

Workplace Violence in Long Haul Trucking

Occupational Health Nursing Update

by Debra Gay Anderson, RNC, PhD

Workplace violence is an issue with dual significance for nurses. Nurses may not only provide health care for individuals who have become victims of workplace violence, but may experience violence themselves at the hands of a client, family member, or other health care provider. Thus, it is important for nurses to understand the magnitude and causes of workplace violence.

Approximately 20 workers are murdered each week in the United States, while an estimated 18,000 workers are victims of non-fatal assault (U.S. Department of Labor [DOL] Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 1995). Almost 2 million workdays and millions of dollars are lost annually because of non-fatal assaults suffered at the workplace (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994). Homicide is the leading cause of death among U.S. women in the workplace and, depending on the geographic area, the first, second, or third leading cause of death among all workers (Simonowitz, 1997). Domestic violence often carries over into the workplace as well. Seventeen percent of workplace homicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner (U.S. DOL BLS, 1995). These statistics are reflective of the U.S. work force as a whole. However, a clearer understanding of the prevalence of workplace violence in specific professions along with both profession specific and gender specific risk factors is necessary to facilitate the development of comprehensive and effective approaches to address this significant, multifaceted issue.

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The U.S. truck driving industry employs 9.9 million Americans. A significant subset (3.16 million) of these workers consists of long haul truck drivers. The BLS rates truck driving as the third largest growth occupation (tied with RNs). It has a projected growth of 561,000 jobs from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. DOL BLS, 2001a). Only teachers and computer software engineers are estimated to be growing more quickly in numbers than truck drivers. This growth is affecting not only the number of long haul drivers, but also the gender make up of the driver work force.

The number of women truckers has increased from an estimated 513 drivers in 1970 (Lembright, 1982) to between 174,000 and 290,000 (6% to 10%) in the 1990s (Renner, 1998). The overall size of this sector of the economy, and projections for its growth, coupled with the non-traditional aspects of long haul truckers' workplace environments and employment arrangements, underscores the importance of assessing this population in terms of workplace violence and the specific risk factors associated with long haul truck driving. This review of the literature is relevant to:

- Workplace violence in general, including statistics related to the impact of violence in the workplace and the four types of workplace violence identified by the Iowa Conference on workplace violence (Loveless, 2001).
- The effects of domestic violence on the workplace.
- Issues specific to U.S. long haul trucking.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

The overall extent and economic impact of violence in the American workplace are well documented. One sixth of all murders in the United States are committed at the

worksite (U.S. DOL BLS, 1995). Approximately 1 million workers are assaulted each year, comprising 15% of all violent acts to U.S. residents age 12 and older (NIOSH, 1996). The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a national household based survey conducted annually, including more than 100,000 individuals ages 12 or older, indicated that approximately 500,000 workers lose 1.75 million workdays annually and more than \$55 million in wages, not including annual leave and sick days, because of acts of workplace violence (Bachman, 1995).

Violence in the workplace has gained increased attention as the awareness of its impact on workers and the workplace has grown. Workplace violence occurs on a continuum (Wilkinson, 2001). It is defined as “violent acts, including physical assaults and threats of assault, directed toward individuals at work or on duty” (NIOSH, 1996). Physical assault may range from slapping and hitting to the use of weapons, and usually results in injury or death (Warshaw, 1996). Threats precede most episodes of physical assault (Wilkinson, 2001).

Harassment

Threats are not necessarily confined to the scope of overt physical actions. They may be manifested in the form of harassment. Harassment is the creation of a hostile environment through unwelcome words, actions, and physical contacts that do not result in physical harm (Warshaw, 1996). Harassment may be expressed as racial, ethnic, or sexual prejudice, or may include an unreasonable number of unpleasant or dangerous assignments. Harassment, although not as obvious as physical assault, is experienced by both men and women and can negatively affect a worker’s sense of self and effectiveness as an employee (Keashly, 1994, 1998). Because of its subtle nature, harassment is difficult to assess. However, Baron (1996) found among full time employees ($N = 178$), verbal and passive forms of aggression were more frequent than physical or active forms of aggression.

Types of Violence

The University of Iowa’s Injury Prevention Research Center discussed four unique types of violence in their report to the nation on workplace violence (Loveless, 2001). The four types include:

- Criminal Intent (Type I).
- Customer or Client (Type II).
- Worker on Worker (Type III).
- Personal Relationship (Type IV).

These four types are described below with a brief discussion of how each type may be manifested in the profession of long haul trucking.

Criminal Intent. Criminal Intent (Type I) violence occurs when, “The perpetrator has no legitimate relationship to the business or its employees, and is usually committing a crime in conjunction with the violence. These crimes can include robbery, shoplifting, and trespassing” (Loveless, 2001). Approximately 85% of workplace homicides are in this category. Because truckers are often in unfamiliar cities and byways, they are at risk for violence perpetrated by strangers.

Customer or Client. Customer or Client (Type II) violence occurs when, “The perpetrator has a legitimate relationship with the business and becomes violent while being served by the business” (Loveless, 2001). Included in this group of customers are students, patients, clients, inmates, and other customers to whom services are provided. Approximately 6% of workplace violence is customer or client related. Truckers may be at risk for this type of violence during pickup or delivery of goods in warehouses that do not provide adequate safety measures.

Worker on Worker. Worker on Worker (Type III) violence occurs when, “The perpetrator is an employee or past employee of the business who attacks or threatens another employee(s) or past employee(s) in the workplace” (Loveless, 2001). Approximately 7% of workplace homicides are in this category. For truckers who drive with partners, worker on worker violence may, in some cases, overlap with Type IV—personal relationship violence.

Personal Relationship. Personal Relationship (Type IV) violence occurs when, “The perpetrator does not have a relationship with the business but has a personal relationship with the intended victim” (Loveless, 2001). Approximately 2% of all workplace violence falls into this category. However, it is significantly higher for women than for men. This category is particularly appropriate for truckers who drive with an intimate partner. In instances where this intimate partner is also a driver, this type of violence is also classified as Type III.

Gender Differences

Researchers have assessed gender differences related to workplace violence. Men are at greater risk for physical abuse in the workplace, whereas women are more likely to be targets of sexual harassment, rape, and stalking (Leiter, 2001). In a survey of 270 participants who had been victims of coworker violence (women, $n = 86$; men, $n = 184$), Tjaden (2001) reported that 27% of women were raped, 34% were physically assaulted, 40% were stalked, and 8% were threatened. In contrast, 4% of men were raped, 79% were physically assaulted, 7% were stalked, and 16% were threatened.

Women are more likely to be attacked by an intimate partner at work than men (Craven, 1997; U.S. Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, 1996). Women are also more likely to die as a result of homicide at the workplace (39%) than men (15%) (Toscano, 1996). Although more men are murdered and physically assaulted at work than women, homicide is the number one cause of death of women at the workplace. Women are less likely than men to be perpetrators of violence (McFarlane, 2000; Tjaden, 2000, 2001). Tjaden (2000, 2001) found that when the victim was a woman, 78% of perpetrators were men. When the victim was a man, 97% of perpetrators were men. Twenty six percent of female victims lost time from work compared to 8% of male victims. Twenty seven percent of female victims reported the violence to the police compared to 16% of male victims. In light of the differences discussed, it is important to develop gender appropriate interventions. Demonstration projects would be useful for the development of programs.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AT THE WORKPLACE

Husbands and boyfriends are responsible for 13,000 acts of workplace violence against women each year. Women are often the victims of harassment and stalking, and 17% of the female workplace homicides are committed by former or current intimate partners (U.S. DOL, Women's Bureau, 1996). Three in four women experiencing domestic violence are harassed at their workplace. These crimes are experienced almost exclusively by women and are not generally included in abuse statistics (McFarlane, 2000). McFarlane (2000) interviewed 90 women seeking a restraining order against an intimate partner. Eighty seven percent of the women had been employed, and 89% of those women experienced harassment from an intimate partner at the worksite. Lost productivity and reduced work performance were often consequences of this harassment.

The majority of the women surveyed (McFarlane, 2000) had been bothered by the abuser in person at the worksite, had been bothered over the telephone at work, had arrived late or left early because of the abuse, had missed work because of the abuse, and had been discouraged by the abuser from working. Almost half had received a reprimand at work related to the abuse and had been prevented from working by the abuser. Women's employment is jeopardized when they are targets of domestic violence. Twenty one percent of the women interviewed reported losing a job because of the abuse (McFarlane, 2000).

Between 24% and 52% of abused women believe they lost their jobs as a result of abuse (Bachman, 1995). In one of the first studies on the effects of domestic violence on the workplace, Friedman (1987) found that 56% ($n = 50$) of the women interviewed reported losing a job because of domestic violence and 54% reported missing an average of 3 days of work each month.

The effects of domestic violence are not confined to the individual victims. Domestic violence has a significant economic impact on the workplace. Employment difficulties include (Lloyd, 1997; Shepard, 1988; Younger, 1994):

- Absences.
- Tardiness.
- Decreased productivity.
- Turnover
- Resultant unemployment.

American employees miss 175,000 workdays annually because of domestic violence, and the cost is estimated at \$3 billion to \$5 billion annually (NIOSH, 1999).

The growing number of women in the trucking industry, are working as both solo and team drivers. Trucking companies often recruit husband and wife driving teams, thus the majority of female truckers drive with a partner (66%). Most often this partner is the woman's intimate partner as well as her co-driver (Bernard, 2000). Because the percentage of couples that team drive is increasing, it is important to assess relationship conflict and violence experienced by both partners and to assess the impact conflict and violence have on the productivity and safety of the team.

The role of domestic violence in the number of injuries and illnesses in the trucking industry is not yet known. Data from the NCVS suggest that a substantial proportion (63%) of the workplace victimization crimes for employees in the transportation field were not reported to the police (Bachman, 1995). In general, rapes or sexual assaults and simple assaults tended to be severely underreported in the study population. The need for additional research to assess this population in terms of workplace violence and other specific risk factors associated with women in long haul truck driving is readily apparent.

U.S. LONG HAUL TRUCK DRIVERS

Worksites differ and as such, so do the types of workplace violence associated with them. As a result, different prevention and intervention strategies may be needed for different occupations. Researchers need to assist the various industries in identifying occupation specific risk factors that will encourage the development of appropriate interventions. Of particular interest in this review are the types of violence and risk factors inherent to long haul truck driving. Both male and female drivers are at risk for violence in a workplace environment that changes daily as a result of the nature of truck driving (Renner, 1998).

From 1992 to 1996, the number of injuries and illnesses for all occupations decreased 20% while increasing 5% in truck drivers. In 1999, truck drivers had more workplace injuries and illnesses involving time away from work than any other occupation (U.S. DOL BLS, 2001b). Heavy truck driving is one of the occupations with the highest costs related to job related injuries and illnesses (Leigh, 1997).

The NCVS uses the occupational category of transportation workers, which includes taxi drivers, bus drivers, truckers, and other transportation industry workers (Bachman, 1995). Based on data from this survey, workers in the transportation industry experienced average annual rates of aggravated assaults (3.5 per 1,000 individuals) and simple assaults (10.2 per 1,000 individuals) that ranked this industry fourth and sixth, respectively, in comparison to the other surveyed industries (Bernard, 2000). The transportation industry, in general, has the highest average annual rate of robberies in the workplace, as reported for the years 1993 to 1999 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (NIOSH, 2003). Further, in comparison to other industries, the transportation industry has the largest percentage (31.7%) of workplace victims who were victimized by the offender with a weapon.

Alcohol

Another significant factor in violence and victimization is the use of alcohol. Individuals who use alcohol excessively are more likely to be victimized than individuals who do not use alcohol. Truck drivers have been identified as 1 of the 10 occupations with significantly elevated relative odds for alcohol dependence and abuse (Mandell, 1992).

Stress

Stress at work is a growing problem for workers. Psychological stress at the workplace contributes to injuries

and illnesses for both women and men. Excessive stress contributes to undesirable consequences on both mental and physical health. Psychological disorders contribute to 1 in 10 work related diseases or injuries (Bernard, 2000). Truck drivers, both men and women, are in the 91st percentile for stress based on the Global Stress Index portion of the Symptom Checklist SCL-90 (Orris, 1997).

Stress factors for truck drivers include sleep deprivation, pressure to meet deadlines, irregular hours, long hours on the road, dangerous actions by other drivers, road rage, and insufficient exercise (Bernard, 2000). Truck drivers often average 4.78 hours of sleep per day (Milter, 1997), which is 2 hours less than what drivers indicate is sufficient for job alertness. The transience of the job keeps drivers away from their families, friends, and other support systems for long periods of time. Thus, their support networks are not easily accessible (Renner, 1998).

Few studies have investigated violence and stress related to long haul truckers. Rates of workplace violence specifically for long haul truckers are not available in the existing literature or from national surveys and agencies. One reason cited for the lack of national data is that, although the Federal Bureau of Investigation investigates hijackings, local authorities generally handle personal crimes against truckers. Therefore, these crimes not always reported to federal authorities (Strah, 1994).

Discrimination

In addition to stress factors experienced by both genders, women face additional stressors. Discrimination, limited job opportunities, balancing multiple demands of work and home, and a lack of social and professional support add to the stress of female truckers (Bernard, 2000). Stress has been identified by as many as 60% of female employees as their number one problem at the workplace (Swanson, 1997).

Women in non-traditional occupational settings, such as heavy trucking, face additional health and safety risks including sexual harassment and gender based discrimination (NIOSH, 2001). In workplaces with an equal number of men and women employees, sexual harassment is less likely to be an issue than in male dominated occupations (Leiter, 2001). Because trucking is a non-traditional occupation for women with a significant disparity between the numbers of women and men, it seems likely that sexual harassment is a larger issue in long haul trucking than previously reported.

In a study of female truckers, Reed (2003) reported that 60% of the respondents ($n = 308$) felt they were treated with less dignity and respect than men because they were women. One third of the participants were victims of harassment at least several times a week. Women drivers frequently felt unsafe at truck stops and even refrained from leaving their trucks to exercise or eat meals (Reed, 2003). Bernard (2000) supports Reed's assessment of safety issues on the job.

The majority of female drivers indicated that their employers, supervisors, and managers placed driver safety as a top priority and that the drivers perceived their company's safety stance positively. However, their

responses to questions related to training topics revealed their concern about safety issues. Fifty two percent ($n = 27$) of the female drivers requested training on self defense topics, 41% on dealing with aggressive drivers, and 33% on harassment. In addition, almost 60% responded that safer truck stops and rest areas would promote the attraction of women to the driving profession (Bernard, 2000).

Organizational leadership that condones sexual harassment and sexually demeaning comments made by coworkers contribute to the odds of a woman being physically assaulted at work (Sadler, 2001). Further study of long haul trucker characteristics and risks for workplace violence will lead to a better understanding of sexual harassment and violence in long haul trucking and also provide insights into the prevalence of these issues in other predominantly male occupations.

SUMMARY

Almost 2 million workdays and millions of dollars are lost annually because of non-fatal assaults suffered at the workplace (NIOSH, 1996). Twenty workers, on average, are murdered each week in the United States and an estimated 18,000 workers per week are victims of non-fatal assault (NIOSH, 2001).

Violence and stress are two interrelated issues that affect the work force. In-depth studies of these issues have not been conducted with long haul truckers in general, or with women in non-traditional, male dominated fields such as the long haul trucking industry. Epidemiological data related to violence and stress experienced by these under-studied populations are needed to plan effective interventions to reduce occupational risks. Studies employing both qualitative and quantitative methods are needed to articulate risk and protective factors related to violence against workers (Runyan, 2001). Occupational health nurses are qualified to participate in the development and implementation of research and intervention studies to improve worker safety related to violence at the workplace for men and women in both traditional and non-traditional occupational roles.

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IN SUMMARY

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- 2 The U.S. truck driving industry employs nearly 9 million Americans. The number of women truckers has increased from an estimated 513 drivers in 1970 to between 174,000 and 290,000 currently. The overall size of this sector of the economy and the non-traditional aspects of long haul truckers' workplace environments and employment arrangements underscore the importance of assessing this population in terms of workplace violence.
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