



## Violence Prevention is Better than Cure!

WRITTEN BY DYLAN DOWNES,  
LABOUR MANAGEMENT ADVISOR

The adoption of a ground-breaking global treaty on June 21, 2019 by the International Labour Organization (ILO) will improve protections for workers facing violence and harassment. The new ILO convention and recommendation affirms the right to freedom from violence and harassment in the workplace. It also provides for an integrated, inclusive, and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.

The convention defines violence and harassment as a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment. As we welcome 2020, one of the major concerns on the minds of many, is the upsurge in violent crimes,

specifically the recent spate of gun related crimes which has been the main cause of the unprecedented murder rate for Barbados which stood at an alarming forty-nine (49) deaths for the year 2019.

Additionally, we seem to be faced with a more aggressive society which when coupled with the harsh economic realities faced by Barbadians could lead to increased work place violence as well as the threat of increased robberies. While it has been reported by police that major crime overall has declined from 2018, the level of violence in society is still of significant concern as it affects persons from all walks of life in our society and in extension our tourism product. With this said, employers and business owners alike must ensure that they are equipped to deal with the eventuality and possible increases of violence in the workplace.

### Signs of Aggressive Behavior

While at work you may have seen a colleague or employee showing signs of anger or frustration at the slightest hint of discomfort. In some cases, it does not take long for a violent act to follow. Whether vocal or physical, aggressive behaviour is an indication that all is not well, and this should be

taken seriously. Aggressive behaviour in the workplace puts employees at risk, hinders productivity and hurts the company's reputation. Even when aggression is not blatant, it eventually erodes trust and morale and could lead to increasingly violent behaviour. Therefore, as employers you must vigilantly monitor employee behaviour and step in at the first sign of trouble. Workplace aggression comes in several forms, with some more obvious than others. While many people view aggression to be examples of overt violence such as provoking a physical altercation, aggression can also manifest in more subtle yet equally destructive ways. In other instances, employees may use verbal abuse to demean and intimidate. For example, they might call another employee an embarrassing nickname or belittle them in front of others. If not addressed promptly, even less obvious forms of aggression can spiral into violence and in some cases could result in life threatening situations.

#### **How can workplace violence be reduced?**

In most workplaces where violent acts can be identified, the risk can be prevented or minimized if employers take appropriate precautions. Such precautions may include providing adequate lighting and security in the form of guards and cameras to monitor the operations of the business. Additionally, in the event of a robbery, employees should be well informed and trained in how to respond and the various steps they need to take in order to report the incident. Also, each person should know the emergency contact numbers in the event they need to contact police or ambulance personnel and these numbers should be posted in full view as many persons tend to panic and have a flight or fight response forgetting pertinent information.

Another preventative measure an employer can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should cover all workers, patients, clients, visitors, contractors, and anyone else who may come in contact with company personnel.

The BEC believes that a comprehensive and implemented workplace violence prevention program, combined with engineering controls, administrative controls and training can reduce the incidence of workplace violence in the workplace.

This can be a separate workplace violence prevention program or can be incorporated into a safety and health program, employee handbook, or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all workers know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. In addition, BEC encourages employers to join us on Wednesday February 5, 2020 for our Violence in the Workplace Seminar, where the featured speaker will be the Hon. Colin E. Jordan, Minister Of Labour and Social Partnership Relations, as well as expert advice from the Tripartite and Judiciary bodies on preventative measures, possible responses and the efficient management of any form of violence which may occur within organizations. Violence at any level has a traumatic effect on persons. As such, being proactive in knowing the signs of a situation with the potential to become violent in the workplace is extremely crucial to protect employees and keep them safe, motivated and ready to work.

**"It is critical to ensure that all workers know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly."**