

*Presents*

# **Post Traumatic Stress in the Workplace**

**Schedule 2 Employers Conference**

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**Susan McGrail, MSW, RSW, PhD (Can)**

**Director of Clinical Services**

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# Outline

- What is workplace trauma?
- Who is at risk?
- Interventions that help
- Policy for the workplace
- Return to work issues
- Case examples

# Learning Objectives

- Understand the factors that contribute to workplace violence.
- Understand the relationship between the traumatic event, the person and the aftermath.
- Identify appropriate workplace responses that can enhance recovery.
- Develop awareness of return to work issues following a traumatic event in the workplace

# Extent of the Problem

- The association of worker's compensation boards of Canada reports that the number of fatalities & worker days lost due to acts of violence grew by more than 88% from 2005-2007 (*Engel, 2007*)

# What is Workplace Violence

*Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. These behaviours can originate from customers, co-workers at any level of the organization.*

*This definition includes all forms of harassment, bullying, intimidation, physical threats/ assaults, robbery & other intrusive behaviours*

# Some Canadian Statistics

- 1997 – 581 cases of Canadian homicide recorded – 14.1% occurring within private & workplace settings
- 1997 – WSIB handled more than 1,400 claims of lost-time injuries due to violent acts

# Some Canadian Statistics (Cont'd)

- International Labour Organization survey reported that 3.9% of Canadian males & 5% of Canadian females reported being assaulted at work
- 1992 – Ontario Ministry of Health survey found that 1/3 of respondents reported experiencing some form of work-related violence in the previous 5 days

# Cost of Treatment

- Research is now demonstrating the economic benefit of substance abuse treatment on a number of outcomes including:
  - utilization of health care services,
  - reduced costs to the criminal justice system
  - increased productivity in the workplace
- Hazelton, 2008, stated that the cost of treating an employee for substance abuse is half that of having the individual fired & hiring & training someone new

# Workplace Violence: Who is Affected

## Victim

- Can experience wide range of symptoms: anger, anxiety, shock, guilt
- Sleep deprivation, headaches, loss of appetite
- Job performance can be impaired, relationships with co-workers altered

# Workplace Violence: Who is Affected (Cont'd)

## Other Employees

- Indirectly involved in the violent incident or co-workers of the victim may also experience wide range of reactions
- Can experience anxiety/ fear – therefore becoming victims themselves
- Other employees may blame victim for incident – leading to staff conflict

# Workplace Violence: Who is Affected (Cont'd)

## The Organization

- Financially costly for company
- Increased WSIB costs
- Reduced profitability
- Increased costs to cover victim's sick leave, hire replacement staff, or increase security

# Workplace Violence: Who is Affected (Cont'd)

## The Organization

- After-effects could include litigation or repair of property damage
- Increased absenteeism, decreased moral & higher staff turnover
- Negative public image

# Workplace Violence: Who is Affected (Cont'd)

## Families

- Victims' families can be affected
- Families of the individual who initiated the violent act can be affected as well
- Possible breakdown of communication
- Feelings of shock, anger, disappointment can occur in both families

# Emergency Responders Have a Unique Role to Play

- Who are they ?
  - First to arrive, last to leave
- At what cost to them?
  - Traumatic stress symptoms and depressive symptoms have the potential to be highly disruptive and long lasting for worker, families and organizations

# Factors Influencing Trauma Response

- Event factors
  - Severity, type
- Personal factors
  - Sense of control
  - Meaning attributed to event
  - Coping strategies
  - View of self/ others
- Social support factors
- Societal/ cultural factors

# Forms of Violence

*“Workplace violence can take many forms, including physical or sexual assault, pushing or shoving, arguments and anger-provoked incidents, psychological or verbal abuse, harassment, pranks, rumours & swearing.”*

*“Workplace Violence Prevention Programs, Resource Manual, Health and Safety Association of Ontario, 2003”*

# High Risk Occupations for Workplace Violence

- Doctors
  - Lawyers
  - Nurses
  - Teachers
  - Flight attendants
  - Postal workers
  - Cashiers
  - Taxi & bus drivers
  - Bartenders, wait staff
  - Police \*
  - Fire Services
  - Emergency Medical Services
  - Military
  - Corrections Officers
- \* Weapons affect suicides

# Ministry of Labour

- Investigators attend worksite to determine:
  - Has employer provided suitable equipment, training, policies and procedures to protect employees from workplace violence
  - e.g.- if you were told who took Valium before a fall


# Hazards When the Community is the Workplace

- High crime areas
- Driving-transit
- Parking lot risks
- Elevators & stairwells
- Home visits (pets, health care role)
- Strangers on site (family)
- Perceived authority over access to desired programs, benefits and resources

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# Theories for Understanding Trauma Response





## Stress Theory

- Sudden or continuous events
- Can be physiological, social, emotional or cognitive demand
- Mind-body interaction creates multiple consequences

*Stress occurs when there is a significant imbalance between one's demands and the type and amount of internal and external resources available to cope with the demands.*


- Temporary or ongoing events overwhelm coping
- Response may include confusion, disorganization, anxiety or helplessness
- Vulnerability increases as event persists without resources



## Crisis Theory

*Crisis = the event + the individual's crisis meeting resources + the individual's perception of the event + other concurrent stressors*

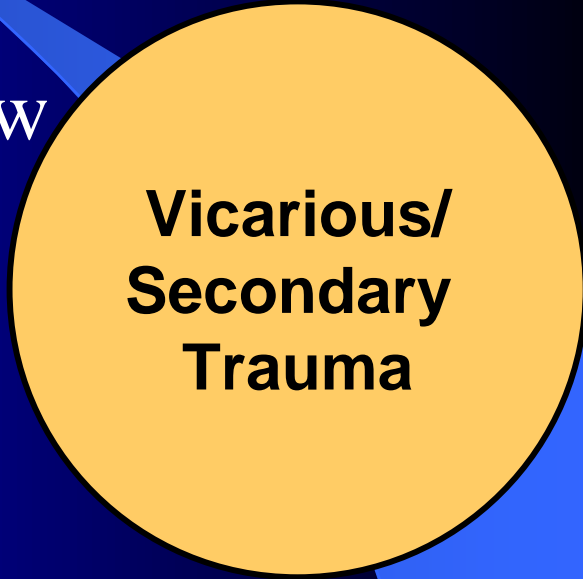
- Re-experiencing, arousal and avoidance symptoms
- Distress followed by adaption
- Degree of distress related to many factors, individual, event, social



## Trauma Theory

*When an individual is exposed to an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to themselves or others during which they experience fear, helplessness or horror, they may subsequently experience traumatic stress.*

- ***Secondary:*** Traumatic effects suffered by helpers, both family and professionals
- ***Vicarious:*** Therapist distress, symptoms plus changed world view
- ***Critical Incident:*** Emergency responders
- ***Burnout:*** Accumulated distress



**Vicarious/  
Secondary  
Trauma**

*Secondary or vicarious trauma refers to the overwhelming emotions, thought and reactions of individuals who, through their work, relate empathetically to traumatic events and survivors.*



## Occupational Stress Theory

- Work-related factors influence health and injury rates
- Factors include: leadership, role clarity, decision-making latitude, social support, balance of rewards and efforts

*Harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not meet the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker.*

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# Individual Responses to Trauma

# Crisis

- Causes
  - Unexpected event which overwhelms the individual's coping ability
- Time Frame
  - 4-6 weeks
- Reactions
  - Helpless/ overwhelmed
  - Impaired decision making
  - Heightened anxiety
  - Risk of uncharacteristic or self-destructive behaviour

# Acute Stress

- Causes
  - Exposure to event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury
  - Response to event involved intense fear, horror & helplessness
- Time Frame
  - Within 2 days to 4 weeks of event
- Reactions
  - Helpless/ overwhelmed
  - Impaired decision making
  - Heightened anxiety
  - Risk of uncharacteristic or self-destructive behaviour

# Post-traumatic Stress

- Causes
  - Exposure to event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury
  - Response to event involved intense fear, horror & helplessness
- Time Frame
  - More than 1 month
  - Acute < 3 months, chronic > 6 months
- Reactions
  - Intrusion – nightmares, flashbacks
  - Avoidance – dissociation, restricted activities
  - Arousal symptoms – sleeplessness, hyper-vigilance

# Individual Responses to Trauma

## **Crisis or Adjustment Disorder**

- Identifiable stressor
- Marked distress
- Impaired functioning
- Lasting less than 6 months

## **Acute Distress Disorder**

- Exposure to a traumatic event
- Intrusion, avoidance & arousal symptoms
- Lasting 2 days to 4 weeks

## **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

- Exposure to a traumatic event
- Intrusion, avoidance & arousal symptoms
- Lasting 1-3 months

## **Chronic PTSD**

- Exposure to a traumatic event
- Intrusion, avoidance & arousal symptoms
- Lasting more than 3 months

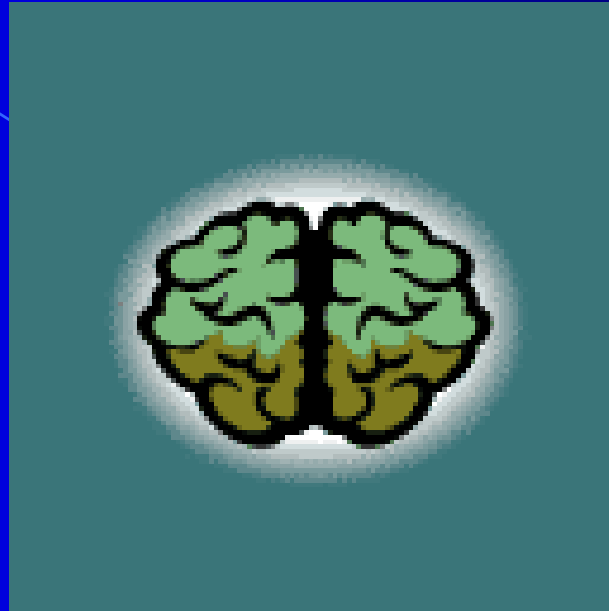
# Assessing Severity of Traumatic Reactions

- Duration of symptoms
- Degree to which symptoms interfere with functioning
- Nature of social supports
- Coping strategies
- Risk of self-harm

# Factors Influencing Trauma Response

- Event factors
  - Severity, type
- Personal factors
  - Sense of control
  - Meaning attributed to event
  - Coping strategies
  - View of self/ others
- Social support factors
- Societal/ cultural factors

# *Why Won't My Brain Turn Off???*



**Healing the Wounds of  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

# Crisis Intervention

## Definition

- **The Event** – marital break-up, injury, job loss, physical assault, sexual assault, major incident on the job
- **Crisis Meeting Resources** – personal coping skills, social supports, physical & emotional health
- **Definition of the Event** – why is this meaningful for this person?
- **Other Concurrent Stressors** – other difficult situations that the person is dealing with at the same time

# Characteristics of Crisis

- They are sudden
- The individual is not adequately prepared to handle the event – normal coping methods fail
- Crises have the potential to produce dangerous, self-destructive or socially unacceptable behaviour
- There is a feeling of psychological vulnerability which can potentially be an opportunity for growth

# Stages of Crisis

1. **Pre-Crisis** – “normal” or equilibrium state
2. **Impact Phase** – when the stressful event occurs
3. **Crisis Phase** – the person is aware of the event & perceives it as a threat
4. Confusion & disorganization

# Stages of Crisis (Cont'd)

5. Trial & error reorganization
6. **Resolution Phase** – person regains control over emotions & works toward a solution
7. **Post-crisis Phase** – person comes out of crisis & resumes normal activity

# Emotional Response to Crisis

1. High anxiety or emotional shock
2. Denial that the important event has occurred
3. Anger & frustration
4. Grief
5. Reconciliation

# Therapeutic Setting

- FIRST, DO NO HARM
- Establish safety parameters
- Secure relationship between client & therapist
- Relieve symptoms
  - Increase coping skills
  - Focus on here & now
  - Improve daily functioning

# Therapeutic Setting (Cont'd)

- Risks of moving too fast in an escalating crisis or re-traumatizing client by eliciting more distressing information than can be integrated
- Stop & Go – braking analogy

*(Rothschild 2000)*

# Ethnically-Sensitive Interventions

- Assessment of individual & organizational cultural profiles, e.g. sudden workplace death in bio-chem lab of East Indian employees or Italian soup factory
- Awareness of cultural rituals & practices affecting the individual, family & workplace, e.g. Swedish company, Buddhist ceremony

# PTSD Rates

- 18–24% of people are exposed to a traumatic event
- Disaster-related PTSD: 2-60%
- Women physically assaulted: 31-84%
- Men physically attacked: 65%
- Men raped: 65%
- MVA: 12%

# Screening for PTSD

- In your life, have you ever had any experience that was so frightening, horrible or upsetting that, in the past month, you
  1. Have had nightmares about it or thought about it when you did not want to? YES/NO
  2. Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of it? YES/NO
  3. Were constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled? YES/NO
  4. Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings? YES/NO

*(Prins et. al. 2003)*

# Screening for PTSD (Cont'd)

- **DREAMS:** A Mnemonic for screening for PTSD
  - **D**etachment
  - **R**e-experiencing the event
  - **E**vent had emotional effects
  - **A**voidance
  - **M**onth in duration
  - **S**ympathetic hyperactivity or hypervigilance

*(Lange et. al. 2000)*

# Screening Needs to Consider Co-occurring Problems

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Health problems
- Substance abuse
- Social problems
- Work problems

# PTSD Treatments

1. Cognitive Therapy
2. Exposure Therapy
3. Stress Inoculation Training
4. Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing
5. Imagery Rehearsal Therapy
6. Psychodynamic Therapy

# PTSD Treatments (Cont'd)

7. Group Therapy
8. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy
9. Hypnosis
10. Spiritual Support
11. Pharmacotherapy

# Barriers to Effective Treatment

- Organizational culture
- Awareness of needs
- Willingness to seek help
- Availability (EAPs, limits of service, experienced professionals, shortage of physicians)
- Accessibility of services (costs, wait lists)

# Common Beliefs, Thoughts, Myths or Distortions

- Preoccupation with danger
  - The world is a bad place
- Self-criticism
  - I feel stupid/ useless/ a total screw-up
  - Others know I am stupid/ useless/ a total screw-up

# Common Beliefs, Thoughts, Myths or Distortions (Cont'd)

- Self-blame

- Bad things happen because I was in the wrong place/ I screwed up
- It is completely my fault this death/ injury happened

- Helplessness

- Nothing I can do will make my life OK again
- Nothing I can do will make their life OK again

# Substance Abuse & Affect

- Interferes with capacity for
  - Self-awareness
  - Identification of emotions
  - Expression of range emotions
  - Self-acceptance of a range of emotions
  - Tolerance of difficult emotions
  - Self-calming and soothing

# Motivational Interviewing

- Motivation seen as state of readiness to change a behaviour
- A client-centred counselling style
- A style guided by expressing empathy, rolling with resistance, avoiding argumentation or direct persuasion, & supporting self-efficacy
- Promotes behaviour change by assisting clients to explore & resolve ambivalence

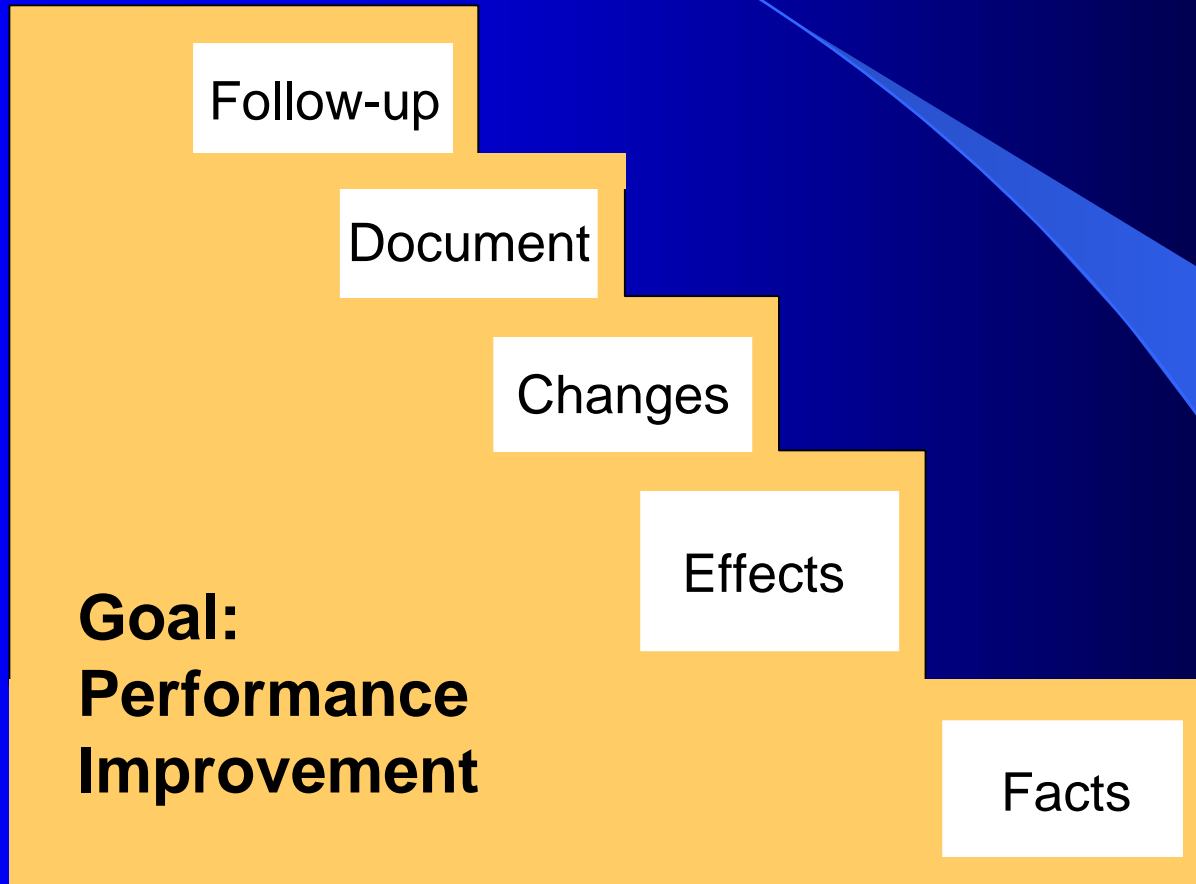
# Workplace Violence is More Likely to Occur in Organizations Where ...

- Management style is rigid & autocratic
- Disrespectful behaviour is tolerated & accepted
- Chronic communication issues exist & are not resolved
- Conflicts exist between management & employees

# Early Warning Signs

- Attendance issues
- Low productivity
- Poor quality
- Accidents and errors
- Missed deadlines
- Interpersonal difficulties
- Inflexible, resistant to change
- Appearance changes

# Constructive Confrontation



# Imminent Signs of Violence

- Threats or intimidating comments
- Allusions to violence
- References to violent events
- Focus on police, military or survival
- Intimidating others with talk of weapons
- Inappropriate comments or remarks
- Stalking

# Imminent Signs of Violence (Cont')

- Expressions of anger
- Depression
- Paranoia
- Externalizing responsibility
- Litigiousness
- History of violence
- History of substance abuse

# Responsibilities of All Managers

- Understand & follow the workplace violence policy
- Be an excellent role model
- Refrain from behaviour prohibited by policy: threats, threatening conduct, aggression, harassment, violence
- Discourage violence or violation of the policy in others
- Know the early warning signs and refer co-workers for help

# De-escalation Techniques

- Remain calm
- Be observant
- Don't argue or make threats
- Speak slowly, softly & clearly
- Avoid phrases like "Calm Down!"
- Communicate you are willing to help
- Ask open-ended questions
- Allow venting first, then help the person focus on solutions

# Why Train Employees on Sexual Harassment?

- Sexual harassment is illegal
- Avoids complaints to Human Resources Commission
- Avoids investigations & fines
- Prevents decline in morale
- Prevents loss of productivity
- Prevents lost days

# Why Train Employees on Sexual Harassment? (Cont'd)

- Helps retain good employees
- Strengthens management team
- Supports discussion of a difficult topic
- Gives tools to employees to eliminate problems of sexual harassment in the workplace
- Role models communications
- Risk management prevention strategy

# Motivation of Organizations to Promote Workplace Violence Prevention Strategies

- Risk management & liability
- Legislation
- Union relations
- Protecting resources

# Common Workplace Conflict Issues

- Diversity
- Bullying
- Harassment
- Threats
- Anger management
- Intra-team conflict
- Management style
- Diseases, e.g. SARS, TB

# Violence in North American Society

- Should we be surprised by increased incidents of workplace violence?
- Society immune to witnessing acts of violence
- Media portray frequent traumatic events
- Entertainment industry – films
- Weapons availability

# Regulatory Influences in the Workplace

- Ministry of Labour
- Human rights legislation
- Occupational health & Safety
- Union regulations
- Professional regulatory bodies
- Workers' Compensation Board

# Stress

## *.... At Work*

### **Role of Union**

- Clearer awareness of employer's responsibility to provide workplace free of violence, abuse & intimidation
- Challenges at times when they have to take sides between employees

# Other Conflict Examples

- Workload volume
- Controversial policies
- Management style
- Flying for work post 9/11
- Professional ethical issues, e.g. law practice
- Substance abuse among team
- How to honour memory of deceased colleague
- Racial conflict

# Characteristics that May Predict Violent Behaviour

- Isolated individual
- Threatening comments
- Interest in military paraphernalia
- Ex-military
- Male

# Characteristics that May Predict Violent Behaviour (Cont'd)

- Previous acting out
- Weapon possession/ access
- Substance use/ mental health issues
- Shift work
- Few family supports or friendships

# Risks Contributing to Workplace Violence

- Money handling – late night, early morning
- Healthcare workers, Correctional employees
- Organizational culture
- Poorly handled change, transition & downsizing

# Other Factors Influencing Workplace Violence

- Reduced co-worker & supervisory support
- Lack of work group harmony
- Security concerns
- Recent layoffs
- High work stress
- Varying work schedules (fatigue)
- Dealing with complaints
- High crime area
- Contact with “The Public”

# Range of Workplace Violence

- Domestic violence
- Stalking
- Theft
- Labour disruptions (strikes)
- Harassment
- Bullying
- Substance abuse

# Recognize the Warning Signs

- People who commit acts of violence generally give warning signs:
  - Direct or indirect threat
  - Intimidating, harassing or aggressive behaviour
  - Arguing frequently, conflicts with co-workers, clients or customers
  - Telephone or email harassment
  - Making unwelcome sexual comments
  - Swearing excessively

# Recognize the Warning Signs (Cont'd)

- Warning signs *(Cont'd)*
  - Uncontrollable temper
  - Stalking behaviour
  - Difficulty accepting authority
  - Holding grudges
  - Substance abuse/ mental health problems
  - Sudden changes in behaviour

# Recognize the Warning Signs *(Cont'd)*

- Warning signs *(Cont'd)*
  - Fascination with weaponry, e.g. magazines
  - Poor support system, few family or friends
  - Isolation from co-workers
  - Disputes over discipline or termination
  - Stealing or damaging property

# Foundation for Workplace Safety

- Policies re:
  - Substance abuse
  - Harassment
  - Violence
- Zero tolerance
- Quick response

# Foundation for Workplace Safety (Cont'd)

- Safety committee
- Regular reporting to senior levels
- Focus on prevention
- Regular education

# Community Resources to Assist in Establishment of Workplace Safety

- EAPs
- Law firms – labour relations specialist
- Legislation
- Forensic services – public, private
- Police, security staff
- Mental health & substance abuse centres

# Regulatory Influences

- Ministry of Labour
- Human rights legislation
- Occupational health & safety
- Union regulations
- Professional regulatory bodies
- Workers' Compensation Board

# Employer's Role Regarding Workplace Conflict

- Ensure confidentiality in reporting
- Clear process to all
- Supportive climate during investigations
- No retaliation policy
- Adequate prevention activities
- Pro-active management roles

# Workplace Safety Training Should Include:

- Review & definition of workplace violence
- Explanation of workplace program (all employees to receive a copy during orientation)
- Instructions on how to report all incidents, including threats and verbal abuse

# Workplace Safety Training Should Include: (Cont'd)

- How to recognize workplace security hazards
  - e.g. - lack of parking lot lights
- Work area design problems
  - e.g. - areas out of sight
- How to use any security equipment
- How to diffuse hostile or threatening situations (PMAB)
- Post incident procedures
  - e.g. - counselling referrals

# Uniformed Presence of Control Agents May Be Required For:

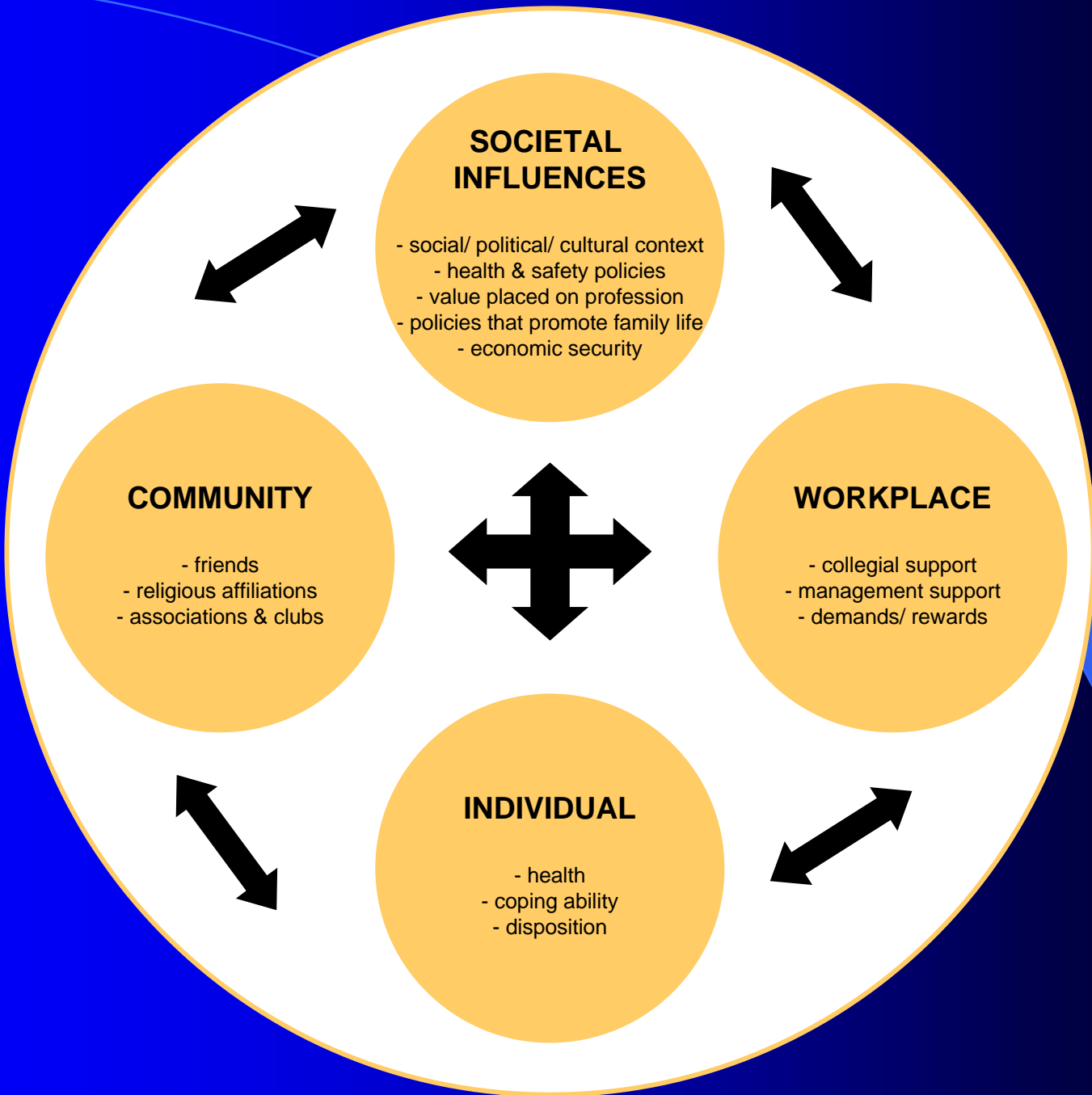
- Terminations/ discipline
- Fraud investigations
- Plant closures
- Downsizing
- Labour disruptions

# The Cost of Mental Health Disability

- The economic reality is that disability represents anywhere from 4% to 12% of payroll costs in Canada
- Mental health disability claims (especially depression) have overtaken cardio-vascular disease as the fastest growing category of disability.

*Source: Homewood Health Services*

# Ecological Approach



# Communicate the Message

- Safe workplace is everyone's job
- Communicate violence prevention policy
- Endorse zero tolerance for infractions
- Be clear about what behaviours are not tolerated, e.g.:
  - Threats
  - Sexual harassment
  - Assault
  - Aggressive behaviour
  - Demeaning language

# Communicate the Message (Cont'd)

- Explain what the consequences will be, including disciplinary sanctions, job suspension or termination
- All management are seen to be in total agreement with all workplace safety regulations, policies & procedures
- Organizational leaders are role model of desired behaviour

# Definition of a Traumatic Event

*“An occurrence which causes physical & cognitive reactions. Examples include natural disasters, terrorism, accidents & events in the workplace.”*

*(Van den Bos, 1998)*

# Influencing Employee Reaction to Workplace Events

- Take charge firmly & direct an effective, immediate response
- Help create an environment where employees can speak freely about the event & express their feelings

# Influencing Employee Reaction to Workplace Events (Cont'd)

- Help restore employee faith in the organization by providing straight-forward information & expressing the organization's concern
- Monitor employees & provide professional help when needed

# Psychological De-Briefing

- May not prevent PTSD
- May cause more stress
- Do not want to re-victimize
- Not always a voluntary process
- Some organizations insist on it
- Sold as a service to most large corporations

# Return to Work Issues

What of accommodations are needed for clients returning to work with PTSD

- No clear list
- Based on needs of individuals (usually inexpensive)

I Would  
Like More  
Information