

Managing the Trauma of Community violence and Workplace Accidents in South Africa

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SUMMARY. Community violence that spills over to the workplace is substantially impacting the quality of work/life in South Africa. Gold mining is one of the country's leading industries and also one of the most dangerous. Internal and external employee assistance programs are well represented in South Africa and are helping employees deal with the economic and psychological fall-out of community violence and work related accidents,

INTRODUCTION

Community violence in South Africa has a direct and severe impact on its economy and its workplaces. Community violence in the form of frequent carjackings, bank robberies, ATM robberies, street robberies, beatings, rape, burglary and homicides are having a substantial negative impact on the South African workplace. There were 22,000 recorded murders in 2000-more than those who were killed in car accidents (Steven, 2003).

In South Africa, workplace hostilities are reported to be *abnormally high*, with some surveys indicating that as many as four out of five workers have experienced hostile behavior at the workplace during their working life (Safety Council, 2005). In a recent study on *The Changing Workplace* (in South Africa), 78% of employees confirmed that they had been bullied or victimized at least once in their careers (International Labour Course, 2005). Sexual harassment is also a widespread problem in the South African workplace. An attorney from the Women's Legal Center, an Non Government Organisation (NGO), estimates that some 75% of women experience some form of sexual harassment and that 40% of these women had left their jobs or changed jobs as a result of the harassment (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2004).

Although workplace violence is reported to be increasing even in places that have been relatively safe, emergency service workers frequently face one form of violence or another, some more than others. For example, a study on ambulance staff in South Africa reported that 70% of them had been subjected to verbal abuse, 50% to physical violence, bullying and mobbing, 40% to racial harassment and 30% to sexual harassment (International Labour Course, 2005).

The result has been a marked decline in direct foreign investment and an estimated 25,000 professionals emigrating from South Africa annually, 60% of which is directly attributed to violent crime (Steven, 2003).

South Africa has a well-developed system of internal and external employee assistance programs all of whom are adept at handling trauma resulting from community violence that has spilled over into the workplace as well as work-related accidents, particularly those that have occurred in the gold and coal mining industry which is fraught with the dangers of sub-surface mining.

***TRAUMA MANAGEMENT BY THE INDEPENDENT
COUNSELING AND ADVISORY SERVICES (WAS)
AND THE CAREWAYS GROUP***

ICAS and the Careways Group are two of the largest external employee assistance providers in South Africa (Terblanche, 2005). Both have had extensive experience in workplace trauma management some of which is unique to the economic and cultural climate of Southern Africa that is characterized by a high incident of community violence as well as tribal clashes resulting from territorial disagreements and longstanding traditional inter-tribal conflict.

ICAS, a UK-based firm, is a global provider of employee assistance and other behavior-risk-management services. They currently service approximately 150 organizations in Southern Africa covering some 200,000 lives. ICAS reported a trauma-debriefing incident where they were called to a client company compound following an outbreak of community violence. The episode was the result of complaints by local youth over the management of a company sponsored soccer club and the alleged killing of a youth during violent clashes with riot police at a blockade disrupting company business activities. Rampaging youth raided the company's facilities including a new ultra modern building and the company housing estate, causing substantial damage and financial loss to the company. They also set fire to fuel tanks, looted property, and in some instances assaulted and threatened individuals with knives and other street weapons. The company clubhouse was looted and torched and the house of several employees who lived outside of the compound was burned to the ground. The attack left four company personnel with injuries and required an urgent helicopter evacuation of a large group of spouses and children of local and expatriate workers. The violence lasted several days, resulted in five deaths, numerous injuries and prompted a government investigation.

Careways reported a rather unique situation where they conducted two consecutive trauma debriefings, the first being an industrial accident followed by a subsequent suicide of a maintenance supervisor who worked at the accident site. A Careways corporate client experienced a major gas tank explosion at chemical plant in a large rural community. The explosion claimed several lives and resulted in numerous injuries. Many of the surviving employees were afraid to return to work for fear of another explosion that might cost them their lives. A large number of contract workers were also afraid that they would lose their jobs because of the explosion. Careways went to the job site and over a three-week period conducted debriefing sessions for 852 employees at various chemical plant facilities. Thirty-five percent of these workers were contract laborers, not typically covered by the Careways service contract. However, the company decided to include all the workers in the trauma debriefing sessions.

Two months later Careways was summoned back to the chemical plant because of the suicide of a senior plant maintenance official. They provided trauma debriefing services to 152 employees who had worked with the maintenance supervisor. The employee suicide raised new concerns for the chemical plant managers, resulting in individual counseling sessions with 76 employees. Six other employees reported that they had sought out private therapy on their own to cope with the stressors of these two related incidents (Terblanche, 2005).

TRAUMA MANAGEMENT IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

South Africa's economy also relies heavily on its gold mining production. The gold

and coal mining industry is one of South Africa's leading employers. It is also one of the most dangerous workplaces as demonstrated by several recent newswire articles reporting underground earthquakes, one of many hazards that accompany deep below ground mining operations.

Johannesburg:

26 Miners Trapped by Quake Hauled to Safety; 16 Missing

Rescue workers hauled 26 miners to safety in a frantic operation to save workers trapped underground by an earthquake that shook the northern parts of South Africa on Wednesday. The quake, which had a preliminary magnitude of 5, damaged buildings and caused scores of minor injuries. It was centered near Stilfontein, 125 miles southwest of Johannesburg. Sixteen miners were still missing, DRD Gold said; 3,200 have been evacuated. (Orlando Sentinel, 3/10/05)

Carletonville:

Rockfall Traps 10 in Mine in South Africa; 5 Dead

The death toll in a gold-mining accident rose to five when rescue workers pulled out the bodies of three miners trapped in the shaft. An underground earth tremor caused a rockfall Tuesday at the mine in Carletonville trapping 10. (Orlando Sentinel, 5/12/05)

These and other death and injury-causing accidents result in considerable physical and emotional trauma to the mineworkers. As a result, the mining industry has taken a lead in the development of post-traumatic stress programs.

Psychologists at the Chamber of Mines, a human resource consortium of mining houses (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992), were the first to implement trauma management programs called the Care of Pressurized Employees program (COPE). The impetus for their development was one of the most catastrophic mining accidents that occurred in 1987 after a methane gas explosion in the mineshaft severed a double-decker elevator cables sending 52 mineworkers to their death at the bottom of the shaft (De Beer, 1988). For many years prior, the Chamber of Mines developed safety systems within mines, provided first aid training, and distributed literature to the employees and trained workers on mine safety (Chamber of Mines of South Africa, 1989).

COPE was developed to provide a management system to "assist employees in coping effectively with the demands and pressures that adversely affect quality of life, health and productivity following traumatic mining incidents. COPE will provide employees who, experience difficulties in coping with the effects of trauma, early access to professional care" (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992). To promote the utilization of this trauma management program and to demonstrate management support of the program, the Chamber of Mines developed the following policy statement:

The management of this mine supports the COPE program to assist the employees and their families to manage psycho-social problems which have adverse effects on their job satisfaction, quality of work, productivity and lifestyle. The following principles pertain:

- Personal information of the employees utilizing the program will be kept strictly confidential.
- Employees treated for trauma-related stress will receive the same consideration as

those extended to employees with medical problems.

- Participation in the program will not prejudice an employee's job security or chances of promotion.
 - Participation in the program is voluntary.
 - Management reserves the right to recommend employees for assistance.
- (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992)

The COPE Program

The COPE program was conceptualized in three specific operational modes:

1. Providing care to employees affected by a past critical incident;
2. Providing care to employees involved in minor critical incidents;
3. Providing care to employees involved in major critical incidents.

1. Providing Care to Employees Affected by a Past Critical Incident

At the inception of the COPE program, it was determined that a relatively large number of mineworkers were likely experiencing some degree of post-traumatic stress due to a high incidence of injuries and death resulting from previous mining accidents. At the height of production of gold mining in South Africa, it was not uncommon to employ 25,000 to 30,000 workers in one gold field with three to four major shafts and dozens of sub-shafts. These shafts are fraught with danger resulting in injuries and fatalities occurring from sub-surface earth tremors and quakes, collapsed pilings, cave-ins, and methane gas explosions. Larger mining operations maintain separate accommodations for paraplegic and quadriplegic miners; disabled workers are unlikely to return to their rural villages as there are no rehabilitation services or facilities available nor are they able to maneuver around their village, as there are no paved roads, sidewalks or disabled access. The disabled miners living in the mine hostels are provided medical care, physical rehabilitation to the greatest extent possible and ongoing counseling through the employee assistance program (EAP) (to clarify-COPE is operated through the employee assistance program). The disabled workers are re-assigned new job responsibilities such as cutting and stitching miner overalls, making tracksuits for the mining house sports teams, and winding spools of electrical cables and light fixtures that were to be used to light the underground shaft tunnels.

The COPE program also provided identification, assessment and treatment of mineworkers whose injuries were not as apparent as those physically disabled workers but whose psychological trauma could be just as debilitating. This initial component also included mandatory employee orientation on the COPE program as well as access to the mine's EAP. Supervisors were also trained to recognize symptoms of mineworkers who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress and referral to the EAP for counseling. The focus of the supervisor training was identifying post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) affected employees based on production and work performance criteria rather than clinical symptoms.

2. Providing Care to Employees Involved in Minor Critical Incidents

The second operational mode of the COPE program addresses the needs of employees involved in minor critical incidents. A minor critical incident is not

defined in terms of the intensity of its effects on the organization, but in terms of the degree to which it disrupts employees inside the organization where it occurs (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992).

In the event of a minor incident, the ordinary support systems of both the organization and the mineworker are still intact and fully functional. Since many individuals involved in minor incidents exhibit no immediate stress reaction (delayed nature of PTSD), a program of proactive intervention was developed where key personnel managers at various mining sites were trained to follow up after the minor incident, identify workers involved as well as those on the periphery. Once these workers were identified, they were interviewed and where appropriate, referred to the employee assistance program and a COPE counselor for education and therapeutic services as necessary. Direct services were frequently provided by the EAP counselor due to the minor nature of the incident. However, on occasion there are situations requiring a community referral for more extensive services beyond the scope of the EAP.

3. *Providing Care to Employees Involved in Major Critical Incidents*

The third component of the COPE program was designed to meet the needs of organization and mineworkers involved in a major critical incident resulting in the disruption of the entire mine operation. The earthquake at the DRD gold mine in Stilfontein referred to at the beginning of this article is one such incident where the entire operation and existing support systems was adversely affected. Loss of life, significant worker injury and damage to facilities both above and below ground appear to be substantial. The premise of the third component of the COPE model is that major critical incidents in mines are unpredictable (impact of destruction on workers, material and existing infrastructure). The mode three management of critical incidents requires that mine management follow a previously established protocol in order to effectively manage the critical incident and its expected aftermath. During the major critical incident, an attempt is made to conduct trauma debriefing sessions to involved workers, observers, rescue workers and families followed by availability and referral for individual counseling as necessary.

During major critical incidents, affected individuals are managed in groups on-site by EAP staff. They also provide on-site consultation to mine management on human behavior issues concerning the macro management of the critical incident. Since trauma-related circumstances can make intervention impractical, the collective addressing of all involved through alternative mediums after the critical incident provides an opportunity to address the following issues:

- An atmosphere of motivation and coping with the critical incident is created.
- Mine management's acknowledgement of the human response to critical incidents is demonstrated.
- Rational perception of the events can be stimulated among all parties involved.

Employees and their families can be reminded of how to deal with and where to receive personal assistance regarding PTSD. The effective systems management of employees following exposure to a critical mining incident is dependent on important trauma management principles (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992). They are:

Simplicity. Any intervention strategy aimed at assisting employees following a critical mining industry should be as simple as possible as the following guidelines suggest:

- Physical comfort, consolation and protection from further harm
- Reunification with natural support systems, i.e., family, friends, coworkers
- Encouragement in the ventilation of feelings and experiences
- Stimulation of rational perspective (providing the real facts)
- Education regarding human reactions to trauma
- Stimulation of realistic and constructive activity
- Encouragement of coping behavior
- Focusing on inner strengths and potential
- Continuous stimulation of hope

Proximity. Support should be provided as close as possible to the mine-site disaster scene by utilizing individuals from normal support systems such as family, friends, coworkers or supervisors to render the necessary bio-psychosocial assistance.

Immediacy. Trauma management should be rendered as soon as possible after the mining critical incident has occurred.

Expectancy. Resumption of normal activities as soon as possible following the traumatic incident is the major objective of management. The expectation should be that recovery is possible through the utilization of personal coping skills and potential. A "sick person" status should not be ascribed to any employee who has been exposed to a traumatic incident (Badenhorst & Van Schalkwyk, 1992).

It is noteworthy to mention that the COPE's mining trauma management model includes family members in addition to the mineworkers. Large mining operations are usually located in remote rural locations with mine employees typically being housed in mining compounds or communities that are constructed and owned by the mining house. These compounds and communities are replete with grocery stores, a hospital and clinic, dining facilities, schools, and recreational facilities such as swimming pools, movie houses, social clubs, beer halls and taverns. As a child, the first author lived in a similar railroad depot community in a remote rural town of Choma, Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia). The Railroad Employee homes, as well as the local school, the grocery store, the outdoor movie theatre (consisting of a large wooden panel painted white and rows of benches behind the grocery store), the bank (housed in the train depot), and health clinic were all owned by Rhodesia Railroads. This concept is quite similar to the company towns created by earlier U.S. industrialists, such as George Pullman and H. J. Heinz, to accommodate the day-to-day needs of workers and to promote productivity.

In the South African mining industry, housing is often included in the compensation package and the layout is similar to the U.S. military base housing with accommodation being assigned based on position in the organization. Unmarried workers and mineworkers recruited from the neighboring countries of Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho and Namibia are housed in large single-sex dormitory-like hostels, each with its own dining, recreational and drinking facilities. Some mining operations also maintain housing for visiting family members as most of the miners work on contracts of nine months or longer and are working a considerable distance from their home community. Visiting family quarters were developed in response to the high rate of absenteeism among mineworkers who were homesick for their families and often abandoned their jobs to return home to tend to family issues. The mining houses found that they also experienced attrition due to a high rate of pedestrian road accidents of workers who had left the mine compound to travel to their home village (Maiden, 1999). As a result, families are intricately woven into the fabric of the mining industry in South Africa and are severely impacted when there are mining accidents resulting in injury or loss of life.

The wisdom of the decision to extend PTSD services to family members was

evidenced in what is referred to as the Virginia mine dump accident that resulted in loss of life and significant damage to the rural community of Virginia, South Africa. South Africa's landscape is pock-marked by large above ground mine dumps that essentially contain the slough of the gold mining industry. These dumps are multiple stories high and contain residual clay, soil and ground rock left over from the gold extraction process. This clay-like substance is pumped in thick liquid form, layer upon layer into the mine dump and is left to dry in the sun. For safety reasons, it is important that each layer dries and solidifies before a subsequent layer is applied. In the Virginia mine dump incident there was a breach in one of the exterior walls that resulted in a mudslide that essentially consumed a substantial portion of the Virginia community. This accident occurred when many miners were far below ground and unaware of what had occurred. Upon coming to the surface, many workers found that they were without homes and some had lost family members. This incident dramatically affected an entire community.

The South African workplace is also substantially impacted by post-traumatic stress because of deaths from AIDS-related complications, one of the highest in the world. The South African population currently stands at 47 million with an HIV/AIDS prevalence of 10% (Xinhua News Agency, 2005).

Post-traumatic stress has also been identified as a national concern after the end of the apartheid era because of the experiences of ex-detainees, families of murdered political activists, awareness of abuse within the family, and the dramatic rise in violent crime outside the townships where the rates have always been high (Du Plessis, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

Experience has demonstrated that a traumatic incident within a mining environment will have a significant impact on mineworkers, mine management, family members and the community or compound surrounding the mine. It is fitting then that attention is given to its effective prevention, and management by means of comprehensive interdisciplinary planning and intervention. The EAP services originally initiated through the Chamber of Mines to the South African mining industry has provided the best solution by offering those employees who have been traumatized in critical mining incidents, with an opportunity to resume a healthy personal life and a productive work life, free of the residual effects associated with trauma producing workplace accidents.

Since the inception of the COPE program, the Chamber of Mines Employee Assistance Programs was spun off to form the independent Centre for Human Development (CHD). While the Centre continues to provide EAP and critical incident debriefing services to many of the mining operations throughout South Africa they are also the external provider of services to numerous other employers in South Africa. The COPE model has been modified with critical incident services being provided to workers and employers who have been impacted by the rise in carjacking, home invasions, workplace robberies, and community violence that continues to plague South Africa. In recent years, because of the closings of a number of South African mining operations, the COPE program has also been incorporated into a mineworker retrenchment program (Historian, 1999). The Centre for Human Development recently acquired Human Dynamics, another South African EAP vendor, and formed the Careways Group, which is cited above.

A study by Harper (1999) on the development of workplace human services in South Africa indicated that of the top 100 companies surveyed in South Africa 42% had implemented an EAP. Of this group, 85% have incorporated trauma

management training as part of their wellness education programs offered to employees and managers (Harper, 1999). In urban areas such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town, street violence is a common everyday occurrence. Harper suggests that South Africa's "culture of violence" has resulted in many employers offering violence prevention and avoidance programs but also *post-violence stress reaction* programs to help employees deal with the aftermath of a carjacking, purse snatching, home invasion or other random street crime (Harper, 2000). She indicates that knowledge of managing post-traumatic stress is a fundamental requirement of all employee assistance and other human resource providers in South Africa. ICAS' experience in helping an employer respond to an episode of community violence is also a unique aspect of trauma management in the South African workplace.

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