

## Violence in the Workplace

by Raymond B. Flannery, Jr., Ph.D.; New York City, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995, 188 pages, \$24.95

Marcia Scott, M.D.

Today, for the third time since I read this book, I'm trying to put on paper why it's so important. The headlines of today's paper are about the decrease in urban murder rates, but the back pages reveal not less murder, but less dying: fewer people are dying because of more and better trauma centers. Take a moment to congratulate the trauma surgeons, then read this book.

Dr. Flannery is director of training for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and associate clinical professor of psychology at Harvard University. He doesn't write quite as well as Scott Turow, but given a different venue, he could. In this brief but powerful and useful text about workplace violence, he confronts the public health epidemic that has subtly changed our lives.

We've known people in high-risk jobs; we worry about our naive, incautious children; now we wonder if we just have to get used to it. Dr. Flannery says that we should not get used to it, that violence is predictable, something we need to and often can prevent. "If we understand the nature of violence at work, there are specific strategies we can take to reduce the risk of undue harm for our colleagues and ourselves," he says.

In the first half of the book, the author makes it clear that no matter how much we learn about individual, cultural, or workplace risk factors, the solutions to violence reside in our planned responses to it. The first four chapters contain compelling descriptions of the victim, the workplace, and the assailant. Dr. Flannery's stories are gripping and clearly the product of experience. His explanations of how people react to trauma could be useful

when you need words to use with the naive or the disbelieving. He also discusses what makes the workplace vulnerable—the work ethic, focus on achievement, and hierarchical helplessness. Unlike Fox Butterfield, who in *All God's Children* fails to see the layering of culture on underlying mental disorder (1), Flannery explains complex psychology and biology without significant offense to science. He conveys his reasoning and recommendations in gentle, almost literary prose.

The second half of the book covers programmatic and ad hoc interventions. In each of the four situations focused on—industry, policing, education, and health care—a common threefold approach to violence at work is emerging. This approach includes pre-incident training, stress management interventions, and debriefing of employee-victims.

The author suggests ways of enhancing stress resistance for both the individual and the organization, and in the last chapter he indulges himself and us in a personal look at policy, parenting, schools, substance abuse, the media, and society. He notes, as did Judge Robert Jones in the silicone-breast-implant case (2), that we have a great deal of scientific and anecdotal information with which to approach issues—in this case violence, poverty, abuse, guns, and drugs—but feasible, sensible planning has been much too politicized and delayed.

This is an outstanding book, deceptively brief, elegantly written, balanced in its analysis, and clear in its recommendations. It is dedicated to "Alan Shields, M.D., Employee Victim, and to Employee Victims Everywhere." Read it, heed it, teach it. It could save a life.

### References

1. Butterfield S: *All God's Children*. New York, Avon, 1996
2. Kaiser J: Breast-implant ruling sends a message. *Science* 275:21, 1997

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## Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in America's Homes and Schools

by William Damon; New York City, Free Press, 1995, 304 pages, \$23

James H. Egan, M.D.

William Damon is professor of education and director of the Center for the Study of Human Development at Brown University. This work follows in the tradition of Hirsch, Bloom, Ravitch, Finn, Wilson, Elkind, Pagan, Bennett, DiLulio, and other contemporary authors who have catalogued the decline of American youth.

Damon comprehensively documents the decline of civic behavior, moral standards, and academic achievement and a parallel increase in violence, suicide, addiction, unwanted pregnancy, and unmarried parenthood among our young people. The presentation is factual and non-polemical, but is nonetheless depressing and numbing. He correctly notes the cultural emphasis on the self and self-esteem rather than on the group, the emphasis on rights without complementary responsibility, and the insistence on feeling good rather than doing good.

The strength of this work is the description of the problem. Unfortunately, the prescriptive section is disappointing. It is either vague and platitudinous or, occasionally, contradictory. Damon urges more virtue, less TV, a greater sense of community, smaller schools infused by local community values, and, at the same time, national standards for curricula and a national consensus about core values. He offers few suggestions about how to implement his recommendations, noting only that it will take a long time. He unfortunately does not address the difficulty of achieving a consensus on behavioral norms and values in a pluralistic society, nor does he seem to ap-

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