

NEWS

▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Recognizing risk of campus/workplace violence a necessary skill

This past week at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, a female associate professor in the biology department pulled out a gun and killed the chairman of the department and two other professors.

She did this after receiving some unsettling news at a staff meeting.

Three others were injured and are currently in hospital.

Although workplace violence can happen anywhere, when it happens at an elementary school, high school or a college



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SCHOOLS
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campus it creates emotional distress for most people (especially parents) as schools are supposed to be safe places to send your children—even if they are 24 years-of-age.

So that is why it is so disturbing for us when

we read about shootings on campus and incidents such as Virginia Tech and Dawson College.

It is also why many schools now have plans to deal with this kind of violence and why I hold a certificate in Post Secondary Violence Threat Risk Assessment Training Level I.

I took the two-day course in December and hope I never have to confront the type of violent behaviour we learned about.

But the course was more than just hear-

ing terrible stories about on-campus violence, it was about giving us the skills to recognize behaviour early on which could cause either an employee or a student to contemplate and carry out violent behaviour.

The course brought forward the importance of having a violence threat/risk assessment protocol at our college. The purpose of these protocols is to create a safe environment where all staff have the training and ability to assess risk indicators in others and to work together

to ensure that intervention takes place well before any violent behaviour occurs.

Without full knowledge of the situation, and with the benefit of hindsight, it's easy to imagine how things might have turned out differently at Huntington University.

Employees with training in risk assessment, can spot the extreme resentment and anger exhibited by an individual in advance of a situation well before a meeting, and report it.

The behaviour can

trigger a number of protocols where counselling, mental health and other on-campus professionals might be called in. Interviews with those close to the individual might take place.

In this instance, administration might also have started looking into the professor's past and found out that in 1986 she shot and killed her own brother—definitely a red flag. Had all these protocols been observed, there's a possibility the shootings might have been averted.

There is enough data and studies on violent behaviour to show us that these things just don't happen overnight. Knowing what behaviour to look for is key in stopping violence from occurring in schools.

We just all have to start getting better at knowing what to look for and sharing this information with others. Safety is a promise we can't afford to not deliver.

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