

WORKING IN FEAR? MANAGERS' AND PETROL ATTENDANTS' EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC-INITIATED VIOLENCE AT SELECTED PETROL STATIONS IN JOHANNESBURG

ABSTRACT

A general consensus generated from various news articles is that violence in the workplace is on the rise and that the workplace is no longer considered safe for many employees. Although some employees such as police officers and prison guards might encounter violence at work to some degree, more and more employees are experiencing the effects of public-initiated violence at work. They include petrol attendants working on the forecourts of petrol stations. Recently, Kole (2010) conducted research on the security measures to reduce workplace violence at petrol stations in Gauteng and highlighted issues and challenges that petrol stations face on a daily basis regarding workplace violence. Kole recommended several prevention strategies to reduce violent crimes at petrol stations. The aim of this study is to add knowledge on this phenomenon by focusing on selected petrol stations in Johannesburg, to understand whether they experience similar issues and challenges regarding workplace violence and what strategies they use to prevent these issues and challenges. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five managers and fifteen petrol attendants working at these selected petrol stations in Johannesburg in 2015. These interviews focused on violent Type I and non-violent Type II workplace violence that occur at their petrol stations.

KEY WORDS

Petrol stations; Workplace violence; Preventative strategies

INTRODUCTION

Mitchells Plain, Western Cape - "A petrol attendant died after he was allegedly assaulted with a plank by a motorist for refusing to fill up the man's tank" (Prince, *Cape Argus*, 7 June 2013).

Soweto, Gauteng - "A group of nine people, two armed with rifles and the rest with pistols, entered the garage and held petrol attendants at gunpoint" (SAPA, 2014).

Centurion, Gauteng – "A man armed with a shotgun single-handedly robbed a filling station in Clubview" (De Ridder, *Centurion Record News*, 29 January 2015).

Reports such as these have appeared in the media with alarming regularity. There is no doubt that a series of tragedies like those described above are an issue of serious concern. More disturbingly, almost every day a public-initiated act of violence takes place at a petrol station across South Africa where petrol attendants and managers are increasingly becoming victims whilst at work (Neuman & Baron, 1998: 392; Hadland, 2002: 23).

Defining workplace violence is challenging due to the different work locales and the vast array of different behaviours that can be considered to be violent. For example, terrorism, domestic violence, armed robbery, verbal and physical threats, sexual harassments, bullying, theft, fraud and vandalism, among others, are all considered to be violent crimes that can occur at workplaces such as petrol stations (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006: 10; Spector, Coulter, Stockwell and Matz, 2007: 117). Accordingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002: 3-4) defines workplace violence as "incidents where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, including commuting to and from work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health". This definition also comprises of sub-definitions of physical violence such as attacks which refers to the intentional physical or sexual harm of another person and includes behaviour such as kicking, slapping,

stabbing, shooting, pushing, biting and pinching. Another subset of this definition refers to psychological violence which refers to humiliating, degrading or disrespecting another person in terms of race, gender, class, and age, sexuality, disability, and HIV status among others. This form of violence include behaviours such as verbal abuse, assaults, sexual harassments and bullying (WHO, 2002: 3-4). All these types of violence can occur at a workplace such as petrol stations where the perpetrators are either strangers, customers or co-workers.

Adding to this, the International Labour Organization (ILO) also provides a useful definition of workplace violence that emphasises its complex nature: “Any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of his or her work” (ILO, 2004: 4). The ILO makes a distinction between internal and external forms of workplace violence. Internal workplace violence occurs between co-workers including supervisors and managers. External workplace violence, also referred to as public-initiated workplace violence, takes place between workers (employees, supervisors and managers) and any other person present at the workplace, whether it is a customer to whom services were rendered or a stranger. Both internal and external forms of workplace violence range from physical attacks, sexual harassments, verbal abuse or assaults (Chappell & DiMartino, 2006: 10).

The focus of this paper is on public-initiated workplace violence, which can be divided into two types: Type I workplace violence occurs when the perpetrator is a criminal intruder who is a stranger to the organization and usually enters the work site to commit robbery or other criminal acts against employees or managers that is of a violent nature. Type II workplace violence occurs when a client, customer or patient to whom a service is rendered becomes verbally abusive or aggressive toward a service employee, which is often non-violent in nature (Kgosimore, 2004: 63-64; LeBlanc & Barling, 2005: 187). Researchers have identified several job related tasks that increase the likelihood of employees becoming victims of Type I and II workplace violence. High risk factors include among others, contact with the public where employees render a service to the public; where there is an exchange of money; where employees work alone, in small numbers, late at night, early in the morning or in high crime areas; or when employees work with mental unstable people such in health care, social services or the criminal justice systems (LeBlanc & Barling, 2005: 44; LeBlanc et al., 2006: 261; Respass & Payne, 2008: 132).

Research done on public-initiated workplace violence in South Africa has mainly focused on the healthcare sector (Steinman, 2003; Kennedy & Julie, 2013), security industry (Kgosimore, 2007; Sefalafala & Webster, 2013; Du Toit, 2015); and the police service sector (Schiff, 2010). One such sector that encompasses most of these high-risk factors that contribute to public-initiated Type I and II workplace violence and that has received relatively little attention apart from Hadland’s study in 2002 and Kole’s Master’s research in 2010, is the petrol industry. Hadland’s (2002) study is a research monograph that included a wide range of oral and written submissions of stakeholders and interested parties with a specially-commissioned RISE survey of 25 petrol stations in the Western Cape. It focuses on the structure of the South African retail industry, the socio-political and internal environments of the sector, types of violent crimes experienced by the sector and various organisational, workplace and technological recommendations for petrol stations. Kole’s (2010) Master’s study focuses mainly on the causes, reasons and opportunities that lead to violent crime at petrol stations in Gauteng, and whether the safety measure strategies implemented are sufficient to reduce violent crime at petrol stations. This study also recommends various security measures for the petrol industry, franchise owners and retailers.

However, it is several years since these two studies on violence at petrol stations and whether petrol stations face similar or different issues and challenges regarding violent and non-violent crime today and types of security measures that are implemented at petrol stations

remains unclear. The aim of this article is to explore whether managers and petrol attendants have experienced public-initiated workplace violence at selected petrol stations in Johannesburg, and if so, what preventative security measures are implemented to avoid such crimes to occur again.

General patterns of workplace violence and security measures at petrol stations

Type I and II workplace violence at petrol stations

Since self-service is prohibited in South Africa, petrol stations provide thousands of jobs to people working as either petrol attendants on the forecourt of petrol stations or as cashiers behind the tills at the petrol stations. On average between ten and 20 petrol attendants work at a single petrol station per shift, depending on the size and area of the petrol station. Petrol attendants are dressed in uniforms with their name and company logo clearly visible. Their job does not only involve physical labour which includes filling up customers' cars with petrol or diesel, washing windscreens, and checking oil and water levels of motorists' cars, but petrol attendants also engage in emotional labour by rendering friendly services to customers similar as waiters do in restaurants (Du Toit, 2012: 130). Additionally, petrol stations are also commercial sites for fast food restaurants, ATM banks, postal services, convenience stores, bakeries, and carwash facilities among others. Conveniently for consumers, most petrol stations are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week where most of these services are rendered (Kempen, 2012: 11).

Although there are many advantages of petrol stations for owners and/or managers, petrol attendants and consumers, one of the main issues is being a high-risk for Type I and II workplace violence. This may have devastating effects on the reputation of the petrol station, cash flow, customer return and the safety of workers and customers. Type I workplace violence includes armed robbery at petrol stations; cash-in-transit robberies; car high-jacking; and/or ATM bombings. Type II workplace violence includes drive-offs which occurs when a customer drive off after the car is filled up without paying; card-skimming of other customers' cards; and verbal abuse, assaults or threats of petrol attendants (Sapia, 2003; Kole, 2010: 2; Kempen, 2012: 12-14).

Research indicated that there are approximately 1100 criminal incidents that occur at petrol stations every year, while up to 42 people are killed at petrol stations annually across South Africa (Kempen, 2012: 11). Recent news articles reveal shocking incidences of such cases. For example, in August 2014, a number of petrol attendants, cashiers and customers were held at gunpoint by five men inside the kiosk at the petrol station in Johannesburg while the safe was broken open and an undisclosed amount of cash was taken (eNCA, 2014). Another incident in January 2015 in Pretoria shows how two suspects parked their car at a petrol station, pulled out a gun and robbed a customer in broad daylight. Another incident in March 2015 in Durban shows how a cash-in-transit vehicle was robbed by a group of men with AK-47s at a petrol station (eNCA, 2015; News 24, 2015). During each such incident, innocent workers and customers have to face the trauma of being exposed to firearms, which often involve heavy calibre firearms such as shotguns and rifles (Kempen, 2012: 11).

In addition to Type I workplace violence that occur at petrol stations, another issue that petrol attendants in particular and managers to some extent are increasingly becoming victims of Type II workplace violence. This includes drive offs where customers do not pay for fuel, and when petrol attendants are physical attacked, verbal abused, assaulted and threatened by customers, an often underreported issue that occur at petrol stations. By engaging with emotional labour, petrol attendants increase their chances of receiving tips from customers or bonuses from managers by rendering friendly customer services. Emotional labour broadly refers to "the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion

during interpersonal transactions” (Morris and Feldman, 1996: 987). However, the emotional exchange may become unequal, where customers may verbally abuse or assault petrol attendants (Du Toit, 2012; Du Toit, 2015). Additionally, petrol attendants have authority to ask customers to adhere to certain rules and regulations as set out by management, which puts them in a vulnerable position of Type II workplace violence. A recent newspaper article reports how a petrol attendant was physically attacked and assaulted by a group of bikers by asking them not to smoke near the petrol pump for safety reasons (SAPA, *Sunday Times*, 3 December 2014). These incidences show that petrol stations are increasingly becoming a high-risk workplace of violence and other criminal activities.

Managers and petrol attendants have the challenge of dealing with high risk factors that may contribute to Type I and II workplace violence: For Type I workplace violence, it is common knowledge that petrol stations have a high cash flow and the nature that most of the petrol stations are open for 24-hour, seven-day a week. On average, some busy petrol stations have a daily cash flow of around R70 000 a day and about R200 000 during busy weekends (Kole, 2010: 34). According to statistics from the eMIRG study, trends of violent crime at the surveyed 426 petrol stations show that 54% of violent crimes occur between midnight and 09:00 am or when petrol stations are quiet. Violent crimes also occur on particularly Monday mornings due to the higher cash holdings at the outlets. This study also found that 12% of the cases involved physical injuries to staff, 7.6% of the incidents involved a loss of life and in 18% of the cases shots were fired (Hadland, 2002: 26). Type II workplace violence is mainly driven by unsatisfied customers. Sometimes verbal abuse and assaults may be driven by racism, as was found in a study between Black security guards and White students at a South African university campus. Female employees in general are also more likely to become victims of verbal abuse and assaults (Du Toit, 2015). However, several preventative strategies are implemented at petrol stations aiming to reduce Type I and II workplace violence from occurring.

Preventative security measures at petrol stations

Kole’s (2010: 162) study found low levels of security measures utilised at the 20 selected petrol stations in his study. For example, although all 20 petrol stations in his study have fire extinguishers, 96% have CCTV cameras and 95% have drop safes, only 85% of petrol stations utilise a cash-in-transit company to collect cash, while only 76% of employees have access to alarm systems and remote panic buttons. More worryingly, only half of the kiosks at petrol stations in this study are protected by bulletproof windows. Armed guards, fences and *digital* CCTV cameras are the least utilised crime security measure at 29%, 22% and 10% respectively.

From this, Kole (2010: 184-188) recommends various preventative security measures for petrol station managers/owners: Make use of cash-in-transit companies to collect cash every day even on public holidays at irregular intervals to avoid a fixed pattern or habit in order to reduce chances of robbery. Managers/owners should not collect cash oneself, as it is too risky. Safety measures should be discussed at regular staff meeting to ensure that all employees know what safety measures are in place, how it is used and when to use it. For example, employees must know where the panic button is that activate the alarm system. Tighten basic security measures to make it difficult for would-be perpetrators to rob a petrol station such as installing clearly visible CCTV cameras and alarm systems; use CCTV scanners to scan registration numbers of vehicles entering the forecourt, test emergency procedures regularly and have bullet proof windows at kiosks. Other suggestions include employing a security guard for 24 hours/7-days a week; arrange for more police visibility by making the petrol station a regular port of call while patrolling the area; get involved with the local community police forum; allow taxis to park at petrol stations at night as it may act as a deterrent to would-be perpetrators; and let

customers pay for fuel before petrol attendants fill up motorists' cars as this will reduce drive-offs.

For petrol attendants, the following preventative security measures are recommended: Petrol attendants should be alert and vigilant at all times. Keeping an eye on each other as one employee is another one's protector. Petrol attendants should also report any suspicious behaviour immediately to supervisors, managers or owners. Petrol attendants should know how to use panic buttons and what situations call for using it. Petrol attendants should also receive training how to deal with and respond in verbal abusive situations (Kole, 2010: 189).

These recommendations serve as a guideline for managers and petrol attendants regarding preventative security measures to reduce Type I and II workplace violence. But whether petrol stations experience similar or different issues and challenges regarding workplace violence and the type of preventative security measures that are implemented remains unclear. This study will fill this gap by focusing on selected petrol stations in Johannesburg in more detail.

METHODOLOGY

Research problem, objectives and site selection

The aim of this research is to uncover interpretations and meanings that managers and petrol attendants working at selected petrol stations in Johannesburg attach to public-initiated violence that occur whilst at work. Subsequently, this article aims to uncover the types of preventative security measures that are implemented at petrol stations to avoid such crimes from occurring again.

The research question of this study is two-fold: "Do public-initiated violence occur at selected petrol stations in Johannesburg and if so, what types?" To answer this question, the first objective of this study is to reflect on managers' and petrol attendants views on the daily job-related issues and challenges. The second objective focuses on whether managers and petrol attendants have been victims of public-initiated violence in the past and if so, to explore such cases in more depth. The third objective focuses on preventative security measures that are implemented at the petrol stations where they work and whether these security measures could be improved upon regarding reducing public-initiated violence from occurring. By identifying types of public-initiated violence that occur at selected petrol stations and preventative security measures that are implemented, it may provide a better understanding of how safe (or unsafe) petrol stations are and what could be done in future to reduce violence at petrol stations.

Johannesburg as a site was selected due to a number of reasons. First, Kole's (2010) study is the only major study that could be found on public-initiated violence that occur at petrol stations in Johannesburg. For this reason, Johannesburg was chosen as the research site of this study in order to build on his work. Second, petrol stations in Johannesburg are consistent with the national profile of petrol stations. The majority of petrol stations in Johannesburg are open 24 hours, seven days a week and are owned by companies such as *Shell*, *Caltex*, *Engen*, *BP*, *Total* or *Sasol*. Although all petrol stations do not experience violent crimes, by focusing on selected petrol stations in Johannesburg allow us to understand some of the issues and challenges that managers and petrol attendants face regarding violent crimes whilst at work.

Population frame, sampling selection and collection of data

Three middle-class suburbs, within close proximity in Johannesburg were selected. A list of all petrol stations in these suburbs were obtained via their websites and five petrol stations were

selected on a number of different criteria: Firstly, since these selected petrol stations are in close proximity of each other, it would enable one to better understand if they have been victims of public-initiated violence in the past and what factors may have contributed to these crimes. Secondly, the selected petrol stations are owned by different companies which may allow a better understanding of the different preventative security measures that petrol stations implement to reduce Type I and II workplace violence. From this, one could draw out different or similar workplace security measures that are implemented at petrol stations, and whether these are successful or not. Four of these petrol stations are open 24-hours, 7-days a week and one is open from 06:00 am till 10:00 pm

From these five selected petrol stations, five managers and fifteen male petrol attendants, (three from each petrol station) were selected with the help from managers and/or supervisors. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted that probed respondents' personal experiences of workplace violence at petrol stations.

Pilot study

Since public-initiated workplace violence that may occur at petrol stations is relatively unexplored in the literature, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. Three petrol stations in different areas in Johannesburg were selected and informal conversations with managers and petrol attendants were conducted. From these conversations, the following types of public-initiated violence have occurred: Burglary, where a manager was held up at gun point and cash was taken from the safe; drive-offs, where customers drive off without paying for petrol; verbal abuse, where petrol attendants have been called offensive names; and other petty crimes such as shop lifting in the kiosk and on the forecourt. These conversations, in correlations with Kole's (2010) and Hadland's (2002) studies, provided a guideline for the semi-structured interviews to be conducted with managers and petrol stations at the selected petrol stations.

Data recording, analysis and ethical considerations

A digital voice recording device was used to record all interviews with managers. From the transcribed interviews, pilot study and literature, important themes were selected. The data was coded into various relevant themes: Type-I public-initiated violence; Type II public initiated violence; and preventative security measures.

Participation of this study was voluntary and all participants were informed about the aims and goals of this study. Participants were informed that they can refuse to answer questions they feel uncomfortable with and that they can withdraw from the study at any point if they wanted. Participants were also asked if they feel comfortable that interviews were recorded and all of them did. Confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms for petrol stations and participants. Petrol stations were numbered A to E. Recordings, notes and transcripts are stored in a secure place that only the researcher has access to.

DISCUSSION

Type I workplace violence: Issues and challenges

The most common issues in terms of Type I workplace violence that occurs at petrol stations in South Africa is armed robbery at petrol stations; cash-in-transit robberies; car high-jacking; and/or ATM bombings (Kole, 2010: 2; Kempen, 2012: 12-14). One of the main challenges for petrol stations is to reduce such instances of violent crimes. Petrol stations have a high cash

flow, many are open 24-hours, seven-day a week and there is easy access for potential criminals to enter the premises (Kole, 2010: 34; Hadland, 2002: 26).

In terms of violent crime, two of the five petrol stations in this study have experienced armed robbery during the past three years, with the latest one occurring in October 2014. Managers of petrol station A and C explained their ordeal:

“Just before 21h00, a few men stopped here and had guns and sticks and entered the shop. They demanded cash, but the panic button was pressed. They still managed to take the cash in the tills. I think it was maybe a R1000 (US\$63) or more”.

“One evening, just before midnight two men came to the window of the shop and showed a gun to the cashier and said to give them money. The cashier did just that and took the money from the till and gave it to them. She then pressed the panic button, but when armed response came, they have disappeared already”.

What is quite distressing is the fact that the managers of the petrol stations B, D and E which have not experience armed robbery, expressed gratitude by saying “Thank God, not yet”; “touch wood” and “It is a blessing from above”. Managers know that working at petrol stations is a high-risk job and that armed robbery can become a reality at any day. None of the five petrol stations have experienced cash-in-transit robbery, ATM bombing or car high-jacking. While these types of crime is the most severe form of Type I workplace violence, other types of potential violent crimes that can occur at these petrol stations such as burglary.

Burglary only occurred once at the petrol station D. None of these crimes were violent in nature, but the manager whose kiosk was robbed had to deal with the humiliating fact that he had to clean up the excrement of one of the robbers:

“A while ago we had a burglary here. They came through the roof of the shop. The shop is not open after ten p.m. for safety reasons. Anyway, they came through the roof and took the petty cash that was left in the till and sweets and chips. And they left a ‘present’ on the floor, which I had to clean up the next morning”.

In both Hadland’s (2002) and Kole’s (2010) studies, violent crimes at petrol stations normally occur during the evening. Petrol attendants and cashiers are in an especially vulnerable position, since managers are not at the premises during the evening, and petrol attendants and cashiers have to rely on panic buttons in potential violent situations. However, petrol stations implement various other security measures to prevent or reduce incidences of violent crimes to occur, by increasing visibility of security measures, reducing the amount of cash on premises and by making it difficult for potential perpetrators to succeed in their crimes through target hardening (LeBlanc et al., 2006: 263).

Preventative security measures

CCTV and security guards

One of the main strategies to reduce chances of violence at any workplace is to increase the visibility of security measures (LeBlanc et al., 2006: 263). While in Kole’s (2010) study, 96% of petrol stations had visible CCTV cameras on the forecourts and inside the shop; all of the five petrol stations in this study have clearly visible CCTV cameras on the forecourt and inside the shop. Only one manager said that he thinks that there should be more than the current twelve CCTV cameras at his petrol station. All managers said that CCTV is an absolute necessity at

petrol stations “especially during the evening shift”, which appears to be a high-risk time for crimes to occur. All five petrol stations also had stickers or posters at the petrol pumps and inside the shop warning customers and potential offenders that the premises are under 24 hour CCTV coverage.

Another way to increase visibility of security measures is to employ a security guard, a crime preventative strategy suggested by Kole (2010). While having a security guard may reduce potential violent crimes at petrol station, only two of the five petrol stations in this study utilise a security guard to patrol premises regularly. However, the manager of petrol station A explained an attack involving a security guard that occurred on the 8th of February 2015:

“Last week [on the 8th of February 2015], just before 11 in the evening, my two security guards were doing their general patrol of the area. While they were here, outside in front of the shop two male students and one female student were having a fight, arguing, [and] pushing the female student around. The students were drunk as one of the security guards said he could smell alcohol. So the two security guards interfered. The fighting and arguing lasted for about ten minutes until the security guards managed to chase the students away. Half an hour later, one of the male students came back and stabbed the security guard with a knife right next to the petrol pump and ran away. The security guard is still in hospital and fighting for his life”.

While having a security guard may improve safety at petrol stations, a lesson can be learned from the above experience. One simply cannot rely on security guards to offer full protection of petrol stations. Petrol attendants and/cashiers have to be vigilant at all times and call the police in cases such as these. Security guards are often unarmed and only carry with them pepper spray. Although the stabbing of the security guard and car in which the students travelled in were recorded on CCTV, the number plate and faces of the students are invisible and blurry. This is a lesson for all petrol stations in that security measures at petrol stations can always be improved upon, especially having digital CCTV cameras, which is of better quality (Kole, 2010). Not only can more CCTV cameras be installed at petrol stations, but they should cover all areas.

Reducing cash on premises

Since petrol stations have a high cash flow every day, cash handling practices such as carrying minimal money and making frequent cash deposits is mandatory to reduce chances of robbery. All five petrol stations in this study have a daily cash flow of way above R30000 (\$US 3000) per day. Petrol stations have to use cash-in-transit companies to collect money as it is too risky for managers to do it themselves. However, Kole (2010) suggests that while utilising a cash-in-transit company to collect money is mandatory, they should also collect it every day, even on public holidays at irregular times to break a pattern. For example, they should collect cash at 10:00 am and the next day at 11:30 am and so forth. Although none of the five petrol stations in this study have experienced cash-in-transit robberies, two have experienced armed robbery, but they failed to get away with large amounts of money. The reason for this was that money was collected by a cash-in-transit company prior to the armed robbery. In addition, all five of the managers indicated that only they know when the cash-in-transit company is on their way. Every day they are notified via a SMS from the cash-in-transit company alerting them what time they will collect the cash.

Another way to reduce rewards at petrol stations is to implement a system that all customers at petrol stations should pay for fuel only by means of a card (either debit, credit or a petrol card) and not with cash. This will reduce the amount of money that is on the premises,

and may reduce the risks of becoming targets of violent crime such as armed robbery. One can for example introduce a special card such as the Oyster card used for the underground trains in the U.K., available at all supermarkets, airports or car rental companies, where motorists can load their cards with money. This will also reduce a huge problem for most petrol stations, one that involves “drive-offs” where customers or strangers do not pay for petrol after petrol attendants have filled up their cars. While most “drive-offs is not particularly violent, one petrol attendant tells his experience of a recent “drive-off” which involved a usage of a fire arm:

“Yes drive-offs happen so often here. The other night, a person was pointing a gun at my face and said to fill up the car. So now the manager has come up with this solution of putting notice boards everywhere that clearly says that from six in the evening, all customers must pay for fuel before we can fill up the car”.

Access

A crucial preventative strategy to reduce chances of violent crime from occurring is to make it difficult for potential criminals to succeed in their deeds. Petrol stations are notorious in its easy access to customers and potential criminals since most petrol stations have more than one entrance and exit, they have limited or no fences or walls around the premises, and people can enter kiosks via automated doors at any time of the day or night. In Kole’s (2010) study, only half of the cashiers who work behind the counters of the kiosks are protected by bulletproof windows. In this study only three of the petrol stations’ kiosks were protected by bulletproof windows. While the managers at these petrol stations said bulletproof windows provide some safety to cashiers, they do not think that it will eliminate violent crime such as armed robbery from occurring. They simply said that it will delay time for criminals to get away with cash, which allow petrol attendants or cashiers to press the panic button to alert the police.

Entrance into and exit from the shop can be tightened by having a roll- or time operated door similar to what are installed at banks in South Africa. This may make it more difficult for potential criminals to rob a kiosk.

Type II workplace violence

One of the main issues for any employee rendering a service to a customer, client or patient, is that they are often targets of non-violent Type II workplace violence that involves verbal abuse, assaults and threats. Kole’s (2010) study, reports that almost all petrol attendants and managers are verbally abused and assaulted at some stage while at work.

As part of petrol attendants’ job is to render friendly services to all customers, an indication that they engage with emotional labour. Posters and notice boards are often found at the entrances of petrol stations emphasising that friendly nature of services. The reason for this is that friendly services often in organisational success via customer return or personal success for petrol attendants by means of increasing the likelihood of receiving tips from customers or bonuses from managers (Du Toit, 2012). However, friendliness is not always reciprocated back to the petrol attendant. All managers and petrol attendants said that they have been targets of verbal abuse and assaults of some sort. However, they say that being verbally abused is “part of the job”. “The customer is always right. When one customer fights with you, you just say sorry, even if it is hurtful. You just say sorry”. Similar responses were found across the board.

A petrol attendant working at petrol station E said that he has been physical attacked by a customer whilst at work. Another petrol attendant working at petrol station B was violently attacked:

“Last year two Coloured men stopped here and asked to fill their car with R50 of petrol. They also asked for oil, which cost R22. They gave me R100 and I gave them R28 change. Then they argued with me and said that I am a thief, because they gave me R150. I said no and they got out of the car and chased me with a *panga* (Machete). I fell on the ground and they hit me. I tried to pull away and they sliced my arm open with the *panga*. I went to hospital and got stiches”.

Fortunately in this case the police were called by one of the petrol attendants and the perpetrators were caught and “jailed for a few months”. However, some petrol attendants said that they are scared at work, because they never know when a customer may pull out a gun or knife.

Petrol attendants are often cursed at, called humiliating names or threatened by customers, which stems from customers having to wait in a queue, card machines that do not work or when a petrol attendant does not hear correctly what the customers said. Petrol attendants working at petrol station C, D and E explained similar cases where they have been verbally abused:

“When you are busy with a customer, and another customer stops here, you first have to finish with that customer before helping the other one. That is the rule of the job. So when you get to that other customer, maybe he is already cross there because there is no one to attend him. So as part of the job I ask ‘how are you’, ‘what can I help with’. Then the customer says ‘this garage is shit. You people do not do your job. You are shit’”.

“Sometimes the petrol card network is off from time to time and customers will tell you how stupid you are and how bad the service is. After explaining what the reason is, then sometimes they calm down, but not always. It is not my fault that it doesn’t work. I can’t help it. But they (the customers) never understand this”.

“Customers who speak strange (referring to foreigners) are a big problem. He just says ... (inaudible), then I ask again how much, he says it again. I still don’t know, so I ask again. He gets angry and says you are stupid. Can’t you hear what I’m saying?”

Interestingly, customers who verbally abuse or assault petrol attendants ranges across race, gender and age. Petrol attendants across the board shared similar stories and said that they seldom report such cases to the managers. For petrol attendants, the main issue is that the “customer is always right” and that the managers train them to keep calm and quiet in such situations and just to do their job. However, this leads to “frustration”, “sadness” and “hopelessness”. Some petrol attendants expressed that they have rights too and that people often undermine the jobs they do. As a petrol attendant from petrol station A said: “That man, he is educated, but he wants to be a painter. I want to be a petrol attendant. It is my choice. People should respect that”.

Although one cannot necessarily prevent verbal abuse or assaults from occurring, there are some strategies that may be implemented at petrol stations to emphasise the consequences of verbal abusive situations, which include organisational and behavioural strategies (LeBlanc et al., 2006: 271-272).

Preventative strategies

One way to reduce verbal abuse and assaults is to get the message across to all employees and the public via posters, notice boards, stickers and/or written policies that indicate that any form of verbal abuse, assaults or threats will not be tolerated at petrol stations. Management should emphasise that all petrol attendants and cashiers should report verbal abuse, assaults or threats by customers to the managers. However, one should be aware of reporting accurate information on the incidence of verbal abuse or assault, and often the case it is the petrol attendant's word against the customer's. To resolve this issue, one could perhaps install voice recording devices at the pumps or to make all petrol attendants wear a recording device around their necks to record the interaction between customers and petrol attendants.

Management should also take all reports of aggression seriously, and petrol attendants must be aware that their safety is the main concern at petrol stations. As it was found that some petrol attendants seldom report verbal abusive situations to managers, a "culture of care" could be established at petrol stations. It appears that there is a problem with the unity between petrol attendants and managers, as some petrol attendants do not report verbal abuse issues to their managers. If one takes a unitarist perspective, any business such as petrol stations succeeds where there is a shared value system. For example, managers are trusted as leaders, who protect and take care of their employees, which is central to the success of the petrol stations, and any deviance from this will be "pathological" for the success of the business (Blyton and Jenkins, 2007: 169; Venter et al, 2009: 7). To solve this, managers could perhaps have weekly staff meetings where stories of verbal abuse, assaults or threats are shared among the group, with the aim of developing a plan that stipulates the necessary precautions to avoid such situations from occurring or what to do in such situations. This may include working in teams when helping customers, giving out information of what type of customers are most likely to verbally abuse petrol attendants or handing out pamphlets to all customers on what the consequences and effects of verbal abuse on people are.

Another way to deal with verbal abusive situations is to regularly train petrol attendants on the different ways in which they can respond in such situations. Although managers and petrol attendants said that they are trained from the petrol companies in dealing with difficult customers, more in-house training should be arranged as petrol stations are located in different areas resulting in different types of customers or circumstances. For example, petrol attendants should be trained how to use unique customer service skills in different situations, ways to resolve conflict, how to recognise escalating agitation and how to manage and respond to aggressive behaviour from customers. For example, when a customer talks on the cell phone, train petrol attendants not to greet customers, but rather to wait until the customer is either finished or to wait for the customer to say how much money worth of petrol they want. Training could also focus on how to deal with different types of customers. For example, to greet an Afrikaans customer in Afrikaans or to avoid making jokes or small talk with customers who look stressed or agitated. Petrol attendants should also try to work in teams reducing waiting time which often results in agitated customers.

CONCLUSION

Public-initiated violence at petrol stations is a serious concern in South Africa and this study has shown that violent Type I workplace violence such as armed robbery and non-violent Type II workplace violence such as verbal abuse and assaults are a daily issue at petrol stations.

While petrol stations have various security measures in place, it seems that more should be done to prevent such crimes from occurring. To reduce violent crimes occurring at petrol stations, this study suggests that the visibility of security measures should be increased, rewards such as the amount of cash on premises should be reduced, and general improvement of security such as making access to petrol stations harder should be improved upon to reduce violent crimes. For non-violent crimes such as verbal abuse, assaults and threats by customers, this study suggests that organisational and behavioural techniques must be implemented to reduce such situations from developing such as educating the public on the consequences of verbal abuse, additional in-house training how to deal with abusive situations and to create a culture of care at petrol stations.

But perhaps these security techniques suggested are insignificant and trivial, and what should rather change is how society views petrol stations and especially the employees who work at petrol stations. There should be a mentality change among South Africans in terms of violence and that one can only hope that one day all employees in all sectors will work without fear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While this study provides an analysis of different types of violent and non-violent crimes that occur at petrol stations and types of security measures in place, future studies could analyse these issues and challenges with more rigour by comparing petrol stations who have been victims of violent crimes with each other to understand what factors contribute to violent crimes at petrol stations. Future studies could also analyse the effects constant verbal abuse and assaults that petrol attendants experience may have on their job satisfaction, family functioning and general well-being. There could also be an analysis between the experiences of male and female petrol attendants regarding verbal abuse, assaults and threats, in order to understand what effect gender plays in verbal abusive situations.

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