

Impact of Traumatic Events and Organizational Response: KeyCorp Bank Study

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Abstract

This study explored how experiencing a traumatic event in the workplace affects employees' physical health, mental health, personal functioning, and work performance. Post-event use of health care services and the effectiveness of critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) sessions and other coping interventions were also examined. A retrospective self-report methodology and mailed survey were used with 141 employees of 42 different banks that had been recently robbed. The results found that most employees had multiple negative consequences from experiencing a bank robbery. Psychological, physical, work, and personal areas all were affected by the robbery. CISD interventions delivered post-robbery were rated as helpful by 78% of employees who attended. Implications for employers, providers and organizational policy are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

- Violence is increasing at companies where workers interface with the public and who handle cash.
- Employees are twice as likely to be attacked by customers than attacked by coworkers or strangers.
- Violent events and the threat of violence have a profound impact on individual victims and the company.
- When violence occurs, management is expected to take appropriate and timely steps to address its impact.

Hypotheses

- H1: Traumatic events have indirect and direct company costs in employee health, productivity and benefits use.
- H2: More traumatic incidents have more severe impact.
- H3: Employees consider post-event CISDs to contribute positively toward their recovery.
- H4: Managers consider post-event CISDs helpful to employees' recovery process.

METHOD

Research Design

- Naturalistic retrospective study of employees at bank branch locations that were robbed at least once in 1996
- One-time assessment of self-reported experiences about robbery trauma and post-event intervention effectiveness
- Mailed survey (35% response rate)
- Non-randomized two-group design comparing participation in post-event formal CISD interventions

Sample Characteristics

- N = 141 participants in the study
- Median age of 39 years (range 20-60)
- 85% female and 15% male
- 87% Caucasian
- 41% managers and 59% non-managers

Bank Robbery Experience

- Number of robberies experienced in 1996:
 - one = 61%; two = 25%; three = 13%
- Bank customers present in 80% of robberies
- 57% involved a weapon (usually a gun)
- Of robberies with a gun, 7% had shots fired
- No injuries were reported from these incidents
- Robber proximity during most recent robbery:
 - 24% face-to-face with assailant
 - 49% in the same room with assailant
 - 27% not in same room/not working
- Perceived threat to the employee's safety
 - 21% felt strong threat
 - 15% felt moderate threat
 - 27% felt mild threat
 - 37% felt no threat

Services Used Post-Robbery

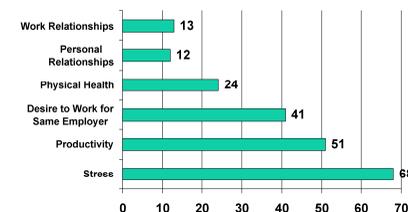
- 86% used employee assistance counseling
- 30% used outpatient counseling services
- 5% used medical services

RESULTS

Consequences of Robbery for Employees

- Increased Stress (68%) and Health Problems (24%)
- Lowered Productivity (51%) and Loyalty (41%)
- Work and Personal Relationship Problems (12-13%)

Percentage of Employees with Experiences Rated as "Worse" or "Much Worse" After Robbery



Overlap of Mind, Body, Work Reactions

Experiences of worse stress, worse physical health, and worse work productivity were all positively and significantly correlated ($r = .42$ to $.73, p < .05$)

Correlates of Mind, Body, Work Reactions

Experiences of worse stress, worse physical health, and worse work productivity were all positively and significantly correlated with measures of the severity of the robbery: weapon use, proximity to robber, level of perceived personal threat ($r = .20$ to $.60, p < .05$)

CISD Interventions

- 47% of employees attended critical incident debriefings
- CISD participation was positively correlated with higher perceived threat, weapon use, worse stress, worse physical health, worse productivity, less desire to work and use of mental and medical care benefits providers.
- 78% rated CISD as somewhat or very helpful to recovery

Consequences of Robbery for Managers

- Experienced mental and physical symptoms and work-related issues post-robbery, similar to non-managers
- 40% reported their role of supporting other employees made their own recovery process "worse"
- Almost all managers felt that offering a CISD was worthwhile

CONCLUSIONS

- Traumatic events had a negative impact on most employees' mental health, physical health and work. Further, these negative effects were interrelated. These results support the biopsychosocial model of health.
- Those most severely impacted by a traumatic event were more likely to attend CISD interventions.
- Organization sponsored CISD interventions were helpful to 8 out of every 10 employees. This self-report evidence replicates past research evaluating how CISD interventions have helped victims of traumatic incidents to recover and cope with the event.

Suggestions for Employers

- Offer pre-incident education about robbery procedures.
- Provide prompt post-incident CISD interventions, access to employee assistance counselors, and management consultation services.
- Limit intrusive questions from the public about event and direct questions to a few well-prepared managers.
- Provide managers with special support post-incident.
- Improve security measures.

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