Prevention of Workplace Violence

DIY Kit
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Foreword

One of the missions of the Occupational Safety and Health Council is promoting safety and health in the Hong Kong workplace. The Council maintains close collaboration and has developed constructive partnerships with various government departments, companies, service organizations, and educational groups. It provides quality service to ensure both employers and employees can work in a safe and healthy environment.

Workplace violence has increasingly aroused public concerns overseas. In 2006, the Council invited the Quality Evaluation Centre of City University of Hong Kong to conduct a research on the subject and to develop a workplace violence management and coping programme that can be used by different industries in Hong Kong. The Council aims at enhancing the capacity of companies and organizations in tackling workplace violence and promoting a harmonious working environment. Employees can therefore work in a safe, violence-free environment.

The research project was undertaken in three phases. The first phase was a large scale survey of over 1,200 companies, government and non-government organizations with a view to explore the trends and situations of workplace violence in Hong Kong. The second phase was developing a workplace violence management and coping programme. In the third and final phase, the programme was tried out and validated in twenty large, medium and small enterprises and organizations.

After an in-depth exploration of the unique features of different industries and based on overseas experience and local characteristics, the research team has tailor-made a workplace violence management and coping programme that can be used by enterprises and organizations in Hong Kong. Based on the research findings, the Occupational Safety and Health Council has designed this DIY Kit. The DIY Kit is presented in a user-friendly manner, which helps readers understand the definition, risk factors, categories and consequences of workplace violence. Preventive measures and suggested strategies for handling workplace violence are also highlighted. This can help employees work with peace of mind whilst their productivity can also be enhanced.

The Council would like to thank Professor Lo Tit Wing, the Principal Investigator of the project and his team members, Adelaide Hung, Jessica Li, Sherrien Sze, Henry Ho and Tina Rochelle for their untiring effort in conducting the project and producing this DIY Kit.
Many people hang back in fear when facing workplace violence. In fact, violent incidents could be tackled properly and even avoided, if an enterprise or organization is well prepared for it by developing appropriate preventive measures, providing sufficient training to staff and arranging workplace violence drills. This DIY Kit provides readers with the necessary knowledge, measures and skills to prevent and tackle workplace violence.

There are three parts in this DIY Kit. In Part One, we try to enhance readers’ understanding and concerns of workplace violence by introducing the definition, risk factors, categories and impacts of workplace violence on organizations and employees. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we have used many case studies to illustrate the various concepts of workplace violence in this Kit.

In Part Two, the workplace violence management and coping programme is introduced. It outlines the responsibilities of employers, overall preventive strategies, crisis management, and immediate response to violent incidents. A simple brawl could turn into a violent outbreak. Therefore, Part Two provides a thorough description of the four stages of violence escalation and related tackling methods. To help employees minimize the harm to be brought about by workplace violence, sixteen techniques of de-escalation with illustrations from selected case studies are introduced. After a violent incident has occurred, the organization must take remedial actions to repair any harm incurred to the organization and its employees. The tasks may include an investigation of the incident, redeployment of staff, providing support to victims and other staff concerned, and inspection of security measures. All of these are introduced in the case studies of Part Two and Part Three.
Part I
Understanding Workplace Violence
1 Understanding Workplace Violence

A worldwide consensus has not yet been reached on a recognized definition of workplace violence as the term can include many different forms of behaviour. Furthermore, different societies and industries have their own understanding of what is and what is not acceptable in the workplace - the boundary becomes vague. Currently, the International Labour Organization defines workplace violence as any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, or injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work. This definition can be identified as internal workplace violence, which occurs among staff; or external workplace violence, which occurs between staff and non-staff members in the workplace. According to the guidelines of the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2006), workplace violence includes any type of physical assault, threatening behaviour, or verbal abuse. Examples are assault, battery, rape, intimidation, nuisance, and speaking coarse language etc. In fact, if workplace violence continues, the situation will be worsened and may even lead to possible deaths (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The possible pathway of workplace violence

- Behaviours drawing attention
- Threatening behaviour
- Physical injury
- Death

Internal workplace violence occurs among staff
External workplace violence occurs between staff and non-staff members
2 Risk Factors of Workplace Violence

The risk factors of workplace violence include personal factors and environmental factors (see Figure 2). Employees of the industries with the following risk factors are considered to face a higher risk in terms of external workplace violence (i.e. violence between employees and non-employees):

- Frequent contact with the customers
- Cash handling
- Delivery of passengers, goods or services
- Having a mobile workplace
- Responsible for supervision or law enforcement, such as security guards
- Working alone
- Working on night shift
- Working in areas with high crime rate
- Working outside office

Figure 2: The causes and consequences of workplace violence

Note: Figure from International labour Organization (1998)
Internal workplace violence (i.e. violence between employees) is often related to personal factors, the work environment, and ineffective management in an organization. These include:

- Insufficient concern about the staff safety in the workplace
- Lack of mutual trust between staff and company
- Lack of direct communication between staff and company
- Fail to handle personnel problems that exist within the organization effectively
- Treating staff members as tools
- The words of the management are not in accord with their deeds
- Inconsistent standards in staff appraisal and promotion
- Increase in workload without staff taking on the responsibility
- Unsatisfactory working atmosphere
- Inconsistency on company’s policy and regulations
- Manipulative management style
- Staff are generally adverse to management

### 3 Categories of Workplace Violence

**First Category: Strangers against Employees**

Perpetrators have no relationship to the victims, and they enter the workplace to rob or physically assault their victims. In this case, the employees are the first to be jeopardized. These violent acts could be haphazard or planned in advance. If the industries have the following characteristics, they are at a higher risk of violence by external sources:

- Handling money
- Working outdoors or in a remote area
- Employees need to work at late night
- Workplace is hermetic
- Insufficient lighting in workplace
- Workplace is located in an area of high crime rate
Case 1
A customer made a phone call at midnight to request a taxi to a remote area in the New Territories. When the taxi arrived, three strangers suddenly appeared and tried to break into it by battering the windows. Luckily another taxi happened to pass by, and scared them away.

Case 2
One day, a bus confronted with a private car on a one-way road. Neither of the drivers was willing to give way. After arguing for some time, the driver of the private car finally retreated and gave way reluctantly. While backing his car, the driver of the private car swore at the bus driver. The bus driver ignored him. Later, the driver of the private car drove to the bus terminus, waiting to seek revenge from the bus driver. He said while walking to the bus driver, "I am pissed by your arrogance. Dare you fight with me!"

Case 3
In a children’s home, a parent was unhappy about his wife talking to a social worker and attempted to cause trouble. The wife left through an emergency exit at once, and the husband was accompanied by a security guard to leave the home later. Later the same evening, though the home had taken precautions by closing the front gate, the husband damaged the gate and broke into the home requesting to meet the social worker. There was only one social worker on duty that night. She locked herself up in the office, and dared not to go out. In the end, she took a chance to invite the husband to the office for a short conversation, while notifying a security guard at the same time. Fortunately the social worker prevented the husband from employing further violent acts and he was later taken away by the police.

Case 4
A night-shift staff member of a restaurant witnessed a billing dispute between three customers and a colleague. Unaware of the customers being drunk, the staff member went to check the situation. This led to discontentment of one of the customers. He started to push and swore at the staff member, "You are cheating your customer!" The staff and the customer then started to push each other.

Second Category: Customers against Employees
Perpetrator has a business relationship with the victim, and is most likely a customer, client, patient, or passenger of the organization concerned. Violence usually occurs when the employee is carrying out duties. High risk factors include:

- Working outdoors or in a remote area
- Employees work outside regular office hours
- No control over who has access to the workplace
- High exposure to clients who are tipsy or have a tendency for violent behaviour
- Easy access to tools that could be used as a weapon
- Difficulty in seeking immediate help from the security personnel
- Lack of escape routes in workplace
Third Category: Acquaintances against Employees
Perpetrator has a personal relationship with the victim, and is most likely a current or ex-spouse, family member, or friend. The motive of the perpetrator is usually related to personal grudges, which may include the following risk factors:

- The perpetrator has a past record of committing violent behaviour
- Violence has occurred within the victim's family

Case 5
A staff member had family problems and was in the process of divorcing her husband. To avoid meeting her husband, she asked her colleagues to stop her husband and notify her at once if he ever came over to her workplace. One day after work, the husband came to the office looking for his wife. When the colleagues told him what his wife said, he replied: "Have you got it wrong? I always come to pick her up. You guys know me! I’m warning you, I’ll fight whoever tries to stop me!" The husband held his fists tightly with a fierce face.

Fourth Category: Employees against Employees
Perpetrator works in the same organization as the victim, and has a past/present colleague or boss/subordinate relationship. These cases may ruin the reputation of the organization. Risk factors include:

- Highly stressful atmosphere in the workplace
- Lack of means for the management to control and discipline subordinates
- Employees have a history of, or tendency for, violent behaviour
- Lack of sufficient training for the management to handle staff conflict

Case 6
Two staff quarreled about work related issues in the kitchen of a restaurant; the chef then beat another staff member. The victim complained to the management about the humiliation. The management understood if they didn’t handle the problem properly, it might become more serious and irreversible. In this case, violence has already occurred. The management should take remedial actions and prevent recurrence. Yet, they had no idea what to do and had to seek advice from an external consultant.
Fifth Category: Customers against Customers

In some industries such as restaurants, public transport and schools, service recipients may bring personal disputes to the workplace. Thus, disputes among service recipients or customers may occur. For example, two customers who held a grudge against each other started to argue and prepared to fight in the lobby of an office. The staff members were puzzled and did not know what to do because they had no idea about the dispute. The potential risk factors are:

- Staff do not know what to do as they know nothing about the dispute.
- If the conflict between customers is out of control, it may affect the other customers or staff.

Case 7

During public holidays, there are more passengers than normal days. Most of them are tourists or campers. On one public holiday, two groups of young passengers suddenly got into a queue while waiting for the bus to come. Both parties had ten to twenty people and the argument could turn into a group fight at anytime. Other passengers felt uncomfortable with the situation and were afraid that they might not be able to dash for cover in case of a fight. The staff members of the bus station had no idea what to do.

4 Consequences of Workplace Violence

Workplace violence has gained worldwide concern in recent years. The number of various forms of workplace violence is on the rise around the world. Nowadays workplace violence poses threats to professions that were once considered to be safe, such as teaching, social services, and health care services, etc. Individuals, organizations and even society as a whole are paying a large price for the damage that workplace violence has caused (Fig.2).
4.1 Trends in Hong Kong

The Occupational Safety and Health Council commissioned the Quality Evaluation Centre of City University of Hong Kong to conduct a cross-sectional territory wide survey of workplace violence in companies of different industries and government departments between 24 July 2006 and 21 August 2006. By using the method of random sampling, a total of 1,210 questionnaires were collected and 1,198 questionnaires were regarded as valid and used for analysis (for the full report, please refer to Lo et al., 2007).

4.1.1 Prevalence of Workplace Violence among Staff

The study showed that workplace violence was not prevalent in both government and private/non-government sectors. The data showed that workplace violence only occurred occasionally, violence among staff mainly took place in verbal form, but minor physical or behavioural violence still occurred.

In private/non-government sector, staff being sworn or shouted at was most commonly seen; more than 29% (mean 1.45, 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Always, same below) of the responding organizations agreed that such acts had occurred in their organizations in the last two years. Moreover, around 13% (mean 1.17) agreed that shoving or pushing had occurred among their staff. More than 12% (mean 1.18) of the organizations found that verbal or written threats and other threatening languages or behaviours occurred among their staff.

Violence was more common among employees from the government sector than those in the private/non-government sector. Around 41.7% (mean 1.55) of the responding organizations said their staff had been sworn or shouted at by other staff in the last two years, and 27.1% (mean 1.37) indicated...
that their staff had experienced threatening language or behaviour from other staff. In addition, 25.7% (mean 1.33) said their staff had experienced verbal or written threats.

In comparison with the private/non-government sector, the percentages of staff in the government sector who had experienced threatening language or behaviour, verbal or written intimidations, and sexual harassment in the government sector were significantly higher: 14.6%, 13.5% and 13.1%. Moreover, the rates of throwing objects or vandalizing to threaten other staff and physical assault in government sector were significantly higher than that in private/non-government sector by 8% and 4.8% respectively.

### 4.1.2 Prevalence of Workplace Violence against Staff by Outsiders

Violence against staff by outsiders is not commonly seen in Hong Kong. The most frequent types of violence occurred in the private/non-government sector were verbal violence, shoving and nuisance. For example, in the last two years, 36.4% of respondents reported that staff had been sworn or shouted at (mean 1.56); 24.5% reported that their staff had received disturbing phone calls (mean 1.37); and 22.5% reported that staff had experienced verbal or written intimidations (mean 1.32).

In the government sector, apart from more serious or sexually-related violence such as murder, sexual assault, rape and sexual harassment, occurrence rates of violence were significantly higher than those in the private/non-government sector (p<.001). 62.3% of respondents indicated their employees had been sworn or shouted at in the last two years (mean 2.11); 41.1% reported that their staff had experienced verbal or written intimidations (mean 1.74); 38.7% said their staff had received disturbing phone calls (mean 1.69); and 37.6%
indicated their employees had experienced other forms of intimidation (mean 1.65). In addition, 27.5% had experienced individuals throwing objects or vandalizing to threaten staff, 26.2% had been shoved or pushed, 24.2% had experienced individuals threatening by raising fists, and 20.3% had experienced physical assault.

Within the private sector, there is a higher frequency of workplace violence in the construction industry. It was also observed that there are correlations between the size of the organization and the prevalence of workplace violence. That is, the larger the organizations, the more violence that takes place. However, there was no correlation between the years of establishment of organizations and the prevalence of workplace violence. That is, the data do not suggest the longer the establishment of an organization, the higher the frequency of violence.

### 4.1.3 Impact of Workplace Violence on Organisations

According to the 568 organizations where workplace violence had occurred in the past two years, the following conclusions were reached:

- 56.7% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had lowered the morale of employees.
- 56.2% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had reduced job satisfaction of employees.
- 49.4% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had ruined relationships among employees.
- 48.6% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had lowered the productivity of employees.
- 45% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had increased administrative costs.
- 30.6% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had led to the loss of key employees.
30.5% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had led to the loss of clients or customers.

26.4% of the organizations agreed that workplace violence had increased the amount of compensation to employees.

Overall, the organizations agreed that workplace violence ruined staff relationships, increased administrative cost, reduced productivity, and lowered staff morale and job satisfaction.

Comparing different industrial sectors in this respect, significant differences are found. For instance, respondents from transportation, storage and telecommunication; financing, insurance, real estate and business services; wholesale and retail; manufacturing and construction tended to agree that workplace violence had led to a number of negative consequences. However, we found no correlations between the consequences of workplace violence and the size as well as years of establishment of the organizations. Moreover, when comparing different government bureaus and departments, no significant differences were found. It suggests that they held similar views on the consequences of workplace violence.

4.1.4 Handling and Prevention of Workplace Violence

The organisations were being asked how they handle workplace violence. Their responses were summarized as follows:

- 35.2% of respondents claimed that their organizations had an effective and comprehensive procedure to handle reported incidents.
- 31.4% of respondents indicated that their organizations had an effective and comprehensive measure to prevent workplace violence.
- Only 26.2% of respondents pointed out that their organizations had provided sufficient training to employees to handle workplace violence.
10.0% of respondents reported that their organizations had conducted workplace violence drills for employees. Overall, the results suggested that staff training, preparation and preventive measures in tackling workplace violence were not sufficient for the organisations involved in the study.

4.1.5 Workplace Violence Management Programme

Although workplace violence is not yet a serious problem in Hong Kong, many organizations are not well prepared and equipped to handle the violence that may occur at work. It is proven to be right that the Occupational Safety and Health Council set its targets at promoting the awareness of workplace violence in industrial sectors, and developing a workplace violence management programme for organizations susceptible to such violence. The research team has completed a pilot of this workplace violence management programme in twenty organizations. We will introduce this management programme in Part 2.

4.2 International Trends

In recent years, evidence from judicial organizations around the world suggests that the number of workplace violence is growing. It may represent an increase of understanding as well as disapproval of workplace violence in the world. It may also represent an increasing number of violent incidents in the workplace. We believe that most of the cases that do not cause heavy casualties are not reported, and thus the real situation is not reflected. In the following, situations of different countries are listed:
4.2.1 United States of America

According to a survey on workplace violence conducted by the US Department of Labour about 74 state government and city government organizations in 2005, around 5% had experienced violent incidents in the past twelve months. As reported, violence had occurred in half of the large organizations with more than one thousand employees. Among all large organizations, manufacturing industries (39.7%) experienced more violence among staff compared to service industries (30.9%). On the other hand, staff of the service industries experienced more violence perpetrated by criminals (18.3% vs. 5.4%) and customers (31% vs. 3.8%) compared to those in the manufacturing industries (US Department of Labour, 2006).

Moreover, there was more workplace violence in state government organizations than in city government organizations or private enterprises. 32% of state government organizations said that there had been some forms of workplace violence in the past twelve months, compared to 15% of city government organizations and less than 5% of private enterprises. This may result by the frequent contact with the public, and having a mobile workplace. Besides, staff may be required to work in the high-crime-rate areas, or work with emotionally unstable or violent individuals, etc. (US Department of Labour, 2006).
4.2.2 European Union

In 2000, the European Union conducted the Third European Survey in 15 member states. It was found that out of the 0.13 billion workers in the member states, 3 million of them had experienced different levels of physical assault within the past 12 months (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003). It was discovered that more than 13 million employees had been intimidated or bullied at work within the past 12 months. In other words, one in every ten employees had been a victim of workplace violence. The most vulnerable industries were service industries (13%). Health care and education sectors were high risk industries with up to 11% of employees having experienced physical violence. Employees (9%) have encountered more workplace violence than self-employed individuals (5%). Furthermore, gender seems to be another contributing factor. Females were more likely to be intimidated (10%) than males (7%). Moreover, 2% of females had experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence at work (Paoli & Merllie, 2001).

In 2003, the European Union extended the survey to include another twelve acceding and candidate states, including Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia etc. The issue of workplace violence was similar to the other member states of the European Union. This means that about 3 to 4 million employees had experienced different forms of workplace violence within the past 12 months prior to the interview (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Paoli & Parent-Thirion, 2003).
4.2.3 England
A crime survey was conducted in England between 2002 and 2003. The findings suggest that during this period, about 376,000 employees had experienced at least one instance of violence at work. Moreover, there were about 849,000 incidents of workplace violence, including 431,000 cases of assaults and 418,000 cases of intimidations. Compared to the peak in 1995, the rate of workplace violence has dropped by 35% between 2002 and 2003. Law enforcers, such as the police, were individuals at high risk of workplace violence. Scientists, researchers and technicians, such as mechanical engineers, were least likely to experience workplace violence. In comparison, health care and social service personnel had a higher chance of experiencing workplace violence (Upson, 2004).

4.2.4 Australia
In 2005, a survey of over a thousand employees in Australia found that most workplace violence involved verbal abuse and intimidations. Most of the verbal abuse and intimidations occurred in juvenile justice institutions (68% and 36%), tertiary educational institutions (50% and 39%), health care industry (67% and 33%) and taxi industry (81% and 17%). Moreover, juvenile justice personnel (17%), health care workers (12%) and taxi drivers (10%) had encountered more physical assault than employees of other industries (Mayhew, 2005).
4.2.5 Japan
From April 2002 to March 2003, there were 625,572 reported cases of workplace dispute in Japan. Close to 32,000 (5.1%) cases were related to harassment and bullying. From April to September 2003, 51,444 cases were reported; 9.6% of these cases were related to harassment and bullying. Because of the continuing increase of workplace violence in Japan, the Tokyo Labour Bureau set up 21 consultation centres at different locations in Tokyo to provide information on management of workplace violence (Chappell & Di Martin, 2006).

4.2.6 Legislation Against Workplace Violence Around the World
Today, many countries have enacted different legislation to protect their workers from workplace violence. For example, England and France have already criminalized any kind of harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, some countries have incorporated injury and death due to workplace violence into their labour compensation scheme. For example, between 1993 and 1996 some provinces of Canada codified the regulations on the protection of employees from workplace violence into their occupational health and safety regulations. Also, countries such as the UK, USA and New Zealand are drafting, or considering to draft legislation to make employers responsible for providing a violence-free working environment to their employees. Employers will then be under obligation to assess the risk of workplace violence, and design related prevention, intervention and follow-up measures, such as related policies, preventive measures and improvement of working environment. Moreover, Italy has already incorporated psychological disturbance caused by bullying at work into their labour injury compensation.
Part II
Prevention of Workplace Violence
The purpose of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509 of the Laws of Hong Kong) are to ensure the safety and health of employees when they are at work. Under this ordinance, both employers and employees have responsibilities in creating a safe and healthy workplace.

**Responsibilities of Employers**
Employers have to ensure the health and safety of employees in the workplace by providing necessary information, instruction, training, supervision regarding health and safety, and maintaining a safe and healthy work environment.

**Responsibilities of Employees**
Employees should also take care of their own safety and health and of the others at work, and follow any safe work practices or system that are employed.

**Responsibilities of Perpetrators**
No matter who the perpetrators of violence are (the employees or the customers of an organisation), they will be handled by the police once the violence is reported. The police will take action against those who have used physical violence, such as assault and intimidations, in accordance with the criminal law of Hong Kong. Security guards of an organisation can expel those who are verbally violent, such as causing a nuisance or swearing at staff. Some public organisations have their own bylaw which sanction individuals’ disturbing behaviour within their premises; this includes the possibility of taking legal action against the individuals.
5.1 The Tasks of Employers

To prevent workplace violence, it is suggested that the tasks of employers may include the following:

- Adopt a policy on workplace violence and spell out the policy clearly to all employees.
- Provide regular training in preventive measures for all new and current employees, including managers, unit supervisors, and frontline staff.
- Support victims of workplace violence.
- Adopt fair and consistent disciplinary procedures.
- Foster mutual trust and respect among employees.
- When necessary, seek advice and assistance from external sources, including risk-assessment experts, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals.

Have you ever thought of the following issues?

- Has your organization set up a policy on workplace violence?
- Has your organization fostered mutual respect in the working environment and shown no tolerance towards any kind of harassing behaviours?
- Do your employees know that they should report to the management if they have encountered any form of violence at work?
- Did your employees get trained in handling workplace violence, such as the procedures of reporting violent incidents, communication channels, evacuation routes, and the handling of injured persons and victims?
- Have your employees received training in handling conflict between employees?
- Has your organization conducted safety drills on workplace violence?
- Does your organization monitor people entering the workplace via CCTV?
- Has your organization assessed the "high risk" areas in the workplace, such as a kitchen equipped with cutlery? Also, is there any plan to differentiate the "high-risk" areas from the public spaces and prohibit strangers from entering these "high-risk" areas?
- Has your organization set up a designated place for staff to take cover in case of an emergency?
- Has the management in your organization received training on how to release information concerning violent incidents to its staff or to the public?
5.2 Inappropriate Approaches of Workplace Violence Prevention

Sometimes, employers may not have taken the correct approaches to prevent workplace violence. The following are some common mistakes in management:

- Using the same method to handle all sorts of problems;
- Lack of flexibility in tackling problems;
- Denying the existence of problems;
- Lack of communication with key parties, such as employees’ unions;
- Lack of collaboration between departments or work units;
- Ignoring the importance of mutual respect among staff;
- Lack of explicit policies or guidelines;
- Lack of thorough consideration in processing job applications;
- Failing to keep a record on past workplace violence history;
- Unable to identify cultural and individual differences;
- Lack of commitment in tackling workplace violence.

Are employers legally liable?

In the United States, employers may be legally liable for workplace violence because of the following reasons:

- Negligence in the recruitment procedure: The employer does not conduct a background check on the applicants, e.g. criminal record.
- Negligence in the retention of employees: The employer does not take the necessary action when employees are found to be no longer suitable for their current positions.
- Negligence in monitoring staff: The employer fails to employ appropriate and sufficient staff supervision, which results in violence.
- Negligence in security and safety measures: The employer fails to provide employees and customers with a violence-free environment.
With increasing concerns of workplace violence, preventive measures and regulations on governing workplace violence, employee-related lawsuits and reliance on key manpower resources; risk management becomes an important management practice. Risk management is an attempt to identify and manage threats that could adversely affect the work efficiency and effectiveness of an organization. Employers should conduct comprehensive assessment of potential risks to the organization regularly. To avoid workplace violence, employers should review organizational preventive practices of workplace violence, identify potential risks of violence and their likelihood of occurrence, and take appropriate actions to address them. This assessment should be conducted at least once a year by a team of staff members representing all departments of the organization. It should be carefully planned, documented and carried out systematically. It is essential to guard against any occurrence of workplace violence. However, even the most complete prevention measure is not a panacea. To moderate the caused damage, the employees should know how to make the right move promptly during the occurrence of violence. If violence does actually cause harm, the employer should provide aid to those who are affected and at the same time, evaluate and make changes to the related preventive measures. Therefore, the stages of handling workplace violence can be separated into three parts (see Figure 3), namely risk prevention, risk control and risk remedy.

**Figure 3: Overall strategies in handing workplace violence**

### Risk Prevention
- Form a multi-disciplinary team
- Formulate policy
- Analyze & assess risk levels
- Strengthen staff training
- Establish administrative procedures
- Human resources management
- Environmental security
- Legal consultation

### Risk Control
- Report violent incidents
- Information collection and risk assessment
- Immediate measures

### Risk Remedy
- Investigate the incident
- Handling of personnel issues
- Support to employee
- Inspection of security system
- Intervention from management

**Periodic assessment, review and monitoring**
6 Risk Prevention

To prevent workplace violence from occurring, it is necessary to coordinate the work of different units and design various preventive measures. Such measures include revising organizational structure and policy, risk assessment, staff training, reporting channels, environmental security measures, and human resources management.

6.1 Form a Multi-disciplinary Team

Every staff member is responsible for the prevention of workplace violence. Staff from different units can take on different roles:

(a) From both legal and moral perspectives, the employer is playing a very important role because the employer is obligated to provide a safe working environment for employees. In order to prevent any casualties or financial loss, it is necessary for the employer to implement policies and strategies against workplace violence.

(b) The employer can form functional groups, such as a Planning Team which can help drafting policies, setting goals, and designing preventive measures. Members of the team may include managerial staff and external consultants.

(c) The security personnel of the organization should regularly monitor access control and the surrounding features. If violence occurs, they should respond swiftly.

(d) Staff members in charge of human resources should regularly assess employees’s abilities in handling violence, and provide them with sufficient training if needed. Furthermore, after the occurrence of a violent event, the individuals involved (whether the perpetrator or the victim) should be dealt with according to the related stipulation.
(e) The legal consultant should provide legal advice on the drafting of the policy-making documents related to workplace violence and on post-violence handling measures, such as lawsuits and compensation.

(f) Incident Response Team is responsible for implementing violence prevention measures. Team members should be conversant with the procedures used in handling a violent incident. Individuals may include the mid-range supervisors and the frontline staff who know better about workplace violence than other staff.

(g) Employee Assistance Programme provides assistance to the perpetrator, victim, affected employees, and their families. Mutual support groups formed by employees usually play the main role of this programme. In Hong Kong, some local social service agencies provide this type of service.

**Figure 4: Staff dealing with violence in an organization**
6.2 Formulate a Policy against Workplace Violence

Prior to the launch of any workplace violence prevention programme, it is essential for the organization to issue a policy statement. This will help employees understand the standpoint and the according measures of the organization in eradicating workplace violence. The policy statement should be posted in an open area of the office so that employees, visitors, and customers can all read it. The employer should also include measures against workplace violence in the employee handbook.

(a) The advantages of having a policy

- Make employees aware of what the workplace violence prevention policy includes;
- Advise employees on how to react should they encounter workplace violence;
- Make employees realize that they are all responsible for reporting workplace violence incidents and who they should report to;
- Provide clear guidelines for managers and staff about their responsibilities and roles in workplace violence.

(b) The content of policy statement

- The policy should state the organization shows "zero tolerance" to workplace violence;
- The policy should be issued against any form of violence, including bullying, or intimidation, or destructive behaviour that could lead to injury of employees or financial loss of the organization;
- The policy should be applied to all employees, clients or outsiders;
- Each employee is responsible for maintaining a violence-free working environment and reporting any observed violent incidents;
• The organization should respond immediately to any reported incidents of violence, and take the necessary action to stop any improper behaviour;
• The organization should give full support to managers or employees who are facing or tackling workplace violence.

(c) Issues that should be attended to when drafting policy statement
• The wording of the policy statement should be terse and exact.
• It is not appropriate to make concrete definitions of violent behaviour in the policy statement.
• The organization should seek advice on the content of the policy from legal consultants or external experts.

6.3 Analyze and Assess Risk Levels
In order to prevent workplace violence effectively, an organization should have the record of its previous or potential violent situations in hand, and should also understand the abilities of itself and its employees in tackling or handling such cases. This can be done by regular inspection and review of safety levels in the working environment.

(a) Review the patterns of past violent events
• Nature and details of previous violent events including date, time, place and forms.
• Unique characteristics of the victim
• Background information, such as work records, mental and emotional status of the perpetrator
• Motive and ability of the perpetrator
(b) Assess the organization’s current capacity to handle risks

- Based on human resources and staff training records, assess employees’ ability in handling violent situations, especially their abilities in mediating, resolving conflict and handling crisis.
- Review past violent incidents, especially the used strategies in handling violent situations as well as their effectiveness. This could help understanding the organization’s experiences in handling violent situations.
- Review the security unit’s ability in stopping potential violent incidents from happening. If there is an unpredictable violent situation, does the unit have sufficient manpower to handle it?

6.4 Strengthen Staff Training

Whether it is the management or the frontline personnel, training is necessary for those who are at risk of facing workplace violence. Training can be provided by internal or external experts. Some organizations integrate workplace violence management into employees’ basic training, some have it as separate training, and some incorporate it into risk management training. Regardless of how the training is conducted, the content should be arranged according to the employees’ work post. The following are some key contents:

(a) All employees

- The organization’s workplace violence prevention policy;
- Examples of workplace violence and reporting procedures;

Stress management, relaxation skills, and psychological health training
• Methods for preventing the occurrence of violent behaviour and escalation of violent behaviour;
• Anger management methods;
• Conflict resolution skills;
• Stress management, relaxation skills, and psychological health training;
• Security procedures, location and operation of security equipments;
• Personal safety measures;
• Information on community resources related to counselling and support.

(b) Managers/Supervisors
• How to explain the organization’s policy and specific strategies in fighting workplace violence to employees;
• How to encourage employees to report workplace violence;
• How to provide emotional support and express concern to employees reporting the incident;
• How to identify and manage potential violent behaviour;
• How to take disciplinary action against misbehaved staff;
• How to manage the risk and control the risk from escalating;
• How to handle emergency situations;
• How to restore staff morale, labour relations and staff relationships.
(c) Incident Response Team

In order to work well together, team members need to know each other’s strengths and weaknesses well. Training can include discussions about relevant policies, legal constraints and procedures in handling violent incidents. Since team members may have to deal with the perpetrator, they should be trained in crisis management. They may have to meet the victim to gather information and conduct an investigation, thus it is necessary for these individuals to be skilled in interviewing, communicating and collecting data.

6.5 Establish Administrative Procedures

(a) How to identify people with violent tendencies

With reference to the study of violent cases by the Profiling and Behavioural Assessment Unit, National Centre for the Analysis of Violent Centre, US Federal Bureau of Investigation, the City University research team has summarized some indicators of potential violent behaviour. Pay special attention to the employees or individuals who have done any of the following acts:

- Directly or vaguely express that there will be unfortunate events happening to a colleague.
- Intimidate, harass, bully or do other improper and aggressive behaviour to the others (physically or verbally).
- Bring weapons to the workplace, wield weapons in the workplace, or threaten to use them.
- Tend to resolve problems by means of violence, and have sympathy for murderers.
- Feel extremely desperate when facing family crises, financial problems, health issues or personal distress.
• Have drug or drinking problems.
• Sudden and abnormal changes in daily routines.
• Have been convicted of violence.
• Always be paranoid or suspicious of getting hurt by the others.
• Cannot take criticisms or responsibilities for faults committed, and frequently expresses his desire in teaching someone a lesson or in revenging.
• Have difficulty in controlling their temper, they are always angry, and challenge the bottom line of normal behaviour without considering the others’ safety.
• Confronted by crisis at work, such as termination of employment, disciplinary action, or redeployment which may lead to possible loss of current status.

The manager should stay alert if his subordinate behaves in the aforementioned ways. Some situations should be handled by police or security personnel immediately, and rule-breakers should be disciplined, some situations should be transferred to the employee assistance programme or to the specialists for follow-up.

(b) Contingency plan
A comprehensive contingency plan should include different steps taken by the staff in order to handle the violent incidents promptly and appropriately. The key steps are:
• Take immediate action when confronted by violence or close to an outburst of violence. At the same time, let trained security personnel to handle the situation, and call the police immediately if necessary.
• Notify the other colleagues and seek help from the Incident Response Team or other trained colleagues.
Isolate the perpetrator and prevent the violence from worsening.
Evacuate staff and service recipients to a safe location if necessary.
Show concern and support to the victim after the incident.
Handle enquiries from the media.
Conduct a post-event review and revise the contingency plan as necessary.

(c) Reporting mechanism

- Require staff to report all incidents of workplace violence to the management within a specified time limit.
- Record each case of workplace violence in written form, and file the records properly.
- Set up hotlines or emails for staff who want to remain anonymous in reporting violence.
- Managers should respond appropriately to the alleged violent incident or inform the human resources unit, security unit, or other responsible units to handle the case.
- Accept anonymous reports and try to verify its plausibility.
- It is very important that management keep all the anonymous reports secret.

6.6 Human Resources Management

Management should be extremely careful and well prepared during times of staff redeployment or employment termination. Being laid off is a blow to a lot of people. Therefore, the employer should handle the case with great caution and consider applying the following measures:
• Remind staff of the possibility of being laid off beforehand to get them prepared.
• Provide training to managers to assist employees in coping with changes.
• Choose a right time and date to disclose the news.
• Set an agenda for the termination meeting.
• Protect the staff’s privacy and dignity during the termination process.
• Let the staff understand that the termination is an unchangeable decision. Be firm to avoid argument and tension.
• Refer supportive and counselling services to the terminated staff.
• Let the security personnel be present in any meeting if necessary, and ask them to accompany the terminated employee to collect personal belongings in the office, or to leave the office building.
• Collect staff identity cards, keys, and entry passes etc. from the terminated staff
• Void all login passwords of the terminated employee.

When an organization terminates the contract of an employee with violent tendencies, it may also consider setting up a contingency plan after the termination. At the same time, it is important to explain to the sacked staff about the arrangements of the retirement pension fund and other related benefits. Thus the employee will feel being treated reasonably and fairly. Change door locks and entrance passwords of the office regularly.
6.7 Environmental Security

Strengthening environmental security measures is essential in violence prevention. According to Crowe's (2000) concept of "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design", some safety measures for workplace violence prevention are introduced (see Figure 5).

(a) Regarding Access control, the following environmental security measures can prevent trespassing:

- Organized control: (1) use photo ID cards as staff cards; (2) have security guards stationed at the entrance of the office building; (3) employees are required to present their ID and enter their passwords to enter the building; (4) register visitors and provide visitors passes for these individuals to enter the office building.
- Mechanical control: (1) set up fences, password locks, gates etc; (2) ensure all the alarm systems, phones (wired and wireless), and surveillance cameras (CCTV) are working properly.
- Natural control: set up "No Trespassing" signs.
(b) To strengthen the Surveillance control, it is important to keep a close eye on everyone that goes in and out of the workplace. Prompt action should be made whenever a suspicious character is spotted. Preventive measures include:

- Organized surveillance: have security guards patrol the office building regularly.
- Mechanical surveillance: install extra lighting in car parks or dark areas.
- Natural surveillance: install two-way mirrors so that people can see what is happening inside the office building.

### 6.8 Legal Consultation

While tackling workplace violence, legal consultants can assist the organization in designing policies and measures that are legally acceptable. Thus, the organization can avoid any unnecessary legal liability:

- Is the employees’ privacy being violated when collecting information and making an investigation for violence prevention? Employers must pay special attention to the discrimination issue.
- Insurance or compensation for the victim.

### 7 Risk Control

When employees report that a violent incident has happened or is likely to happen through whatever means, the organization needs to make a prompt response and refer the case to the relevant units or staff for investigation, analysis and control. Thus, the situation will not be worsened.
7.1 Report of Violent Incidents

The earlier the violent behaviour is recognized and reported, the more likely it can be controlled. Damage can therefore be reduced to a minimum. It is why every employee in the organization should know how to report cases so that the incident response team can obtain useful information in a short period of time. The following steps would make the reporting procedure smoother:

- Set up various ways of reporting violence, such as report form, hotline and email.
- Let employees know that the organization will treat every reported case seriously and keep the information confidential.
- Assure that employees who made the reports will not be avenged.

7.2 Information Collection and Risk Assessment

(a) Basic information of the violent incident

When the incident response team receives a report, they should collect information on the following:

- Who is involved? Who is the perpetrator (outsider, customer, employee’s family or employee)? Who is the victim? Who is/are the witness(es)?
- What kind of violent behaviour is involved?
- Where did the incident happen?
- When did the incident happen?
- Why did the incident happen?
- Is this case real?
(b) Risk assessment

In order to handle a violent incident in a better way, we should assess its underlying causes and risk factors from the information collected. The following questions can help understanding the problem associated with the violent incident:

- Did anything happen that trigger the violent incident?
- Is the perpetrator being badgered?
- What was the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim?
- Did the perpetrator blame others for his/her own fault?
- Did the perpetrator believe he/she had been treated unfairly?
- Was the perpetrator undergoing a lot of personal distress?
- Did the perpetrator show any signs of drug-taking or suffering from psychosis?
- Did the perpetrator bring a weapon or use a weapon found in the workplace?
- Did the perpetrator mention using violence on a specific target before?
- Did the perpetrator undertake a surveillance on a specific target?
- Did the perpetrator plan the violent behaviour beforehand?
- Did the perpetrator believe his/her violent act was wrong?
- Was the perpetrator willing to bear the responsibility for the violent act?
Figure 6: Risk Control

1. Report of violent incidents

2. Information collection and risk assessment

- No risk
  - 3. No action required
- Low risk
  - 3. Non-emergency response
    - Data collection
    - Management of complaints
- High risk
  - 3. Emergency response
    - Effective Communication
    - De-escalation
    - Conflict resolution
    - Isolation or escape
- Danger
  - 3. Handled by security or law enforcement personnel

4. Execute follow-up options

- Investigation of events
- Handling of personnel issues
- Support to employee
- Inspection of security system
- Intervention from management

5. Risk under control
7.3 On-the-spot Response (Non-emergency response)

Customers always complain about the service providers or the staff performance. Although these complaints should not be treated as violent behaviour, it is possible to lead to further conflict or even violence if handled improperly.

**Principles of managing customers’ complaints**
- Principle 1: Trustworthiness
- Principle 2: Respect
- Principle 3: Understanding
- Principle 4: Sensitivity
- Principle 5: Timeliness and accuracy

(a) Understand customers’ needs behind the complaints

When facing customers’ complaints, it is important to understand what their needs and goals are. Their complaints reflect two aspects of their needs: psychological and emotional needs and problem-solution needs. To meet these needs, please refer to the steps in the tables below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological and emotional needs</th>
<th>Solution needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Apologize</td>
<td>• Report progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Express concern</td>
<td>• Take responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Believe what is reported</td>
<td>• Solve the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand their situation</td>
<td>• Explain the follow up actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Face saving</td>
<td>• Explain how much time is required to handle the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Express understanding of their needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remain flexible in handling the case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 7: Steps in managing customers' complaints](image)

Source: Hong Kong Association for Customer Service Excellence
## 7.4 On-the-spot Response (Emergency Response)

The customers’ complaints may intensify if a staff member fails to respond appropriately. It will bring the customers to a state of blame, anger or hostility, or even violence. Here are some "Do's" and "Don's" in handling workplace violence according to the suggestions of the International Association of the Chiefs of Police (2005):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posture and Position</th>
<th>Do's</th>
<th>Don's</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keep a relaxed posture, such as standing beside the customer. Pay attention and show interest to his/her speech.</td>
<td>Show a challenging attitude, such as standing face to face, holding waist, crossing arms, making body contact, pointing and staring at the customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose a position where the customer cannot block your escape route.</td>
<td>Invade the customer’s personal space; stand less than 5 feet away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Be calm and friendly.</td>
<td>Talk cold heartedly, be unresponsive, arrogant, stiff, and use rules in every response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose a position where the customer cannot block your escape route.</td>
<td>Do not pay attention to tone, volume, and speed while talking. Make sudden movements which may be seen as threat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and Expressing</td>
<td>Show empathy when listening so the customer can calmly express his/her views and listen to advice.</td>
<td>Reject every request of the customer right from the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand the customer’s feelings. Indicate that you can see he/she is upset.</td>
<td>Behave in a challenging and threatening way, making the customer feels he/she is neglected or stupid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a positive attitude when dealing with the complaint. When the complaints are reasonable, the response should be: “maybe you are right”; “it is our fault”. If the complaints are unreasonable, you should explain and clarify the issue.</td>
<td>Make careless reply or unreal promises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Provide the customer with assurance and choices, lessen the problem and break a big problem into smaller parts.</td>
<td>Overlook the problem and make inappropriate criticisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome suggestions and tell the customer your interpretation of his/her request.</td>
<td>Agree with distortions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Allow the customer to calm down by employing the delaying tactics, such as giving him/her a cup of water.</td>
<td>Act impatiently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.5 Escalation and Handling of Risk Situations

If the perpetrators behave violently because of their discontentment with the organization or its employees, their behaviour is usually predictable and is possible to escalate. The responsible staff should understand the perpetrators’ situation, pay attention to the increase in severity of the violent behaviour, and predict their next move (see Figure 8) before making the right response.

(a) Stage of Frustration

The clients’ response is characterized by confusion. They do not listen to what others say and suggest, and are constantly impatient. Under such circumstance, the following techniques can be considered:

- The responsible staff should listen actively, and give the clients space to express their concerns. Make clarifications whenever it is needed, and provide the relevant information to the clients. The staff should try to understand the clients’ needs and solve the problem with the right remedial steps.
- Share your limitations and difficulties with your clients aboveboard. Be open and considerate. Try to pacify them by serving them with respect.

We can discuss it in the meeting room!
(b) Stage of Blame

The clients refuse to compromise, and blame others for the problem. They impute the blame to the liability of the company or the staff. They may scold and even bully the staff. When this occurs, the staff member may continue to use the above tactics as well as the following:

- Suggest the clients to meet in a quiet place to protect their privacy, then invite the clients to an appropriate place to talk about the problem. This will help isolating the clients and preventing the other service users from being affected in case of violence.
- If there is more than one client, try to befriend the calm and reasonable ones, and invite their participation as much as possible so as to counteract the tension.

(c) Stage of Anger

If the clients’ posture or gesture changes to specific poses like holding fist, pointing at staff, shouting, and screaming, it denotes danger. In such situation, employees may do the following:

- Venting techniques: let the clients vent their emotion and tire them to buy time.
- Remain calm. Listen to the clients’ accusations and avoid arguing with them, but prepare your next move, such as the following:
- Press the emergency bell to notify the manager, security guards and other staff members for assistance. Handle the incident with a team work approach.
- When clients’ attention is diverted, remove any dangerous objects that can be used as weapons nearby.
- Prepare to escape when violent behaviour is about to occur. Try to find an excuse to leave the spot, for example, answering a phone call from a colleague.
(d) Stage of Hostility
The clients start to be antagonistic and intimidate the others, or even physically assault other people and vandalize properties; this means they are getting out of control. In such chaotic situation, staff should take the following moves:

- Isolate the perpetrator; then signal the security guards or other staff to advance immediately to take over the situation.
- Escape immediately.

8 Techniques in Handling Violent Situations

Basic Technique: Understand the Reason Behind
In any kind of crisis, you should ask yourself one question: What is the reason behind the client’s anger? You should try to understand and respond to this reason.

In handling workplace violence, it is better to handle the problem before violence occurs. According to Figure 8, a risk situation would escalate if handled improperly. As such, appropriate skills should be used to de-escalate the tension as well as its detrimental effect. Here are some feasible approaches in dealing with angry clients.

8.1 Empathize with the clients (Feeling Card)
Angry clients may complain that staff do not understand their situations and may blame any staff nearby. If staff can empathize with the clients, the clients may calm down. For example, the staff can say: "I can understand why you are so upset. If I were you, I would feel the same!"
8.2 Delay the outburst of violence (Time Card)

In emergency situations, clients may not listen to anyone and may act violently. When the rescuers have not yet arrived, try to delay the outburst of violence by talking to the clients, even about trifles: "Don’t rush, speak slower, let me understand the situation more." Pay attention to whatever is said because you will need to buy time for your rescuers to arrive.

8.3 Emphasize one’s expertise in specific areas (Expert Card)

When facing the querulous clients, you must demonstrate your trustworthiness in order to calm their emotions. Use your professional knowledge to gain your clients’ trust so that they may listen to your suggestions. For example, staff may say: "My 10-year experience in handling this kind of problem tells me that your way would not work. Don’t worry. Tell me more about your case and I will see how I can help you."

Case: The Angry Parent

A parent went to school angrily to look for his son, suspecting that his son had taken his money. The father said to the teachers, "I need to see my son now. He deserves a blow!" The teachers tried to stop the father, but he ignored them "Don’t stop me or I will hurt you! It is none of your business!" Then he marched towards the classroom.

Analysis

What was the motive of the parent? In fact, he just wanted to find out the truth and see if his son had taken his money. If one knows the motive, one may know how to help him. However, the father was really anxious and irrational. If he was provoked, his verbal violence might have escalated into physical violence. It was possible to lead to child abuse.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions

The teachers should show the father that they understand his anxiety and anger. Sharing with the teachers might help the father to vent his emotion. The teachers may say, "It is not easy to be a parent nowadays. We need to worry about our children all day long, it may be frustrating sometimes." (Feeling Card) To avoid disturbing the students, the teachers should try to lure the parent away to an appropriate place, such as a meeting room. The teachers should also delay the development of the crisis so that they have more time to convince the parent to use a more appropriate way to handle the issue; i.e. to prevent the parent from using violence on his child. The teachers may say, "We have encountered this kind of parenting problems very often and have helped many parents to handle these issues. Some of the methods work well. (Expert Card) We can sit down and discuss your case in detail to see how we can help you (Time Card)... When you see your child, we hope you can control your emotion and listen to his explanation first." If the parent is willing to discuss the issue with the teachers, his anger may dissipate gradually. As such, he may not use violence to handle the problem. On the other hand, if the teachers cannot pacify the parent, a “teamwork approach” should be used by inviting more colleagues to join the conversation.
### 8.4 Emphasize one’s limit in authority (Soldier Card)

Unsatisfied clients may chide staff to vent their dissatisfaction. In this situation, it is better for frontline staff to let the clients understand that their authority is limited. So, they cannot take all the responsibilities for the incident; hopefully, it will gain sympathy from the clients. If the clients sympathize with the innocent staff, their anger is less likely to be vented on him/her. Staff in this situation can say: "I want to solve this problem too. As an assistant officer, I have limitation in authority and I hope you can understand. As you know, sometimes it’s very hard to be a hireling!"

### 8.5 Be fair to everyone (Consistency Card)

Sometimes clients blame the frontline staff because they believe they have been treated unequally. If they understand the treatment they received is not different from that of their precedents, they may then believe they have been treated justly. As a result, there would be less resentment and they would understand there is minimal opportunity of receiving special treatment. The staff can say: "In the past, other people have been in a similar situation with you. We treated them the same way and they were satisfied."

### 8.6 Making use of group pressure (Group Pressure Card)

Some clients may ignore the interest of other people and vent their anger on the frontline staff. In this situation, we can employ group pressure to make the clients understand that their behaviour will not be tolerated by the other clients at the scene. It may even cause other clients to retaliate. If the clients understand this possibility, they might stop their unreasonable behaviour. The staff can say: "Look, other people are lining up. I believe they won’t be very happy if you jump the queue."
The Hospital Patient
There are always long queues of patients in the hospital lobby, waiting to see the doctor. One day, a man used an umbrella to occupy a place in the queue. The hospital did not allow this to happen; therefore, a staff went to stop him. The patient knew that his attempt failed so he started to revolt. He pointed at the staff and shouted: "Who do you think you are to bully a patient? Watch your attitude!"

Analysis
What is the motive of the patient? Obviously, he wanted to take some small advantage. However, after he got caught by the staff, he wanted to "save his face". If the staff member continued to argue with him or be harsh on him, he would believe that the staff was being hostile to him. As a result, verbal violence might escalate to physical violence.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions
The staff members should understand the patient’s needs. He would be less hostile if somebody showed him empathy. At the same time, the staff members should let the patient know that they have to work according to hospital’s regulations. They should also emphasize that they were being impartial to every patient, hoping the patient would understand their limitations. The staff handling the case can tell the patient politely, "I can understand that you want to see the doctor as soon as possible. However, everybody in the line is feeling the same way. Our colleagues will arrange for you to see the doctor as soon as possible. (Feeling Card) I hope you can understand my position. It is difficult for us because the hospital regulations do not allow holding seat. As a small potato, I have to follow the rules. (Soldier Card) We have no intention to pick on you. We ask all the patients to line up here. Look, everyone is lining up, right?" (Consistency Card) If the patient’s attitude remains tough, the staff can reason with the patient that if they show him a special favour, other patients might become resentful. Hopefully, this will add pressure on the patient and make him give up escalating his action. Staff can try to achieve this by saying, "Do you notice that other queuing patients are looking at you? You make them feel unfair and your shouting makes them feel disgusted." (Group Pressure Card) Since the patient’s anger was vented on a particular staff, other staff should join in to help (Team Work). This will make the antagonist know that he is out-numbered and has no chance to succeed.

8.7 Truthfully admit one’s mistakes (Dead Dog Card)
Furious clients usually expect someone to make an apology. Therefore, admit your or your organization’s mistakes truthfully can reduce their anger. For example, the staff may say: "Sorry for our inappropriate handling in this matter. We will try our best to improve the situation, please accept our apology".
8.8 Use presents for compensation (Present Card)

When clients feel being ignored, their emotion will be easily provoked. In this situation, other than showing our empathy to the clients, we can also offer them a present. The value of the present is not the crucial point. It is the staff member’s sincerity when presenting the gift that all matters. For example, free drink, snack or discount offers are good choices for a compensation. The staff may say, "The gift is a token of our gratitude to you. Thank you for supporting us and please forgive us for the inconvenience caused."

8.9 Take action in front of clients (Action Card)

Clients may think that the staff member does not want to help them, so they would hold a grudge against the company, or become angry. Doing some follow-up work right in front of the clients can help pacifying them. For example, making an enquiry call to look for information of their case or writing down their requests seriously can prove that the staff member is willing to help them. So, they cannot find any excuse to criticize the staff.

The Restaurant Customers

A group of customers in a restaurant was upset. They had waited for a long time but the food they ordered had still not arrived. Later, they saw the late-comers on the next table received the same food they have ordered. They got even angrier after seeing this and started to yell at the waiter: “What is going on? They have already got their dish even though they had made their order later than us! Did you take our order?” The waiter understood that he had given the dish to the wrong customers.

Analysis

What is the customers’ motive? The customers were at the stage of anger because they found being treated unfairly. Therefore, giving them some special favours is needed. Though their reaction was not intense, the problem must be handled immediately to ensure a quality customer service. It is necessary to soothe the customers’ anger and to prevent them from disturbing other customers.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions

The waiter should admit his mistake honestly and show understanding towards the customers’ reaction. Hopefully his sincerity can soothe their anger. He can also do some follow-up work in front of them to prove that he is actively responding to their needs. He can say, "Sorry for waiting so long. Please accept my apology. (Dead Dog Card) I will go to the kitchen now and ask them to make your dish immediately. (Action Card) The restaurant should also show its apology in the form of present by offering free drinks or snacks to the customers. The waiter can politely say, "Thank you for your support to our restaurant. Here are some snacks for you. You can enjoy your snacks while waiting for your dishes. They will be coming shortly." (Present Card) The customers would usually be satisfied after getting their gifts.
8.10 Emphasize the negative influence on clients’ family (Family Card)

When clients become aggressive or lose control of themselves, they may not be able to think clearly. Therefore, reminding them of the disgrace their violent behaviour is bringing to their family members will help calming them down. For instance, the staff may say in an appropriate moment: "Please think about how your son would feel if you acted violently here? How would his classmates look upon him?"

8.11 Well-being of clients (Caring Card)

Some clients are living in disadvantaged situations, such as discordance with family, suffering from physical illness and facing financial problems. They believe that no one cares about them, and feel helpless. They may hold a grudge against everyone. If the staff let them understand that everything the staff did is for their own good, they may become more amenable. For example, a nurse may say to a patient, "We are just trying to help you get better. Please be patient." His/her attitude may turn better after knowing the good intention of the staff.

8.12 Remind clients of past events (The Past Card)

At critical moments, staff can mention accidents or unhappy incident in the past to alert clients of the potential danger. After being aware of the possible consequences of their own actions, the clients will not get angry and will even thank the staff for reminding them.
The Case of Security Guard

A security guard saw a woman obstructing the main entrance of a shop with a pram. The staff asked her to leave immediately but she felt discontented and complained about the guard’s attitude: “Are you trying to bully me and my baby? You are so rude. I will report this to your senior for sure!” After saying that, the woman called her husband to come and insisted on making a complaint. Finally, the security manager came to settle the incident and the guard had to apologize to the couple.

Analysis

What is the woman’s motive? She was angry because she felt that her freedom was restrained and she should not be stopped in a shopping mall. Moreover, the guard failed to explain the reason for asking her to leave the entrance, which made her feel being picked on. The guard should let her know that he stopped her from obstructing the entrance is due to safety concerns.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions

The security guard can use the "family card" and "caring card" to let her know that her behaviour will affect her family. He asked her to leave is for her own good. The guard can say, “How old is your baby? He is so cute and adorable (Family Card). You should be careful because there are lots of busy people passing by. They may bump on your pram and hurt your baby. It will be safer to move the pram aside. There are fewer people around.” (Caring Card) The guard can also use "Past Card" and say, "Please be careful for leaving your pram here. Last month, a pram was pushed over here (Past Card). Your baby might get hurt easily. It will be safer to move the pram aside (Caring Card)."

8.13 Arouse clients’ sentiments on special persons or events (Sentiments Card)

The staff can arouse clients’ sentiments on certain people or events in order to appease their anger. Whenever necessary, the staff can remind them of the long-lasting relationship they have with the company. Hopefully, they may think twice before deciding to ruin this relationship. For example, a social worker can respond to a complaining parent in this way: "We are sorry that our services were not up to your expectations. In fact, we should thank you for supporting us and using our services for all these years. Our colleagues have known you well and have always complemented you on being an actively involved parent! We have collaborated very well in the past.... we are just like a family."
The Mother with an Autistic Son
A woman has a 20-year-old autistic son who has been chronically ill. They need to go to the hospital 3 times a week for check-up and each session lasts for 3 hours. This has been going on for 10 years and the woman complains frequently. Once, she criticized the nurse for turning on the television at an inappropriate time: "You are picking on my son. I know you turned on the television on purpose and used the noise to disturb my son. I don’t trust you nurses. None of you can help us! You always bully us!" She also messed up everything in the room. The nurse has tried to understand her situation with her husband before but she has always avoided the conversation. It might due to their poor relationship or her husband did not provide enough support for her.

Analysis
What is her motive? The woman who frequently complains and loses her temper is probably physically and mentally exhausted for taking care of her son alone for so many years. Besides paying attention to her behaviour, the nurses should also try to understand her difficulties.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions
The nurses should show empathy to her, and emphasize the mutual trust they have established throughout the ten years of medical services. The nurses should also take action to help them, such as making an appointment with a social worker or doctor for them. They can say, "Do you remember the first time your son visited the hospital? He was still a little kid at that time and now he has grown up and become so familiar with the hospital. (Sentiment Card) Actually we understand that taking care of a child alone for so many years is exhausting. (Feeling Card) Do you want to talk to a social worker or the doctor so that he can explain the treatment process to you? We can help you make an appointment. " (Action Card) The nurse can also alert her to the bad feeling she might have brought to her son, saying, "Please calm down. You son is looking at you now. You don’t want to upset him, right? Throwing yourself in a tantrum in the public may make your son feel ashamed and embarrassed. You don’t want to affect your son, do you?" (Family Card)

Angry clients may feel that people around are unfriendly and believe that no one respects them. In this situation, complimenting them in an appropriate and sincere way would help them feel gratified; and thus make them less hostile. For example, a teacher can respond to an angry parent who is shouting at school in this way: "You are a busy person. Coming to the school to talk to us about your son shows that you are really a caring father!"
The Case of Shop Keepers
In a small shop, a young staff member would sometimes complain about an older staff member for working too slow. One day, the former accused the latter impolitely: "Diapers for baby girls are pink but not baby blue! I have told you three times already!" The boss saw the incident but did not know how to respond.

Analysis
What is the motive of the younger staff? His reasons behind might be good, however, he lacks good communication skills. This involves staff cooperation in a company. Lack of skilful communication among staff may lead to staff conflict. The incident is less likely to lead to immediate violence, but a negative working atmosphere is created. It will affect the productivity of the company and the possibility of violence still exists.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions
The employer should show appreciation to the younger staff. He should also emphasize the joyful cooperation and precious working relationships among colleagues developed in the past. The employer can say, "Your caring about the performance of other colleagues shows that you care a lot about the company. (Compliment Card) If you are really thinking on behalf of the company, I would like you to keep a harmonious working atmosphere for us. All of the colleagues have contributed to the company in the past. Our business will become even better if you guys can work well together and help each other out." (Sentiment Card)

8.15 Explain related policies to clients (Policy Card)
When processing applications for services, applicants may not meet certain requirements and may eventually be rejected. Under certain circumstances, they may believe that staff made things difficult for them on purpose and become angry or violent. Therefore, staff must let them understand from the very beginning that the decision is made according to stipulated polices of the service so that they would not direct their anger towards the staff.
8.16 Resort to an authority (Boss Card)

Sometimes, clients will be more aggressive towards frontline staff who they think can be easily manipulated, but will hold back when facing higher authority. Some clients may feel having "face" if their cases are handled by a senior staff member. As such, staff can refer a troublesome case to a senior colleague, saying that it is the boss who makes the final decision and that the boss will reply to the client if necessary.

The Social Service Case

Some community centres provide assessment of electricity and gas discount for people living in the neighbourhood. A man came to the centre to apply for the discount and a staff member conducted the assessment. The staff chatted casually with him to understand his financial and living situations. The client had mentioned his investments in stocks and funds but when requested to show his bank book, he did not provide information of his investment account. After knowing that his savings had exceeded the limit, the staff informed him that he was not qualified. The client started to yell in the interviewing room and scolded the staff: “You pretend to be nice and chat with me but actually you don't want me to get the discount. You are a bad guy!”

Analysis

What is the motive of the client? The client wanted to apply for the benefit, but did not know much about the criteria. Also, the friendliness of the staff made him feel comfortable to reveal his financial situation. When he learned that he was not qualified for the benefit, he vented his anger and blamed the staff member for his failure.

Strategy and Skill Suggestions

In order to prevent recurrence of similar incidents, the staff who is handling such applications should be cautious about their communication with the clients. During the interviews regarding the application of benefit, the staff should explain the criteria clearly to the clients at the very beginning to prevent any subsequent misunderstanding. The staff should also let the clients understand that the conversation between them is work-related and they need to meet the criteria in order to be qualified for the discount. (Policy Card) Staff members should also explain to clients that all applications will be approved by their seniors, but not by them. They cannot withhold any applicant information. “My boss asks us to report accurately on all the information for him to make the final decision.” (Boss Card) If a misunderstanding has already been created and the client was showing his discontentment and was venting his anger, the staff should prevent the client from escalating his anger to violence. First of all, staff can apologise to the client for the misunderstanding. Then he can make the client aware that concealing information is against the law. The action of the staff is just to protect him. Staff can say, “I am sorry that there has been a misunderstanding in our communication. (Dead Dog Card) However, if I turn a blind eye to this now, you will be sued when you get caught later. I just don’t want to see you running into trouble.” (Caring Card) Staff can also call the boss in front of the client to explain the situation. This will make him feel that the staff member is trying to help him. (Action Card)
9 Remedy for Workplace Violence

After a violent incident, the employer must repair the damage brought to the organization, including the impact on the victim and other employees. In addition, the risk factors of the violent incident must be removed to reduce the chance of recurrence. The following approaches are suggested:

9.1 Investigation of Events

The employer should decide on how to handle the violent event promptly. If the incident is a criminal case, it must be reported to the police. If not, it can be handle by the organization base on its normal administrative procedures. Investigation requires sufficient preparation and detailed procedures, the investigators must be skillful interviewers. Time management is very important because the witnesses may forget the details if the case is left for too long. In addition, someone may try to distort, exaggerate, or make compromises. Thus, the investigation should be conducted as soon as possible after the incident has occurred. Some important details of the investigation are listed below:

- Scrutinize the information available.
- Choose an appropriate time and location for the interview, so that the interviewers can be comfortable and free from interruption.
- Staff invited to the meeting must be informed about the reason of the meeting beforehand.
- Decide beforehand whether other people will be allowed in the meeting or not.
- Make sure the witnesses are providing the information under their own will.
- The investigation procedures should comply with the law.
- Take minutes for the meeting, and keep the minutes properly.
• Stick to the principle of objectivity in investigation, such as no bias, no favour, and no prejudice etc.
• If the result of the investigation leads to disciplinary action, staff concerned should be notified in advance.
• The investigation report may include:
  (1) objective and scope of investigation;
  (2) case information and its sequence;
  (3) case analysis;
  (4) conclusion and suggestions; and
  (5) supporting documents.

9.2 Handling of Personnel Issues

Normally, an organisation’s human resources unit is responsible for workplace violence prevention. One reason is that many reported cases would result in disciplinary actions taken against the employees. Another reason is that the involvement of the human resources unit would make staff redeployment faster, and thus stop the situation from worsening. Possible measures adopted by the unit include:

(a) Immediately removal of target from the workplace

Even the violent incident may still be under investigation, the violent employee should be removed from the workplace immediately if concrete evidence exists. The organization still holds the responsibility to assure the safety of other employees even before it comes up with the final decision.

(b) Disciplinary actions

If the investigation of the violence case supports disciplinary actions, the management should reach a decision quickly in accordance with the organization’s policy and relevant procedures. Actions to be taken may include verbal warning, verbal reprimand, written reprimand, suspension or dismissal.
(c) Non-disciplinary actions

If the result of the investigation supports a non-disciplinary action, the employee can be transferred to receive counselling, employee assistance programme, or mental health support service, etc. Currently, there are local social services organizations providing counselling services for employees.

9.3 Employee Assistance

The employer may consider using the "Employee Assistance Programme" as victim support after a violent incident. The Programme can be run by staff members or external professionals. Tasks of the Programme include:

(a) Pay attention to the psychological impact of violence on employees

Violence may cause different levels of impact on individuals. The victims may feel confused, helpless, threatened, unsafe, and hard to sleep. In addition, physical symptoms may appear, such as headaches, nausea, feeling woozy, and stressed. These reactions may last for days, weeks, months, or even longer.

(b) Support for victims and other staff affected

In some situations, employees’ problems may require comprehensive intervention. For example, from crisis intervention to extensive mental health counselling. Employee assistance programme can provide employees with a simple and basic assessment, but more in-depth assessment should be conducted by professional psychologists. When necessary, victims should be recommended to attend the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and Defusing Group. This aims at reducing the post-traumatic damage inflicted on the employee, and deciding whether the employee requires further professional support.
(c) **Advice to management**

Members of the employee assistance programme can support management by analyzing the violence case, taking care of the mental health of the staff concerned, and assisting the work unit to resume its normal functioning. They can also help in announcing the incident to the public, and observe the employees’ performance after the violent incident.

### 9.4 Inspection of Security System

After a violent incident, the organization should inspect its environmental security system. It should remain close contact with the local police station to seek advice on security issues. This will help the employees know more about the role of security and law enforcement units in handling violent situations. The organization can also seek advice from security consultants or employ them to conduct security assessment of the workplace. The consultants should be able to identify areas that need improvement, for example, environmental security design, risk factors, information security, and alarm systems, etc.

(a) **Strengthening environmental security measures**

After the occurrence of a violent incident, the security systems may require a re-installment or a repair of surveillance camera, alarms, metal detectors, two-way mirrors, electronic access systems, internal emergency alarm or codes, road barriers, and extra lighting in the car park or darker areas of the office building, etc.

(b) **Computer security**

The organization should prevent its computer system from being hacked or damaged. There are precedents of dismissed employees who damage the computer system, the data file in the computers, and the equipment of the workplace. An effective preventive measure is cancelling the dismissed employee’s login permission for the computer systems right after his/her dismissal.
9.5 Intervention from Management

Staff from senior management should show up in front of the other staff members after the incident to show that the organization cares about the incident and its staff. At the same time, they should be prepared to respond to staff queries in order to ease the worries of their staff. They should help the staff recover their spirit and morale, and show special care to the staff who were injured or traumatized by the experience. The following handling methods are suggested:

- Share information of the incident with the employees.
- Invite risk management professionals to assist the organization.
- Provide counselling to the affected employees and their families.
- Provide employees with sufficient rooms for sharing and dealing with their emotions in a relaxed environment.
- Encourage mutual support among employees.
- Carefully manage the venue where the violence occurred, clean up the location quickly so that employees will not be reminded of the tragedy.
- Sympathise with those who become fearful of work or the workplace.
- Appease the stress of employees brought on by the mass media.
- Use a questionnaire to collect employees’ opinions in violence prevention.
- Set up a workplace violence information system.
- Regularly review and analyze the recorded information, tendency of workplace violence, effectiveness of preventive measures, and administrative procedures or work steps.
Experiences of Other Countries

Example (1)

A Social Service Centre in the Netherlands has tried to reduce clients’ violent behaviour towards its staff by improving its interior design, so as to provide a comfortable, friendly and quiet environment to its clients. To ease the clients’ anxiety, the Centre has beautified the reception area and interview rooms, added clear signs, introduced a waiting number system, and provided appropriate entertainment for waiting clients. Moreover, a CCTV system was installed and the number of security guards was increased to deter any attempts of violence. At the same time, safety factors were taken into consideration in the selection of decoration and furniture. The new measures have achieved certain positive effects.

Example (2)

A hospital in the Netherlands has implemented a program called "Safe Care" because of staff concern on workplace violence. They used different colours and codes to divide the hospital into different areas according to the levels of violence risk. A hospital map with these areas was drawn as a reference for future improvement. Violence incidents were classified and responding strategies were designed accordingly. Furthermore, the hospital requested all staff to bring along safety alarm so they could seek help from security guards in times of trouble. These measures have reduced the number of physical attack by 30% and verbal violence by 27% in the hospital.

Example (3)

A tram company in Germany aimed to lower the incidence of harassment from customers towards the drivers. After the management identified the black spots of violence, the company set up leisure facilities for the youth in the neighbourhood. With the slogan of “Communication instead of Opposition”, its staff cooperated with local resident groups to handle conflicts with the youth proactively. This not only increased the customer satisfaction towards the company, but also reduced the rate of violence between the youth and the drivers.
Part III
Prevention and Management Strategies for Different Trades and Industries:
Case Discussion
10. Health Care Services

According to our survey and interview, reported news, and overseas research, the health care services is a relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. More “customer against employee” violent incidents have occurred in this industry than in other industries, and have caused more serious injuries to staff members. Thus we choose to further explore the health care services in this report. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, various cases will be used to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus, arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, the health care services has the following common characteristics:

- Frequent contact with patients and their families
- Responsible for monitoring patients
- Employees sometimes work outside the office
- Some workplaces are not under surveillance by the public or staff
- Employees often work outside regular office hours
- Easily access to tools that could be used as weapons in the workplace
- Highly stressful atmosphere in the workplace

The following cases are provided by the management or frontline staff of the health care services organisations concerned and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two of this kit to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

10.1 Patient against Staff

An inpatient asked the doctor to let him take a few days of sick leave at home. The doctor refused his request as his condition was unstable. The patient got really upset and started to yell at the doctor: “What? I’ve recovered already! Why can’t I go home?” The doctor and the patient were the only two in the room at that time.

Analysis

The patient was frustrated. He felt confused and disoriented.
**Skill Suggestions**

To subside the patient’s frustration and to correct his misunderstanding, the doctor should show him empathy by saying: “You seem so eager to go home, to see your family, and to get better (Feeling Card). How about this, I will see you in a few days for another check-up, so we can decide how many days of leave would fit your interest best.” The doctor can use his/her professional judgment to convince the patient by saying: “I’ve been a doctor here for many years and have treated many inpatients who suffered from the same illness like you. If you follow my instructions, I am sure your condition will improve quickly and you will be able to leave the hospital sooner (Expert Card).” The doctor can also emphasize the negative impact that the patient might bring to his family by saying: “If you go home without a full recovery, your family would be unhappy in case something happens to you. You would make them worry (Family Card).”

10.2 Patient against Staff

There was a long queue of patients in the lobby of a hospital waiting to see the doctor. One of the patients suddenly pointed at a nurse and yelled: “What kind of service is this? I’ve waited for an hour and it’s still not my turn to see the doctor!” There were many patients and some health care workers at the scene.

**Analysis**

The patient was in the initial stage of violence - “frustration”. The goal of intervention is to calm down the patient.

**Skill Suggestions**

The nurse can show empathy to the patient’s situation, and try to soothe him. The patient will be appeased once he feels being understood. The nurse should contact the related personnel in front of the patient immediately to show that she is trying to help him/her to get more information: “I can understand why you are anxious (Feeling Card). I will call my co-workers to check it out for you (Action Card).” The nurse should let the patient understand that she is only a “small potato” and doesn’t have full control over the situation. By doing
so, the patient may understand her limitations in power and be less resentful. For example, the nurse may say to him: “We will try our best to help you, but sometimes it is out of the control of frontline staff. I hope you can understand. No matter what, I will do the best I can to help you (Action Card, Soldier Card).”

10.3 Patient against Staff

A male patient initiated a conversation with a female nurse, asking her personal questions and trying to get her phone number. The nurse felt uncomfortable and did not know what to do. When she expressed that it was not appropriate for her to give him the number, he did not back off: “I just want to be friends with you. How can you really care for your patient if you can’t even give me your phone number? You don’t value customer service... You aren’t friendly at all and you look down on patients.” He made himself a scene, and caught the other patients’ attention. The nurse felt really upset.

Analysis

The patient did not listen to what other people say. He was impatient, refused to compromise, and bullied staff. He was at the stage of frustration. Thus, the intervention goal is to calm him down. To stop the patient from creating a nuisance, he should be accompanied to leave the scene if necessary.

Skill Suggestions

The medical staff may consider the following methods:

(1) Teamwork: Before the “rescuers” come, other colleagues near the scene should stand by the nurse to show their support.

(2) If the situation worsens, make up an excuse for the nurse to leave.

(3) “Policy Card” and “Consistency Card”: The medical staff must emphasize to the patient that the hospital does not allow staff to reveal any personal details to any patient. They treat all patients the same way.
A patient took a blood test in a hospital. Two days later the patient’s wound had swollen. He went to the hospital and scolded the nurse who took his blood sample: “What’s wrong with you? What did you do to my arm?” He yelled and made a complaint to the nurse’s supervisor. Afterwards, the supervisor met the nurse in private and said: “Give me a statement 15 minutes before you leave work today!” The nurse was nervous and did not know what to do: “What should I write...I...” Her supervisor replied loudly: “I don’t care! I don’t want to hear any excuse! Write it! Give it to me before you get off! I won’t help you proofread it! Just write it!” The nurse managed to finish the statement but was discontented.

**Analysis**

The patient wanted to complain about the service, and was worried about his wound. So the nurse and her supervisor should try to soothe his anxiety. Moreover, the supervisor should be careful in assisting their subordinates to handle such problems. In this case, the supervisor made a premature judgment and pressurized the nurse before taking his time to look into the details of the incident. This may cause a negative impact on staff morale. The supervisor should try to help the nurse deal with the case. Yet, he/she must stay impartial before the truth is revealed. To ease the nurse’s worries, the supervisor should also let her know that the investigation will be completed soon. The wound examination of the patient can be conducted by another nurse.

**Skill Suggestions**

The supervisor may consider using the following skills:

1. **“Action Card”**: The nurse should try to comfort the patient by saying: “Don’t worry. I will help you check the wound..... How are you feeling right now? Does it hurt a little?” The patient’s accusation might be wrong, but it is not a good idea to criticize him. In fact, we should let him understand that the nurse was being helpful.

2. **“Expert Card”**: The nurse should explain to the patient that it is normal for the wound to swell after a blood test. “Ok, let me see...... Your wound looks fine. You just need to ice it a little bit. Many of our patients show the same reaction after a blood test. Don’t worry.”
(3) On the other hand, the supervisor should be supportive to the nurse, “According to what you said, you have done all the necessary procedures. You can prepare the report based on all the facts. It is close to your off-duty time now, you can hand in the report tomorrow when you report your duty. I can take a look of it for your to see if there is any clarifications needed.”

10.5 Patient’s Family against Staff

A patient was admitted to a hospital a few days ago. One day, she fell down in a hospital ward. Later, the hospital contacted her family but they thought the hospital should have contacted them earlier. They said: “You guys are neglecting your duties! You are all useless. You have notified us so late. I want to see your patient liaison officer!” They also threatened to throw a computer at the female staff at the enquiry counter. She started to snivel: “Are you trying to threaten me?” The family’s attitude got worsened: “You should cry! I don’t care if you cry. If you cry, I can see the patient liaison officer more quickly!” At the same time, the family kept yelling in the hospital lobby.

Analysis
The patient’s family ascribed the accident to the hospital. They became irrational and started to use verbal violence due to their emotions.

Skill Suggestions
To stop the family from causing further trouble and to comfort them, the staff should invite them to have a talk in a meeting room. This will help preventing the family from disturbing other patients and keeping them away from the mass media. The hospital should also inform security guards to stand by and to take immediate action whenever necessary. Staff should express sympathy for the patient’s family, saying: “We understand that you care about the patient (Feeling Card). Let us talk about how we can help you. Don’t worry. We have already informed our supervisor. We are arranging for him to meet you.” Once they understand the hospital is taking the case seriously and is sending a senior staff to meet them, they may feel they “have face”; and thus, their anger may subside (Boss Card).
10.6 Patient against Staff

One day a patient went up to the head nurse. He pointed at a nurse and said: “Head nurse, your subordinate is really rude. I want to complain about her. Tell me her name and I will write a complaint letter!” The head nurse was in a dilemma.

Analysis

The patient was unhappy about the service but had not been violent. The head nurse should be careful in responding to the patient and in assisting her subordinate.

Skill Suggestions

She can consider using the following skills:

(1) “Feeling Card”: Whether the patient is right or wrong, the head nurse should first calm the patient down. “I’m really sorry for upsetting you. What happened? Can you tell me about it? As her supervisor, I will take appropriate measures whenever necessary.”

(2) If the patient insists on getting the name of the nurse, the head nurse should not tell him her name to avoid creating troubles. In fact, she can invite the nurse to meet the patient to understand the situation. If he really wants to make a complaint, tell him the name in front of the nurse.
11. Education Services

The education services is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. Many “customer against employee” violent incidents have occurred in this industry, and have caused serious injuries to staff members. Thus we choose to further explore this industry in this report. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, education service has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with parents
- Many service recipients have family problems
- Staff face difficulties in handling some cases because they do not know the reasons behind the family problems
- Staff are often unsure of how to intervene when they are involved in the interpersonal conflict between parents. If the conflict is out of control, it may cause physical harm to other students, parents or staff
- Occasional money handling
- Highly stressful atmosphere in the workplace

The following cases are provided by the management or frontline staff of the educational organizations concerned and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

11.1 Customer against Staff

A mother brought her daughter to school one day and told the teacher that she was divorcing her husband. She asked the teacher to stop her husband if he came to pick up their daughter. That day after school, the husband came to pick his daughter up as usual. When the teacher told him what his wife said, he replied: “Have you got it wrong? I always come to pick my daughter up. I’m warning you, I’ll fight whoever tries to stop me!” The parent held his fists tightly with a fierce face.
**Analysis**

The parent was in the stage of anger. The primary goal of the teacher is to calm him down. At the same time, the teacher should maintain a “neutral” stand and should not take the role of “family policeman”. Instead of restraining him, the teacher should ask the wife to talk to her husband directly, and try not to get involved in their family dispute. Indeed, he/she could introduce the couple to a social worker if they want to.

**Skill Suggestions**

The teacher should express empathy to him by saying: “Maybe it is difficult for you to accept your wife’s request within such a short period of time (**Feeling Card**).” The teacher can stress on things that mean a lot to the angry father, like: “I am sure your daughter would like to see both her Mom and Dad. If you yell here, her peers will laugh at her. You don’t want to embarrass her, do you?” Once he understands what he does would embarrass his daughter, he might think twice before he acted (**Family Card**).

**11.2 Customer against Staff**

A grandparent called the school and requested to talk to her granddaughter on the phone. The teacher replied that the student was in the middle of the class and could not speak to her. However, she threatened to file a complain if her request was rejected: “If you don’t let me speak to her, I will call the Education Bureau and complain about your school. My granddaughter can’t learn anything because of the low quality education service of your school. Don’t think you can manipulate me.” The school knew the grandparent was learned and her words would be convincing. It could be a threat to the reputation of the school.

**Analysis**

The grandparent was in the stage of frustration. The primary goal of the teacher is to calm her down.
**Skill Suggestions**

The teachers should emphasize that they were thinking on her granddaughter’s behalf: “Can you please tell us why you are calling your granddaughter? Maybe we can help her in case of anything happens. We just want to help (**Caring Card**).” Once she understands the teacher and her are on the same boat, she will control her temper. The teachers may stall the grandparent off while they try to contact the child’s guardians (parents) to see whether something urgent has happened. They may tell the grandparent: “Can you please wait a moment? We will make some arrangements. Can you give me your phone number so we can call you back afterwards?” In this way, the grandparent will not be provoked and the teachers can gain some time to plan the next step (**Time Card**). Moreover, the teacher should make a record of the conversation in case the grandparent makes something up later.

### 11.3 Stranger against Staff

A school frequently received calls from people looking for a staff who had already left the position. The female caller claimed to be the the ex-employee’s friend or mother, while the male caller claimed to be his father. All requested to talk to the ex-employee on the phone. Although they were told the person they were looking for had already left his position, they kept asking furiously: “Not here!? Are you sure?” or “He said he works here. Are you lying to me?”

**Analysis**

These people are strangers and their next step of action is unpredictable. Therefore, the most important point is upholding the safety of staff and preventing them from create further nuisances. Staff should not be overstressed since the strangers contact them by phone. Only verbal violence can take place, but not physical violence. However, the staff concerned must avoid provoking these strangers or make them angry in order to ensure their own safety.

**Skill Suggestions**

Staff who answer the call of the strangers should state clearly that the ex-employee has already left his position and ask them not to call again: “I’m sorry but the person you are looking for has already left his position. Is there anything I can help you? Do you want to
leave your contact with us so that if he visits us in the office, we can inform him.” If the strangers are the real relatives or friends of the ex-employee, they will thank staff for being attentive. If they are not, a clear reply will convince them it is useless to keep calling. Whenever necessary, the school should seek help from the police.

11.4 Stranger against Staff

The school door was opened to allow parents to pick up their children after classes. A woman ran into the school and cried for help, saying that her friend and her were being attacked by a stranger. They requested to hide in the school.

Analysis

Since the woman is a stranger, the staff cannot predict what troubles she might bring to the school. Therefore, it is appropriate for the staff to refuse her entrance to the school. The school should contact the police for help if necessary.

Skill Suggestions

Taking the safety of students into consideration, the staff concerned should refuse her request. He/she should emphasize the school policy does not allow strangers to go into the school premise. “I’m sorry. According to the school regulations, outsiders cannot enter the school area (Policy Card). Do you want me to call the police for you (Action Card)?” In this way, the staff will be able to ensure the safety of the students, and avoid provoking the woman.

11.5 Customer against Staff

A parent tried to get privileges for his children in school. One day, he talked to a teacher: “I know the school supervisor. I always go high tea with him. I will tell him if you don’t do your job right. Be a smart person, OK?”

Analysis

The parent had no tendency for violence and his remark was unlikely to develop into violence. However, the teacher might feel uncomfortable with his speech or even feel being threatened. Appropriate response from the teacher can reduce his own anxiety as well as to help the parent exhibit some self-control.
Skill Suggestions

The teacher can consider using the following skills:

(1) “Consistency Card”: The teacher should let the parent understand the school treats all students the same. He needs not to worry about his children for being treated unfairly, or looks for privileges for them. The teacher may say to him: “I believe you can see that every teacher really cares about the students in the school. You don’t have to worry about it.”

(2) “Family Card”: The teacher can hint the parent that everything he does would be observed by his children, so he needs to watch his own behaviour. The teacher may say: “You are right. We understand that everything we say and do in school will post an effect on the children, so we will try our best to maintain our high quality of service.”

11.6 Customer against Staff

During the school morning assembly, students were informed to pay their lunch fees before next Monday. Later, one of the parents sent a complaint letter to a teacher: “I don’t understand why your school has to collect lunch money so early. Did you guys take business management courses in school? You must be getting commission from the vendor. That’s why you are collecting our money so early. I’m reporting this to the ICAC!” After reading this letter, the teacher in charge of this event felt threatened and started to cry.

Analysis

This is a written threat posted by the parent. If handled inappropriately, the threat can be intensified. He may use a different means, such as calling the school to make a verbal intimidation.

Skill Suggestions

The teacher may consider using the following skills:

(1) “Action Card” and “Boss Card”: The teacher should first express concern for the parent’s situation and try to understand whether he is facing financial problems. Then he/she
should pass the final say to the school principal. By doing so, the teacher will be able to prevent direct confrontation with the angry parent and let him understand the teacher is willing to help him. The teacher may tell him: “What about tell us more about your situation so that we can see how we can help you? If you’re facing financial difficulties, I can inform the school principal and see if we can defer your payment.”

(2) “Compliment Card”: The principal can write the parent a reply to express concern. At the same time, the principal can acknowledge his children’s hard work at school, and are always respectful towards the teachers and school rules. This will remind the irrational parent that he should follow the rules, like his children do.

11.7 Customer against Customer

Parent A and parent B did not get along with each other due to personal issues. When they were waiting at the school playground to pick up their children one day after school, parent A looked at some photos and pointed at one of them. Parent B thought that parent A was talking about her, so she flipped out: “What are you pointing at? Stop gossiping, you bitch!” Parent A yelled back: “I have every right to point at things. Are you trying to pick a fight?” The two parents started to have physical contact and pull each other’s hair, other parents were stunned.

Analysis

Violence has already occurred and both the perpetrator and victim are service users. Staff members were not involved. Thus, the key point in handling this case is how to control the parents’ violent behaviour so that the students’ emotions and the school’s image won’t be affected. If the school fails to manage the parents’ violent behaviour properly, similar cases may occur again in the future.
Skill Suggestions

In this case, there are two levels of intervention:

**Risk control:**

(1) Separate the two parents to reduce the tension, or separate them from the bystanders in order to avoid them from hurting the bystanders by any accidents.

(2) “Family Card”: Emphasize that every move they make in school are observed by the teachers, other parents and students. “What can I help you two? Would you like to sit down over there and have a chat (Separate them)? Your children are going to be upset if their classmates and them see you making a row. I know you care about your children and don’t want to embarrass them in front of their classmates.”

**Risk Remedy:**

(1) Meet both parents after the incident and explain to them that their behaviour is unacceptable in school grounds. Ask them to guarantee that it won’t happen again.

(2) Meet the parents’ children after the incident and explain to them that the conflict is an adult matter. The problem has been solved, and they have no need to get involved.
Wholesale and retail is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. Many “customer against employee” violent incidents have occurred in this industry and have caused serious injuries to staff members. Thus we choose to further explore this industry in this report. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, this industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with customers
- Cash handling
- No control over who can access to the workplace
- Workplace is not under surveillance by the public
- Difficulty in seeking immediate help from security personnel
- Lack of escape route in the workplace
- Lack of sufficient training of the management to handle the staff conflict
- Frontline staff lack sufficient training in handling customers’ brawls and complaints.

The following cases are provided by the management or frontline staff of wholesale and retail companies and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

### 12.1 Customer against Staff

One day the delivery from the distributor was late. So, a wholesale company could not deliver the goods to the retailer in time. The retailer phoned the company to make a complain and shouted loudly: “Don’t you have any credibility? I have waited for the whole morning for your company to deliver the goods! Have you taken my order?” The answering staff tried to comfort him.

**Analysis**

The customer wanted to express his dissatisfaction towards the inefficient service, and hoped to get a reassurance from the company. Since this was done through the phone, it is likely that he would use verbal violence rather than physical violence.
**Skill Suggestions**

The staff concerned can use the following skills to handle the case:

1. **“Action Card”**: The staff should express an enthusiastic attitude in helping the customer solve the problem. The staff may tell him: “Ok, I will call the driver immediately and see what is wrong. I will call you back in a few minutes”. Taking immediate action can soothe the anger of impatient customers.

2. **“Dead Dog Card”**: Since the company has caused inconvenience for the customer, it is reasonable for the staff to make an apology to the customer: “I’m really sorry. The distributor’s schedule was delayed today. We will keep track of your case and ask the distributor to deliver your good as soon as possible.” Then the customer will consider the company is being responsible.

**12.2 Customer against Staff**

A wholesale company has involved in retail business, and had a lot of overseas customers. One day, an overseas customer wrote an email to the company to express his dissatisfaction on a dysfunctional product. However, it is believed the product failure is led by misusage. The email was filled with swearwords and the customer threatened to void his credit card payment.

**Analysis**

The customer wanted to express his dissatisfaction towards the product and hoped that he would not have to pay for it. Therefore, he put the blame on the company. Since he was overseas, he could not use any verbal or physical violence on the staff. All he could do is sending written threats or claiming not to order goods from the company again. Still, the customer’s written threat may make the staff feel uneasy or affect their work morale.

**Skill Suggestions**

1. **“Policy Card”**: If there is no correlation found between the product failure and the company’s oversight, the staff should explain the situation clearly to the customer: “I’m sorry. It is our company’s policy that we will not make any compensation in this situation.” This will let the customer understand that all compensations must be made according to the company’s policy.
(2) “Consistency Card”: The staff should let the customer understand that the company treats all their customers equally. Customers will not be privileged or treated partially. Hopefully the customer would understand it is useless to keep grumbling.

(3) When reading these provoking emails, the staff member concerned should watch out for his own emotion. He may leave his seat to calm down whenever necessary.

12.3 Customer against Staff

An elderly man went to a pharmacy to buy “Pak Fung Pill” but returned the next day for an exchange with an opened box of pills. He complained to the salesman for giving him the wrong pills, and insisted that he wanted the one he described. The salesman came to understand that the one he wanted was the “Pak Fung Pill” in its old package from 10 years ago. The salesman tried to explain it to the old man, but he did not listen. He started to yell in the shop: “You are cheating an old man into buying fake products. Give me the real thing or you are not getting away with this!”

Analysis

The situation is at the first stage of violence. The customer is frustrated and starts to be verbally violent. He was being suspicious of the quality of the product but not picking on salesman. Therefore, the salesman should strengthen his trust.

Skill Suggestions

The staff should express understanding towards the customer’s worry by saying: “The company has changed their packaging a few years ago. A lot of customers are used to the old one and thought I have given them the wrong ones. Though the packaging has changed, the ingredients and the taste remain the same. I can understand why you are being so cautious since it’s edible (Feeling Card)!” The staff can use his experience and knowledge to regain the customer’s trust towards the product. “Don’t worry. I have worked here for 20 years. I can tell if the product is fake or real. This product has a label to show that it’s real. We got it directly from the general agent so it has a guarantee (Expert Card).” The staff can also emphasize that the old man is a frequent customer so they value him a lot: “You have purchased from us for 3 to 4 years already. I can recognize you; I won’t lie to you. We have to keep a good reputation in the neighbourhood (The Past Card).”
12.4 Customer against Staff

A young man went to a pharmacy to purchase a “pregnancy tester”. Later, he returned to the store angrily with the used “pregnancy tester”. He blamed the staff for giving him a defective product. “This is ridiculous. It didn’t work when my girlfriend tried to use it. Give me a refund!” The staff explained that there are no refunds for used products. The man started to shout: “How can you run a business like this? You better watch out. I’m warning you!”

Analysis
The customer was at the frustration stage and felt confused. As the customer might lose his control, the staff should pay attention to how desperate he is. Verbal violence may turn into physical violence if handled inappropriately.

Skill Suggestions
The staff should show empathy to the customer: “Sometimes it’s not accurate if you only use one method to testify the result. To play safe, I have seen customers using “pregnancy tester” first and go check with a doctor later to ensure the result is correct (Feeling Card).” The staff can also use his professional knowledge to relieve the customer’s anxiety so that he will be able to calm down and listen to his analysis. “I’ve worked in the pharmacy for many years. A lot of customers buy this brand because the manufacturer is very experienced in producing this type of product. Don’t worry. According to your description, you’ve conducted the test properly. There is a chance that she isn’t pregnant. If you want to testify the result, you can check with a doctor (Expert Card).”

12.5 Customer against Staff

A customer had bought a computer from a computer company some time ago. Later, the customer found some problems on the computer (most likely to be infected by virus) after he had used it for a period of time. He called the company saying: “You guys are selling faulty products. If you don’t exchange a new one for me, I will write a complain letter to the newspaper!” Then the staff replied: “The virus problem is not included in our maintenance service, therefore we cannot exchange it for you.” The customer scolded the staff over the phone.
Analysis

Other than venting his emotion, the customer wanted to seek some professional advice to help him solve the problem of his computer. If the company can maintain a positive relationship with the customer, he will continue to use the company’s services or products in the future.

Skill Suggestions

The staff should show empathy to the customer, and ease his worries. “It is quite annoying for the computer to break down when we are in a hurry. Although the warranty of your computer has expired, you can still tell me what has happened and see if I can offer you some advice over the phone (Feeling Card).” The staff can also offer him some professional and tangible advice: “According to your description, it is probably not a hardware failure. It is most likely that your computer has been infected by some viruses. To get rid of the viruses, you can buy an anti-virus software from the stores or download it from the internet. If you cannot solve the problem, bring your computer back and let us check it for you (Expert Card).”
Security and law enforcement is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. Many “customer/stranger against employee” violent incidents have occurred in this industry, causing serious injuries to staff members. Thus we choose to further explore this industry in this report. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry to arouse the readers concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, this industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with the public
- Responsible for supervision or security management
- Working outdoors sometimes
- Employees need to work late at night
- Workplace may not be under surveillance by the others
- Insufficient lighting in the workplace surroundings
- Workplace may be located in an area of high crime rate
- Employees work outside regular office hours
- No control over who can access to the workplace
- High exposure to customers who are tipsy or have a tendency for violent behaviour
- Highly stressful atmosphere in the workplace
- Frontline staff lack sufficient training in handling customers’ brawls and complaints.
- If customers are out of control, it may threaten the safety of the other customers or staff.

The following cases are provided by the management or frontline staff of the security and law enforcement organizations involved in the project and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

### 13.1 Customer against Staff

While a security guard was on duty in the car park of a cinema at 11:00pm, a visitor approached him to enquire about parking discount. The guard answered: “I’m sorry but parking discount ends at 9:00pm. The time is already over.” The visitor got irritated and shouted loudly: “I have just finished watching a movie. I don’t know about the parking regulations of this shopping mall. I’m a customer. If you don’t give me a discount, you are deceiving a customer. What kind of shopping centre is this? I want to file a complaint!” The
guard notified his supervisor for help immediately. The supervisor explained everything to the visitor. However, he was still behaving unreasonably as he left.

**Analysis**
The customer was at the stage of blame, and he believed the staff should be responsible for his misunderstanding of the parking discount. If the staff argued with the customer or the case was not handled properly, it was likely to develop into physical violence.

**Skill Suggestions**
Staff should make the customer feel being understood. The staff may say: “Sorry for any inconvenience we might have caused. Some customers shared similar experience with you. After watching the movie, they were disappointed to learn that the time for parking discount was over (**Feeling Card**).” Staff should also inform the customer that he has limited authority over the situation and could not change the regulations set by the company, saying: “I really want to help you but these are the rules set by the company. We small potatoes cannot change them. Sorry (**Soldier Card**)!”

### 13.2 Stranger against Staff

A delivery worker used the guest lift and escalator to deliver a carriage of goods. Once the security guard saw that, he told the delivery worker that it was dangerous to use the guest lift for delivery as it might cause an accident. The delivery worker didn’t listen and yelled back: “Don’t block my way. You will be in big trouble if I’m late!”

**Analysis**
The delivery worker was in the stage of frustration. He did not listen to the advice of other people. He was impatient, refused to compromise, and bullied the staff of the office building.

**Skill Suggestions**
The security guard should tell the delivery worker that he will be blamed by the company if he allows the delivery worker to use the guest lift. This is the regulation set by the company but not him. He should say: “I’m sorry, our company only permits delivery by goods lift. This applies to all delivery workers, I am not picking on you (**Policy Card, Consistency Card**), but I’ll get into trouble if I don’t stop you. I’m just doing my job. I hope you can understand (**Soldier Card**).” The guard can add: “If an accident is cause or somebody gets
hurt, your company would have to pay the price. You would be in big trouble then (Caring Card).”

**13.3 Stranger against Staff**

One day, the mall office received a complaint about a hawker having business in the mall and blocking the passageway. The office assigned two security guards to go there for investigation. The hawker aged about 60 was selling “Put chai pudding”. Once he noticed the two officers, he left his goods and ran immediately. He fell down and injured his head and elbow. When seeing this, the two officers rushed to check out his situation. He responded angrily: “Do you want me to die? You are bullying the elderly!” He then hit his head on the floor, and intended to injure himself. The guards called the police and ambulance for assistance.

**Analysis**

The old hawker realized that his illegal hawking was not backed by any sound reasons. His mind was filled with grumbles and fear. While executing duties in public areas, security guards not only have to deal with the rule-breakers, but should also pay attention to the response of bystanders.

**Skill Suggestions**

The security guards should let the hawker know that they were not lacking of human touch. They may say: “Are you alright? Let us help you to go over there and take a rest; see if we need to call an ambulance. We will leave other matters aside first (Caring Card).” Such response may help calming the hawker’s emotions and provide no room for bystanders to make any complaint. The guards should also let the hawker understand that they were impartial in carrying out their duties. They may tell him: “You know, we need to execute our duty according to the rules of the mall. No one is allowed to hawk here. We are not picking on you (Consistency Card). Just like you, we are employees only, and have to make a living too. If we do not take any action against the rule-breakers, we will lose our jobs (Soldier Card). Please cooperate with us.” On one hand, this message will help the hawker understand that no privilege will be given to senior citizens, and the guards will not discriminate against him because of his age. On the other hand, he would understand that the guards have no choice but to carry out their duties.
13.4 Stranger against Staff

A female hawker was driven by the security guards in a mall. Her husband got irritated and said, “How dare you are to treat my wife like this? I will fight against you till I die!” He then picked up a knife from his cart and swung it around, attacking the guards. A guard’s forearm was slashed while another guard’s left shoulder was sprained when struggling with the man. The bystanders called the police immediately, and the man was arrested.

**Analysis**

Obviously, the man acted out his aggression and hurt the guards. His violence might be an impulsive move or a vent of his rage.

**Skill Suggestions**

In such cases, prompt action and recovery of staff morale are of the utmost importance.

1. **Risk Control:**

   It is noticeable that the perpetrator was irritated at the time he arrived at the scene. Therefore, the staff present should take away any weapons nearby in order to prevent the offender from getting access to weapons. If the perpetrator is holding a weapon, the officers should seek help from the police. Meanwhile, priority should be given to staff safety. If necessary, staff should back away from the perpetrator.

2. **Risk Remedy:**

   If some staff members were injured in the incident, the management should try their best in restoring staff morale and confidence. De-briefing sessions should be arranged whenever appropriate. Management should also pay special attention to the stress level of those who have witnessed the incident. Showing extra care to the injured staff is a good management practice. Sparking mutualism among staff members (e.g. employee mutual-help group) is also helpful.
Catering industry is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. The occurrence rates of “employee and employee” violence and “customer against employee” violence are far higher than those in other industries. Staff members are harmed more grievously. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various examples to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus, arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, the industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with customers
- Cash handling
- Employees need to work on the night shift
- Employees work outside regular office hours
- No control over who can access to the workplace
- High exposure to customers who are tipsy or have a tendency for violent behaviour
- Easy access to tools that could be used as a weapon in workplace
- Difficulty in seeking immediate help from the security personnel
- Lack of escape routes in workplace
- Highly stressful atmosphere in the workplace
- Lack of means for the management to control and discipline their subordinates
- Lack of sufficient training for the management to handle staff conflict
- Frontline staff lack sufficient training in handling customers’ brawls and complaints.

The following cases are provided by the management or frontline staff of restaurants and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two and Three of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

### 14.1 Customer against Staff

In a restaurant, a waitress accidentally knocked over a menu in front of a customer causing a large bang. As the waitress did not apologize right away, the customer thought she was impolite and asked for her name. The customer grumbled, “How come your are so rude?
You won’t even say sorry!” The waitress got annoyed and asked the customer to look at her name tag instead of telling him her name. Later, the management received a complaint letter from that customer.

**Analysis**

The customer was in the blaming stage. The customer blamed the waitress mainly because she did not apologize for her mistake. Under this circumstance, the intervention aims at apologizing to the customer, as well as calming him down.

**Skill Suggestions**

The management or the staff should apologize sincerely in order to soothe the customer’s anger, “I’m sorry for the inconvenience caused (Dead Dog Card)!” As an apology, management can offer the customer gifts, such as drinks or snacks. The manager may say: “This is our gift for you. Thank you for supporting us. Please forgive us for what have happened.” Since the incident has already occurred and a complaint has already been filed, the manager may consider sending a discount voucher when replying to the customer (Present Card).

14.2 **Customer against Staff**

A night-shift staff member of a restaurant witnessed a billing dispute between three customers and his colleague. Unaware of the customers being drunk, the staff member went to check the situation. This led to the discontentment of one of the customers. He started to push and swear at the staff member. “You are cheating your customer!” The staff and customer then started to push each other.

**Analysis**

When the customer became aggressive in his gestures, he was clearly in the “Adversary Stage”. In fact, fracas could have been avoided in the first place. Under such circumstances, staff members should let the customer vent his anger. No matter who is right or who is wrong, safety should be of the utmost importance.
**Skill Suggestions**

To avoid the outbreak of violence, the staff member should stop arguing with the angry customer. The staff member may say: “I’m sorry. Please tell us what had happened, and see if we can help you (Dead Dog Card)!” Show the customers you are taking remedial actions by saying, “No worries, we will check the bill again (Action Card)!” If there is a billing mistake, you may apologize to the customer, “Sorry for the inconvenience caused. My colleague might have mistaken your bill. On behalf of the restaurant, I will present you with a VIP card (or voucher). So you will have a discount when you dine here next time (Present Card).”

**14.3 Staff against Staff**

Two colleagues quarreled about work related issues in the kitchen of a restaurant. Then the chef bit a staff member. The victim complained to the management about the humiliation. The management understood if they didn’t handle the problem properly, it might become more serious and irreversible. Yet, they had no idea what to do and had to seek advice from an external consultant.

**Analysis**

In this case, violence has already occurred. The management should start with remedial actions and prevent recurrence of similar cases:

**Skill Suggestions**

1. Management should initiate an investigation by means of human resources. If anyone was proven to be responsible for the incident, they should act accordingly, for example: (a) settle the dispute by mediation; (b) discipline the staff who behaved violently; (c) use non-disciplinary ways to deal with the problem, such as transferring the staff to another work unit.

2. Provide support and counselling to the victim. Pay attention to the psychological effect caused by the incident to the staff.
After the incident, management should also focus on preventing recurrence of violence. They can start with reducing stress in the workplace and helping employees regain “team spirit”. Through training, employees can learn stress management techniques and replace “negative thinking” by “positive thinking”. This would create a harmonious work environment and help employees recover their morale.

### 14.4 Stranger against Staff

One day, the management of a restaurant received a complaint phone call saying: “Your staff are being ridiculous. They kept on changing lanes on the road and swearing at me. They have no discipline at all. You guys need to keep a close eye on the behaviour of your staff!”

**Analysis**

There was no concrete evidence for the complaint. Traffic could get really complicated so even if the staff has really changed lanes, it was hard to determine who was right and who was wrong.

**Skill Suggestions**

To maintain the positive image of the company, the management may consider taking the following approaches:

1. **“Dead Dog Card”**: When receiving this kind of complaint, the staff must first apologize for causing the accuser any inconvenience to make him feel respected and to soothe his anger: “I’m really sorry. We will investigate the incident and follow up your complaint. Sorry for the inconvenience caused!”

2. **“Action Card”**: Besides expressing concerns, the staff should also take down the caller’s message, saying: “Thanks for your call. We understand your concern and we will take down your message in details for further process of your case.”

3. Due to the lack of concrete evidence for the complaint, management should choose to trust the related staff. However, staff should be reminded about paying attention to their languages and behaviours during staff training session. In order to maintain the positive image of the company, it should be listed on the staff handbook that swearing while working is prohibited.
One day, when a delivery worker delivered goods to the kitchen of a restaurant, a kitchen staff found that some goods were missing and asked: “Why one of the ingredients is missing?” The delivery worker answered: “I don’t know. I deliver whatever is there. It’s none of my business!” The kitchen staff responded: “What are we going to do with the missing ingredient? You should be responsible for this.” There were signs of conflict.

**Analysis**

This involves the cooperation between employees of different departments of a company. The lack of communication skills can easily lead to conflicts among staff members and even violence at work.

**Skill Suggestions**

The delivery worker should not have said: “It’s none of my business!” This will only provoke the kitchen worker. Therefore, he should show his understanding and offer his help: “Oh no! Ok, I will go check the truck and if I can’t find anything I will call the warehouse to see if they have missed it ([Action Card](#)).” The delivery worker can also emphasize that the two units have worked together for many years. He can remind the kitchen worker of their pleasant experience in the past so that he won’t easily rebuke, “I’ve delivered goods to you for many years and we know each other very well. Don’t worry. I will help you to find it ([The Past Card](#)).”
According to our survey, insurance is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. Many “customer against employee” violent incidents have occurred in this industry causing serious injuries to insurance agents. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus, arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, the industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with clients
- Handling monetary issues
- Having a mobile workplace
- Working alone
- Working outside office
- Employees work outside regular office hours
- Clients may have a tendency for violent behaviour
- Difficulty in seeking immediate help from the security personnel
- Lack of escape routes in workplace
- Staff may be harmed because of the insufficient understanding of the clients’ background

The following cases are provided by insurance agents and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two and Three of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

15.1 Customer against Staff

A client who had a 25-year work relationship with an insurance agent found out that the agent was leaving the company to join a different company. He became angry and requested to withdraw all his investment: “You can’t just leave me like this! I don’t care. Just give me back my money.” The agent failed to comfort him, so he informed the manager.

Analysis

The client was angry because the insurance agent has concealed the truth from him; and thus, he felt being disrespected. This angry client was venting his emotion, and hoping to get reassurance that his investment would not be affected due to the agent’s departure. This client would tend to be verbally abusive instead of physically violent.
**Skill Suggestions**

The agent should explain to the client that the investment would not be affected by his departure. He should take the initiative to present all the information and related documents to ease his client’s worries (Action Card). He can also enhance the client’s confidence in the company by employing his supervisor’s prestige: “Would you like to meet our area manager? She has been working in this field for 30 years and has really great achievements. She is far more experienced in financial investment than me. She has already known about your situation and is happy to meet you. (Boss Card)?”

**15.2 Customer against Staff**

An insurance agent had seen a client a couple times. One day, the client confessed his secret admiration to her: “Don’t worry! I won’t do anything to you because I respect you.” The agent told him she was married but the client constantly called her to talk about personal issues and asked her to go out.

**Analysis**

The client wanted to develop a relationship with the agent and hoped to seek her attention. His next move was unpredictable. He might give way in view of difficulties but there is a possibility that he would do something that could harm the others.

**Skill Suggestions**

The insurance agent should make the client understand that she treats all her clients the same way. No client will be privileged. She may say:”As insurance agents, we treat all clients the same way. Generally speaking, we meet them once a year to review their insurance plans. In normal circumstances, we will neither meet them every week, nor talk about personal issues (Consistency Card).
15.3 Customer against Staff

An insurance agent took over the clients of another agent as the other agent had left his office. A client expressed his discontentment with the plan introduced by the predecessor to the replacement agent. He started to swear: “You guys are not doing the right job. The plan is a scam! I was told to buy things that I don’t need. It was a big mistake.”

Analysis

The client was angry because he did not get the service he wanted. He claimed that the previous agent did not understand his needs. Therefore he blamed the substitute, hoping that someone would listen to him and provide him the service he wanted. In this case, it is unlikely that the client would become physically violent.

Skill Suggestions

The agent can consider using the following means to handle the case:

(1) “Feeling Card”: The insurance agent should show his understanding of the client’s discontentment as the client’s needs were not met and he was eager to get the service that he was expected. While listening actively, the agent may say: “I agree with you. Of course you would want an insurance plan that matches your needs as you are paying for it.” When the client sees that the agent is trying to understand his needs with patience, he will be pacified.

(2) “Action Card”: The agent can take immediate action to ease the client’s worry. For example, the agent may say: “I am going to review your plan and help you list out how much you have to pay a month and the amount of dividends you can receive each year.” This action will let the client know that the agent is happy to help him understand his own plan more.

(3) “Expert Card”: The agent should make the client understand all insurance agents are licensed. As such, they are obligated by professional ethics. The agent may say: “Don’t worry. All insurance agents need to obtain licenses to work. We have received professional training. When preparing insurance plans for our clients, we need to meet their needs. Perhaps the previous agent was a greenhorn. Don’t worry. I’ve worked in this company for more than 10 years. I can help you solve your problem.”

Insurance
16. Transportation

According to our survey, transportation is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. There are numerous cases of “driver against driver” violence and “customer/stranger against driver” causing serious injuries to those involved. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus, arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, this industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with customers and the public
- Cash handling
- Employees work outside regular office hours or at late night
- Having a mobile workplace
- Responsible for monitoring passengers’ behaviour
- Working alone
- Working outdoors or in a remote area
- No control over who can access to the workplace
- High exposure to customers who are tipsy or have a tendency for violent behaviour
- Difficulty in seeking immediate help from the security personnel
- Lack of escape routes in workplace
- Frontline staff lack sufficient training in handling customers’ brawls and complaints.
- If the conflict among customers is out of control, it may cause physical harm to other customers or staff.

The following cases are provided by transportation workers and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two and Three of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

16.1 Driver against Driver

One day a taxi driver drove to a gas station to pump his tires. As his car was parked in a location that blocked the way of another taxi, the other taxi driver started shouting: “What is wrong with you? You are blocking my way. Who do you think you are?” He kept shouting while he walked towards the taxi driver. It seemed that he was going to hit the taxi driver.
**Analysis**

The taxi driver was in the stage of anger. In addition to verbal violence, he may also become physically violent. While soothing his anger, we should pay attention to our personal safety.

**Skill Suggestions**

To avoid being harmed, the driver should use “Dead Dog Card” and apologize to the angry driver by saying: “I’m sorry. I’ll be leaving very soon.”

**16.2 Driver against Driver**

In a taxi station, a taxi driver budged into a line up. The taxi driver behind him got off his car and started to jangle: “What is wrong with you? Don’t you know the rules?” While bickering, the two had physical contact.

**Analysis**

The driver was in the stage of anger. In addition to verbal violence, he may also become physically violent. While soothing his anger, we should pay attention to our personal safety.

**Skill Suggestions**

Since queue jumping is wrong, the driver should apologize to the angry driver to avoid being harmed: “I’m sorry. I’ll be leaving immediately (Dead Dog Card).”

**16.3 Driver against Driver**

In some taxi stations, a group of taxi drivers worked together to take over the business in the area. They adopted a “one car clinging to another car” method to prevent other taxis from coming into the line. If an alien taxi successfully came into the line, some “fishy customers” would get on the taxi and request to go to a nearby location. As a result, the alien taxi had to leave the station.
**Analysis and Skill Suggestions:**

Though this case tends to be a bullying one instead of a violent one, it is worth the attention of the taxi industry. If some taxi drivers could not control their temper, it could lead to fracas and even outbreak of violence. Taxi drivers should work together to attain mutual benefits and avoid vicious competition.

**16.4 Customer against Driver**

A passenger got on a taxi and asked the driver to cross the harbour tunnel. When the taxi was about to enter the tunnel, he suddenly said: “Driver, I want to get off here. I’m telling you to stop right here!” He shouted as he kicked the door. He even left without paying his fare.

**Analysis**

The passenger was in the stage of frustration. He was confused and disorientated. The taxi driver should pay attention to his emotional status. The outburst may turn into a safety issue if handled improperly. Thus, the intervention should focus on the safety of the passenger.

**Skill Suggestions**

The passenger might have thought of some urgent issues and wanted to leave the taxi. The taxi driver should delay the passenger to do anything recklessly. The driver may tell him: “Calm down. I will let you off very soon. You can get off after the cars behind us have passed. I don’t want you to be knocked down by the cars passing by. You can leave soon. Don’t worry (**Caring Card**)”

**16.5 Customer against Driver**

In the middle of a journey, a taxi passenger requested a discount: “It usually costs me HK$20. How come it cost HK$50 now? I usually pay HK$20, so I will only pay HK$20. I won’t give you an extra penny.” The driver refused to offer him a discount. The passenger pulled him out of the taxi and beat him up.
**Analysis**

Taxi drivers always work alone. Sometimes they work at midnight and even in remote areas. Therefore, they have developed their own set of jargons to communicate with the pager stations and among themselves.

**Skills Suggestions**

To reduce the damage done to drivers and to deter potential attackers, the following steps can be taken:

1. The driver should run away immediately and report the crime to the police to avoid further or serious injury.
2. Install “partitions” in the taxi to separate passengers from the driver to prevent unexpected violence.
3. Install “alarm/silent alarm” on the exterior of the taxi. When the driver is in danger, he can press the alarm to seek help from the pedestrians or other drivers.

**16.6 Customer against Driver**

A drunken passenger got on a taxi and kept swearing at the driver.

**Analysis and Skill Suggestions:**

Since the passenger was in a trippy state, any type of communication technique would be useless. In fact, strengthening of security measures would be more useful in case of emergency. Related measures may include:

1. Install “partitions” in the taxi to separate passengers from the driver to prevent unexpected violence.
2. Install “alarm/silent alarm” on the exterior of the taxi. When the driver is in danger, he can press the alarm to seek help from the pedestrians or other drivers.
16.7 Stranger against Driver

A person made a phone call at midnight to request a taxi to a remote area in the New Territories. When the taxi arrived, three strangers suddenly appeared and tried to break into it by battering the windows. Luckily another taxi happened to pass by and scared the culprits away.

**Analysis and Skill Suggestions:**
Since the driver was dealing with the law breakers, any type of communication technique would be useless. Strengthening of environmental security measures would be more useful in case of crisis. Related measures may include:

1. Install “partitions” in the taxi to separate passengers from the driver to prevent unexpected violence.

2. Install “alarm/silent alarm” on the exterior of the taxi. When the driver is in danger, he can press the alarm to seek help from the pedestrians or other drivers.

16.8 Stranger against Driver

A taxi driver picked up a passenger in the middle of a street. Some strangers suddenly held up the taxi and drove the passenger away. They did not allow the driver to pick up passengers on that street.

**Analysis and Skill Suggestions:**
Since the strangers may belong to an organized crime syndicate, any type of communication technique would be useless. Taxi companies should cooperate with the police and report such cases so that the police can raid the syndicate.

16.9 Customer against Staff

Many buses only come in 15-20 minute intervals during non-rush hour. A lot of passengers think it is unacceptable to wait that long. One day after a bus stopped by a bus stop, a passenger boarded and shouted angrily at the bus driver: “I’ve waited so long for the bus to come. The service is so bad! You guys take my fare right away but your service is terrible!” He continued to shout loudly.
Analysis

The passenger is angry because the bus service did not meet his expectation. His motive is to vent his dissatisfaction. He was picking on the service but not the bus driver. Thus, the driver had no need to argue with him.

Skill Suggestions

The driver can express his understanding and concern to the angry passenger: “Well, it is non-rush hour now, buses only come in every 15-20 minute. Passengers have to wait for a while if they miss a bus. Please take a seat. Both of us are in a hurry. So, let’s start off.” This can help the passenger think that the bus driver understands that he is in a rush. Thus, the driver can appease his hostility (Feeling Card). The driver can also let the passenger know that there are ways to channel his comments about the service. He may say: “The number of the company’s customer hotline is posted in the bus. You are welcome to call them to give your comments. I always tell those who are dissatisfied with our service to call the hotline. If the service gets improved, the life of our drivers would be much easier. It will be beneficial to all of us (Action Card).” This will let the passenger know that the bus driver is trying to help him and in fact, they are on the same boat.

16.10 Customer against Staff

Sometimes passengers like to stay close to the entrance for their own convenience instead of moving to the back of the bus. This makes it hard for the incoming passengers to get into the bus, and blocks the sight of the bus driver. Usually the bus driver will ask the passengers to move in. One day, a passenger responded angrily to the driver’s request: “It’s really crowded. How can we move? If you are smart enough, you won’t be a bus driver.”

Analysis

There are always some selfish passengers who do not care about the other passengers. However, if the case is treated inappropriately, it may turn verbal abuse into physical violence. The driver should not scold the passenger directly, but he can point out the consequences to all the other passengers.
**Skill Suggestions**

The driver can use “**Group Pressure Card**” to let the passenger know that no one is on his side, and hopefully he will give way. The driver may say: “Look, the entrance is blocked. It is difficult for the incoming passengers to get on the bus. It is really crowded here, and I cannot start driving.” As the driver will only head off under a safe situation, the driver can let the passengers know that they will lose time if they do not cooperate. The driver may say: “If you guys don’t move in, I won’t be able to see the side mirror. I can’t drive under this situation as it may cause a traffic accident. I don’t want you to get hurt (**Time Card, Caring Card**). Since the passengers are in a rush, they will cooperate with the driver.

**16.11 Customer against Staff**

One day while a bus was moving, the air conditioning suddenly broke down and the temperature started to rise. Some of the passengers became impatient. At that time, a passenger went to the bus driver and shouted: “It’s so hot. Why are you still driving when the air conditioning is broken? Fix it before you head off again! You guys are torturing your customers!” His aggressive moves attracted other passengers’ attention.

**Analysis**

The passenger might be irritated by the sweltering condition. He was trying to vent his emotion. If the situation is treated inappropriately, it may turn verbal abuse into physical violence. Instead of arguing with him, the driver may consider the following approach.

**Skill Suggestions**

The driver should be empathetic and express understanding towards his discomfort. He may say: “Oh, the air-conditioner has suddenly broke down. No wonder I am sweating bullets (**Feeling Card**).” When the passenger thinks they are on the same boat, his will tend to be less hostile. The driver should also apologize for the inconvenience caused by the air conditioning, “I’m sorry that the air conditioning has broken down but the ventilation is still working. Don’t worry. We will have someone fix it when we get to the station. I’m sorry but please be patient (**Dead Dog Card**). If we change another bus now, it will waste your time (**Caring Card**).”
16.12 Customer against Staff

One day while the bus was moving, a passenger said to his neighbouring passengers: “I think we are sitting in a tram. It’s so slow.” After listening to the conversation, the bus driver did not respond and continued to drive according to the speed limit. Later, the passenger went to the bus driver and said: “Are you a novice? Why are you driving slowly? I’m in a hurry! Do you know how to drive?” His speech was provocative.

**Analysis**

The passenger was impatient and blamed the bus driver’s for his driving skill. He wanted to vent his emotion and to get someone to give him an explanation of the slow speed.

**Skill Suggestions**

The bus driver can consider using the following approaches:

1. **Policy Card**: The driver can tell the passenger that the speed is restricted by company policies. “I’m sorry but the speed limit of the bus company is 70 km/hr while that of the general city street is 50 km/hr. Bus drivers must drive according to the regulations.” Let the passenger know that the driving speed will not be changed because of him.

2. **Soldier Card**: The driver can also let the passenger understand that the bus driver is only an employee of the company and does not have the right to decide the speed limit of the bus. He is following the company’s regulations only. The driver may say: “I want to go faster too, but I need to follow the company’s regulations, including the speed limit of the bus. If I don’t follow the regulations, I will be fired when being found.”

16.13 Stranger against Staff

One day, a bus confronted with a private car on a one-way road. Neither of the drivers was willing to give way. After arguing for some time, the driver of the private car finally retreated and gave way reluctantly. While backing his car, the driver of the private car swore at the bus driver. The bus driver ignored him. Later, the driver of the private car drove to the bus terminus, waiting to seek revenge from the bus driver. He said while walking to the bus driver: “I am pissed by your arrogance. Dare you fight with me?!”
**Analysis**

The driver of the private car has been verbally violent already. He may proceed to do something violent at any time. On one hand, he was venting his anger, and on the other hand, taking revenge is a way to save “face”. He was expecting an apology from the bus driver.

**Skill Suggestions**

Let senior staff, such as the station head, settle the case by mediation. This would make the driver of the private car feel being valued and respected (**Boss Card**). The station head should represent the bus company to apologize to the client without losing dignity: “I can more or less understand what has happened. Our company would like to express our apology if there was anything made you feel unpleasant or inconvenient. We are really sorry.” The station head can continue to compliment the part that the driver of the private car has done right: “Actually we appreciate that you gave way at that moment. Everybody on the bus would thank you for being considerate. We really appreciate it (**Compliment Card**).” After being acknowledged, he will not do something violent which may tarnish his personal image.

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**16.14 Customer against Customer**

During public holidays, there are more bus passengers than usual. Most of them are tourists or campers. On one public holiday, two groups of young passengers suddenly got into a quarrel while waiting for the bus to come. Both parties had ten to twenty people and the argument could turn into a group fight at anytime. Other passengers felt uncomfortable with the situation and were afraid that they might not be able to dash for cover in case of a fight. The staff members of the bus station had no idea what to do.

**Analysis**

The two groups had threatened each other and were even ready to fight. They were trying to safe “face”, and to show off in front of others.
**Skill Suggestions**

The staff can consider using the following methods:

(1) Separate the two groups from each other. Get one of the groups on a bus as quickly as possible. At the same time, arrange a different bus to take the other group. This is done to avoid further conflicts if they are put on the same bus.

(2) “**Caring Card**”: Tell the two groups respectively: “You’d better get on the bus quickly. Once the police have come, all of you have to go to the police station for investigation. Then you can’t go camping, and you’ll be disappointed.” Remind the young people of the gain and the loss from the row. If they can understand they will benefit from nothing, they will control themselves.

(3) After the incident, the company should do more promotion for requesting the passengers to comply with the rules in the bus station so as to prevent recurrence of such cases. The staff should pay more attention to the passengers on holidays. They should keep in touch with the police and seek help from them if necessary.
According to our survey, welfare service is another relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. A number of “client against employee” violent incidents have occurred in this industry causing serious injuries to staff members. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus, arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, this industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with service recipients
- Having a mobile workplace
- Need to approve the applications of privileges and welfare benefits
- Require to work alone sometimes
- Require to work outside office sometimes
- Employees may need to work at night
- Some workplaces are hermetic
- No control over who can access to the workplace
- Clients may suffer from mental illnesses or have a tendency for violent behaviour
- Easy access to tools that could be used as weapons in workplace
- Difficulty in seeking immediate help from the security personnel
- Lack of escape routes in workplace
- Highly stressful atmosphere in the workplace
- Face difficulties in handling some cases since they do not know the reasons behind certain family issues

The following cases are provided by welfare service organizations and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two and Three of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

### 17.1 Client against Staff

In a youth centre, a service user suddenly hit a staff member with a baseball bat. He was dissatisfied with how the staff had treated him previously, and thus took revenge on the staff.
Analysis

Since violence has already occurred, ensuring the safety of the staff team and other service users in the centre is of the utmost importance. Moreover, the ultimate aim should target at strengthening the preventive measures in order to avoid recurrence of similar cases.

Skill Suggestions

**Immediate actions should be:**

1. Use the “**Feeling Card**” to soothe the service user and prevent the situation from worsening. The staff may say to him, “I know you are very angry. I really want to hear your grievance. Put down your bat and we will talk about it.”

2. Since there is no security guard in the youth centre, the staff members have to stop the service user through a “team work approach”. They should work together to overpower the service user or seek help from the police.

3. If the situation worsens and the service user becomes uncontrollable, the best way is to “**Run**” - That is, the staff should evacuate other service users and leave the centre immediately.

**Preventive measures may include:**

1. Allow sufficient means for service users to channel their discontent.

2. Improve procedures in handling complaints.

3. Strengthen staff training in quality customer service.

4. In staff deployment, team up at least two staff members for each shift.

5. Make sure the emergency exits are always clear, and are ready for evacuation of the service users in case of violence.
17.2 Client against Staff

In a children’s home, a parent was unhappy about his wife talking to a social worker and attempted to cause trouble. The wife left through an emergency exit at once, and the husband was accompanied by a security guard to leave the home later. Later the same evening, though the home had already taken precautions by closing the front gate, the husband damaged the gate and broke into the home requesting to meet the social worker. There was only one social worker on duty that night. She locked herself up in the office, and dared not go out. In the end, she took a chance to invite the husband to the office for a short conversation, while notifying a security guard at the same time. Fortunately the social worker prevented the husband from employing violent acts to cause further damage, and he was later taken away by the police.

**Analysis**

The parent’s violent behaviour had become a threat to the personal safety of the staff. He was in the stage of adversary, and was obviously out of control. The staff must place their priority on the safety of themselves and of those who are around. If possible, the staff should appease the parent’s anger right after his first attempt of causing trouble.

**Skill Suggestions**

The staff should remind the parent that his children would neither want to see their parents argue nor to see him causing trouble in the public (Family Card). If he really loves his children, the family card would stop him from acting recklessly. The staff should also let him know they will call the police if anyone tries to cause trouble (Policy Card) in hoping to have the parent think twice before he acts.

17.3 Staff against Staff

An anonymous individual put a blackmailing note on a staff member’s storage cabinet in a social service organization. Later the supervisor received a similar blackmailing letter; she suspected that these were done by one of the staff members.
Analysis

Since the identity of the perpetrator was unknown, it was difficult for the organization to make an immediate intervention. Talking skills will not be applicable in this case.

Skills Suggestions

Management can consider the following methods:

(1) Management should contact the police to make staff aware that such act is illicit. The supervisor should hold a meeting with all staff to declare that the organization have no tolerance for workplace violence.

(2) Since the police are investigating the crime, management should not waste time and energy to investigate their employees. It is improper to create suspicion among colleagues as it will affect their morale.

(3) Management should encourage staff to help each other out, such as accompanying the victim to leave work and prevent the victim from working alone.

17.4 Client against Staff

One morning, a service user of a community centre shouted loudly to request a meeting with his social worker. The social worker came out from her office and invited him to have a talk in the conference room to understand why he was making a commotion. A few minutes later, the social worker anxiously ran back to the office and cried to the supervisor. She sobbed out that the service user was getting physically violent and held her arm tightly to request for an apology. He said: “You are responsible for this. You lied to me that I am eligible for handicapped person benefits. Now the doctor rejects my application. You owe me an apology! Get down on your knees! Now!” The supervisor immediately went with another staff member to the conference room to talk to the service user.

Analysis

The service user was angry because he believed that he could get the benefits. When failed, he felt being disrespected and tricked by the social worker. Thus, it is natural for him to vent his anger in the community centre.
**Skill Suggestions**

The responsible social worker can consider using the following skills:

1. **“Dead Dog Card”**: The social worker can apologise that she might not have explained the scheme clearly to him which caused a misunderstanding. The worker should sincerely say: “I’m really sorry. I might not have explained the scheme clearly to you and led to your misunderstanding. I apologize for this!” Sincerity may help soothing him.

2. **“Feeling Card”**: The social worker should listen actively and let him vent his anger freely. She should express understanding towards his anxiety by saying: “If I were you I would be upset too. Try to think twice. If the doctor said you are not eligible, we cannot change the fact. It is no use to get frustrated.” Showing concern towards the service user can soothe him.

3. **“Boss Card”**: Invite her supervisor to meet with the service user may make him feel that he is being respected and is gaining face. It will also help reducing his hostility.

**17.5 Client against Staff**

A home care worker visited an elder’s house to provide services. She found the client appeared to be mentally confused and later spoke louder and louder. The worker found the situation risky and wanted to leave. However, she was stopped by the client who expressed intention of harming himself and threw his stick to threaten the worker.

**Analysis**

The client was likely to have mental health problems so it was difficult to understand his motives. Communication skills would not work well in such circumstances. It is not necessary to explore the motives behind his behaviour. The most important thing is to identify high risk service users beforehand and make prior preparations. Thus, the worker is protected and assistance can be sought immediately if violence occurs.

**Skill Suggestions**

As a precaution, if a high risk case is involved, the worker should inform colleagues of the client’s address, telephone number, visiting and expected departing time. Also the worker should get to know the client’s neighbour and make the neighbour aware of she is serving the client. So they may help in case of getting into troubles.
In this crisis, priority should be given to the safety of the worker. The worker should listen to the client actively and remain calm. Do not argue with, provoke or excite the client. Let him calm down first, then slowly attempt to convince him. If possible, try to seek external help, and take away any objects nearby that could be used as a weapon. If time is prolonged, the worker can suggest, “We have been talking for a long while and we haven’t had any food. Let’s go downstairs for a meal.” If the client doesn’t show any interest, the worker should keep listening to the client’s story and avoid arguing: “It is fine. I’ll be here and listen to you.” At the same time, the worker should prepare for escape.

If the door is locked and violence is approaching, the worker should protect herself by staying away from the client, such as locking herself inside a bathroom or bedroom and calling for external help. If the place is out of the coverage of mobile phone, call 112 for help.

17.6 Client’s Family against Staff

One day a home care worker visited an elder’s home for providing service. The door had 3 locks. Other than the elder, there was another family member. The individual seemed to have some mental health problems and became tense upon seeing the worker. The door was locked and the situation was critical.

Analysis

The service user’s family member probably has mental illness so no type of communication skill will work. We have no need to explore the motive behind his verbal violence. The most important thing is to identify potential high risk service users beforehand and take the necessary precaution. We need to ensure the home care worker’s safety by providing him with assistance when violence occurs.

Skill Suggestions

For high risk service users, it is better for the service centre to make preparations prior to home visits. Methods include:

1. If a home care worker is going to pay a home visit, the service centre should have the service user’s address and phone number recorded.
(2) The centre needs to have the phone number of the management office of the building in case of emergency.

(3) When arriving at the location, the worker should call the centre and tell them the approximate leaving time.

(4) The worker should inform the centre whenever he/she leaves a work site.

(5) If the centre does not receive any calls after the stated time, they should call the worker right away.

(6) When the worker senses something is wrong inside the house, he/she should make up an excuse by saying there is an urgent call from the boss and leave the house immediately.

(7) If the centre’s staff lose contact with the worker, they should call the service user’s home to look for him/her.

(8) If the centre’s staff still fail to contact the worker, they should call the management office of the building to send someone to the service user’s place.

(9) Teamwork: It is better to arrange two workers to visit the same housing estate at the same time so they can help each other. They should arrange a meet up time to return to the centre together. If one staff member did not show up, the other staff member should go to his/her work site to look for him/her.

17.7 Client against Staff

A home care worker went to a service user’s home to assist him with rehabilitation exercises. He always resisted doing the exercise as it hurt. According to the physiotherapist, this situation is normal. So the worker continued to assist him with the exercise based on the physiotherapist’s instructions. Yet, the service user kept grumbling, “What’s wrong with you? You’re hurting me!”

Analysis

The service user was angry because he was in pain. He was venting his frustration, and expecting better service from the home care worker.
Skill Suggestions

The home care worker can consider taking the following approaches:

(1) **“Compliment Card”**: When the service user has made the right posture, the home care worker should praise him immediately: “That’s right, well done. You may feel a bit painful at first, but you can stand it. You’re doing great!” Receiving such compliment will encourage the service user to bear the pain.

(2) **“Caring Card”**: The home care worker should make the client understand that these exercises are good for his health: “The physiotherapist told me that the pain is normal. The more you do this exercise, the better it will help your body. The most important thing is to improve your health. I don’t mind to help you do more exercises.”

(3) **“Family Card”**: The home care worker can remind the client that his family would like to see him keep working on the therapy: “If your son knows that you have stopped exercising, how would he feel? He would probably be upset and disappointed.” Get him to think about his beloved family will help him stay positive.
18. Import and Export Trades and Logistics

According to our survey, import and export trades and logistics is a relatively high risk industry in terms of workplace violence. “Employee against employee” violence and “customer against employee” violence occur frequently in this industry, causing serious injuries to staff members. To ensure a better understanding of the subject, we will use various cases to illustrate different situations of the industry; thus, arousing the readers’ concerns of workplace violence prevention. To summarize, this industry has the following characteristics:

- Frequent contact with customers
- Delivery of goods
- Having a mobile workplace
- Working outside office
- Stressful work environment
- Lack of means for the management to control and discipline their subordinates
- Frontline staff lack sufficient training in handling customers’ brawls and complaints.
- Fracas among customers may threaten the safety of the other customers or staff.

The following cases are provided by logistics companies and thus are representative of the industry. In discussing these cases, we will also apply the strategies and skills introduced in Part Two and Three of this report to tackle the violent incidents and crises.

18.1 Customer against Staff

One day a cargo was delivered late because of the bad weather. The truck driver had to drive slower than usual. The customer called the delivery company: “You keep saying my cargo is coming soon! I’ve been waiting for three hours and I still haven’t got my cargo yet. My customers are waiting for it. What’s wrong with you? If I don’t see it in a minute, I won’t take it...” He swore while complaining.

Analysis

The customer wanted to express his discontentment towards the low efficiency of the service provider, and hoped to get a reassurance from the company. As he was grumbling on the phone, it was less likely for him to turn verbal violence into physical violence.
Skill Suggestions

Since the company’s service was poor, it was reasonable for the staff to apologize: “I’m really sorry. Our truck got delayed because it’s raining hard today (Dead Dog Card).” Staff should also express his enthusiasm about helping the customer: “Ok, I will call the driver and see what is going on. I will call you back in a few minutes (Action Card).” Taking immediate actions can appease the impatient customers.

18.2 Customer against Staff

In rainy days, storage containers will get flooded easily. As a result, some cargos may get damaged. A customer and two other men went with some damaged items to the logistics company and asked for compensation. “What’s wrong with you? What did you do to my stuff?” He raised his voice and the staff members were shocked.

Analysis

The customer wanted to get a compensation from the company. He got angry as he was worried about the logistics company might shirk its responsibility.

Skill Suggestions

Staff can consider adopting the following approaches:

1. “Feeling Card”: No matter a compensation will be made or not, the staff should show sympathy towards the customer: “It’s really annoying in rainy days. Neither of us want this to happen.” The staff needs to show his care for the customer.

2. “Action Card”: Staff should show their enthusiasm about helping the customer: “Don’t worry, I will make some calls to follow up your case. Please have a seat.” The staff should check whether the storage container is damaged or not. The customer will then portrait the company as a reasonable party and stop seeking attention by yelling.

3. “Dead Dog Card”: The company should not only make a compensation to the customer, but also apologize to him if it was responsible for the damage: “I’m really sorry. It is our fault. This rarely happens, but we will compensate for your loss.” The customer will portrait the company as a responsible organization.
(4) **“The Past Card”**: After making the compensation, the company should try to fix its relationship with the customer. Emphasizing the pleasant experience both parties had in the past will be helpful. “We have worked together for many years, you should know that we are always reasonable. Don’t worry.”

(5) **“Policy Card”**: If the damage is not caused due to the company’s negligence, the staff should make it clear to the customers: “Sorry, we have checked our storage containers and they are fine. Under the company’s policy, we cannot make compensation for your loss.” Let the customer understand that the staff member has no right in making the decision to compensate, and compensation has to be made in accordance with the company’s policy to stop the customer from blaming the staff.

### 18.3 Staff against Staff

On a very hot day, the delivery workers were sweating bullets while working. Suddenly, a worker pointed to a co-worker and said: “Go faster. Stop blocking my way. You walk too slowly!” The criticized worker became angry and shouted back: “How dare you to instruct me! You aren’t my boss!” They swore at each other and attracted other workers’ attention.

**Analysis**

The two workers became verbally violent, as they wanted to show the others they were no cowards. They needed to save face and disliked being controlled. The supervisor should stop the staff from bickering, and avoid turning verbal violence into physical violence.

**Skill Suggestions**

The supervisor can consider using the following skills:

(1) **“Compliment Card”**: The supervisor can make acknowledgement to the two workers to ease the tension: “Both of you have worked really hard. I appreciate your diligence. Please don’t let minor things ruin your good names. Keep working.” The supervisor should remind them of being a good asset to the company, and he has high expectations of them, hoping that they will control their temper.
(2) "**Boss Card**": The supervisor can remind them that the boss dislikes having arguments at work: "Stop arguing. It’s not doing you any good if the boss sees this. You will be fired." Remind them of the disadvantages of arguing and they may even lose their job for this.

(3) If the two workers get out of control and will not listen to the others, try to separate them. The staff can make up an excuse and take one of them away from the scene: "Stop arguing with him. Let’s go have a drink and relax.”

### 18.4 Staff against Staff

Verbal violence is common among staff members of logistics companies. One day, a female counter staff received a call from a customer complaining about the delay of goods delivery. Then she called the driver to understand the situation. “I am busy.” The driver replied impatiently and hung up. When the driver returned to the company, he swore at her: “What’s wrong with you? Don’t bother me!” The counter lady felt being insulted and started crying.

**Analysis**

The driver became angry as the counter staff might have called him at a wrong time. He was venting his emotion by scolding his female colleague. At the same time, the counter staff was irritated and felt bad. Mediation from a third party will help settling the dispute.

**Skill Suggestions**

The supervisor can consider using the following skills:

1. "**Caring Card**": The supervisor should let the driver understand that his colleague had good intentions. “The counter staff was trying to pacify the complaining customer for you. She was helping you and the company. She didn’t mean to disturb you.” When the driver understands that his colleague was trying to be nice, he will calm down.

2. "**Soldier Card**": The supervisor should let the driver understand that his colleague was acting in accordance with the company’s policy. “She is only a small potato in the company. She needs to follow the company’s policy. She will be blamed by her boss for the late delivery if she didn’t call you. Will it be fair to her?”
18.5 Customer against Staff

One day, a customer made a call to a company complaining about its low efficiency. Although the receptionist has apologized over the phone, the customer kept complaining: “I want to talk to your manager!” However, the manager was not in the office. “I am sorry, he is not in,” The receptionist replied. The customer got more irritated and insulted the receptionist: “You are lying! Who are you? I don’t believe in you!”

Analysis

The angry customer was unhappy as he was dissatisfied with the service. He wanted to vent his anger and be authoritative.

Skill Suggestions

Staff can consider using the following skills:

(1) “Dead Dog Card”, “Action Card”: Staff should show empathy to the angry customer, and take notes for his request in details. Such action will help demonstrating the company is happy in responding to the customer’s needs. “Sorry for causing you inconvenience, please tell me what has happened and I will take down the details. When my manager returns to the office, he will handle your case immediately.” Hopefully it will help soothing his anger.

(2) “The Past Card”: If the customer has been with the company’s service for a long time, the staff can recall his past pleasant experience with the company to avoid ruining the fruitful working relationship. The staff may say: “You have been with us for a long period of time, and we really appreciate your support. If we have done something wrong, we will try our best to fix it.”

18.6 Stranger against Stranger

One day, two couriers from different companies were arguing near the reception counter. One of them said: “You are ridiculous. We should follow the procedures as required.” The other one replied, “I have done it like this for a long time, and no one have ever complained about it. Do you want to fight?” They argued loudly and scared the office staff.
Analysis

Obviously, the conflict was caused by a communication problem. The couriers shouted at each other to avoid being called cowards. Since both parties are not the company’s employees, very little can be done. The only action we can take is controlling the situation to prevent it from affecting other people.

Skill Suggestions

Staff can consider using the following skills:

(1) “Group Pressure Card”, “Caring Card”: The staff should inform the individuals that the bystanders are paying attention to the conflict and their behaviour is disturbing others. “We are sorry. There are many people around the office. They are watching you. If you fight, someone will call the police. You will be in big trouble.”

(2) Staff may invite one of the couriers to go to a different place for a discussion so that the two people can be separated, thus avoiding the outburst of violence.
Conclusions

In 2006, the Occupational Safety and Health Council invited the Quality Evaluation Centre of City University of Hong Kong to conduct a research on workplace violence prevention and to develop a workplace violence management and coping programme that can be used by different industries in Hong Kong. The research project was undertaken in three phases. The first phase was a large scale survey of over one thousand companies, government and non-government organizations, aiming at exploring the trends and situations of workplace violence in Hong Kong. The second phase was to develop a workplace violence management and coping programme. In the third and final phase, the programme was tested and validated in twenty large, medium and small enterprises and organizations which represent different sectors in Hong Kong.

In the first phase, a cross-sectional territory wide survey of workplace violence in Hong Kong was conducted between 24 July 2006 and 21 August 2006. By using the method of random sampling, a total of 1,198 valid questionnaires were collected from private enterprises and government departments. Overall, there are three main observations:

Firstly, the data suggest that workplace violence is not prevalent in Hong Kong. Comparing with private enterprises and NGOs, government departments tended to have more workplace violence. The prevalence of workplace violence against staff by outsiders was higher in the government sector than that in private/non-government sector, so as the prevalence of workplace violence among staff. The data seem to suggest that the problem of workplace violence is relatively more serious in the government sector.
Secondly, respondents from enterprises and NGOs were more inclined than their counterparts in the government to believe workplace violence would lead to negative consequences, especially the loss of valuable employees and customers. However, we found no correlations between the consequences of workplace violence and the size as well as the years of establishment of the organizations. The result suggests that both sectors held similar views on the negative consequences of workplace violence.

Thirdly, more government departments than private enterprises and NGOs had comprehensive and effective procedures in handling reported violent incidents and in preventing workplace violence. They also provided sufficient training to staff. However, both sectors had conducted very few drills for staff to learn the right way in handling workplace violence. Yet, comparing with small and medium organizations, more large organizations had adopted the above handling and preventive procedures and conducted staff training and drills.

In the second and third phases, the Quality Evaluation Centre of City University of Hong Kong developed a workplace violence management and coping programme, which has been tried out and validated in twenty large, medium and small enterprises and organizations representing different sectors, namely the health care services, education services, wholesale and retail, security and law enforcement, catering, insurance, transportation, welfare services, import and export trades and logistics. This management and coping programme adopts a risk management model, and suggests that a risk could turn into a violent incident if handled improperly. Risk management should be employed to identify and manage threats that may severely impact the work efficiency of an organization. Regular and comprehensive assessments of potential risks should be conducted in an organization. These assessments would include reviewing the organizational practices in the prevention of workplace violence, identifying potential threats of violence and the likelihood of their occurrence, and taking the appropriate actions to address them.
In practice, there are three work phases in this risk management model. Before the outbreak of violence, it is necessary to orchestrate the work of different units and design workplace violence policies and preventive measures, including organizational structure, risk assessment, staff training, reporting channels, environmental security measures, and human resources management, to reduce the risk of workplace violence. When a violent incident is about to occur, staff should use techniques of de-escalation to minimize the harm to be brought about by the violence. After a violent incident has occurred, the organization must remedy and repair any harm incurred to the organization and its employees. These tasks may include an investigation of the incident, redeployment of staff, providing support to victims and other staff concerned, and inspection of security measures.

Although the survey data suggest that workplace violence is not yet a serious problem in Hong Kong, many organizations in the private and non-government sectors, and even some government departments, are not well prepared and equipped to handle the violent events occur at work. Workplace violence has aroused increasing public concerns overseas. Many people hang back in fear when facing workplace violence. In fact, violent incidents could be tackled properly, if an enterprise or organisation is well-prepared for any event of workplace violence by developing appropriate preventive measures, providing training to staff and arranging workplace violence drills. Thus, the Occupational Safety and Health Council is keen to promote the awareness of workplace violence in various industrial sectors and to develop a workplace violence management and coping programme for organizations susceptible to such violence.


**Webs about workplace violence (Organizations)**

- http://members.aol.com/endwpv/
- http://www.workplaceviolence911.com/
- http://customerservicezone.com/Workplace_Violence/
- http://www.managementhelp.org/emp_well/violence.htm

**Papers related to workplace violence**

- http://www.doa.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=2521