

## Hostile behavior: the toll it takes

*Aggression in Organizations: Violence, Abuse, and Harassment at Work and in Schools.* By Robert Geffner, Mark Braverman, Joseph Galasso and Janessa Marsh, Haworth Press, Binghamton, N.Y., 2005, \$47.96/hardback; \$31.96/paperback.

Aggression at work and at school is manifested in a wide array of abusive behavior, a continuum that ranges from mild forms of kidding to “verbal abuse to institutionalized harassment to fatal violence itself.” It is a serious social ill. Legislative acts such as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), and a variety of Hate Crime Laws begin to address the issue of violence in our culture, but additional proactive means to prevent aggression are necessary. The issue has at its core the abuse of power, and it is a very complex one. Much research has been done (and scholarly journals published), but that research has focused largely on narrow aspects of the topic. In 3 sections of 13 research articles appearing in *Aggression in Organizations*, authors Robert Geffner, Mark Braverman, Joseph Galasso, and Janessa Marsh attempt to fill the gap in knowledge regarding the continuum of abusive behavior.

In “Foundations and Overview,” the first section, Mark Braverman defines terminology used in the book, explains why the articles were chosen, and discusses violence prevention programs and their effectiveness. This section is vital to

anyone doing research or developing violence prevention programs. It is critical to understanding the remaining articles, and Braverman does an excellent job with it. The second article in the first section summarizes ongoing research resulting from the recent fatal rampages of postal workers and school-age boys. It helps establish the relationship between child abuse at home and physical and emotional abuse at work and at school.

“Aggression, Abuse, and Harassment in the Workplace” is the much longer, second section of the volume. It delves into such topics as how employees react to fatal and nonfatal violence, sexual harassment, and aggressive behavior. It also describes creative ways to avoid hiring people prone to aggression and ways to avoid environments that contribute to problems in the workplace. The last article in this section includes an evidence-based proactive plan to build a respectful and violence-free workplace.

“Aggression, Abuse, and Harassment in Schools” is the final section, addressing the global nature of physical and emotional violence toward children. It highlights the conditions and thought processes of those who administer education (teachers and managers) and also looks at workplace conditions. It examines teachers’ experiences of emotional abuse by administrators, and sexual abuse by teachers of their students, which often goes unreported for fear of reprisal. Interestingly, administrators find male accusers more believable than female accusers; in contrast, male perpetrators find themselves under more scrutiny than female perpetrators. Perhaps this will begin to change with the new definition

of rape that now includes males as victims. The last article examines a successful bullying prevention program for third- to fifth- grade students. As the authors demonstrate, violence is a learned behavior: the earlier new social norms and skills are taught and reinforced by authority figures, the better the chance of eradicating emotional and physical violence from schools.

As the reader moves through the book, there is an overarching conclusion that perpetrators of violence and aggression have different cognition and value systems. Put another way, violent and nonviolent people think differently. Perpetrators of violence perceive hostile intent even when there may be none, and their social value systems do not constrain them from hurting others. They act in covert and overt ways to exact revenge. Power and locus of control are critical factors in the perpetrators’ reactions, and frustration facilitates violence and aggression.

The analyses permit the reader to draw several pertinent conclusions. First, victims of abuse typically experience a lack of locus of control, leading to frustration. They often suffer reduced productivity, find another job, or react aggressively themselves, all costly to the organization. Second is the perception of violent behavior in the workplace. When employees feel that there is no recourse or redress for aggressive behavior, they often react in one of the three aforementioned manners. Finally, workforce behavior tends to follow the lead of management: if management is overtly or covertly aggressive or abusive, it can expect employees to model these same workplace behaviors as well.

This reviewer’s understanding of

the devastating effects of violence on its victim is personal as well as academic. As a survivor of domestic violence, I have dedicated my life to researching those devastating effects of aggression on society. This research was significantly aided by my reading *Aggression in Organizations*, which I highly recommend. The editors successfully demonstrate the harmful and lasting effects of

emotional abuse, making it a must-read for anyone in a supervisory position at work or school. Because of the nature of research articles, however, some knowledge of the language of research is necessary to fully comprehend them. I would further recommend that the editors widen the scope of their research to include a more lengthy discussion of the effects of domestic violence on

the workplace. Domestic violence is no longer a private matter but one of public and corporate concern. Its toll on the workplace, school, and culture at large is significant. □

—Kelly Grandchamp  
Limited License Master Social  
Worker (LLMSW)  
Domestic Violence Consultant

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