

Terrorism at the workplace: Emerging occupational mental health risk

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Contents

This presentation will cover the following topics:

1. Introduction and definition of terrorism & workplace terrorism
2. Workplace terrorism
3. The impact of terrorism on employees
4. Dealing with the impact of workplace terrorism

Introduction

- Kenya has been hit hard by terrorist attacks since the first bombing of the American Embassy in August 7, 1998 that resulted in more than 200 deaths.
- Since 2011, there have been over 300 terrorist attacks in Kenya resulting in deaths and destruction of resources
- Terrorism is a major threat to the security and economy of Kenya

Terrorism

- Terrorism involves intentional violence/threat of violence, is motivated by an agenda, and is carried out with an intention of instilling fear to achieve a desired goal (Schmid and Jongman, 1988).
- Terrorism occurs in all parts of the world although most incidents occur in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa (Enders & Sandler, 2006)

Workplace terrorism

- Workplace terrorism: *an intentional act of violence or the threat of violence by an individual, group, or organization against an employee, or a work group, or organization while undertaking work-related duties, motivated by a political agenda for the purpose of instilling fear, in order to achieve desired political goal (Malik, Abdullah, & Uli, 2014).*
- Many terrorist acts have been waged in or against a workplace, or against transport systems leading to work, or against individuals as a result of their occupation (Inness & Barling, 2005).

Workplace terrorism

- People spend many hours at the workplace, and the threat of terrorism may result in mental health problems due to excessive fear and anxiety
- Why workplaces are vulnerable to terrorist attacks:
 - Large congregations of people found in work places especially in urban areas (Molotch & McCain, 2003).
 - Attacks on work places likely to receive media coverage and publicity (Burke & Cooper, 2008; Scotti, 1986).
 - Workplaces are selected because they represent an ideology that is different from that of terrorists (Drake, 1988).

Workplace terrorism cont..

- Various businesses are soft targets – they are less protected compared to primary targets such as military camps, foreign embassies, etc. (Bader & Berg, 2014).
- Attacks have potential for disrupting routine functioning of individuals, organizations, and nations (Schouten et al., 2004).
- Workplace terrorist attacks are acute stressors, and while they may be shorter in duration compared to chronic stressors (e.g. socioeconomic status, work-life balance) they are potentially more psychologically devastating and have long-term effects (Beehr et al., 2000)

Psychological and mental effects of workplace terrorism

Exposure to terrorism has adverse effects on somatic, psychological and emotional health

- Emotional distress, paranoia, panic and fear
- Severe distress as a result of losing colleagues in the attack
- Increased consumption of alcohol and drug abuse (Substance Abuse Disorders)
- Risky behaviors such as drunk driving
- Increased healthcare utilization
- Depression symptoms
- Suicide
- Anxiety related disorders (Acute Stress Disorder & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)) (Sederer, Ryan, & Rubin 2003)
- Workplace Discrimination (Kulwicki, Khalifa & Moore, 2008)

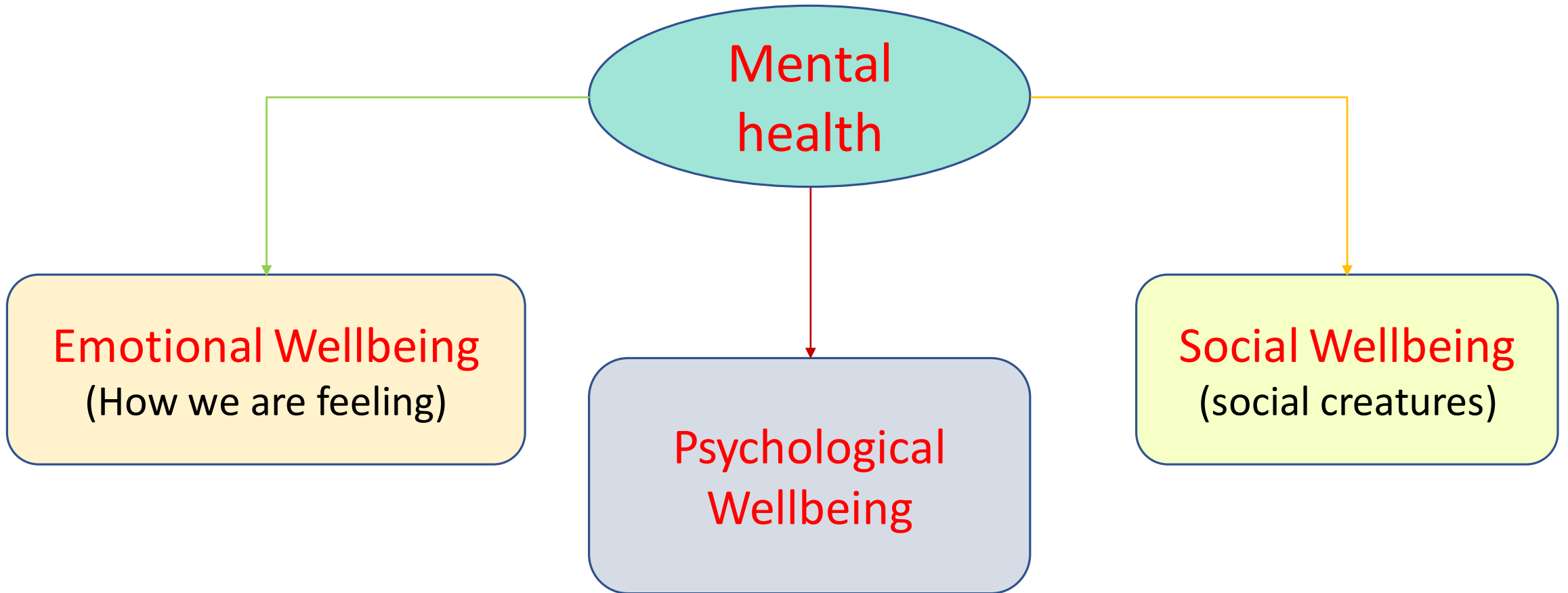
Psychological and mental effects of workplace violence

- A study comparing post-disaster psychiatric disorders after bombings in Nairobi and Oklahoma found that:
 - 75% of the survivors developed Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - 1/3 of the men, and 1/2 of the women in Nairobi developed PTSD
 - There was an increase in alcohol and tobacco consumption in Nairobi
 - Both samples reported major depression
 - PTSD symptoms experienced by Nairobi sample: being easily startled; intrusive memories, insomnia and lack of concentration
- The study found that coping strategies of Kenyans included:
 - support and debriefing groups
 - Religious counseling
 - Turning to family and friends for support

Organizational consequences of workplace terrorism

- Work related outcomes of workplace violence are indirect and mediated through fear of future workplace violence & emotional wellbeing
- Workplace violence is associated with negative work attitudes including:
 - Job dissatisfaction (Harris & Leather, 2011; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010);
 - Lowered organizational commitment (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002);
 - Turnover intentions (Chang & Lyons, 2012; Rogers & Kelloway, 1997);
 - Increased job neglect (Barling et al., 2001; Schat & Kelloway, 2000);
 - Decreased job performance (Schat & Frone, 2011)
 - Reduced productivity (Budd et al., 1996)
 - Absenteeism (Byron & Peterson, 2002)

Mental Health



Dealing with the psychological impact of workplace terrorism on employees

The mental health of employees is important

- Psychological first aid immediately after the terrorist attacks
- Employee Assistance Programs to offer psychological support to individuals
- Preparedness training (evacuation, resiliency skills, first aid, etc.)
- Psychotherapy (individual and group)
- Spiritual therapy
- Referrals to psychiatrists
- Enhancement of security

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