

Teens Affected By Workplace Violence

A report by the MassCOSH Teens Lead @ Work Peer Leaders
and the Brazilian Immigrant Center GUMBWEB Peer Leaders

♦ **...gone but never forgotten...** ♦



Cristian Ribeiro Giambrone
1985-2004

Workplace Violence Affecting Teens

was written by Peer Leaders from MassCOSH's Teens Lead @ Work and from Brazilian Immigrant Center's GUMBWEB Youth Program

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MassCOSH Teens Lead @ Work serves as an advocate for teenagers in need of advice on workplace health and safety issues. We aim to educate teens and build awareness about workplace health and safety while involving teens in making changes in our community through organizing. Teens Lead @ Work is a program of the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, a non-profit membership organization representing workers, unions, health and safety professionals.

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GUMBWEB (Generation one in a half, in Portuguese Geração Um e Meio, for a Better Workplace Environment for Brazilians). Peer Leaders is part of a safety and health project called COBWEB (Collaboration for a Better Workplace Environment for Brazilians). Our mission is to advocate for teenagers and adults on what their rights are, and educating the Brazilian community about what the hazards and issues they encounter in the workplace.

This report was made possible with funding from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell through a grant from the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, as well as from the Merck Family Fund, Common Stream, and the Ms. Foundation. Special thanks to Taciana Ribeiro Saab, Argelis Rivera, Anacelia Torres, Francys Miranda, the Department of Public Health's Occupational Health Surveillance Program, Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner and members of MassCOSH's Teens Lead @ Work Advisory Committee.

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Introduction

On February 16, 2004 18 year old Cristian Ribeiro Giambrone, who would have graduated from Boston Latin Academy in 2004, was killed by a shoplifter at a CVS in Boston. Cristian took a fatal stab wound to the neck when he and his boss pursued the robber in a chase. Cristian's boss was also stabbed and suffered a non-fatal wound.

Homicide is one of the leading causes of work-related deaths in the country. In Massachusetts homicide was the third leading cause of occupational fatalities between 1991 and 1999; 82 workers (13%) died as a result of homicides at work. Of these work related homicides, the Wholesale and Retail Trade industry had the highest rate.¹ In addition, workers involved with the exchange of money and with direct customer service are at even greater risk for work-place homicides.

After learning about Cristian's death, the MassCOSH peer leaders came together with teens at the Brazilian Immigrant Center to take action against workplace violence. Cristian was a teen who attended school in Dorchester and his tragedy touched his fellow peers and community deeply. As a result, the teen peer leaders in collaboration with Cristian's mom, Taciana Saab, created a survey to administer among workers. The survey guided the development of recommendations for what steps need to be taken to protect teen workers.

Process Summary

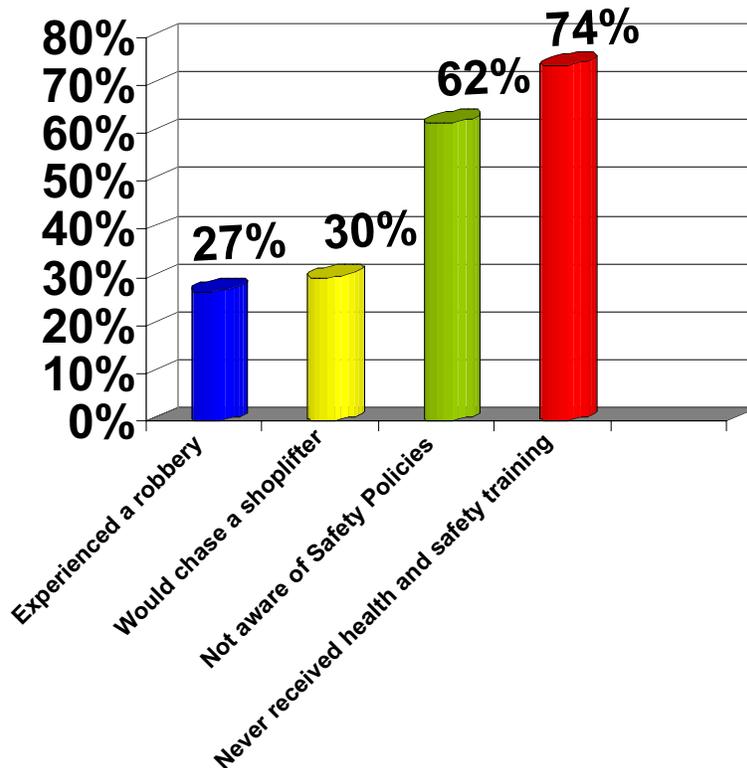
During the summer of 2004 MassCOSH and Brazilian Immigrant Center peer leaders went to pharmacies such as CVS, Walgreens, and Brooks to conduct surveys. Peer leaders went to about 50 stores and obtained 70 surveys. Our survey consisted of teen employees, young supervisors, and managers in these pharmacies. We conducted our surveys in urban areas such as Dorchester, Roxbury, Downtown Boston and suburban areas which included Quincy, Braintree and Weymouth.

¹Massachusetts Department of Public Health Statistics

Findings

Of the 65 teens and 5 managers surveyed a significant portion (27%) reported experiencing a robbery at their workplace. Equally alarming, of those surveyed 74% of the employees had never received training regarding robbery or theft situations. Out of the 5 managers surveyed: 4 had received training, 3 received video training and the fourth and fifth did not specify. Thirty percent of workers stated they would chase after shoplifters and not surprisingly 62% of employees stated they were not aware of any health and safety policies regarding robberies. To worsen the situation, 31% of employees surveyed sometimes worked with no supervision. Employees noted they knew their rights but never told supervisors they couldn't work past certain hours. A large number of employees felt supported by management, which would make them feel more comfortable helping a supervisor or manager out when a dangerous situation occurs.

Teen Health and Safety Survey Results



Recommendations

As the results indicate, most of the teens surveyed have never received training for robberies or theft. In our survey alone, ten people could have lost their lives because they did not know how to react to workplace violence. Furthermore, policies get confusing for employees and employers alike. On the one hand, policies state that employees are not supposed to chase shoplifters, on the other hand managers are given bonuses for limiting the cost of stolen goods. Below is a list of recommendations developed by the teen peer leaders.

Recommendations for employers:

1. Employers should establish clear, well written and visible safety policies that include :

- Limiting amount of cash in registers
- Never have employees work alone
- Employees should not chase shoplifters , especially teen employees.
- Supervisor should be responsible for enforcing policies.
- Fact sheets and pamphlets about workplace policies should be distributed and posted at job sites as changes occur.

2. Trainings should include but not limited to:

- How to respond to armed robbery and theft situations.
- Stress
- Sexual Harassment
- Dealing with angry customers

Peer leaders believe that the larger chain retail stores like CVS should have Regional Safety Trainers who would be responsible for making sure all employees are adequately trained

3. Implement/Enforce a security program, including:

- **An observing room, when possible, so a person responsible for security can observe activities in the store.**
- Working alarms
- A sufficient number of cameras that are clearly visible to customer (saying more doesn't mean anything)
- **Secret codes (that would be announced over a loud microphone, employees will only recognize) example: "code blue" or "clean up on aisle 13" (but the store only has 12 aisles)**
- In-store panic button to notify managers or security of shoplifters (Portable buttons)
- More security guards in high crime place

Recommendations for Government policies:

- Require employers to adhere to the above recommendations.
- Implement a law requiring employers to provide on-site supervision for minors working after 8:00 PM.