate**
- Psychological climate

**Employee and Organizational Outcomes**
- Aggression exposure
- Aggression prev. motivation
- Aggression prev. performance
- Job attitudes
- Strains (physical and emotional)
Inhibitors of Workplace Aggression

(Study 5: Yang & Caughlin, 2016)

- We developed/validated a 9-item assessment scale of APSB.
- APSB predicts outcomes through shaping positive climate.

**Unit/Group level**

**Aggression Preventive Supervisor Behavior (APSB)**
Unit-level average

**Violence Prevention Climate**
Unit-level climate

\[ \text{APSB} \rightarrow \text{Violence Prevention Climate} \]

\[ r = 0.34^{**} \]

**Individual level**

**Aggression Preventive Supervisor Behavior (APSB)**
Individual occurrences

**Violence Prevention Climate**
Psychological climate

\[ \text{APSB} \rightarrow \text{Violence Prevention Climate} \]

\[ r = 0.28^{**}, 0.51^{**} \]

**Employee and Organizational Outcomes**

- Aggression exposure
- Aggression prev. motivation
- Aggression prev. performance
- Job attitudes
  - emotional and physical strains

\[ \text{Violence Prevention Climate} \rightarrow \text{Employee and Organizational Outcomes} \]

\[ r = 0.16^{**}, 0.61^{**} \]

*Values indicate solely magnitude of relationships*
Additional Benefits of APSB
(Study 5 & ongoing research)

Aggression Preventive Supervisor Behavior (APSB)
- Individual occurrences
- Unit-level consistency

Peer network

Employee and Organizational Outcomes
- Aggression prev. performance
- Psychological safety

Social learning process
Are there any possible interventions?
Aggression Prevention:
Intervention for Better Resource Building

- Doing more with less: Employees are often under-resourced.
  - Healthcare workers and their supervisors are amongst the least resourced\(^1\).
- Yragui, Yang, Hammer, Olson, McCurry & Wipfli (in progress): An integrated intervention to reduce/prevent nurses’ exposure to patient and coworker aggression and work-nonwork conflict, through building their resources
  - Train supervisors’ APSB to build workers’ resources.
  - Facilitate supervisors’ peer groups to build their resources

\(^1\)OSHA, 2015
Overall Summary

- Workplace aggression, an intense form of mistreatment, is **prevalent**, affecting worker well-being, retention and productivity, and costing the organization and society **tremendously**.

- Recent evidence indicates workers’ political skills, positive organizational climate, and preventive supervisor practices as **promising inhibitors of workplaces aggression** and its consequences.

- Such evidence guides future efforts for interventions aimed at **promoting positive work environment and total worker health**.
Collaborators, Co-authors, and Funders

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- NIOSH/ERC
Thank You

Questions?

Liu-Qin Yang (lyang@pdx.edu)
Appendix: APSB-coworker scale (Yang & Caughlin, 2016)

My direct supervisor...
1. Describes policies available in the organization for preventing aggression incidents between employees
2. Makes sure I am aware of the available organizational resources for preventing aggression between employees
3. Communicates the consequences of failing to follow organizational processes for preventing aggression between employees
4. Encourages me to update him/her regarding signs of potential coworker-initiated aggression
5. Steps in to resolve disputes between me and my coworkers before they escalate
6. Gives me advice for effectively working with specific aggressive coworkers
7. Assigns me to work with coworkers whom I get along with
8. Moves me and my coworkers around different shifts to ensure that people in the same shift work well together
9. Reduces the chances of direct interaction between me and another coworker who have a history of interpersonal conflict.
References


References (Con’t)


References (Con’t)


References (Additional)


Supplemental Slides
Consequences of Workplace Aggression

(Study 5: Li, Wang, Yang et al., 2016)
86 team leaders and 351 team members

- Psychological Distress (Leader)
  - Team Performance (Leader)
  - Abusive supervision (Team members)
- Psychological Capital (Team members)
- Psychological Distress (Team members)

Protection
Meta-Analytic Results for the Relations between Overall Mistreatment Climate and Presumed Outcomes (Yang et al., 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presumed Outcomes</th>
<th>$k$</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean $r$</th>
<th>$\rho$</th>
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Meta-Analytic Results for the Relations between Different Types of Mistreatment Climate and Presumed Outcomes (Yang et al., under review)

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<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.19</td>
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Logistic regression of Time 2 violence exposure on Time 1 violence prevention climate (Yang et al., 2012)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Violence exposure (Time 2)</th>
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<td>Odds ratio</td>
<td>Lower bound (95% CI)</td>
<td>Higher bound (95% CI)</td>
<td>Wald Chi-Square</td>
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<td>Hospital ID</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence exposure (Time 1)</td>
<td>14.59</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>34.07</td>
<td>38.35**</td>
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<td>Prevention practices (Time 1)</td>
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<td>1.55</td>
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<td>Prevention policies (Time 1)</td>
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<td>0.81</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.14</td>
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<td>Pressure against prevention (Time 1)</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>6.57**</td>
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Note: CI, confidence interval. "p < 0.01.
Consequences of Workplace Aggression
(Yang et al., 2012)
Consequences of Workplace Aggression  
(Yang et al., 2012)
Aggression, Bullying, & Lateral Violence

**Aggression/Violence:** Physical or nonphysical behaviors that intentionally harm; from supervisors, coworkers, patients/customers, or patients’/customers’ family (Baron, 1977; Yang, 2009)

**Bullying:** Harassing, offending, or social exclusion behaviors that occur repeatedly, regularly (e.g., weekly), and over a period of time (e.g., 6 months) (Einarsen et al., 2003); could be from any of the above 4 sources; <ongoing debate regarding “intent” & strict “criteria”>

**Lateral Violence:** Bullying among nurses and other members of the health care team; one facet of aggression/violence or bullying or ...