

# Good Practice Guide #1

## **Protecting the protectors: security guard tactics for managing workplace violence**

By

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**10 FEBRUARY 2020**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank everyone who assisted in me in the collection and development of this research project. This included the management of the contract guard companies as well as relevant companies with in-house security staff who volunteered to distribute participant information letters to their staff. I especially thank the survey participants who volunteered their valuable time, expertise and shared their experiences with me. I also wish to thank those Government of Alberta employees who responded to my queries in regards to both the Alberta security guard industry and workers compensation synopsis.

I also very much appreciate the feedback provided by Gina Arbeau M.Sc., Dr. Declan Garrett and Lisa Helm.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Security guarding is inherently a dangerous occupation. Guards regularly experience high levels of verbal abuse and physical violence. This is to be expected given that rule enforcement is a key component. Verbal abuse includes low level 'push back', personal attacks, profanities and threats of employment termination and direct threats against their lives. The violence guards experience includes being threatened or experiencing punches, kicks, spitting and being bit. Various weapons including improvised, guns, knives and explosives. Low level violence includes bruises whereas high level violence results in death. This violence comes from a variety of groups including hospital patients, street people, client guests and hardened criminals. There is an inconsistency in the self-defence and conflict de-escalation training provided despite the high-risk environment guards work within. This study examines the nature of violence experienced by licensed security guards in Alberta, Canada and how they manage that violence. 20 security guards participated in semi-structured interviews and shared their personal experiences. In addition, a variety of information was analysed from sources including workers compensation board statistics, occupational health and safety investigations, media reports and data provided by a contract guard provider.

Either through training or by on-the-job learning the interviewees identified some or all the rules detailed in the table below to safely de-escalate conflict.

1. Introduce yourself
2. Stay out of their personal space.
3. Do not let your emotions rule.
4. Watch for weapons while assuming everyone has a weapon.
5. Use respectful language.
6. Present options to the subject.
7. Always follow through.
8. Be flexible.
9. Ask for their name(s).
10. Separate if in a group.
11. If able to, search for weapons where appropriate.
12. Focus on the issue, not the person.
13. Use emotional intelligence and practice self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management.
14. Be direct and honest and never lie to the subject.

## SECTION 1: INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The first theme was that harassment were experienced by every security interviewee. All 20 interviewees experienced multiple levels of verbal harassment while 15 of them experienced physical attacks. When asked the question of how often, answers ranged from a low of “two or three times in the last 10 years” to a high of “multiple times every shift”. Two respondents indicated that verbal harassment was relatively rare while 18 respondents suggested that they experienced harassment every shift.

The verbal harassment ranged from relatively benign non-confrontational comments such as “this is my turf, this is where I make my money”, “you guys are stopping me from making a living, I have to pay my rent”, “I am just here to warm up” or “...to sleep” or “go hassle the druggies” to personally directed comments including being called “a cop wanna-be”, “you don’t have the authority”, “you are not a police officer”, “you are worthless”, “if you step out of the property or view of the camera, I would kick your ass”, “fuck yourself”, “I will get you fired”, “I am not leaving”, “you guys are assholes” and “get a real job”. One interviewee, went conducting a bag search and finding contraband, was accused of planting it in a subject’s purse by the bag owner. Finally, guards are occasionally blamed for the condition or status of the subject or were asked to turn a blind eye to the situation.

Variations on physical threats include “I will wait for you to get off work”, “I will come back with friends”, “let’s fight right now”, “let’s go outside and have a fight”, “if you touch me, I will kick the shit out of you”, “I’ll find you when I get out of here” to more extreme comments including “I was in in the army, I could kill you”, “I am going to kill you” and, “I will kill you and your entire family”.

Some comments are directly personally at the guard focusing on their appearance, religion, or gender where they were called “fat”, “ugly”, “terrorist”, “bitch”, “cunt”, “turban motherfucker” and other extreme racial insults. Some subjects claim they were being singled out by guards due to their religion or through racial profiling whereas other subjects used religion or race as a basis for harassing the guard. One subject accused a guard of “picking on him because he was homeless”. Another had an employee ask him, when he asked her for ID to access a government office “would you be asking me this if I was white?” One guard, wearing a turban, when confronting subjects who were not following site rules was often asked “where is your cowboy hat?” in a derogatory tone.

A pattern of three levels of verbal harassment emerged from the interviews when guards dealt with subjects in various situations. Level one was where the subject would verbally 'push back' against the guard while at the same time following the guard's requests, whether these requests involved the subject leaving the area, to cease harassing others, or to stop whatever activity they were engaged in. To get the best results at all three levels, guards engaged in developing good relations as one guard said by 'being polite and respectful' and another said it was about "building rapport". Actions included providing the guard's first name, asking the subject how their day was going, engaging in light conversation possibly discussing sports or the weather, staying out of the subject's personal space, avoiding becoming emotionally responsive to the subject, using respectful language, presenting the subject with options to resolve the situation, remaining flexible, after asking the person's name using it, separating them from others if they were in a group, and by being direct with the subject. A high degree of emotional intelligence was required by the successful guards as this process was repeated regularly with a steady number of subjects on each shift. Guards recognized the success of this approach when dealing with a variety of subjects. One guard indicated in his opinion "every situation requires serious conflict de-escalation skills." Another guard said "I think dignity is the most important thing a person can maintain. These people (homeless) have been stripped of everything else so all they have left is self-respect." Interesting insight into the conflict process was provided by one very experienced interviewee who stated, "it is important to clarify engagements are not called verbal abuse as this just the way these people talk." This allowed him to not take the verbal harassment personally and disassociate the comments from the individual. Another interviewee stated that "if you are not steering the conversation, you are doing it wrong."

Level two harassment involved initial refusal by the subject to follow the guard's direction. However, through a series of negotiations the subject would comply while at the same time expose the guard to constant verbal harassment. This initial refusal required the guard to actively engage with the subject in a positive manner as stated in step 1. In addition to these steps, several guards identified that when they approached the subject, they needed to be very accurate in the rules of the site and laws otherwise many subjects would challenge them. Guards would inform the subject of the site rules. This meant guards had to be very knowledgeable about the site client requirements and the legal framework in which they operated. This legal framework was a combination of provincial trespass to premises legislation and Canadian criminal codes around use of force and conducting arrests and the site rules as detailed by the client. Guards often stated they "worked hard to not arrest anyone and would only follow through as a last

resort". Instead, they preferred calling police, however it was not a given that police would attend the site when called.

The third level involved a full refusal by the subject to follow direction with the guard and the two would come to an impasse. Severe abuse is ongoing refusal to comply until the threat of police action or more guards forced them to comply. At this point the verbal harassment would continue. This impasse could end with various tactics including a second guard attending the situation where either their physical presence was enough to cause to convince the subject to leave, or with the change out of guards. If the first guard was unsuccessful, they would "tap out" and the second guard would inject themselves into the situation allowing the negation to continue. As one guard stated, "sometimes they just don't like your gender, race or face". Another tactic was to simply let the subject "do what they had to do, which was fix their zipper, shoe, or do drugs" before the subject left. Other tactics were for the guard to become physical or wait for police to attend the site. However, there were incidents in which guards were attacked for various perceived reasons or no reason whatsoever. One guard stated it made for a difficult situation as "if they must get physical, they fight to defend themselves and restrain the individual while the subject is fighting to hurt the guard." In addition, as one guard stated the subject "refusing to leave is also a stalling tactic. The longer the person can fight, the longer they can stay on site. They have nowhere else to go and nothing to lose." As a result, the outcome he worked toward was "the cessation of the behaviour that brought it to security's attention in the first place."

While interviewees did not all agree on specific percentages within each level, there was some consensus that level one interactions comprise of the majority of the verbal harassment at approximately 70 - 75% of the total number of incidents. Level two interactions involved the next highest level of interactions and were estimated at around 20 - 25%. Finally, level three interactions were estimated by guards to be around 1 - 5%. This left physical attacks at the smallest percentage with a range of 1 - 10%. One way to consider these interactions is in the form of a pyramid with level one forming the broad base and the physical attacks at the apex.

The vast majority of interactions with subjects resulted in a peaceful resolution of the situation. However, due to the overwhelming number of interactions, this still resulted in physical violence or attempts at intimidation as shared by interviewees. An attempt to identify the actual number of assaults proved impossible given the time frames discussed but self-estimates by interviewees

suggest that the 20 guards had collectively experienced 500 to 700 physical interactions with subjects during their security careers.

In interviewing those guards who had not experienced physical attack or intimidation all five guards, based on their interviews came across as calm and very confident in their job. They certainly were exposed to the potential for violence but managed to avoid it. However, the other 15 guards who experienced violence also came across as calm and confident.

The second theme was that possession of weapons by subjects were common. 14 of 20 interviewees experienced the display of, threatened with or struck with weapons or being attacked by others. Weapons involved can be divided into actual or pretend, converted and improvised.

The first category of actual or pretend weapons included displays of various edged weapons including a numerous assortment of knives, a machete and a sword. Firearms included three guns, a fake gun, airsoft guns, BB gun, a lighter gun and finally brass knuckles. In one case, a guard was involved in a situation where a firearm was discharged in his vicinity. Other situations involved the display of firearms on two separate occasions by subjects.

The second category involved weapons converted from tools or equipment for other purposes such as skateboards, a hammer, a sledgehammer, golf club, collapsible walking stick, bear spray, fire extinguisher, chairs, a table, electrical cord when the attacker attempted to choke the guard, ashtrays, bricks, medical IV poles, a pen, a belt buckle on the end of a belt and a screw driver.

The third category involves improvised weapons included metal pipes and pieces of construction rebar, multiple display of needles often covered in blood or other bodily fluid, a piece of wood with nails in one end, a broken beer bottle, pieces of furniture, rocks, garbage, improvised num-chuks made out of broom handles and wire, two needles tapes to a broom handle, and an arrow with razor blades taped to the shaft.

For those experiencing physical assault, this included being punched, spit upon, kicked, while pushing the attacker away or grabbing weapons away from the attacker. Other outcomes for the interviewees included broken bones, multiple stabbings, scratches and being bit. One interviewee described being grabbed by a motorist as he stopped the vehicle from going through a closed intersection. The motorist sped off, dragged him several yards before the guard was able to free

himself. In some cases, guards experienced physical intimidation or attempted intimidation when subjects stepped into the guard's person space requesting them to some action. In addition, other intimidation tactics include a subject touching guards somewhere on their uniform or body such as their hand, mock rushing the guard or throwing punches in the air.

One interviewee stated that when responding to a call of a person wandering about a site, that the person was observed carrying a metal pipe. He did not respond to verbal commands. Assistance was called and "they gave him an avenue to escape, which the guy did." The lesson learned was to give people a way out. Another interviewee stated that when he was called with his partner about fights in progress, upon arrival the fighters "turned their attention upon the guards"

Weapons are extremely common. One guard stated that at the hospital she worked at that "75 – 80% of the people" they deal with have them. She also stated that of the "approximately 15% of the people she physically deals with, 70% are male with the remained 30% female." In this group the "males very much use pushing and punching whereas the females scratch and bite." A common response from participants was the statement "assume that everyone is armed with some sort of weapon, especially at construction sites."

The third theme was that guards learned a variety of tactics to de-escalate conflict and manage the harassment and violence they experienced both in the moment of dealing with the subject as well as making sense of their overall experiences.

A common tactic expressed by several guards included "developed a script and sticking with it, using it effectively." Another interviewee stated, "at each level, you have to kick it up a notch". She was referring to staying focussed on the situation. Another guard stated "when confronting people, give them an avenue of escape otherwise they will try to go through you." One guard suggested to not "give gift certificates, clothing or food to subjects as it encourages them to come back." Guards need to be prepared for verbal and physical confrontation and attempts to embarrass them. Other words of insight included "know that the guard will be tested with verbal and physical push back and they must be prepared to defend themselves and prepared to be bullied." It was common for interviewees to state that "some subjects will try to intimidate the guard, especially if they are new." Other comments from interviewees were directed not at the subjects but clients and emergency services. One guard stated "be prepared to be second guessed by the client who is the armchair quarterback". Another said "be prepared to be treated

poorly by emergency services.” One interviewee assaulted with a weapon and experiencing a serious injury stated he “couldn’t get the detective assigned to his case to return his call” so he just stopped trying. One guard cautioned that he saw that “aggression often comes from the subject when they have friends with them”. Hence it was important to separate the subject from his or her friends by a few feet to have a one-on-one conversation with them. Guard response to managing violence was the reminder that “people will verbally attack you based on who you are or who they think you are. They will attack your race, gender, weight, appearance, job validity or uniform.” It was important for participants to “develop a script, stick to it and be prepared to wait them out”. This required forethought and patience. Some subjects see this as about leaving the site with dignity so delivering verbal abuse is part of maintaining their dignity. Street life is about an expectation to fight back either verbally or physically. “There is a lot of pent up emotion but the person needs a trigger to escalate 99% of the time.” Another interviewee stated “violence is not specifically directed at her as a person or a guard. It is nothing personal. It is that the person is fighting to escape the situation.” One interviewee stated that he was “prepared to allow another guard to step in and take over if you are making no headway.” Over and over interviewees identified that extreme patience was necessary as was the requirement to not get emotionally invested nor react to their abusive behaviour. One very experienced guard stated he “used short and specific directions”. This was to not overwhelm the subject and to aim for a series of small and successful interactions. One guard stated how important it was to “be aware of your body language, voice tone and cadence”. They recognized that verbal and physical abuse can come from anyone and everyone. Additional insight included “giving the person time to respond” and “when negotiating with the subject, offers choices”. One Interviewee stated that he “pre-planned the removal process and planned for worst case scenario”. Situational awareness was important as advice included being aware of “body language to watch out for including the subject moving towards them, closing hands, puffed up chest, leaning forward and leaning back (a change in body posture).” Additional protective tactics included “personal presentation as being very important”. How guards look is important as it conveys professionalism and competency. Interviewees said to “avoid raising your voice and the use of profanity” as this acted as trigger for some subjects. The females interviewed stated that they “experienced sexual harassment as part of the abuse” and also “include exposure by subjects”. However, some male guards were also exposed to sexual harassment. Some male guards would “experience physical contact from females subjects in a sexual manner”. One female interviewee indicated she thought this was common. Final thoughts on managing these potentially violent situations including direct discussion of the subject’s behaviour by “asking why they are engaging in it”. In addition, interviewees stated that

they needed to “be consistent in applying the rules to everyone equally”. Interviewees suggested that guards working in these situations needed to “figure out what works for you” and stick with it. They recognized that “many subjects have mental health issues, under the influence, tired, hungry, etc. so speak slowly”. Finally, in reference to the rules about dealing with subjects, particularly the homeless, one guard said “everything changes when it gets below -10C.” This was in relationship to the cold weather that people are exposed to. Given that many homeless and vulnerable people are seeking warmth to survive, this suggests that subjects are going to require additional management and that guards need to be cognizant that these situations can become life and death potentially for both parties.

Related to the management of violence was the topic of various types of training provided to guards. There were two kinds of training involved: formal and informal. 16 of the 20 guards had received formal conflict de-escalation training and it ranged over the course of their careers from 16 hours to “several thousand hours” (see Table 4). The several thousand hours of training was on the extreme end and was an anomaly. When asked what type of training interviewees completed, common responses included ‘non-violent crisis intervention’, ‘verbal judo’, ‘engaging vulnerable people’, ‘officer safety’, ‘pressure point control tactics’, ‘handcuffing’, ‘baton’, ‘ground fighting’ and other forms of self defense, ‘customer service’ and ‘breakthrough communications’. Training provided was a combination of standardized courses provided throughout the security industry and courses created by the employer. In some cases, training was mandatory and required as part of the employment contract between guards and their employers and other training was sought out by individuals. One interviewee said he wanted to “be better at verbal de-escalation” and “has had to go outside the security industry” for training. 17 guards stated they would take more training if available to them while three interviewees stated they did not “required additional training”. One interviewee stated he would take more training as “it was definitely getting more violent”. In addition, guards benefited from knowledge passed onto them by others. Another guard stated that while he “was always looking for additional training” to be cautious as there is also “bad or unrealistic training”. Another guard said that while training was really useful, “clients don’t want to pay for it and most guards do not take training seriously”. One guard stated that she “would like to better develop her inter-personal communication skills as she sometimes comes off as harsh”. This self-awareness is important as it sheds insight into ongoing skills development (Blanchard, 2014, p. 801). Other forms of training included informal training consisting of advice offered to guards or by watching others and either learning what to do or more importantly what not to do. One interviewee stated that “no one ever put me through formal

training. It has all been on-the-job.” And while he thought he did not need additional training he would “accept training if it was offered.” One guard said working in downtown Vancouver that “things would get tense as co-workers would put their gloves on their hands, sending out a signal that they were prepared for violence.” Some expressed the concern that co-workers themselves caused conflict “due to ego” and “territoriality”.

#### **Detailed lessons learned from the interviewees.**

- 1 When confronting subjects, do not block their escape path.
- 2 Don't give gift certificates, clothing or food as it encourage subjects to come back.
- 3 Guards need to be prepared for verbal and physical confrontation and attempts to embarrass them.
- 4 Know that the guard will be tested with verbal and physical push back and they must be prepared to defend themselves. Prepared to be bullied.
- 5 Some subjects will try to intimate the guard, especially if they are new.
- 6 There seems to be three levels of verbal abuse: mild, medium and severe.
- 7 Mild abuse is push back but subject is complying.
- 8 Medium abuse is where the subject initially refuses to follow requests but when the guard stands firm, they comply
- 9 Severe abuse is ongoing refusal to comply until the threat of police action or more guards forces them to comply.
- 10 Be prepared to be second guessed by client (armchair quarterback)
- 11 Be prepared to be treated poorly by emergency services.
- 12 Aggression often comes when the subject has friends with them.
- 13 Be prepared for specific rules about the property and criminal code. If he does not know the rules he will get push back.
- 14 Assume everyone is armed with some sort of weapon.
- 15 Watch for weapons around such as when at a construction site.
- 16 People will verbally attack you based on who you are or who they think you are. They will attack your race, gender, weight, appearance, job validity, uniform.
- 17 Develop a script
- 18 Be prepared to wait them out. Stick to your script.
- 19 Some subjects see this as about leaving the site with dignity so delivering verbal abuse is part of maintaining their dignity. Street life is about an expectation to fight back either verbally or physically.

- 20 "There is a lot of pent up emotion but the person needs a trigger to escalate 99% of the time." Don't be the trigger.
- 21 Be prepared to allow another guard to step in and take over if you are making no headway.
- 22 Be patient.
- 23 Do not get emotionally invested and do not react to them.
- 24 Use short and specific directions. Be aware of your body language, voice tone and cadence.
- 25 Verbal and physical abuse can come from anyone and everyone.
- 26 Give the person time to respond.
- 27 When negotiating with subject, offers choices.
- 28 Pre-plan the removal process and plan for worst case scenario.
- 29 Body language to watch out for including the subject moving towards them, closing hands, puffed up chest, leaning forward and leaning back (a change in body posture).
- 30 Personal presentation very important. How guards look is important.
- 31 Avoid raising your voice and the use of profanity.
- 32 Females more experience sexual harassment as part of the abuse. This may include exposure. However, some male guards were also exposed to sexual harassment.
- 33 Male guards may experience physical contact from female subjects in a sexual manner.
- 34 Guards may be accused of planting weapons or drugs on a person when they are doing searches.
- 35 Guards: if they must get physical, fight to defend themselves and restrain the individual while the subject is fighting to hurt the guard.
- 36 Ask the subject about their behaviour and why they are engaging in it.
- 37 Be consistent in applying the rules to everyone equally.
- 38 Figure out what works for you.
- 39 As many subjects have mental and physical health issues, under the influence, tired, hungry, etc, it is important to speak slowly and let them take their time.

## **SECTION 2: WORKPLACE VIOLENCE DEFINED**

There are various definitions of workplace violence. At a federal level, the Government of Canada views it as “any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated, assaulted, degraded, or humiliated in his or her employment” (2019). The Government of Alberta where this research was completed has a far more detailed description. Harassment and violence are two separate categories. Harassment includes “a single incident or repeated incidents of unwelcome conduct, comment, or bullying likely to cause offense or humiliation (2018, p. 1) whereas violence is defined as a “physical attack or aggression, threatening behaviour, verbal or written threats, domestic violence or sexual violence” (2018, p. 2). Governments are well aware of the violence workers are exposed to. In Alberta, employers are mandated via the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Guide which identifies “violence and harassment as a hazard” (Province of Alberta, 2019, p. 27-1) and in turn, hazards must be “eliminated or if it not reasonably practical, then controlled” (ibid, p. 2-1).

In Alberta, “by law, employers are required to report injuries that their workers suffer while on the job. When an accident results in, or is likely to result in:

- Lost time or the need to temporarily or permanently modify work beyond the date of the accident;
- Death or permanent disability;
- A disabling or potential disabling condition;
- The need for medical treatment beyond first aid;
- Incurring medical aid expenses (WCB-Alberta Employer Report of Injury, p. 1)

The WCB of Alberta provides an industry synopsis of ‘Security Services/Industrial Patrols’ which details types of accidents experienced by those in the security industry. While there are five types of accident reports, the focus here is upon ‘Assaults/Violent Acts/Harassment’. Table 3 on page 30 details reported incidents usually resulting in lost employment time. Many of those participating in this research stated that they rarely reported their incidents of violence as it simply ‘part of the job.’ At least two facts be seen by the data presented in Table 3. First, the percentage of reported claims is on average just under .25% of the total number of licensed guards. Second, the total number of WCB claims has more than doubled between 2013 and 2019.

A distinction between aggression and violence was made by Barling, Dupre & Kelloway where they defined aggression as “psychological” in nature “that is intended to harm another individual in their organization” whereas violence is “more physical in nature” (2009, pp. 672/673). This is an important distinction as while physical violence is experienced less often, aggression is experienced by a high number of employees, with numbers being as high as 70+% (p. 673). There is also a strong link between alcohol and violence (Graham & Livingston, 2011, p. 5) so given that guards are often hired to manage special events where there is a high level of alcohol consumption, it is unsurprising that guards in turn are exposed to harassment and violence at these special events.

## SECTION 3: SETTING THE CONTEXT

A common response to manage aggression and violence in the workplace is to request the presence of and response by security guards (Anyanwu, 2012, p. 4; Mcleod, 2002; Black, 2010; p. 471, Cawood & Corcoran, 2009, p. 277; Kerr, 2010, p. 296; Maskaly, et al, 2011, p. 162; Pritchard & Maslen, 2010, p. 292; Raveel & Schoenmakers, 2019, p.10; Tufano, 2014, p. 59; Waddingham, 2014, p. 6). Regardless of whether it is in a commercial high-rise, health care environment, shopping mall, transportation hub, sporting stadium, special event or any of the myriad other locations where guards are stationed, one of the primary guard responsibilities is to be prepared for and indeed expected to respond to dangerous situations.

Due to the request for guards to attend violent and potentially violent situations, it is obvious that guards work in high-risk situations. Researchers have studied workplace violence exposure by security guards in Australia, Finland, India, Sweden, and Turkey (Laureys & Easton, 2018, p. 126; Leino, Selin, Summala & Virtanen, 2011, p. 400; Sarre & Prenzler, 2018, p. 9). Guard exposure to violence was also studied by Ardic, Usta and Ozturk in six hospitals in three different cities in Turkey. They found that over “65% of the guards were exposed to verbal violence and 40.9% to physical violence three times or more in the previous 12 months (2018, p. 153). In Sweden Larsson evaluated looked at threats and violence of a number of occupations including guards, police officers, prison staff, social workers, bank clerks and found that security guards experienced some of the highest rates of victimization of all groups (2010, pp. 2/3). He looked at a variety of situations where the guards were injured. These situations ranged from patrolling and removing drunks from property, taking shoplifters in custody, experiencing a robbery in a variety of situations, attacked by an addicted or aggressive person and controlling access to venues (Larsson, 2010, p. 9). Research undertaken in Finland in 2011 indicated that “security guards constitute a high-risk occupation for workplace violence” (Leino, Selin, Summala & Virtanen, p. 143). 39% of guards reported experiencing verbal aggression, 19% of threats of assault and 15% of physical acts of violence at least once per month (Leino, et al, p. 147). Other research completed by Leino states that the risk of workplace violence is “highest with security and other protective services” (2013, p. 18). In Australia Ferguson, Prenzler, Sarre & de Caires investigated police and security guard experiences of occupational violence and injury. One finding was that “security guards had the highest rated occupation for work-related injuries and death from occupational violence, higher even than police guards” (2011, p. 223). Eight years of data of

reported workers compensation incidents were evaluated. While police officers suffered more accidents, security guards experienced higher rates of violence and were “more likely to sustain serious non-fatal injuries than police (p. 231). The authors suggest the differences in violence by security may be due to “the more prominent role for security guards in crowd control duties that involve direct confrontation with the public” (p. 231). While these two occupations do suffer high rates, they have been on a downward trend with the suggestion for the drop due to “better selection and training and improved safety procedures” (p. 231).

In addition to the immediate violence that guards face, several researchers have identified that there are long term health impacts associated with constant exposure to violence. Stutzenberger & Fisher identify “stress resulting from exposure to violence in the workplace also impacts one’s behaviour and attitudes including reduction in job satisfaction and/or commitment to the employer, unsafe behaviour and increased ability for accidents and poor lifestyle habits” (2014, p. 216).

However, guards are rarely given appropriate training or preparation to manage either (Kitteringham, 2017; Sarre & Prenzler, 2018, p. 15; Tufano, 2014, p. 107). Fundamentally security guard work has the high potential for conflict with others and the training is simply not provided (Kitteringham, 2017). A review of over 30 training syllabi identified that the topic of workplace violence was introduced in ten of the syllabi and physical fitness training was identified in only one syllabus (Kitteringham, 2017, p. 95). Adding to this is the fact that language requirements are not particularly high yet verbal conflict resolution skills are required. Add alcohol, rule enforcement, crime prevention presence and it all adds up to constant opportunities for the potential for violence.

In 2010, an Australian nationwide survey of security firm owners and security managers found very mixed views on regulation. When asked about pre-licence training, a majority felt that courses were adequate in the areas of knowledge of law (60%), basic security procedures (83%) and occupational health and safety (78%). However, training was considered inadequate in developing skills in communication (73%), conflict resolution (69%), physical restraint (69%) and self-defence (75%) (Sarre & Prenzler, 2011, p. 15).

Rigakos conducted research into the world of Canadian nightclub door staff or bouncers as they are more commonly known and their experiences with workplace violence (2008, p. 10). While the experiences of bouncers were not considered in this current study, bouncers are considered

part of the security industry. Rigakos “provides empirical evidence that bouncers experience statistically significantly more workplace violence than local police officers (p. 12). He presents evidence of bouncers both as the culprit and victim of violence (p. 115). There are some parallels with this research and those of certain experiences of guards interviewed for this research. More than one interviewee stated that he or she had seen guards contribute to the escalation of violent situations. This was supported by Hobbs, et al in England with similar findings (2003).

Other researchers have also drawn parallels (Prenzler & Sarre, 2008, p. 4; Wadds, 2010, p. 2) between the night-time economy, bouncers (or crowd controllers as they sometimes called) and uniformed security guards carrying out their duties in a variety of situations. While both work under the umbrella of security and are seen as part of the manned guarding industry (Button, 20016, p. 155), bouncers are a separate and distinct group from uniformed guards. As such this study exclusively focuses on uniformed security guards.

In Manzo’s research on with Canadian security guards, interviewees in separate cases discussed one guard being exposed to bear spray, two witnessing a suicide and finally a guard takedown of a thief with a knife (2011, p. 118). While Manzo came across as sympathetic to the experiences of the interviewees there is no mention of the context of workplace violence as instead the incidents are discussed from the analytic perspective of emergent situations and whether the guard received training to respond to them.

Johnston discussed the use of violence by security guards in a psychiatric ward in Ontario, Canada first from personal experience as a “demonstration of control” (2014, p. 162). Johnson & Kilty then examined the use of violence by eight guards in their 2016 study in examining “the use of chemical, physical and coercive force against psychiatric patients” (p. 1). The authors’ approach was to view the guards always as the perpetrators and the patients as victims. There is no discussion of the guard’s experience with violence in self-protection or being seen as a victim of violence at the hands (or feet) of psychiatric patients.

Yadav and Kiran explored occupational stress among security guards in Lucknow, India as a significant issue and that security work is “very difficult and that security guards suffer from high stress” (2015, p. 21). The authors list a number of stress factors that impact the guards including meal patterns, nose irritation, problems with commuting and the vague category of ‘risky’ (p. 25). One can assume that the term risk indicates the potential for harassment or violence but without

a definition, one cannot know for sure. However, the findings are clear that guards do experience high levels of occupational stress. Lofstrand identified violence as an issue for residents and employees including security guards in her study of a Swedish homeless shelter (2015).

The research indicates that guards are both cause of and are victims of workplace violence (Mazlan, 2013, p. 135). However, this is a grey area requiring further study. While guards are responsible for using force on people under the influence of drugs, alcohol or pain, it is very often due to a request by others to use force or required by standard operating procedures. There are other issues as well, particularly as it pertains to the management of both public and private space. Security guards have a complex relationship with the homeless and vulnerable populations as found in most urban centres. On one hand they are expected to protect businesses and their customers creating a safe space while at the same time be sympathetic to the plight of the vulnerable while recognizing that being homeless is not a crime. However, many of these vulnerable are often exposed to high levels of violence themselves (Miller, McIntyre & Werth, 2016/2017, p. 10) making even the most casual of interactions between security and the vulnerable potentially violent. In some cases, the guards were reported to have been responsible for the violence (Bennett, Eby, Richardson & Tilley, 2008, p. 6; Novac, Hermer, Paradis & Kellen, 2009, p. 2; Kennedy, et al, 2015, p. 1). Again, the inherent nature of security guard creates conflict.

## **SECTION 4: PROFILING THE PRACTITIONERS**

20 security guards were interviewed in October and November of 2018. Of the 20, all experienced multiple levels of verbal abuse, often many times on a single shift. Regarding physical violence, 15 of the 20 interviewees experienced anywhere from a single incident to others who had 'hundreds of experiences'. Details are found in Appendix 2, Table 1. Semi-structured interviews with 20 guards were undertaken. It starts with an overview of interviewee profiles before discussing three themes that emerged from the interviews. The first was that harassment or violence experienced by every guard. The second theme was that possession of weapons by subjects was common. The third theme was that guards learned several tactics to de-escalate conflict and manage the harassment and violence they experienced.

The 20 interviewees worked in seven different sectors of the economy. However, as their time in the security industry ranged from seven months to 20 years, many had worked in diverse sectors throughout their careers. A brief profile is provided in Table 1 starting on page 28.

The average amount of security experience held was 6 years 10 months. Personnel had worked in a variety of settings including shopping malls, bars, concerts, beer gardens, parking lots, hotels, government offices, parks, festivals, construction sites, while delivering executive protection, bus stations, health care settings, an international sporting event, an airport, a courthouse, a warehouse and sports facilities. 16 guards had received a variety of conflict de-escalation training during their careers ranging from 16 to 1000+ hours of training. One trained other guard. When asked if they thought additional training was desired, three guards stated they thought they did not require additional training while 17 interviewees stated they would take additional training if it was offered to them. Several have been involved in multi-year training with self-defence.

## **SECTION 5: CONCLUSION**

Research findings from around the world have identified that guards face a considerable amount of harassment and violence. Some of the research has suggested that guards are prone to violence and victimize the subjects they interact with. Some research also suggests that guards are provided with little training to manage the violence they are exposed to. This research suggests instead that most, if not all those interviewed for this research have relatively high levels of training, have good self-awareness and developed successful tactics to manage that violence. Without a doubt the majority desire additional training. Given the challenges that these guards face, additional training would be likely very beneficial for all parties concerned.

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## **APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE**

### **Research Approach**

The approach to undertaking this qualitative research was based on interpretivism which incorporates the experiences of people in social situations (Robson, 2011, p. 24), in this case those security guards involved in a wide number of interactions with the public. In fact, these interactions were often a series of negotiations between guard and subject where the subject was engaging in some activity considered improper or illegal which initially brought it to the attention of the guard. Further supporting this approach was the guard's interpretations of the situation which would most often affect the outcome of the negotiation.

### **Research Strategy**

Considering the nature of the research which was to identify and discuss the kind and levels of harassment and violence experienced by security guards the research undertaken was to approach those guards with direct experience and responsibility in dealing with the public in a variety of situations and locations.

### **Research Method**

A grounded theory approach was used. Grounded theory "involves going out into 'the field' and collecting data. It can involve observations, document analysis and interviews (Robson, 2011, p. 148). In this case, 20 security guards working on a regular basis with the public were interviewed. Grounded theory was founded "in data obtained during the study, particularly in the actions, interactions and processes of the people involved (Robson, 2013, p. 147). This approach was used for two reasons. First, it allows for a flexible method to undertake qualitative based research. Second, because of the nature of the data gathered it allows for thematic coding to be used (Robson, 2013, p. 467). This coding process was undertaken to first gain familiarization with the data gathered as it was added to a spreadsheet to display the information. Initial codes were generated into themes and then sub-themes allowing for the interpretation and understanding of the information (Bryman, 2008, p. 554). While the interviewees, of which there were 20, were too small to be representative of the security guard industry as a whole or of the Alberta guard industry specifically, there are questions of whether the study results can be generalized (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 26) to the larger security industry. However, their experiences are vital to understand as it sheds light on the challenges facing guards and opens up further study opportunities.

## **Research Collection**

Five in-house employers of uniformed guards and three contract guard companies in Alberta, Canada were approached in October 2018. Each organization was provided with a letter of introduction and participation information sheet and asked to pass them on to their employees. Interested employees in turn were asked to contact the researcher if they wished to participate. These companies collectively had approximately 2500 guard employees, representing about 11% of the licensed security guard industry in Alberta in 2018 of which there were approximately 23,351 licensed guards (M. Redillas, personal communication, January 3, 2019). Those wishing to participate in the interviews was based upon a first come-first serve approach where 20 people were ultimately interviewed.

## **Data gathering**

To gather data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken. Ten questions were asked. Questions included whether the interviewee had experienced verbal abuse in the past, what specifically was said and outcome of the incident(s), whether the interviewee had experienced physical violence in the past, and the outcome of the incident(s), if the violence included a display of aggression or weapons, who the subject was, if these incidents caused the interviewee to consider leaving the security industry, what kind of training they had received in the past to deal with workplace violence, if the interviewee thought they needed additional training and what kind of training this may be. These standardized questions allowed for common themes to be discussed. It also allowed for the flexibility to pursue additional information brought up by interviewees. This approach fit nicely with the grounded theory approach and thematic analysis.

## APPENDIX 2: DATA TABLES

Table 1: interviewee profiles/responses						
#	Current sector worked	Gender	Verbal abuse	Physically attacked	Estimated hours of training received	
1	Special events and parking	Male	multiple levels each shift	one attempt by subject	110	
2	Special events and parking	Male	regular occurrence	10 – 11 times	200	
3	Special events and parking	Male	every shift	30/40: in last 18 months.	40	
4	Special events and parking	Male	2 to 3 times per shift	no	80	
5	Homeless shelter	Male	on a good day, 2-3 times, on a bad day 30 times per shift.	couple incidents in last 12 months. Prior to this, 150 fights in four years.	8	
6	Special events and parking	Male	a regular thing	many times including being dragged by a car.	200+	
7	Homeless shelter	Male	hourly	200 – 300 times.	7000+	
8	Municipal complex	Male	2/3 times in last 10 years	yes	0	
9	Transportation centre and shopping malls	Female	every shift multiple times	no	0	
10	Special events and parking	Male	every shift multiple times	yes: stabbed	90 – 100	
11	Special events and provincial building	Male	once a week	once	16	
12	Health care	Male	at least once per shift, 4 out of 5 shifts and sometimes multiple times per shift.	about every two weeks.	56	
13	Special events complex	Female	multiple levels of abuse every shift	no	0	
14	Special events	Male	multiple levels each shift, depending upon site.	no	200	
15	Health care	Female	yes, at least once per shift but more likely multiple times per shift.	yes, on many occasions. Males (70%) push and punch whereas females (30%) scratch and bite	700+	
16	Special events and parking	Male	multiple times per shift	no, but has come close	30	
17	Commercial high-rises	Male	yes, frequently and almost daily basis. 1-2 times on a slow day, 3-4 on a busy	yes, 3-4 times, about every 6-8 months.	100	

			day and 10-15 when the weather is bad		
18	Transportation warehouse	Male	yes but quite mild low level stuff at his current site but at the mall lots of verbal abuse including death threats	pushed once and spit on once	0
19	Health care	Male	yes, multiple times per shift	yes on average, once every other shift. Has been hit 5 times in the last 3.5 months at one particular site	110
20	Special events and parking	Male	at least once per shift.	he got physical (pushing/pulling) with a female attempting to rob a convenience store.	74

One contract guard company provided data on their reported assaults in 2018. A total of 29 guards in Calgary (21) and Edmonton (8) were assaulted. Methods of attack are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: guard company records of assaults	
Type of attack (2018)	Company A
Hit with fist/foot	18
Biological (bear spray) spitting	5
Bitten	1
Struck by object	4
Pushed	1
Total:	29

Table 3: violence by year								
Assault/Violent Act/Harassment	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Totals
Security Guards	21	23	30	27	22	46	46	215
Total licensed guards	11,455	9,784	12,135	11,129	12,558	10,793	13,124	80,978
WCB claims as a % of total licenses	0.18%	0.24%	0.25%	0.24%	0.18%	0.43%	0.35%	0.27%

Table 4: media reports on violence experienced by guards			
#	Date	Incident details	Reference
1	01NOV06	Security guard raped at construction site she was assigned to protect in Calgary, Alberta.	Slade, 2011.
2	09SEP16	Two security guards sprayed with bear spray at Spruce Meadows in Calgary, Alberta.	Gilligan, 2016.
3	08JUL16	Two armoured car guards were pepper sprayed in a robbery attempt. Since 2000, there have been 85 robberies of armoured vehicles in Canada.	Clancy, 2016.
4	13DEC18	Two Edmonton security guards injured in an explosion as part of a robbery.	Snowden, 2018.

## **ABOUT KITTERINGHAM SECURITY GROUP INC.**

Since 2010, KSGInc. has provided three services to clients: first, is the provision of security, mentoring and employee development, crisis management and research expertise. Second, KSGInc. provides time that clients do not have themselves to create or evaluate documents and programs. Third, the company provides products including standard operating procedures, emergency response plans, posters and training material.

Clients come from agriculture, education, energy, financial services, government, health care, personnel, property management, publishing, security, technology and transportation. Company expertise includes research, employee mentoring, violence prevention, risk and security assessments, CPTED audits, personnel security and crisis management/life safety planning.

Dr. Kitteringham has undertaken research in a number of areas including Security Practitioners Perspectives of the Alberta Basic Security Training program, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Laptop Theft Prevention, Offender Perspectives on Shoplifting and Security Guard Exposure to Violence.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Glen Kitteringham CPP has worked in the security industry since 1990. He started his career at The Bay in loss prevention and investigations, conducted insurance fraud investigations with Bison Security Group and was a site supervisor with Minion Protection Services. In 1997 he joined Brookfield Properties as Manager, Security & Life Safety and left in 2010 as Director for Western Canada. He was instrumental in developing their national security and life safety program.

Dr. Kitteringham obtained his Professional Doctorate in Security Risk Management from the University of Portsmouth in 2017. He completed several 100- and 300-hour certificates in Security Management, Terrorism Awareness and General Management. He also completed three Certificates in Adult Learning specializing in Adult and Community Education, e-Learning & Workplace Learning between 2010 and 2019, obtained his Certified Protection Professional (CPP) designation from ASIS International in 2002, his Masters of Science Degree in Security and Crime Risk Management in 2001 from the University of Leicester and a Diploma in Criminology from Mount Royal University in 1992.

He has been an adjunct instructor with the University of Calgary since 2008: online classes include 'Security Administration', 'Physical Security Planning', 'Managing Investigations' and 'Emergency Planning for Industry'. He has instructed since 2010 for the Justice Institute of British Columbia developing and delivering online courses including 'Introduction to Risk Management', 'Developing Strategic Partnerships', 'Technology Applications in Emergency & Security Environments', 'Safety & Security Planning for Major Events' and 'Managing Information and Technology in the Fire Services'. He has created and delivered over 60 days of training content including security management, leadership, emotional intelligence, CPTED and physical security.

His expertise in security and life safety is well recognized internationally. He actively managed more than 8 million square feet of A and AA property with over 100 security staff. In his role of manager, senior manager and director and in his capacity as a consultant he has completed several hundred projects in a variety of areas including risk assessments, security management program surveys, physical security evaluations, project managed the implementation of security projects including contract guard RFPs, software and hardware evaluations, and employee mentoring and development.

He has authored or co-authored over 150 articles, books and papers on various elements of security and life safety. His book, 'Security and Life Safety for the Commercial High-Rise' was published in 2006. He wrote Lost Laptops = Lost Data in 2008. He was a regular columnist for 'From the Top' for Canadian Security Magazine from 2009 to 2013.

Professional memberships include ASIS International, International CPTED Association and BOMA Calgary. He is active on the BOMA Calgary Public Safety Committee since 2002.