Workplace violence in convenience stores

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Workplace violence is a problem that can occur in any occupation and at any operational level. Each occupation has different levels of risks depending on factors including personal factors (i.e. workers and service users), temporal factors and location factors. In all workplaces, convenience stores are considered one of the top places with frequent violence. Partially, this is because there are many factors different from other workplaces. Those factors may lead to violence and crimes such as verbal harassment, physical harms, robbery, and murder. The mentioned violence does not only have direct physical effects but also has short-term and long-term mental effects as well as economic and social effects. This article presents the extensive review of the violence at convenience stores. Its contents consist of the introduction, the definition of the workplace violence, the sizes of the violence at the convenient stores, the effects from the workplace violence, the factors of the violence at the convenient stores and relevant studies about the convenient stores in Thailand, and conclusion.

Keywords: Workplace violence, convenience store.

In this report, we searched the data by using electronics database through the library of King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital. We checked the accuracy of the reference sources and the relevance to the subject studied for use in writing this article. In Thailand, there are a lot of situational information that is based on searching by Internet sources on this issue. Convenience stores are one of the workplaces at high risk of violence. Data from a number of studies were frequently prioritized at top rank in terms of the number of violence especially violence that leads to casualties with the highest number of incidents in the convenience stores. The reason is that there are many factors in the convenience stores in support to violence. Currently, there are many guidelines for violence and crime prevention in convenience stores i.e., Preventing Violence to retail staff from Health and Safety Executive (UK); Workplace violence preventing program in late-night retail establishments from Occupational Safety and Health Administration (USA); and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design guideline (CPTED), such guidelines have been applied in many countries.

Thailand is one of many countries that have several convenience stores disperse in cities, towns even in alleys more than ten thousand locations nationwide. The rapid growth of convenience is more likely to have a higher rate of violence.
**Workplace violence**

Occupational Safety and Health Administration: OSHA defined workplace violence as follows: “Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide, one of the leading causes of job-related deaths.”

Meanwhile, the European Union Occupational Health and Safety: EU-OHS identified the definition of workplace violence that “Incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, including commuting to and from work, involving explicit or implicit challenges to their safety, well-being or health”.

These meanings can be summarized that workplace violence is originated from verbal usage up to physical abuse until death and such incidents are pertaining to works.

Workplace violence can be categorized in numerous types based on the characteristic of violence and cause of violence etc. However, the reliable classification of violence referred by large institutions and a number of research studies was the division based on the relationship of a wrongdoer and a victim. This classification was conducted by the Injury Prevention Research Center, Iowa University, the United States of America in 2001 saying that workplace violence could be categorized into 4 types, namely:

Type I: violence from the intentional crime that has no relationship with a business or employees but he/she just desires to commit a crime or violence.

Type II: violence between an employee and service user (Most common).

Type III: violence between employees from slight violence such as slandering up to threatening, sexual harassment, and death

Type IV: personal violence arises from the violence that has a relationship with a victim but such violence happens in a workplace.

**Size of violence in convenience stores**

The problems of workplace violence can occur in every establishment and with every employee at all levels even with service users. Most workplace violence is verbal violence accounted for 38.5%, followed by bullying for 30% of all violence. The proportion of workplace violence in each study was different depending on the populations or characteristics of data collection. For instance, Hye-Eun Lee studying workplace violence in Korea found the prevalence at only 5.8% of all workers while Dan H. examining workplace violence in the United States of America and discovered prevalence at 8%. Additionally, Serpil A. investigated workplace violence in Turkey and found the prevalence at 44.8%.

It is obvious that in different regions, the proportion of violence is unequal; however, overall workplace violence was at a high level and should gain more attention for prevention and resolution.

From the reports of violence circumstances, convenience stores are always one of the places where violence frequently occur at top ranks of all workplaces. For example, in the United States of America, the statistics of Ministry of Justice indicated that among approximately 1.5 million victims of the workplace violence 300,000 persons were in convenience stores or accounted for 20%. This was consistent with other literature with proportion of violence in convenience stores about 18 - 20% of all workplace violence. It is obvious that the problems of violence in convenience stores are substantial and the prevalence in regions all over the world is similar.

Another crucial point of violence in convenience stores that should be emphasized is death in the workplaces. Convenience stores always have the highest death rate or the second in some studies. Deaths in the convenience stores are consistent in any periods data were collected. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health examined the proportion of death during 1980 - 1989 and death rate in convenience stores was 37% of all deaths in workplaces. Furthermore, Greg W. investigated the proportion of deaths during 1992 - 1996 and the proportion of deaths in convenience stores was 43% while Kelly K. studied the proportion of deaths during 1994 - 2003 and found that deaths in convenience stores were accounted for 51% of all deaths in the workplaces. It is clear that the proportion of deaths in convenience stores is not likely to decrease but rising. Most causes of death are violence in the stores.

**Impacts of workplace violence**

When workplace violence occurs, person is affected, directly or indirectly. Impacts of violence can be divided as follows:

1. Impacts on victims: violence can physically impact the victims from no injuries, small injuries, disabilities or up to death. Mostly, violence to physical injuries is
not severe (1) but if violence is related to crime, it is highly likely to cause more injuries. Apart from the physical term, psychological impacts are essential and the impacts can be at different levels, (13) i.e., anxiety, fear, agitation, attention deficit disorder, decreased self-confidence, insomnia, and stress that may develop to be depression. (8, 16) Accordingly, it is clear that apart from visible physical diseases, adverse psychological conditions are hidden and they can result in long-term impacts (15) which lead to behavioral changes such as less attention to works, laziness, lack of motivation, higher business leave and turnover need.

2. Impacts on organizations: for organizations, when violence occurs, they will lose revenue and may lose employees including skilled full-time employees, and part-time employees with a turnover of employees. If the organizations have frequent violence, it possibly affects customers and investors that apart from direct damages arising from such incidents, there are losses of other revenues such as prosecution cost, training cost for new employees, a remedy for victims and impacts on the reputation of the organizations in long term. (17)

3. Social impacts: workplace violence can widely affect society in different aspects such as public perception, the overall image of a country or even overall income of society. Additionally, in case of severe violence that the victims cannot work, they may have to resign or have a permanent disability which is the increase of burdens of sectors to provide assistance such as social security and social assistance etc. Previous studies about the estimation of damages of all products lost from violence in establishments showed that the number was at 1 - 3.5% of gross domestic product (GDP). (17) However, the impacts and loss of revenues in each country depend on healthcare system, management process, and collaboration from societies in that country.

Workplace violence not only affects physical and health conditions but it also has impacts on minds of the victims. These impacts can be extended to colleagues, friends, families, establishments up to societies and countries.

Factors of violence in convenience stores

Convenience stores are one of the workplaces that usually have violence especially robbery and theft which are at the highest rate in convenience stores and lead to severe injuries. The reason why violence often occurs in the convenience stores is that in past years, a number of studies examined different factors relating to violence in convenience stores and they could be categorized as follows.

**Personal factors**

1. Part-time employees: the studies discovered that part-time employees were likely to have workplace violence more than full-time employees for 2.38 times (odds ratio, OR) = 2.38, 95% Confidence interval (CI) = 2.01 - 2.84). (9) It may be caused by part-time employees who had no experience dealing with the occurrence of workplace violence before.

2. Young employees: Kimberly investigated risk factors of robbery and injury of employees in convenience stores and found that the workers with age lower than 24 years were highly likely to have violence than older workers for 2.3 times (Relative risk or RR = 2.3, 95% CI = 1.2 - 4.3). Furthermore, the study of Corinne Peek Asa found that employees with age below 20 years were at risk of death in convenience stores more than those with different ages for 2.08 times (OR = 2.08, 95% CI = 1.76 - 2.44). (18) Young employees are not skillful enough to control their emotions and have experience in problem management. However, some literatures discovered that older employees were likely to have more violence, likewise.

3. Female employees are at higher risks than their male counterparts for 2.92 times (OR = 2.92, 95% CI = 2.64 - 3.22) (18) Characteristics of violence in different sexes are distinct. That is, male employees are most at risk of physical violence while female employees are at higher risks of verbal violence, sexual harassment, bullying than males. (8) It has been shown that different types of violence have different prevalence in each gender.

4. Foreign employees (18) in some countries, employees with many nationalities are together and in some areas, race discrimination can trigger violence whether from employees or service users. (19) However, such factor may slightly affect employees in Thailand where racial discrimination is less than in other countries.

5. Employees are not trained to handle violence. Therefore, when violence occurs, they do not know how to deal with it and they are at higher risks of injuries. (5, 20) Opposition of employees towards violence cause even more injuries than normal situation for 9.7 times (RR = 9.7, 95% CI = 5.6 - 16.7) (12) and the employees do not realize importance of getting prepared for dealing with potential violence. (20, 21)
Moreover, the fact the stores do not have a policy of cash loss or surrender for employees to cope with such a situation may cause more severe violence.

6. Intoxicated offenders are highly likely to have more violence. This factor is originated from that the service users are intoxicated and have less consciousness to ponder leading to higher violence \( (RR = 1.70, 95\% CI = 1.19 - 2.43) \).\(^\text{(11)}\) Intoxicated offenders can not control their emotions and thoughts which is a common factor in any workplace.

7. Few employees or only those in a store are easily at risk of violence, especially crime-related violence. \(^\text{(3, 20)}\) When there are fewer employees, viewing and surveillance are not thorough, even if there is a crime, the perpetrator is aiming at a shop that has few employees.

**Time factor**

1. Working for a long time or for many consecutive days can cause stress including fatigue, stress, emotional control and management which is a part of violence. The studies found that a workplace with employees working more than 60 hours/week had workplace violence than normal for 1.83 times \( (OR = 1.83, 95\% CI = 1.45 - 2.31) \).\(^\text{(9)}\)

2. Violence mostly happens in night shift more than the day shift. \(^\text{(3, 9)}\) Each research study had different time of working in each country; for example, Corinne Peek-Asa examined the work period after 10 PM to 6 AM and found that violence occurred more than other periods for 1.79 times \( (RR = 1.79, 95\% CI = 1.40 - 2.29) \)\(^\text{(11)}\) or working after 8 PM was likely to have more violence for 2.56 times \( (OR = 2.56, 95\% CI = 2.39 - 2.74) \).\(^\text{(18)}\)

**Factors of places and environments**

1. Convenience stores with small size and fewer than 20 employees are at higher risk of violence than larger stores for 1.20 times \( (OR = 1.20, 95\% CI = 1.12 - 1.29) \);\(^\text{(18)}\) this causes stores to be not thoroughly and easy to commit crimes.

2. A workplace located in areas where crime rate is high or violence recurs \(^\text{(3)}\) or a workplace located in areas where few people are around is at risk of crime \( (RR = 2.4, 95\% CI = 1.2 - 4.6) \);\(^\text{(12)}\) and the reason why the convenience stores or shops are targeted for criminal activity is that these places provide cash exchange which is easy to commit larceny.\(^\text{(3)}\)

3. A workplace with a non-standard security system; for example, when the security system does not cover areas, is at risk of violence and crime. \(^\text{(3)}\) In addition, a shop with one exit or too few exits can have increased risk for 3.9 times \( (RR = 3.9, 95\% CI = 1.1 - 4.7) \).\(^\text{(12)}\)

Standardized security systems will lead to better prevention of crime, especially violence related to crime regarding which has a security standard in stores, either in European or USA but there is still no such standard in Thailand.

4. Violence usually occurs outside the workplaces more than inside the places for 2.01 times \( (RR = 2.01, 95\% CI = 1.57 - 2.58) \) such as robbery or ambush in front of the stores, etc. Because inside convenience stores there can be other customers and employees but outside such as the storefront, there are fewer people. Exit doors and security systems are less likely to cause greater risk of violence.

**Convenience stores in Thailand and Bangkok**

A convenience store is a type of small-sized retail shop located in inaccessible areas, in communities or gas stations. This store distributes routine consumer products to facilitate persons who desire to purchase products throughout 24 hours. It is emphasized on convenience and rapidity and most distributed products are convenience goods. The convenience store is a kind of retail business in Thailand that is highly popular and expanded quickly with many branches.

Currently, routine living requires quickness and convenience; therefore, a number of convenience stores emerge. The rate of convenience store users in Thailand nationwide is approximately 12 million persons/day. According to data of establishments, current convenience stores in Thailand that provide 24-hours services include approximately 12,000 stores i.e. Seven-Eleven, Family Mart, Tesco Lotus Express and Lawson, etc.; 44% of these branches are in Bangkok and vicinity, and 56% in communities nationwide.

Workplace violence situation of convenience stores in Thailand according to a report of the Metropolitan Police Bureau in 2015, only in Bangkok, there were 48 robberies in a convenience store that year. The reported only part of the workplace violence that has occurred, there is still a lot of violence in the workplace that has not received attention and not presented.
In Thailand, there were few studies about convenience stores although the number of convenience stores in Thailand increases continuously in every community. However, the studies on convenience stores were focused on the economic relationship such as purchase behavior, shop selection, service usage or event attitudes towards the convenience stores. Knowledge about occupational medicine in the context of Thailand is still in substantial shortage especially violence that happens unceasingly. Furthermore, important data are still unavailable such as the size of violence, prevalence, and relevant factors to be extended in the determination of violence prevention measures for convenience stores in Thailand in the future.

In Thailand, convenience stores have only a few forms of market dominance, i.e., from large companies then it is difficult to access the information. Therefore, if studying workplace violence, it must start to access information from the companies to study the insights in each convenience store that has a history of violence; access to such information is another challenge for those who want to study on this issue.

Conclusion

After literature review, violence in convenience stores is an essential problem and violence can easily happen in different forms. However, violence may be overlooked or partially presented. There should be more studies on various aspects of workplace violence in order to plan to reduce the risk of harm to employees. The reason why the convenience stores have violence more frequently than other workplaces is due to various factors including personal factors, time, places and environments at risk of violence. The outcomes of violence possibly cause effects extensively to victims, organizations up to economy and societies. The studies on the safety of employees in Thailand are still considered few. Data about workplace violence are rarely available especially in convenience stores as well as measures to be implemented in Thailand the context of which needs to be further studied in the future.

References


