Population Health; Violence Prevention

Understanding Small Business Engagement in Workplace Violence Prevention Programs

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Abstract

Purpose. *Worksite wellness, safety, and violence prevention programs have low penetration among small, independent businesses. This study examined barriers and strategies influencing small business participation in workplace violence prevention programs (WVPPs).*

Approach. *A semistructured interview guide was used in 32 telephone interviews.*

Setting. *The study took place at the University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center.*

Participants. *Participating were a purposive sample of 32 representatives of small business–serving organizations (e.g., business membership organizations, regulatory agencies, and economic development organizations) selected for their experience with small businesses.*

Intervention. *This study was designed to inform improved dissemination of Crime Free Business (CFB), a WVPP for small, independent retail businesses.*

Methods. *Thematic qualitative data analysis was used to identify key barriers and strategies for promoting programs and services to small businesses.*

Results. *Three key factors that influence small business engagement emerged from the analysis: (1) small businesses' limited time and resources, (2) low salience of workplace violence, (3) influence of informal networks and source credibility. Identified strategies include designing low-cost and convenient programs, crafting effective messages, partnering with influential organizations and individuals, and conducting outreach through informal networks.*

Conclusion. *Workplace violence prevention and public health practitioners may increase small business participation in programs by reducing time and resource demands, addressing small business concerns, enlisting support from influential individuals and groups, and emphasizing business benefits of participating in the program. (Am J Health Promot 2015; 30[2]:e83–e91.)*

Key Words: Occupational Safety, CPTED, Workplace Violence, Small Business, Information Dissemination, Prevention, Social Marketing, Qualitative Research, Prevention Research. Manuscript format: research; Research purpose: descriptive; Study design: qualitative; Outcome measure: other; Setting: workplace; Health focus: social health; Strategy: built environment; Target population age: adults; Target population circumstances: education/income level

PURPOSE

Small businesses, particularly independently owned retail or service businesses with 10 or fewer employees, have been the focus of workplace violence prevention programs (WVPPs) because of their high workplace homicide rates.[1] In 2011, occupational homicides accounted for 10% of all fatal occupational injuries in the United States, of which one-third were committed by a robber.[2] In the retail sector, homicides accounted for 41% (110) of all workplace deaths (266) in that year.[2] Although businesses such as convenience stores, gas stations, and restaurants are more vulnerable to workplace homicide than other business types,[2,3] they are less likely to engage in workplace health and safety programs than their larger counterparts.[4,5] Lower participation in such programs may result in poorer health outcomes for workers.[4] In 2012, retail establishments accounted for almost 22% of all workplace homicides, and the services sector accounted for almost 16%.[6] Despite significant progress in reducing workplace deaths in recent years, workplace homicide lags behind this trend.[7] Part of the reason

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may be barriers to delivering effective solutions to the businesses that need them the most.[8]

Small businesses have been responsive to worksite safety and wellness programs delivered through environmental health inspections and insurance agencies, which suggests that these businesses are open to program dissemination by key influential organizations.[9–12] Monetary rewards, discounts, and even bonus points on health inspection scores have been used to encourage small business participation in health promotion and safety efforts.[4,13]

While the existing literature offers some strategies for engaging small business owners (SBOs),[4] there is still much to be understood about what and who may influence SBOs to participate in workplace violence prevention programs (WVPPs). Our research shows low participation and retention in such programs by SBOs when disseminated by police departments alone (unpublished data from grant, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH] grant #1R01OH009527). The aim of this article is to determine how various organizations and agencies that interface with SBOs might influence participation in a WVPP called Crime Free Business (CFB). An additional aim included identifying influential organizations that could provide CFB training and mechanisms for sustaining the program.

DESIGN

Intervention

Crime Free Business is an intervention informed by the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), a widely used model for the prevention of workplace robbery and violent crime.[1] CFB is based on a program that has been shown to effectively reduce robbery and violent crime in gas stations, liquor stores, grocery stores, bars/restaurants, and motels, the business types most at risk for workplace injury and death due to violence.[14]

One challenge that the CFB program has faced is recruiting and retaining SBO participants. To investigate this problem, three of the authors and others, supported by a grant from NIOSH, launched a study in 2011 with 70 SBOs from each of the six sites that implemented CFB to understand (1) why they participated in CFB or declined to participate, (2) what barriers deterred them from participating, (3) what would have persuaded them to participate, and (4) what formal and informal networks they belong to. The current study adds to this line of investigation by focusing on how various organizations encourage SBOs to participate in their programs and services.

Approach

A realist, postpositivist epistemological approach informed the design and methodology of this study.[15] Realism assumes that an objective truth can be inferred—but not observed directly—from observations that can be broadly generalized, but that care must be taken to account for bias and errors in interpretation.

An interview guide based on the major themes that emerged from complementary studies involving SBOs and law enforcement officials, observations from CFB implementation, and social marketing principles was developed.[16] Semistructured telephone interviews conducted with SBO-serving organization representatives were used to investigate two primary research questions:

- How do representatives of organizations that influence small businesses ("influential organizations") engage SBOs in programs and services? What barriers do they encounter?
- How do representatives of influential organizations recommend that public health practitioners or program implementers engage SBOs in WVPPs?

The ultimate goal of this investigation was to inform an improved, community-based dissemination model for CFB.

Setting

Participants were located primarily in the southeastern United States, with one participant from the Northeast and another from the Southwest, since contacts in this region were likely to be familiar with the university with which the research team is affiliated and would be willing to participate. Organizations with a local, rather than interstate or national, presence were preferentially selected for the intensity of their experience with small businesses in their own communities. Small businesses were defined as independent retail or service businesses with 10 or fewer employees. Data collection took place from April to July 2013.

Participants

"Typical case" and "snowball" purposive sampling methods were used to recruit representatives of a variety of organizations that interface with small businesses.[17] These representatives were chosen for their experience providing support and training services, security and financial products, insurance, and regulatory oversight to SBOs and these representatives' potential for disseminating a WVPP to them, determined based on the quality and quantity of contact they have with SBOs. The typical cases included people working or volunteering in a nonprofit, for-profit, or governmental organization that provides services, products, programs, or regulatory oversight to small retail and service businesses. Prospective participants were identified through Internet searches of organizations that interface with SBOs (described earlier) and were approached by telephone and/or e-mail. Recommendations of other organizations and/or individuals to contact were also obtained from participants for inclusion in the study.

Prospective participants (n = 51) were contacted a maximum of five times. Of these, 32 agreed to participate, 15 declined, and 14 could not be reached. Only one representative from each organization was interviewed. Participants were recruited until no new relevant snowballing contacts were generated, no new organization categories (e.g., business membership organization) were mentioned, and thematic saturation had been reached. In qualitative research studies, in which the sampling aim is depth and relevance of experience, sampling until no new relevant information is obtained is an appropriate strategy.[17] The resulting sample achieved representation from 11 categories of orga-

Table 1
Number of Participants in Each Organization Category

Organization Classification	Participant Count	Participant Roles
Business membership/accreditation organization	5	Membership chair, founder, director of business development, political director, communications specialist
Community association	2	Vice president, board secretary
Crime prevention/law enforcement organization	4	Executive director, crime prevention specialist, president, community resource officer
Economic development organization	4	President of initiative capital, microenterprise loan program director, president and CEO, jobs and leadership development director
Insurance company or agency	2	Insurance agent, manager of small business insurance unit
Lending institution	2	Senior vice president, branch sales manager
Licensing or regulatory agency	3	General inspections supervisor, assistant fire marshal, code consultant
Property management company	1	Tenant liaison
Security company/ association	4	Owner, marketing staff (2), vice president of education, vice president of marketing
Small business assistance organization	3	Director, volunteer mentor, ombudsman
Trade association	2	Membership director, communications staff
Total	32	

nizations that interface with small businesses (Table 1).

METHODS

Oral informed consent was obtained, and each participant was asked for permission to have his or her interview audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview guide and ranged in length from approximately 30 to 50 minutes. Participants were mailed a $50 gift card upon completion of the interview. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings, coded, and analyzed using QSR NVivo 10 for Windows (QSR International, Burlington, Massachusetts). Transcript and audio files were deidentified and retained only a participant identification number. Based on repeated reading of the transcripts, a list of emergent themes was developed, refined, and used as the basis for a preliminary codebook. The first author used an iterative process of coding transcripts, developing new codes, and recoding to develop a final codebook. Thematic ideas such as "reactivity versus proactivity" and "fear, uncertainty, doubt pitch" emerged from the data. Memos containing notes about the first author's analytic process, descriptions of emerging themes, special cases, illustrative quotes and narratives, and relationships among themes, such as between workplace violence salience and reactive stance, were used to analyze code reports. A conceptual model was created to represent ideas about causal relationships among key themes and factors emerging from the data. These analytic products facilitated integration of study findings into a cohesive narrative in which participant comments were chosen for their representativeness of cross-participant themes or special cases. Theoretical models and constructs from health behavior and social marketing were consulted during the final stages of analysis.

RESULTS

The Challenge of Engaging SBOs

At times, participants appeared to be at a loss to explain why SBOs were unresponsive to the organizations' promotion of business development programs, educational seminars, membership benefits, and crime prevention programs. One crime prevention practitioner related a story about her organization's difficulty engaging SBOs in the aftermath of a nursing home mass shooting:

> *So we made a big push after that shooting and we didn't get one business that asked to have the training. . . . And we don't even charge anything. And not one business takes us up on it.*

This participant's emphasis that "not one business" decided to participate in their program conveys a sense of perplexity that other participants echoed. Many participants indicated specific barriers and strategies for overcoming them. Three overarching thematic categories emerged: (1) limited time and resources, (2) the salience of violence and crime, and (3) informal networks and credibility (Table 2). Although most participants were not disseminating WVPPs, the barriers and strategies are applicable to workplace violence and crime prevention.

Limited Time and Resources Are Barriers to SBO Program Participation

The recurring theme that emerged across interviews was that SBOs have limited time, money, and staff to run their business. SBOs are under pressure to allocate their limited resources primarily to operating their business, and "for small businesses, time is money."

Several participants had difficulty making contact with and engaging SBOs. Many SBOs have little time to

Table 2
Key Factors and Strategies for Engaging Small Business Operators (SBOs) in Workplace Violence Prevention Programs (WVPPs), Organized by Thematic Category

Theme	Factors Involved	Strategies
Time and resources	• SBOs have limited time to participate in formal business networks	• Reach out in person at events or business site
	• SBOs respond less to certain communication channels (e.g., mail and phone)	• Build a program with business benefits and incentives
	• SBOs have greater concern about bottom line issues than safety and security	• Use persuasive messages regarding business benefits
	• SBOs have limited time to participate in WVPPs	• Make the program convenient for SBOs to attend
Salience of violence and crime	• Workplace violence and crime are not salient topics	• Use persuasive messages about violence, crime, and prevention
	• Workplace violence and crime are "icky, awkward" subjects	• Reach out to SBOs who have experienced crime
	• Workplace violence and crime may be more salient to women and SBOs who have recently moved to an urban location	• Address SBOs' other concerns
	• SBOs who have experienced crime are more attuned to workplace violence and crime	• Piggyback on other programs
	• SBOs' concerns about identity theft, fraud, etc., are more salient	• Consider advocating for making WVPPs mandatory for small business licensing
Informal networks and credibility	• SBOs are motivated to network with one another	• Ask WVPP clients to refer friends and colleagues to the program
	• Informal SBO networks spread information through word of mouth	• Build rapport with SBOs and establish a positive local presence
	• Networks of partner organizations cross-refer SBO clients	• Partner with influential organizations and individuals
	• SBOs disregard solicitations	• Offer SBOs opportunities to network within the WVPP
	• SBOs attend to messages from credible sources	

participate in formal business networks, such as Chambers of Commerce or trade associations, which offer organizations access to business operators through networking events and contact listings. Time and resource constraints also limit the communication channels that SBOs use. "Working owners", because they interface directly with customers, can be difficult to reach by telephone. According to one participant, some "mom-and-pop" businesses do not use e-mail.

When SBOs do receive program information, they may screen and ignore it because "things don't jump to the forefront of their attention unless it . . . directly impacts their ability to save time, save money, or make money." In fact, crime prevention professionals remarked that it either takes SBOs "losing money" due to robbery or becoming concerned about "liability" for them to be interested in WVPPs. Several participants described that getting SBOs to attend program-related trainings and events is difficult because "while . . . small business owners are concerned about these issues, they just feel that they sometimes just can't . . . engage in them because of the time commitment." Once involved in a WVPP, participants felt that SBOs may "cut corners" on crime prevention measures that cost money, as two security and crime prevention representatives noted, or keep obstructive vendor displays in place that provide extra income, as an inspection official observed. Organizations have therefore had to find alternative ways of meaningfully engaging SBOs in their programs.

Programs Promoted In-Person and Designed to Save SBOs Time and Money Address Resource Barriers

Four major categories of strategies for overcoming time- and resource-constraint barriers emerged from participant interviews: (1) conduct in-person outreach, (2) build a program with business benefits, (3) use persuasive messages addressing "bottom line" concerns, and (4) make the program convenient. Many participants regularly used in-person outreach strategies—trade shows, community fairs, and drop-in visits to the business—to recruit SBOs. This approach counters several barriers at once by circumventing SBO information screening; avoiding difficulties reaching SBOs by telephone, e-mail, and direct mail; and improving the odds of capturing SBOs' attention because "it's harder to blow off a person than it is a piece of paper."

To boost a WVPP's appeal, several participants recommended minimizing costs and incorporating benefits to businesses. Specific tactics include limiting participation costs, encouraging peer competition with visible signs of program participation, promoting business participation to customers, and offering financial incentives such as discounts or compensation for time. Several participants suggested insur-

ance discounts as a logical incentive, although insurance companies would need to be persuaded or mandated to offer such discounts. Persuasive messages also emerged as a way to convince SBOs to participate. A crime prevention professional found the language of financial risk, specifically "liability," compelling: ". . . [Y]ou throw that word out and say, do you understand you're liable for this? . . . [T]heir eyes get real big. . . . ." Others framed WVPP participation in terms of "saving money now and in the future" or attracting employees to a safer work environment.

Finally, because "time is money" for SBOs, many participants recommended not only offering programs outside of normal business hours and hosting events close to the place of business, but also eliminating time off-site by using Web-delivered content. Collectively, these approaches address the communication, information-screening, and program commitment barriers to engaging SBOs in programs and services.

Workplace Violence and Crime Have Low Salience Among SBOs

Time and resource constraints not only guide SBOs' attention toward "bottom line" business concerns but also away from less immediate concerns, such as workplace violence. When asked if the topic of workplace robbery or violent crime ever enters into interactions with SBOs, many participants reported that this rarely or never occurred. One small business counselor said, "It just hasn't come up at all, at least during my, maybe 150 sessions over the last three years." An explanation that several participants echoed was that "everybody is said to be reactive instead of proactive," reflecting the idea that workplace violence is "the last thing they're [SBOs] thinking about" until they become victims. The types of crime that participants reported SBOs were more concerned about were check and credit card fraud, identity theft, Internet security, and employee theft. Conversely, several participants noted that SBOs who have recently experienced workplace crime are more attentive to the topic of workplace violence and more likely to seek crime prevention programs. Certain situations may make workplace violence a more prominent topic, such as during a building code inspection when SBOs sometimes express concerns about security and robbery prevention. Although particular SBO characteristics and circumstances may enhance the salience of workplace violence, three of the four crime prevention professionals interviewed expressed some level of frustration that, overall, SBOs appear unconcerned about it most of the time.

Strategic Messaging and Piggybacking Increase the Salience of Workplace Violence and Crime

Participants offered several strategies for increasing the salience of workplace violence or capitalizing on opportune contexts to engage SBOs in WVPPs. One approach that some participants mentioned was targeting SBOs who have experienced crime, while being careful not to "add insult to injury" in approaching them immediately after the incident. Message repetition at multiple time points and from multiple sources is another method that participants recommended or reported using. The content of the messages can emphasize the potential costs of workplace robbery and violent crime ("the fear, uncertainty, and doubt pitch") using "real-life examples" of business loss. Messages can also emphasize program effectiveness and benefits. A few participants found that adding safety and crime prevention program components of most concern to SBOs, such as identity theft or fraud, can be an effective way to interest SBOs in their programs. Other times simply listening to and acknowledging the SBOs' concerns can "open the door to provide . . . training that otherwise they wouldn't ask for."

Two participants recommended "piggybacking" a WVPP onto another program that targets SBO concerns or "has something that they [SBOs] absolutely have to have," such as a training session on a mandatory licensing requirement. Low salience of workplace robbery and violent crime can be a barrier to recruiting SBOs to WVPPs; however, organizations can use strategic messaging and incorporation of other topics of concern to SBOs to raise interest.

Informal Networks and Credibility Enhancement Are Important Avenues for SBO Information Dissemination

SBO time and resource constraints sometimes limit the ways organizations can disseminate program information and influential messages about workplace violence. Representatives of diverse organizations indicated that many SBOs exchange and receive information through informal networks. Two participants, who are owners of small businesses that serve other small businesses, actively seek opportunities to discuss business-related issues with their peers. SBOs use these informal networks to "ask around" about programs and services to help their business. Others alluded to the power of informal networks to facilitate "word-of-mouth" promotion of programs, often through client endorsement or reputation.

Once a SBO has made contact with a small business assistance organization, the possibilities for information dissemination expand. For over one-third of all participants, an informal system of "cross-referring" business-assistance organizations—including small business counseling, education, and economic development organizations—was a major source of clients. These networks emerged as important communication channels for resource-constrained SBOs and the organizations aimed at engaging them.

Credibility, familiarity, authority, and rapport came out of interviews as interconnected elements of an organization's ability to influence SBOs. The credibility and familiarity of communication sources emerged as a major facilitative factor for engaging SBOs. According to two participants, SBOs reject communications they perceive as solicitations. SBOs may believe a message coming from an unfamiliar source is "trying to sell me something in the long term." Sources with "authority," such as law enforcement, may be better able "to tap into that instinctive reservoir of respect." A history of positive interaction ("rapport") can also increase an organization's ability to influence SBOs to participate in a WVPP. To boost their credibility and use informal networks to promote their programs, participants developed four main strategies that might be

transferable to promoting WVPPs: (1) encourage client referrals, (2) build the organization's influence in the SBO community, (3) cultivate organizational partnerships, and (4) offer networking opportunities to SBOs. Instead of relying on passive word-of-mouth information diffusion, a few participants recommended asking current members or clients "to reach out on your behalf."

To enhance an organization's influence, some participants recommended developing personal relationships through regular contact. One insurance professional developed rapport with a neighboring restaurant owner by providing translation services for the owner, who had limited English ability. Through this pro bono service, the insurance agent garnered the restaurant owner's trust. The owner eventually contacted the agent to get insurance-related advice: "[T]hey just had a loss where they were broken into, and they came to us first because they knew they had somebody that they could talk [to] and understand what was going on." Building the organization's reputation by "establishing a track record" of serving the small business community is another recommended strategy, as is partnering with influential organizations and individuals. Partners tended to be both familiar to SBOs and actively involved in their local communities. Several participants conveyed that local law enforcement and Chambers of Commerce are "very powerful entities" that have "a pulse" on the SBOs in their communities. Other participants emphasized the importance of partnering with other business owners because "they have credibility among their peers" and "businesses tend to listen to other businesses they deem successful." One small business assistance organization leader established cross-referral networks by repeatedly referring SBO clients to other organizations.

Several participants observed that SBOs value opportunities to connect with other SBOs, suggesting that establishing business roundtable groups or mentoring programs could motivate SBOs to participate in programs. By generating client referrals, establishing credibility, partnering with peer organizations, and building networking opportunities into programs, many participants have been able to harness the power of informal SBO and organization networks for promoting their programs.

DISCUSSION

Interconnections Among Barriers and the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The current study found that most of the barriers to engaging SBOs in programs and services stem from SBOs' limited time and resources. These barriers are similar to those found in other studies. Qualitative data gathered from SBOs and implementers of workplace health promotion programs have indicated that SBOs are reluctant to adopt programs that require a significant time commitment or do not produce immediate business gains, such as increased worker productivity or reduced health care costs.[12,18,19] For SBOs who participated in a WVPP, researchers noted that they preferentially made lower-cost changes to the store environment, supporting the notion that SBOs are sensitive to cost due to time and resource constraints.[20] Some workplace health promotion researchers have postulated that small businesses have low participation in occupational wellness and safety programs because they must prioritize "business survival" over employee health promotion.[4] The current study lends support to this claim and further identifies SBO time and resource constraints as root causes of many other barriers to SBO engagement.

Conversely, Peek-Asa and Casteel[8] found that SBOs do, in fact, spend money and resources on workplace violence and crime prevention. For instance, previous studies have found that more than 70% of SBOs had surveillance cameras, which may be costlier than evidence-based, more effective changes such as cash control policies. These findings contradict the perceptions of participants in the current study and suggest that a lack of information about effective methods, not necessarily a lack of resources, prevents many SBOs from using successful workplace violence prevention strategies.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers a theoretical explanation for the links between limited time and resources and the other barriers identified in the current study. The ELM is a model of attitude change in which persuasive messages are processed through a central (elaborated thinking) route or a peripheral (heuristic) route.[21] According to the ELM, time constraints often cause people to rely on heuristics—or mental shortcuts—instead of careful thought and analysis in responding to a persuasive message.[21] SBOs who have limited time may be more likely to use such mental shortcuts to decide how to respond to messages promoting a WVPP. In time-limited circumstances, messages with clear implications for a person's "material outcomes" become more salient than other kinds of messages.[21] For SBOs, this heuristic may manifest as a focus on bottom line business concerns and low workplace violence and crime salience.

Another potential factor contributing to the low salience of workplace violence and crime is the relatively low incidence of serious events such as workplace homicide, even in the high-risk retail sector, which saw 110 events in 2011.[2] Robbery events, however, are much more common. In 2011, 7.5% of all robberies (approximately 26,580 of 354,396 that year) occurred in convenience stores and gas or service stations, of which there were 149,220 as of 2012.[22,23] Thus, although fatal workplace violence events are relatively rare, the high incidence of robbery in small retail and service businesses does not help to explain the issue of low salience in this population.

The ELM also asserts that, under time- and resource-constrained circumstances, cues indicating a source's expertise and trustworthiness can shape a person's response to persuasive messages.[21] Expertise and trustworthiness both relate to credibility, which in the current study was a major factor determining whether organizations could persuade SBOs to participate in programs. The literature on entrepreneurial networks lends support to this idea. SBOs develop and use networks of friends, family, fellow entrepreneurs, and even SBO-serving organization and agency staff to obtain business

information and resources.[24,25] Some researchers have suggested that SBOs rely heavily on trust in developing and utilizing their network connections.[26] The current study adds to this research by identifying specific ways that rapport and familiarity contribute to SBOs' trust in organizations and their staff. Furthermore, it elaborates on the kinds of informal networks SBOs rely on for information and support, as well as the role of organizations' networks in information dissemination.

Social Marketing Implications for Engaging SBOs in WVPPs

Many of the strategies identified for engaging SBOs in WVPPs can be translated to a social marketing framework. Social marketing involves the application of commercial marketing methods to the design and implementation of campaigns for increasing personal and societal welfare.[16] The principles of social marketing emphasize strategies to influence behaviors, such as an SBO signing up to participate in a WVPP and making recommended environmental changes.[16] To encourage behavior change, social marketing principles characterize programs and promotion strategies according to the four P's: product, price, place, and promotion.[16]

Product. The social marketing concept of *product* encompasses the benefits that a program confers to the person(s) adopting it.[16] In the case of WVPPs, the signature benefit mentioned in participant interviews and confirmed by research is a reduced risk of robbery and workplace violence.[27] To augment the benefits of a WVPP further, WVPP coordinators may incorporate content on topics that concern or interest retail SBOs, such as check deception, shoplifting, and employee theft.[28] Another potential benefit of a WVPP product is to satisfy a requirement to open or operate a small business. The current study revealed conflicting opinions on legislatively mandating that small businesses participate in and comply with WVPPs. Legislative mandates for businesses to participate in occupational health programs may generate high compliance among large businesses, but small- and medium-sized businesses may nonetheless be less likely to comply.[29] To overcome barriers to compliance in smaller businesses, complementary training and support may be necessary.[29]

Price. The *price* of a social marketing object includes any barriers consumers might encounter in program participation.[29] In the current study, several participants mentioned the cost of implementing WVPP-recommended changes to the store environment as a potential barrier to participation and compliance. Offering incentives, such as insurance discounts or compensation for employee time, was one strategy identified in this study. Reports on public health interventions involving small businesses have recommended providing funding for equipment and regulatory licensing assistance as program incentives.[9,30,31]

Place. *Place* can be interpreted broadly as the environment in which a consumer receives promotional information about the product, decides to adopt it, and participates in the program. Applied to WVPPs, place can refer to the point at which a SBO hears about the program and the environment in which training and program events occur. As revealed in the current study, the route by which a WVPP is promoted to SBOs is important. Several participants recommended promoting WVPPs in person to SBOs, either directly or indirectly via referrals, endorsements, and informal SBO networks. This approach has been recommended in other reports on SBO-interfacing health promotion programs.[30,32]

The credibility and familiarity of the message sender is a key factor in the persuasive power of the message. Other occupational safety and wellness program studies have indicated that partnerships with credible, local organizations, such as workers' compensation insurers, may influence SBOs to participate.[4,12]

Promotion. Social marketing *promotion* refers to the strategies and theoretical models used to craft messages about product, price, and place.[16] The Health Belief Model (HBM) provides a useful framework for approaching WVPP promotional messaging, the primary aims of which are to increase SBOs' perceived threat of workplace violence, increase perceived program benefits, and decrease perceived program barriers.[33]

Perceived threat has two components under the HBM: perceived severity and perceived risk.[33] The current study identified a "fear, uncertainty, doubt pitch" strategy for promoting WVPPs. Participants recommended talking with SBOs about their potential liability and monetary losses from robbery and violent crime (perceived severity). They also recommended giving examples of similar businesses that have experienced workplace violence, conveying that such incidents can happen to them (perceived risk). Similar methods emphasizing the magnitude of a hazard have been employed to promote other occupational safety programs.[34] As the current study and others have suggested, SBOs that have already experienced the effects of the targeted hazard may be more receptive to program messages—and more likely to take preventive action—than those who have not.[12,28] The HBM also asserts that increasing the perceived benefits of and reducing perceived barriers to engaging in a behavior—participating in a WVPP—will increase the likelihood of that behavior occurring.[33] Program coordinators can increase perceived benefits by promoting the WVPP product, including its effectiveness in reducing the risk of workplace violence. A study of worksite wellness program promotion found that employers prioritized wellness programs that they perceived were effective in improving employee health.[35] Messages emphasizing the low cost and convenience of a WVPP can potentially reduce the perceived barriers to participating.

Another component of "promotion" for WVPPs is message repetition at multiple time points and from multiple sources. SBOs may be more responsive to repeated messages because, according to the ELM, repeated exposure can generate more positive attitudes toward the object being promoted ("mere exposure" effect).[21] Combining message repetition with in-person dissemination methods and influential sources can potentially result in more effective program promotion.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. The purposive sampling method generated a deliberately diverse sample of organization representatives, including many from SBO-interfacing organizations that do not engage in WVPPs. This heterogeneity produced breadth in the findings for engaging SBOs in a variety of programs and services, but may have limited the depth of information specific to WVPPs. The findings of the study may not be transferable to regions outside of the southeastern United States or to organizations that interface primarily with larger corporate or professional businesses. Additionally, questions about WVPP promotion strategies asked non-WVPP-affiliated participants to respond hypothetically, potentially impacting the validity of their responses. Finally, because most participants were representatives of organizations and not SBOs, inferences about SBOs' motivations and decision-making processes reflect the views of individuals who market programs to or regulate small businesses.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses a gap in the research on workplace violence prevention by identifying barriers and strategies for persuading small businesses to participate in workplace violence programs. It also applies a social marketing framework to WVPP promotion and suggests strategies for improving dissemination. In accordance with reports from other small business–oriented public health programs, the current study finds that time and resource constraints make it difficult for SBOs to participate in programs that do not provide an immediate, tangible business benefit. This study further connects other barriers, such as communication barriers and the low salience of health and safety issues, to SBO time and resource constraints and offers strategies to counter these challenges through program design and promotion.

The current study suggests that WVPPs—and potentially other health promotion programs—may achieve greater success in recruiting and enlisting the support of small business operators by reducing the time, money, and staffing costs of participating. By identifying and addressing the prioritized needs of SBOs, partnering with organizations that are influential in the small business community, crafting effective messages, and disseminating those messages through SBO networks, program coordinators may be able to expand the reach and impact of their interventions. These recommendations can inform not only workplace violence prevention efforts but also other occupational health and environmental change programs that rely on the participation and partnership of the small business community.

SO WHAT? Implications for Health Promotion Practitioners and Researchers

What is already known on this topic?

Robberies among small businesses are commonplace, but in rare events they lead to employee or customer injury or even death. Most large companies have implemented workplace violence programs, but small businesses are less likely to engage in such programs.

What does this article add?

This study identifies previously unknown barriers to engaging small businesses in workplace violence prevention programs stemming from time and resource constraints. The findings suggest new strategies for increasing small business participation in workplace violence prevention programs, including reducing program participation costs to small businesses and conducting outreach through networks of influential organizations and individuals.

What are the implications for health promotion practice or research?

The barriers and strategies identified in this study for engaging small businesses in workplace violence prevention can inform the development and promotion of a wide range of programs, from worksite wellness programs to initiatives to improve the health environment, that depend on the small business community to help improve the public's health.

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