

Violence and Threat

Violence and Threat in the Workplace: Absenteeism and Discursive Analysis of Absenteeism

Policies

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the connection between abuse in the workplace and absenteeism. Frontline workers often experience abuse, threats, incivility, humiliation, and they often are the first responder to overdoses and deaths. One question initially explored was whether absenteeism is a form of resistance to abuse. Resistance is explored through an analysis of the four faces of power suggested by Fleming and Spicer (2009). The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance (IDVVR) was used to explore how absenteeism is conceptualized and managed in a Housing First workplace. Absenteeism management policies from the union and from the Housing First organization were analysed to explore the question: Could the language used in these policies contribute to the oppressive nature of this work environment? The analysis revealed themes of paternalism, punitiveness, communication and collaboration. Implications for frontline workers include justice doing, as outlined by activist Vikki Reynolds. Managers and organizations are encouraged to name and make explicit the abuse workers experience. Counsellors can use the findings of this study when working with frontline workers who have experienced abuse by honouring their resistance and making clear who is responsible for the abuse.

Keywords: absenteeism, abuse and violence, incivility, resistance, panopticism

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Chapter 1

In this chapter I will introduce this research, its purpose and its relevance. I will start with a brief description of the work I am engaged in, followed by a definition of the key terms and phrases used. I will then provide a scholarly context for this work, closing the chapter with an overview of the structure of this thesis.

I work for an initiative called Housing First. It provides a permanent residence for those who may be homeless and struggling with substance misuse or mental health issues. Having a home is an important first step for many who are homeless, as it provides safety, security, and dignity. I work in a housing facility where the staff support residents who actively struggle with addiction to maintain their housing, and to access services as needed. Myself and other staff are often subjected to verbal abuse, threats, violence, overdoses and deaths. I have had residents enter my office yelling at me, standing over me in a threatening way. I have been called a variety of names. Guests of residents have threatened to burn the building down and others have brought weapons into the site and robbed residents. Staff have been robbed. Staff have found the bodies of residents and guests after overdoses, and most of the housing support staff has had to act as first responder to multiple overdoses.

The expectation from management when confronted with verbal abuse or threats is for staff to extricate themselves and or leave the area where the assault is happening. When we next encounter the resident or their guest we are expected to engage with them as though nothing has happened. The phrase *staff disengaged* written in the daily log is generally how we let each other know how we handled the situation, which is to disengage and remain neutral to avoid escalating the situation.

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The people we work with are often dope sick, frustrated and may have been treated badly by other institutions, and they may have little patience for staff when denied access to a building or are being asked to leave. These interactions often escalate quickly, and our safety can be at risk with little provocation. In our training we do not talk about how to deal with aggressive or hostile individuals, other than to disengage. In most of the buildings where we work, doors and windows can be closed, and they lock automatically to shut out or disengage from hostile interactions. How we handle these threatening situations is often based on in-the-moment intuition and the experience we bring to the job. The problem is that the vague, use-your-intuition-style of working with abuse creates the feeling that abuse and violence are just part of the job and that it is up to the worker to deal with it. This evokes a feeling, at least for me, of powerlessness.

The neutral stance that front-line workers are expected to take when faced with abusive behaviours can be experienced as oppressive. Absenteeism may be a form of resistance and I suspect that the absenteeism from work—cancellation of shifts due to illness and leaves of absence--may be the result of the abuse and threats we endure. Our organization has policies for absenteeism. However, the policies in this organization—both from the institution itself and that of the union—are written in language that may, instead of supporting workers' struggles as they navigate the abuse and threats, contribute to a hostile and oppressive work environment. In this thesis, I will explore the oppressive environment of workplaces like the one described, and I will link this oppression with incidences of absenteeism. I will then perform a discursive analysis of the documents on absenteeism in this workplace and analyse how the language of these policies may, or may not, contribute to the oppressive environment in which workers must operate.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how language in which policies for absenteeism are written may contribute to an already oppressive work environment. To begin, I will use the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance (IDVVR) as a framework to examine the policies that guide organizational practices of absenteeism management by using the four operations of language in the IDVVR (Coates & Wade, 2001) to explore how absenteeism in the workplace is conceptualized and managed. By attending to the language of the workplace documents I will explore the ways in which language of policy on absenteeism may contribute to the oppressive nature of a workplace environment in which violence and threat is commonplace.

Scholarly Context

A review of the literature regarding absenteeism reveals several reasons or explanations for workers not showing up for work. For example, connections have been identified through examining sickness and infectious disease literature (De Clercq, et al., 2015; Kumar, 2015). Drug and alcohol misuse have also been identified as having a "strong linear effect" with absenteeism (Bacharach, et al., 2010). Several different types of drinking behaviours, binge, heavy drinking and moderate drinking behaviour have been identified (Bacharach, et al., 2010; Roche, et al., 2016). McFarlin and Fals-Stewart (2002) found a relationship between an employee's alcohol consumption and the rate of days absent from work. Similar results have been found when drug misuse is examined in relation to absenteeism (Van Hesselt, et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2011; Roche, et al., 2016).

Smoking is correlated with lower productivity and higher rates of absenteeism than non or former smokers (Halpern et al., 2001). Other researchers have linked absenteeism with financial stress (Kim & Garman, 2006), stress management (Willert & Bond, 2011), benefits and changes

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in benefits (Scoppa, 2010; Henrekson & Persson, 2004), work reciprocity (De Clercq et al., 2015), fairness (Elpine, et al., 2002), and depression and anxiety (Evans & Knapp, 2016; Bhui, et al, 2012). All of which become a problem for most organizations. Absenteeism impacts organizations financially, reduces workplace morale, and adds to the stress and workload of workers (Kocakular, et al., 2016).

Generally, the research cites two broad explanations for the phenomenon of absenteeism. Absenteeism is often explained as avoiding or withdrawal from aversive work conditions (Biron & Bamberger, 2012; Culbertson, 2009). As an example, researchers have found a relationship between job dissatisfaction, low commitment, and absenteeism (Farrell & Stamm, 1988). The other explanation is that work is associated with stressors and this in turn is a cause for absenteeism. Theorists have explained absenteeism as an inability to cope with the conditions at work and it is reported that when conditions are challenging, employees go on to develop health complaints (De Boer, et al., 2002).

Absenteeism impacts organizations in several ways. The financial impacts can be significant. In one study, small businesses were losing as much as \$60,000 per year and the largest employer lost \$3.6 million annually (Morneau Shepell, 2018). In Canada the estimated direct cost to the Canadian economy in 2012 was \$16.6 billion (Morneau Shepell, 2018). The direct and indirect payroll expenses are as high as 15% to 20% in Canada (Morneau Shepell, 2018). Other costs to organizations come in the form of seeking alternative employees, recruitment and training, added responsibilities and workload for co-workers (Kocakulas, et al., 2016), lost productivity and lost wages and benefits to individual workers (Hannif, 2009). In the organization I work for, clients and workers form relationships that are founded on rapport, trust and support. Large turnover and/or replacement/casual staffing changes can erode the

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foundation that the client and worker relationships are built upon, thereby impacting service delivery (Barbie & Antle, 2011).

For this research I focused on the discourses that relate to violence and abuse in the workplace and how it relates to absenteeism. Unable to find literature that is directly tied to the area that I am targeting, namely residential support workers who support the tenancy of those who struggle with substance misuse homelessness, I have narrowed the literature review to include the literature that connects absenteeism with abuse from clients toward workers in the workplace. I have further narrowed the search to include articles that refer to abuse from clients or persons outside of the workplace as opposed to workplace bullying or abuse from staff or managers. While there appears to be a correlation between abuse within an organization and absenteeism (Nielsen, et al., 2016; Cheang & Applebaum, 2015; Wood, et al., 2016) this is outside of the scope for this thesis.

Definition of Terms

Several terms require definition for this thesis including terms used in the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance (IDVVR). The language of violence and resistance is fundamental to understanding the framework of the IDVVR (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Absenteeism: Hannif (2009) defines absenteeism as

any failure on the part of the employee to report to work when scheduled to do so. This includes absences that occur for any reason, whether involuntary or voluntary. Here, involuntary absenteeism refers to unavoidable illnesses and injuries that prevent an employee from attending to their work obligations. Voluntary absenteeism, on the other

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hand, includes unplanned absences to look after sick dependents, but can also be the outcome of boredom and/or low job satisfaction. (p. 1)

Absenteeism has also been conceptualized as a response to illness, stress, or work strain (Darr & Johns, 2008).

Incivility: This is the mistreatment of a service worker by a person who is external to the organization (Slither, 2012; Sliter, Sliter & Jex, 2012). It is a form of deviant behaviour that is low intensity with an "ambiguous intent" (p. 122). It is behaviour that is outside the norms for mutual respect and courtesy (Pearson et al., 2000). Others have defined incivility as mistreatment or a hassle characterized by "rude, impolite or discourteous actions" (Cortina et al., 2001, p. 231). The perpetrator does not necessarily have the intent to do harm to the worker however, but incivility can cause workers to withdraw from the workplace.

Violence and abuse: These are interpersonal or institutional acts against the safety and dignity of the person (Wade & Coates, 2004, 2007). These transgressions can be physical, psychological, sociocultural, emotional, or spiritual (Stockall, 2016). These actions can be in the form of coercion, incivility, isolation, intimidation, micro-aggressions, harassment, humiliation, prejudice and physical or sexual assault (Stockall, 2016).

Responses to violence: Within the IDVVR victims of violence always actively respond to violence and abuse as opposed to being passively affected by violence (Wade, 2000).

Resistance to violence: Resistance encompasses any response to violence (Stockall, 2016). It may be physical, psychological, sociocultural, emotional and spiritual and expressed as words, thoughts, feelings, or actions used by the victim in response to the violence of oppressive working conditions (Stockall, 2016). Resistance is universal and ubiquitous (Coates & Wade,

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2007). Resistance may be covert or overt dependent on context (Coates & Wade, 2007; Wade, 1997). Resistance is not dependent on strength or judged by its success (Stockall, 2016).

Resistance is considered an act of wellness (Renoux & Wade, 2008) that enhances employment sustainability (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). Resistance and its relation to power will be explored in further detail in Chapter 2.

Panopticism: "A society in which individuals are increasingly caught up in systems of power in and through which visibility is a key means of social control" (Elliott, 2007, p. 89).

Structure of the Thesis

In this chapter I have outlined the problem of workplace abuse and who might be affected by it. Absenteeism may be an act of resistance against the incivility, verbal, or physical aggression that frontline workers experience. Proponents of Response-Based Practice claim that whenever people are oppressed or experience acts against their dignity, they respond through acts of resistance (Wade, 2000). Resistance may not be visible, may not stop the affronts to dignity or the violence however, these acts are not to be judged on how effective they are but honored as resistance against the abuse (Wade, 2000; Coates & Wade, 2007). This thesis examines the language around policies that seek to manage absenteeism in organizations and in unions. The study applies the principles of IDVVR to workplace documents to show that organizational policies are obscuring the resistance that employees are using to mitigate the incivility, abuse, humiliation and threats that front-line workers experience. One question initially explored: Is absenteeism an act of resistance to threats and abuse from clients and management in the workplace? Additionally, policies that guide organizations were also examined to explore the question: Could the language used in these policies contribute to the oppressive nature of this work environment?

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In this chapter, I have introduced the purpose and method of my study. I have defined key terms and phrases and outlined the structure of the thesis. In Chapter 2, I review some of the discourses around absenteeism and highlight two of the most common theories used to try to understand this problem, followed in Chapter 3 by the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 highlights the discourse analysis findings and in Chapter 5, I summarize this study's main findings, explore areas for future research, and, most importantly, offer implications for counsellors, managers, front-workers, and clients of housing initiatives like Housing First.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature on workplace abuse, resistance and power in the workplace in order to lay a strong theoretical foundation for the discursive analysis. I will also discuss technologies of punishment as described by Foucault (1975). I will close the chapter with a discussion on incivility.

Power in Modern Organizations

In contemporary societies, organizations have become one of the most important sites of power and politics. Fleming and Spicer (2007) have identified four faces of power: coercion, manipulation, domination, and subjectification. They define coercive power as the direct use of power, which usually involves getting a person to do what she or he might otherwise not have done. Power is also episodic and situational.

According to Fleming and Spicer (2007) manipulative power is the ability to either fit within the boundaries of what is acceptable or challenge those boundaries. Power is exercised through "changing the background rules of the game" (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 23). Fleming and Spicer (2007) identify three processes used in the exercise of manipulative power: anticipation of results, mobilization of bias, and rule norm-making (2007). This form of power is exercised through covert decision-making but also by what is decided on what *not to do*. This is of relevance to my analysis as in certain workplaces, one might stick to "safe" topics and ignore or avoid other discourses. Alternatively, as McGivern (as quoted in Fleming & Spicer, 2007) has shown, health-care workers, in response to audits that could threaten their position, may adopt "surface compliance" while simply carrying on routine activities which is then a form of manipulative power on the part of the workers.

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Beyond direct use of power or manipulation of power, the third face of power is domination. Domination is a conception of power in that it highlights how some "issues are legitimized while others are not even imagined" and it draws attention to "manifest conflict as well as potential or latent conflict" (p. 26). According to Fleming and Spicer (2007) avoiding conflict is one of the most insidious ways that this type of power operates. Fleming and Spicer (2007) suggest that domination is present in macro-level structures, and it is most frequently resisted through escape, where employees may attempt to disengage mentally from work (Cohen & Taylor, as quoted in Fleming & Spicer, 2007). This may take the form of active disengagement where workers de-identify with the organization and its goals or they may exhibit weary cynicism and skepticism (Ezzamel, as quoted in Fleming & Spicer, 2007).

The fourth face of power defined by Fleming and Spicer involves a process of subjectification. The focus here is on achieving power through "defining conditions of possibility underlying how we experience ourselves as people (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 31). The work of Foucault is informative here, according to Foucault (1975), "power is achieved through defining conditions of possibility underlying how we experience ourselves as people. Power therefore produces the kinds of people we feel we naturally are" (as cited in Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 31). Subjectification might construct workers into agents who are resourceful, hard-working, and reliable. This type of power infused workers' entire sense of self, [while] human resources management (HRM) as a discipline is analysed as a process of producing power:

The discipline of HRM establishes divisions within groups of employees through enclosure, the portioning of individual identifiable units, and the ranking of employees. HRM also instigates the micro-monitoring of employee behaviour. The broad result is

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that employees come to internalize the discourse of HRM and enforce it upon themselves. (Townley, as cited in Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 53)

Resistance in Organizations

Each of the faces of power has, according to Fleming and Spicer (2007), a corresponding act of resistance. Refusal as a resistance corresponds with coercive power as described earlier. Refusal is the attempt to block the use of coercive power, by being a visible show of resistance. Refusal to comply may take the form of agreeing to the changes in work related policies and/or practices while continuing to work as though there were no changes. Fleming and Spicer (2007) suggest that workers may resist by refusing to comply with the status quo. The resistance may take the form of strikes (Hyman, as quoted in Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 45), go-slows, theft (Mars, as quoted in Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 45), and sabotage (Dubois, as quoted in Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 45).

Resistance as voice "may not only aim to block power, but also gain access to power in order to express voice via the legitimate organs of domination" (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 47). Forms of resistance include organizing groups and voicing discrimination or inequality, trade unions, using voice to let those in power know all are not happy with the organization.

Resistance as escape corresponds to the domination construct of power. Escape as resistance are those strategies that allow the worker to separate themselves from the world of work. This may come in the form of cynicism, skepticism or dis-identification. Workers may "distance themselves from the roles they play" (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 53).

Strategies within the construct of resistance as creation may involve acts of resistance that use "domination to create something that was not intended by those in authority" (Fleming

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& Spicer, 2007, p. 58). Workers may use parody to lampoon the cultural scripts; unions may work to rule, stuff suggestion boxes with many not so useful suggestions. Employees may also "resist subjugation by creating alternative self-narratives and identities" (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 59). Changing the corporate script, or refusing to internalize the script, are both acts of resistance against the power of subjectification.

Technologies of Punishment

Foucault (1975) introduced the notion of *technologies of punishment*, which include Monarchal Punishment, referring to the public and torturous punishment practices of the 18th century, and Disciplinary Punishment, which refers to the incarceration of offenders and their subjection to the power of the prison officers. Disciplinary power often leads to self-policing of behaviour through fear of being caught disobeying the rules (Marshall, 2012). This latter technology of punishment is especially informative for my work.

Foucault (1975) uses the metaphor of the panopticon to illustrate the impact that constant surveillance has not only on an individual and on society. A panopticon is a cylindrical building (prison). Inmates cannot see one another, but they are all visible to a guard station at the core of the building. The point of the panopticon is that control is achieved through what Foucault calls *disciplinary power*, a form of power that is constant, unnoticeable, and internalized. As inmates are not sure whether they are being watched at any one time, they must always act in accordance to the rules. Control is thus achieved through self-surveillance as the fear of being caught breaking the rules keeps them in line with expectations.

Foucault (1975) saw panopticism as present in many contexts--not just prisons but also asylums, schools, and military and secret services, where constant surveillance is used to

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maintain control of those within them. However, as Marshall (2012) argued, given the bureaucratic nature of--and the amount of monitoring that people are subject to in contemporary society and its institutions may also be panoptic.

As norms become internalized, we act as though we are being watched at all times, whether that be from surveillance cameras, the government or law enforcement officials, or from other agents who are themselves under forms of surveillance as well. As behaviour becomes normalized, expectations of how one is to act in public soon translates into the private sphere where these expectations are not even applicable. The internalized discourse moves into the private sphere where surveillance from others is not possible.

Incivility

Incivility is often cited as a cause of or reason for workers' absences or withdrawal. While incivility may be characterized as a minor form of mistreatment, there are consequences for both organizations and workers. Incivility is considered a low intensity form of deviant behaviour however it is thought to occur frequently (Von Dienrendrock & Mevisson, as quoted in Slither, et al., 2012), and according to Slither (2012) client incivility may be very damaging, resulting in "negative, long term impact on employees" (p. 1). Clients come to workers for help and support, workers are trained to comply and help where they can. When client incivility happens, workers may smile, which Slither (2012) refers to as "emotional labour." In his research on incivility of victims towards firefighters, Slither (2012) cites the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to explain why firefighters might respond to incivility with absenteeism. The Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) is one of the leading models for understanding stress. Hall and Hobfoll (2012) explain COR in terms of resources gain and loss. Resources are the "objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies that are valued by the

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person" (p. 145). We have a finite amount of resources to use in response to stressful situations. The four principles of COR suggest that the loss of resources is more notable than resource gain; to retain resources to protect against loss, recover from loss or gain further resources people must invest in resources; the gain in resources becomes more notable after experiencing a significant loss of resources; people possess an array of resources or lack an array of resources (Hall & Hobfoll, 2012). Workers try to protect their resources (emotional and cognitive energies) any way they can. When workers are repeatedly engaging in emotional labour, their resources are drained. Dealing with human suffering becomes more difficult over time, impacting the ability to empathize and respond with compassion (Slither, 2012). According to Hobfoll (2012) social resources become depleted when people are repeatedly exposed to social stressors like incivility. Depletion of resources is linked to burnout as well as an array of negative health outcomes (Slither, 2012).

Sliter et al. (2012) did a study that involved 179 male firefighters that measured incivility, exhaustion, physical symptoms related to stress, work engagement, trait empathy, and absenteeism. They found that experiences with incivility increased withdrawal or absenteeism in the firefighters. This positive relationship is worsened by the number of times a worker experienced incivility (Sliter et al, 2012). They explain absenteeism in terms of the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), which is based on the idea that resources for dealing with incivility are drained or depleted when workers are exposed to stressful or abusive work environments (Sliter, et al, 2012). Workers may use withdrawal behaviour or absenteeism to replenish their resources. In his doctoral research, Sliter (2012) asks if incivility among victims' impact withdrawal or absenteeism behaviours in firefighters and cites a firefighter as saying:

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So they get high, they'd OD, they get Narced up, they get back to the hospital, and an hour or few later, they're back on the street and they yell at you for wrecking their high and you just want to punch them in the face (Kitt, 2009, as quoted in Sliter, 2012, p. 11)

Absenteeism could then be a way of coping with incivility, although Darr and Johns (2008) in their research on work, strain and health, suggest that while absenteeism may be in response to strain or stress at work it has short term value as a restorative action.

It has become evident that subtle forms of workplace violence, like workplace incivility, usually occur under the radar, are thought to be benign, and frequently are not apparent to the leaders of the organization (Lewis, 2009). A review of the literature reveals a connection between incivility and aggression with burnout and absenteeism. The most commonly reported aspect of burnout is the feeling of exhaustion. As workers experience exhaustion they distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from the work. This distancing is also known as depersonalization and, according to the construct of burnout, is a way of putting distance "between oneself and the service recipient by actively ignoring the qualities that make them unique" (Maslasch et al, 2001, p. 403). According to researchers, exhaustion and depersonalization are directly connected to work overload and social conflict (Maslasch et al, 2001). Rugulies et al. (2007) found that as burnout levels rise so does sickness absences. For these researchers the assumption is that burnout causes workers to be more susceptible to illness and therefore more likely to be absent from work.

An analysis using the interactive and discursive view of violence and resistance presents us with a differing perspective that challenges the use of language that pathologizes the worker. Language that situates the causes of absenteeism within the individual can obscure the organizational responsibility to create safety at the workplace. Using language that posits the

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deficit within the individual also hides resistance to incivility and abuse. The Conservation of Resources theory and the construct of burnout are deficiency laden explanations of the individual's responses to violence. In the next chapter I will offer a discursive analysis of two policy documents that are aimed to guide workplace absenteeism management.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I will outline the research methodology, Discursive Analysis. This begins with locating Discursive analysis within qualitative research. Engaging in research requires the researcher to make a number of decisions about what questions will be answered and how to gather data, how it will be analyzed, how and to whom is the data meaningful and useful (Creswell, 2014). Research methods are frameworks researchers use to guide them in making these decisions regarding their research (Creswell, 2014). Generally, research methods fall into quantitative or qualitative approaches. These approaches are not discrete categories, rather they are more like two ends of a continuum that represent the methodology the researcher uses as a framework to guide their research (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative methods often employ surveys and experiments to answer research questions and statistical strategies help make sense of the data (Creswell, 2014).

Researchers using quantitative methods identify variables or attributes to be observed (Creswell, 2014). Cause and effect relationship are often identified through the examination of the variables in question (Creswell, 2014). The researcher's voice is privileged through the expert explanation and theorizing of the interaction among the variables (Stockall, 2016). Quantitative methods are born out of a deterministic philosophy where the need to "identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes" and where the researcher can "reduce the ideas into small, discrete set to test" (Creswell, 2014, p. 7). Knowledge is thought to be "out there" in the objective, observable world.

Examining complex human interactions requires a methodology that allows researchers to work to understand the complexities of interactions and the creation of meanings (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to ask broader and more general questions

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and "draw on diverse designs" (Creswell, 2014, p. 183). These methods are part of the social constructionist perspective that sees meaning making as a social process. This perspective allows researchers to explore and understand the "meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4).

Discursive Analysis

Discursive analysis is a qualitative research method that allows the researcher to examine how meaning is produced using language (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Both qualitative and discursive methods share the concern in the meaningfulness of social life, but traditional quantitative approaches "work to understand or interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis endeavors to uncover the way in which it is produced" (Phillips & Hardy as cited in Jansen, 2008, p. 6). Discursive analysis is the "study of social life, understood through analysis of language" (Shaw & Bailey, 2009, p. 413) and is concerned with meaning and how it is created in social life. Discursive analysis is a qualitative approach to methodology, which typically aims to create an understanding, or an interpretation of how social reality is, whereas discourse analysis endeavors to investigate how meaning is produced. Discourse analysis seeks to discover the social function of language. The idea is to move beyond the literal meanings of language to show how we use language. The desire to discover truths is not necessarily part of the discourse analysis agenda, rather the emphasis is on how meaning is created through social interactions (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Carol Stockall (2016) adds that using a discursive analysis methodology provides an opportunity to "thicken the narrative by searching for social context" (p. 77).

Foucauldian discourse analysis examines language practices (Stevenson, 2004). The interest is in how we use language and how language uses us (2004). Words and phrases have

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meanings that are organized into systems and institutions, what Foucault called “‘discursive practices’ that position us in relations of power” (Foucault, as cited in Stevenson, 2004, p. 206).

The interplay of text, context and the practices of talking and writing are concerns of discourse analysis however, approaches vary dependent on what is being studied and how text and context are combined. The analysis of discourse is based on the assumptions that language and interaction are best understood in context; that social reality is socially constructed; and that for an optimal understanding of the phenomenon explored, one needs to look beyond the literal meanings of language (Shaw & Bailey, 2009).

Discourse analysts will often describe research findings as socially constructed, for example, products of historical, geographical, economic and other contexts, and influenced by the researchers themselves (e.g. disciplinary background, age, gender, ethnicity and so on). Discursive findings are therefore seen as rigorously produced interpretations rather than discoveries. Providing detail about study settings, participants and methodologies allows readers to judge credibility and plausibility of findings. As is the case for other qualitative approaches, discursive findings are appreciated for the insights they can offer and are theoretically rather than statistically applicable to other situations (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Andrea Mayr (2015) writes about how institutional discourse is used to "create and shape institutions and how institutions have the capacity to create, shape and impose discourses on people" (p. 755).

Discourse analysis has its challenges. The researcher needs to make decisions about how much material will be included in the study and what kind of discourse will be examined by sifting through a large amount of information, however one cannot read everything or include everything in their research so decisions must be made. It is easy to see how a researcher could include discursive materials that only support the research questions. To avoid this pitfall, I have

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used a framework that guided how the material was being analyzed. Having a "clear position, which is rationalized through the framework" makes any "potential alignment more transparent" (Stevenson, 2004). This strategy assures that the researcher did not find only what they expected to find.

Using the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance (IDVVR) as the framework, I will analyze themes and constructs within organizational and union documents that guide the management of absenteeism from Housing First sites. These documents spell out how absenteeism is managed from an organizational point of view and from a union perspective. Examining discourse guides "certain ways of talking about a topic, defining 'acceptable' ways to talk, write or conduct oneself and ...this can serve a range of social functions" (Shaw & Bailey, 2009, p. 414). There are messages within text that are implicit and based on assumptions of what the reader might already know. These messages contribute to the culture within which the text is being read (Fairclough, 1995).

For my research, the four operations of language identified within the IDVVR will be used to critique the language, tone, and meanings attributed to absenteeism in the workplace. The IDVVR is a "framework for critical analysis and research, prevention and intervention that takes into account the conditions that enable personalized violence, the actions of perpetrators and victims, and the language used in representing those actions" (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 511).

Document analysis involves skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). For my document analysis, I followed the method outlined by Bowen (2009). This iterative process combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is the process of organising information into categories

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related to the central questions of the research. The kind of content analysis that Bowen recommends entails a first-pass document review, in which meaningful and relevant passages of text or other data are identified. I identified pertinent information and separated it from that which was not pertinent (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used Bowen's pattern recognition within the data, in which emerging themes became the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I then performed coding and category construction, based on the data's characteristics, to uncover themes. The codes that consistently pointed to similar meanings were then categorized to uncover as themes. Inconsistent or weak codes were not categorized but rejected for further analysis.

Coates and Wade (2007) highlight four discursive operations and suggest that language can be used to conceal violence, obscure and mitigate offenders' responsibility: conceal victims' resistance, and blame and pathologize victims; expose violence, clarify offenders' responsibility, elucidate and honour victims' resistance, and contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims. These four operations and corresponding themes from the analysis are presented in Table 1 (see Chapter 5).

As mentioned earlier, the policies analysed for this study, guide employees and management. Coates and Wade (2007) point out that

questions about how professionals, elected officials, and other authorities exercise their social power cannot be answered by examining the institution's ideology, policies, or objectives. It is only through analysis of individuals' specific social and discursive actions that we can see how power is used and how abstract policy is interpreted and applied. (Coates & Wade, 2007)

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In Chapter 4, I will present the policy documents that are subject to the discussion, present the analysis, and discuss the results.

Chapter 4: The Discursive Analysis

Using the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance (IDVVR) as a framework, I will provide an examination of two policies that guide the management of absenteeism. One document is from the organization and the other is a union policy. These documents outline what the organization will provide and what are employee obligations. I will start this chapter with excerpts of the original documents, (in a different font to make it easy for the reader to identify them as original policy documents).

Institutions create policies and guidelines of which individuals within the institution must make sense. Through an analysis of discursive actions, we can see how abstract policies and ideologies are applied (Coates & Wade, 2007). Employees are expected to link their actions to policies or ideologies. Policies and ideologies of the institution can be used to conceal negative acts "conducted under the cover of the institution" (p. , 2007). The use of social power cannot be answered by looking at policy or ideology but by an analysis of the discursive practices of individuals (2007).

The Interactional and Discursive View of Violence as a framework helps uncover how language is used to "(a) conceal violence, (b) mitigate perpetrators' responsibility, (c) conceal victims' resistance, and (d) blame or pathologize victims" (Coates & Wade, 2007). First, I will introduce both policy documents (in the next two sections) exactly as they are presented to workers.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) represents workers in health care, emergency services, education, early learning and child care, municipalities, social services, libraries, and utilities. Many frontline workers such as fire fighters, nurses, paramedics are

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represented by CUPE. The policy included is a CUPE document. It is comprehensive and similar in language and content to other policies I encountered.

The second policy was taken directly from the organization I work for and is presented here as it is presented to staff.

The Discursive Analysis

In this section I will organize the union and organizational policy on absenteeism into common themes. All direct quotes are italicized and the reader may cross reference quotes with the original documents. The original documents can be found in Appendix A and B.

Paternalism

Paternalism as defined by Merriam-Webster (2018) is "a system under which an authority undertakes to supply needs or regulate conduct of those under its control in matters affecting them as individuals as well as in their relations to authority and to each other" (n.p.). The following statements from both the organization and the union's policies on absenteeism are examples of the inherent paternalism that is supported by the language throughout the document.

Organization: *Regular attendance is a core expectation for all employees in fulfilling their work responsibilities.* (Section 2)

Union: *Managers should communicate regularly with employees about the expectation for regular and consistent attendance.* (Section 3)

Organization: *All employees are expected to cooperate with respect to attendance management conversations and meetings.* (Section 2)

Union: *If a review of the record does disclose problem absenteeism the employee is required to attend a meeting.* (Section 2)

Lawal and Babalola (2017) characterize paternalism in an organization as someone with authority who “takes the role of a parent by protecting and paying attention to the subordinate as a duty, while the subordinate in turn reciprocates through respect, commitment and compliance” (p. 2). Kultgen (2014) notes that although paternalism is “pejorative in ordinary language because those who use it have in mind the treatment of grownups as if they were children” (p. 402).

Midtgaard (2017) suggests that paternalism will “infringe people’s autonomy or self-determination. It treats them in some sense as children who are incapable of tending to their own good” (p. 408). Policies that are paternal in tone may have the effect of setting up workers to do what management fears they will do.

Using words such as “expected” and “required” highlight the power imbalance. Employees are told what is required and expected of them, as opposed to what agreements might have been worked out or agreed to. The language has a paternal tone and hint at punitive actions should these expectations not be met. The language also implies the content of any meeting an employee is required to attend. The use of the terms “problem absenteeism” and “attendance management” suggest that the employee will need to explain the absenteeism to management and then they will decide what happens next. As Coates and Wade (2007) point out, “individuals must freshly justify their use of institutional power in each case by linking their actions to institutional ideologies, policies, or objectives” (p. 511). Employees may also need to justify their absenteeism using the language, policies and ideologies of the institution. The language here blames the employee and conceals workplace violence, distracting from an employee's

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resistance to the workplace violence by focussing on the need for the employee to explain her or his reasons for being absent. Resistance to violence or abuse is often covert or unnoticeable and yet according to Coates and Wade, is always present when one's dignity is affronted (2007).

Organization: *Where an employee may not be attending work regularly or meeting reporting requirements including sufficient notice or documentation, when required, such as medical notes the manager or coordinator has a responsibility to meet with the employee to determine what if anything the Society can reasonably do to assist them in their efforts to come to work. (Section 2)*

Union: The union document I am using does not have a specific statement regarding notice or documentation of absences, however it does state the steps that managers should take to address absenteeism as follows: *Compile the employee record and identify all absences due to illness or injury regardless of cause; all injury on duty or WCB leave; many other unplanned, unscheduled absence or leave-some examples being absent without leave, failure to report to work, absence to care for family members, personal emergencies (Section 4).*

The language used in these statements lets the employee know that the manager or coordinator will decide what should be done about absentee employees. It is up to the employee to provide documentation. Even though the Union document does not require the employee to provide notes or documentation, the implication is that there will be a record of causes of absences. There are hidden and invisible aspects of power in the language used. First, it is up to the manager or coordinator to decide when absenteeism becomes a problem. Then management can implement the absenteeism management policy to deal with the employee. There is no mention of the employee's agency in these documents. There is no language use suggesting an

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agreement made between employee and employer. There is a clear message that workers are under surveillance or being monitored. The tone goes beyond paternalism and becomes punitive.

Punitiveness

Another theme that stands out in these documents is the theme of punitiveness. Punitive is defined as " inflicting, involving, or aiming at punishment " (Merriam-Webster, 2018, para. 1). The threat of punitive actions is suggested throughout these two policies; however, the following statements are examples of how the union and the organization communicate the consequences of excessive absenteeism. Also, the terms culpable or blameworthy communicate to the employee that there will be consequences if the worker is misleading, misrepresenting or lying to management regarding their absences.

Organization: *When the manager or coordinator determines there is a satisfactory reason for inability to report or attend work, the absence is deemed non-culpable (as defined below). (Section 2)*

The problem is framed as being the employee's fault. There is no adult to adult negotiation or process and it is clear that the expectations are coming from a top down management style. The employee does not seem to have a choice about attending a meeting. The union policy advises that there is a threshold of absences and if the employee is beyond the threshold then a meeting will be scheduled, regardless of circumstances. There is no invitation to discuss, the assumption here is more of a reckoning and may set the employee up to be defensive. Add to this the fact that most meetings also invite a union representative and creating an us against them situation. There is no assumption that an adult to adult respectful conversation can be had. Conversely, other forms of communication such as non-violent communication or conflict resolution techniques encourage respect, listening, understanding and

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empathy, and the goal is to reach agreement rather than to be combative or right (Rosenburg, 2013). Rosenburg (2013) suggests that when we use language that is about right and wrong we “classify and dichotomize people and their actions” (n.p.), for example culpable and non-culpable. These are clear barriers to communication that is open and trustworthy.

Organization: *When the manager or coordinator determines that the reasons are unsatisfactory, the absence is culpable (as defined below), and the manager or coordinator will follow the procedures as outlined. (Section 2)*

Union: *Culpable conduct involves employee fault or wrongdoing including: failure to report to work or follow the established call in procedures; sick leave fraud; falsification of time records; excessive lateness. (Section 2)*

Organization: *Employees incapable of regular and consistent attendance, and following a clear review process, may be subject to formal discipline. The society will communicate expectations to employees and offer assistance in meeting acceptable attendance levels. (Section 3.7)*

Again, in these statements it is suggested that management need to decide what is satisfactory or unsatisfactory reasons for absenteeism. Managers and/or coordinators may exhibit their own acts of resistance such as dissent, cynicism and loss of faith in leadership (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013), and may not necessarily agree with the policies they are required to implement. Middle managers and coordinators are both the subjects and objects of control and subjects and objects of resistance. Like the staff managers are charged with monitoring, middle managers will actively resist or re-interpret plans or policies, they may comply rather than promote (Harding et al., n.d.).

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Union: *Non-Culpable or Innocent Absenteeism: Absence from work due to illness, or non-occupational injury, including absences that may be a result of a disability other than a compensable illness or injury. These absences are subject to Attendance review. (Definitions)*

Similarly, the language used in the union document defines non-culpable absenteeism as absence due to disability, injury illness or another legitimate health reason. It includes:

Sick leave (paid or unpaid, absence on Workers Compensation Benefits (WCB) and other absences attributable to illness or injury (Section 2).

The document goes on to explain that the term "non-culpable" means that the employee's behaviour is not blame worthy. Therefore, the response from management is not disciplinary.

These statements highlight the power differential inherent through the use of language and consequently reveal the practices of the organization subject to these documents. The policy is based on an expectation that management needs to decide what is non-culpable or legitimate absences from work. Absences that are non-culpable are still subject to an "attendance review" suggesting that the responsibility is on the employee to provide documentation of illness or injury. The language is punitive, and the inherent assumption is that workers are under surveillance because they may not be trustworthy. This system further sets up an us and them dynamic that may, paradoxically create the very behavior that the management is afraid of, namely that employees will not show up for work, will not have a good reason for not showing up or may be lying about why they are away from work. Using the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance to analyze these passages it is clear that while the employee may not be held culpable for her or his absence there is no mention of the possibility of absence due to abusive work environments, abusive clients or incivility. The language conceals workers'

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resistance to abuse and blames and pathologizes workers while concealing "systemic social responses to absenteeism by requiring medical verification of illness" (Stockall, 2016).

Organization: *Culpable or Blameworthy Absenteeism: Absence from work due to factors within the employee's control. Culpable absenteeism includes failure to notify, absences without leave and abuse of leave. Culpable or blameworthy absenteeism difficulties may be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination. (Definitions)*

The union document defines culpable absenteeism as conduct that involves employee fault or wrongdoing. Examples of culpable issues in absenteeism may include:

Failure to report to work or follow the established call in procedures; sick leave fraud; falsification of time records; excessive lateness. Culpable absenteeism is addressed using a disciplinary approach.

If you have concerns about a potential culpable conduct (for instance, concerns that an employee on sick leave is not actually sick) contact your HR advisor to discuss appropriate steps. These types of allegations involve a disciplinary approach and therefore must be handled outside of this program. (Section 2)

The use of the words 'culpable' and 'blameworthy' serve a purpose here. Merriam-Webster (2018) defines culpable as "guilt, criminal; meriting condemnation or blame especially as wrong or harmful. Blameworthy is defined as being at fault; deserving blame." Both words suggest the committing of an offense and/or moral wrongdoing. The sentence beginning "*If you have concerns about a potential culpable...*" is somewhat vague in that it is unclear who the 'you' is. It could be read as a directive for managers, supervisors or coordinators. It could also invite co-workers to monitor each other. Monitoring implies mistrust. Mayer, et al (as quoted in

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Muller et al, 2013) defines trust as the “willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 28). Trust is important as an organizing principle and according to McEvily, et al (2003) trust within organizations fosters “communication, conflict management, negotiation processes, satisfaction, and performance” (p. 91). Erdem & Özen-Aytemur (2014) add that when trust is high in organizations there are fewer conflicts, there is a decrease in the need for formal agreements and hierarchical control along with a decrease in opportunistic behaviour.

Communication and Collaboration

How does the organization communicate its attendance standards to their employees? Below are the guidelines used to let the employee know what the criteria will be used to assess what they consider to be problem absenteeism. The term “regular monitoring” and “corrected at an early stage” are somewhat troubling. Staff know absences are being monitored, this is a problem because it is not an adult to adult conversation but rather paternalistic reinforcing the powerlessness of the employee.

Organization: *The manager or coordinator is responsible for attendance management. Through the maintenance of accurate records and regular monitoring, absenteeism issues will be corrected at an early stage. Responsibilities include: regular communication with employee, maintenance of records, assistance in return to work.* (Section 3.1)

The last sentence here speaks to a possibility of collaborating with the employee.

The manager or coordinator should take the following into account:

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- *Whether the absences relate to sickness arising from a disability/or an underlying health condition*
- *Whether there is a likelihood of reoccurrence*
- *Whether the absence record indicates a trend/pattern of absence e.g. before or after a holiday, following weekends or non-working days.*
- *Where information given at return-to-work discussion raises concerns about the absence*
- *Where there has been a failure to follow sick notification procedures, especially if on repeated occasions reminders have been given*
- *Absence record linked to a recently completed probation period. (Section 2.2)*

Union: *Specific actions a manager should take to promote regular attendance and implement a successful attendance management program: (Section 3)*

This speaks to the possibility of collaboration with the employee who is in the attendance management program.

- *Engage employees to recognize their value*
- *Communicating regularly with employees about the expectation for regular and consistent attendance*
- *Managing absences consistently and concurrently*
- *Identifying and resolving contextual factors in the workplace that may contribute to absenteeism through dialogue with employees*
- *Is the problem recent, can it be traced to a particular change in the employee's circumstances?*
- *Are the absences due to family responsibilities?*

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- *Is there a solution that will likely enable the employee to maintain regular attendance in the foreseeable future?*
- *Has the employee identified a chronic underlying condition?*
- *Has the employee identified a need for accommodations a disability or other condition?*

(Section 3)

There is an attempt here to collaborate with the employee and to take contextual factors into consideration. There is some hope that working together to address the issues that lead to absenteeism may lead to better attendance. However, the list of possible causes or reasons for a worker being absent does not include responses to abuse, incivility, verbal aggression or humiliation. There is an implication that there are some acceptable reasons for being absent from work and the list is here for workers to read. In neither of the documents is there an attempt to address systemic factors or organizational responsibility for worker's safety. The attendance management program seems to be an attempt to get the employee back on board with the organizational expectations, like a reprogramming of the employee. The language does not take responsibility for any safety needs nor does it question the policy or ideologies of the organization. The organization I work for maintains logs at every site and are accessible to all staff and management. It is clearly documented that staff deals with situations that are unsafe, experience incivility and abuse, even deaths and robberies. With this knowledge why is there so little concern shown regarding the safety of our work sites?

Organization: *Employee attendance will be compared to the annual average absenteeism within the program area. Absenteeism that exceeds this average is an indicator of a possible attendance concern. However, there may be occasions when absenteeism above the*

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average level does not indicate an ongoing attendance concern (for example, where an employee is absent for a period of time due to a single injury or illness). (Section 2.3)

Union: *The Initial threshold point for inclusion in the program (Attendance Management Program) is that in the preceding year, the employee has been absent:*

A. *For 12 or more days (Section 1)*

OR

B. *At a rate greater than the departmental average for the year. (Section 1)*

Organization: *In determining the average for the purpose of the attendance management policy, the following absences should be included: (Section 2.4)*

1. *Sick with pay*
2. *Sick without pay*
3. *Accident no credit (ex. Worksafe denials). (Section 2.4)*

Union: *In order to identify who will be placed in the attendance management program, Managers must compile the record for each employee and identify (Section 4):*

- *All absences (paid or unpaid) due to illness or injury regardless of cause*
- *All injury on duty or WCB leave*
- *Any other unplanned, unscheduled absence or leave – some examples being absent without leave, failure to report to work, absence to care for family members, personal emergencies (Section 4)*

Organization: *Employees whose attendance pattern shows that their total quarterly absences were greater than the standard for the program will have their attendance reviewed. (Section 2.6)*

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It is the responsibility of all managers and coordinators to ensure the consistent application of the Attendance Management Program (Section 2)

Union: *The consistent and appropriate evaluation of absenteeism by management is essential in order to implement and maintain a successful attendance management program.*
(Section 3)

The implication here is that employees need to be managed and monitored. The attendance management program does not address the conditions under which many employees work. There is no reference to conditions that create burnout and stress, or take responsibility by suggesting, for instance that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that management is aware of the circumstances that create stress for employees. It is not expressed that management expect/welcome open communication among staff and management of all concerns which affect attendance. Contextual factors are not considered, and priority is given to the application of the program as opposed to seeing workers in context and looking for ways to improve worker safety and general well-being. Ignoring those contextual factors can conceal systemic penalties for absenteeism. The last paragraph in section 3 has a somewhat foreboding tone and suggests that the transgression is so serious that it must be handled outside of the attendance management program. The seriousness of the tone also suggests the employee may be terminated.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to use the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance (IDVVR) framework to examine the policies that guide organizational practices of absenteeism management. By attending to the language of the workplace documents I explored the ways in which policy on absenteeism may, or may not contribute to the oppressive nature of a workplace environment in which violence and threat is commonplace.

Main Findings

The results of the analysis of the organizational absenteeism policy and the union policy reveal three themes: paternalism, punitiveness, and communication. In Table 1 these themes are cross referenced with the four operations of the IDVVR. There was also an unexpected finding (titled surprise theme from here on in) that came out of the analysis of the documents: collaboration. I call this a surprise theme as it was not a finding I expected based on my working hypothesis, which was that the policies would be a contributing factor to the oppressive work conditions. These findings are important because the policies aimed to manage absenteeism may contribute to the problem by using oppressive language. Collaboration may be a way to contribute to solving the problem of absenteeism. If there were a way to create safety for the employee while collaborating to use alternative practices that would work for both parties. Having clarity and transparency around goals and objectives prevents confusion and distrust, thus helping people feel safe to challenge their curiosity. Amy Zimmerman (2016) suggests a few strategies for creating trust: “replacing words like “I” with “we,” noting that this shift connects people, reminding them that they are all in it together. And finally, “shoot straight with folks. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Your word is everything. Creating an environment where there is mutual trust and where people feel safe will pay dividends” (p. 4).

Table 1

Discursive Operation	Concealing violence	Obfuscating perpetrators' responsibility	Concealing resistance	Blaming/pathologizing victims
Theme	Punitiveness, communication (in the form of monitoring)	Punitiveness	Communication	Punitiveness, paternalism, communication (in the form of monitoring)
Surprise Theme	Collaboration			

Absenteeism in the workforce has, according to the literature, a myriad of causes. For frontline workers who deal with the stressors of incivility, verbal abuse, threats of violence and violence, being absent from work may be a response or form of resistance against the oppressive work conditions and the lack of support from organizations. Explanations for workplace absenteeism for workers who experience these types of stressors often locate the problem within the individual and suggest that somehow the worker is lacking in coping resources or needs to be more resilient (Sliter & Jex, 2012; Hall & Hobfoll, 2012). Constructing absenteeism as an individual problem where workers need resiliency training or mindfulness strategies or emotional first aid, locates the problem in the individual.

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Neither of the two policy documents discuss or address issues of threats, oppression, abuse, or incivility. The language of absenteeism may be contributing to the problem by ignoring the contextual factors under which frontline workers do their jobs. The undertones of punitiveness and paternalism add to the workplace stressors that employees respond to. There is no mention of client factors such as trauma, sadness, crisis, sickness and death. These omissions conceal the oppressive demand to care for people who are abusive to workers. The threats, abuse, incivility, humiliation that front-line workers endure may make it appear that these acts are just part of the job, something to be tolerated. Yet these factors could be represented, thus made explicit and visible, in the policies that guide the management of absenteeism.

One of the surprising findings of the research was the theme of collaboration. The documents state that management will try to "identify and resolve contextual factors in the workplace that may contribute to absenteeism." If management is willing to work with the employee and perhaps identify and respond to the abuse workers experience as one of the contextual factors that contribute to absenteeism, then it may be a place to truly collaborate with workers.

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It is important to note that not all absenteeism is an act of resistance against oppressive work policies, abuse, incivility or aggression. Just as all responses are not acts of resistance (Wade, 2000). Wade (2000) points out that "for victims of both sociopolitical and interpersonal oppression, there exist a multitude of remarkably diverse forms of resistance, ranging from cryptic, opaque, and barely discernible oppositional acts to those that signify, but stop just short of, open defiance" (p. 158). Absenteeism may be one way in which workers respond to abuse, however, people respond in a multitude of ways and it is only by examining the context of the situation through the words of the victim that we can ascertain if being absent from work is a response to abuse. In addition, managerial staff may have their own responses to the very same challenges in the workplace, including, perhaps, absenteeism.

Lastly, all dimensions of power as identified by Fleming and Spicer (2007) - coercion, manipulation, domination, and subjectification - are present in Housing First. Coercive power is present in the expectation to disengage and not respond to threats or abuse in any way. Presumably (as discussion of this is beyond the scope of this thesis) there are consequences should an employee not disengage. Refusal as a resistance to this coercive power may happen in workplaces such as Housing First in the form of a refusal to comply to attendance policies.

Manipulative power is present especially in the sense that there is an implicit expectation to remain silent about the abuse and threats experienced at work. Resistance takes the form of workers who may perhaps adopt "surface compliance" when calling in sick (2007). Resistance to this form of power may be expressed by gaining power by navigating attendance expectations carefully enough to not "get in trouble." Indeed, as the literature revealed, disciplinary power often leads to self-policing for fear of being caught disobeying the rules (Marshall, 2012).

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Domination is present in the sense that abuse and threats are legitimized as part of the job while delegitimizing workers' responses to it (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). As Cohen and Taylor (1992) suggest, workers may, in response escape through disengagement (in Fleming & Spicer, 2007) and indeed absenteeism. Fleming and Spicer's (2007) subjectification is present in how power is achieved—or indeed lost--through "defining conditions of possibility" in this case, restricting the conditions of possibility in response to abuse, incivility and threats to one's safety to one response—disengagement. It seems possible that in workplaces such as Housing First, refusal to internalize the organizational script on absenteeism, may be an act of resistance. Further research needs to shed more light on this.

Implications

Implications for Counsellors.

Counsellors who work with men and women who are front line workers may want to seek out how a person has responded to the abuse that is experienced at work. Acknowledging these acts of resistance can highlight for the worker that they are not passively taking the abuse but are always resisting. Counsellors must listen closely to their clients and help them see that they resist affronts to their dignity and, contrary to what it might feel like, are not just tolerating the abuse or accepting that it is just part of the job in order to validate the person's resistance; no matter what this looks like from the outside.

Frontline workers are expected to work with abusive and threatening clients. Response Based Practice is a way of working with clients that honour their resistance to abuse and highlight how they were actively engaging in behaviours that resisted affronts to their dignity. Coates, et al. (2003) suggest "that prevention and intervention efforts are most effective when

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language is used to (a) expose violence, (b) clarify perpetrators' responsibility, (c) elucidate and honour victims' resistance, and (d) contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims" (p. 118).

Allan Wade (1997) outlines the approach by describing how a therapist would "engage persons in a conversation concerning the details and implications of their own resistance. Through this process, persons begin to experience themselves as stronger, more insightful, and more capable of responding effectively to the difficulties that occasioned therapy" (p. 24).

The internalization of abuse is another potential area that counsellors may need to address with frontline workers who have experienced abuse. Results from a study by Chang (1995) indicated that a wide range of problematic symptoms post abuse (especially emotional abuse) can be best understood as two distinctive and valid dimensions, externalization and internalization. For both her male and female participants, emotional abuse had a significantly stronger relationship to internalization than to externalization.

Walter, Rutledge, and Edgar (2003) suggest that internalization is common in first responders; many emergency calls can trigger emotional responses in first responders. Counsellors who work with first responders need to be aware about the possibility of internalization. Internalization often manifests as depression (Karakurt & Silver, 2014). Karakurt and Silver (2005) suggest attachment theory as a good foundation for clinical work with clients who present with internalized abuse.

Implications for Frontline workers

An examination of workplace policies shows that the abuse, threats, and incivility experienced by frontline workers is obscured. Implications for frontline workers may be to 'out' this hidden curriculum of abuse. Organizing support circles or support groups among workers,

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may make more explicit the harm that these micro aggressions cause. The creation of peer support that can be available for workers to debrief after an incident may help the worker to acknowledge the intense emotions that accompany abuse, overdoses, and deaths. As reiterated by Halpern et al. (2009), it is important to recognize the emotional impact of critical incidents.

It may be difficult for workers to express these emotions to supervisors as there may be a perception of weakness or an inability to be able to handle the job (“Stressed Workers”

Vikki Reynolds (2011) echoes these findings and emphasizes the need for frontline workers to collaborate and work together for justice doing. For her, working together toward a more just society is necessary when working with populations who are oppressed. She says:

activist traditions of envisioning collective ethics, looking for connective practices of resisting oppression (Wade, as quoted in Reynolds, 2011, p. 6), and promoting justice-doing. Solidarity speaks to an understanding that just ways of being are interconnected as are our struggles and sites of resistance. We are meant to do this work together.

(Reynolds, 2011, p. 6)

For Reynolds, justice doing means enacting our ethics, she uses the word intention rather than principle because intentions are “linked, overlapping, living, and fluid” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 21). The guiding intentions she identifies are: centering ethics, doing solidarity, fostering collective sustainability, addressing power, critically engaging with language, and structuring safety (Reynolds, 2010). Centering ethics means that we enact our ethics in our work. Collectively identifying the ethics of the workers in an organization and being able to enact them, is what sustains those of us who work on the front lines (Reynolds, 2010; 2011; 2013). Doing solidarity speaks to an “understanding that just ways of being are interconnected, as are our struggles and

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sites of resistance” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 22). Fostering collective sustainability creates connectedness with others and a sense that our work matters. Fostering collective ethics means that we resist the language of individualism and burnout. According to Reynolds (2010) the construct of burnout is a problem that is located in the individual as opposed to identifying the problem within an unjust social structure. The prescription for burnout is self-care however Reynolds (2010) suggests that “self-care does not change the context of social injustice, which is where clients live and we work” (p. 24). Addressing power requires that we not take a neutral stance about oppression and injustice; that we hold a complex analysis of power; that we continue to be attuned to acts and sites of resistance and that we recognize intersections of privilege and power (Reynolds, 2010). To critically engage with language is to “serve our commitments to justice-doing by making power public, contesting domination, attacks on dignity, and oppression” (p. 27). Reynolds (2010) reminds us that it is important not to replicate oppression in our work. Structuring safety requires that we consistently negotiate “conditions, structures, and agreements” (p. 28) in our work.

Implications for managers and organizations.

Supervisors, managers, and the organization have a responsibility to address the abuse, humiliation, threats, and incivility employees encounter. Policies could be created where there is a collaboration between employee and managers/organizations to identify abuse and ways to create safety for the workers. Ongoing training for staff on ways to deal with abusive situations, highlighting the ways in which employees resist abuse and working together to create and support workers are a few practical strategies. Acknowledging safety issues and collaborating on ways to create safety at work sites and within the teams will accurately describe the conditions under which employees are expected to do their jobs.

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Organizations and managers could create opportunities for professional development. For example, Sliter (2012) in his research on firefighters and incivility found that empathy training can mediate the effects of the incivility employees experience. Slither (2014) also investigated the use of humour as a buffer against traumatic events. Humour is a coping mechanism and employees could be trained using cognitive strategies to restructure or reappraise stressful situations (Sliter, 2014). These are findings that managerial staff could consider in order to better support front line workers.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this research include the fact that policy was analysed through a discourse analysis. The idea that absenteeism may be an act of resistance to abuse is hard to address without talking to frontline workers about their experiences and responses. Further study should include workers' words through focus groups or interviews about how they respond to abuse. Other areas of research could include perceptions of safety from frontline workers, investigations into what frontline workers need in their work in terms of safety, support, and professional development.

Conclusion

It can be challenging to work in an environment where workers are dealing with clients who are misusing substances, have been through traumatic childhood experiences, and who are now faced with barriers to housing due to substance use and mental health issues. In a setting such as my work place, this population is considered to be some of the hardest to house. As workers we are often dealing with verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and physical violence. The research question for this paper explores the idea that workers may take off time from work in response to the abuse they have experienced. The literature would suggest that they do (Sliter et al., 2012). Anecdotally, I have heard workers say they will not be in to work after experiencing abuse at work. I know workers who will not work at certain sites due to the potential risk of violence. The action of work withdrawal could be considered an act of resistance (Wade, 2007).

Policies that use language that is oppressive to the worker further add, I believe, to the use of absenteeism as a form of resistance. Using the Interactional and Discursive View of Violence and Resistance as outlined by Wade and Coates (2007) shows that the language within the absenteeism policies conceal violence, obscure and mitigate offenders' responsibility, conceal victims' resistance, and blame and pathologize victims. Conversely, language can be used to "expose violence, clarify offenders' responsibility, elucidate and honor victims' resistance, and contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims" (Wade & Coates, 2007, p. 513). A discursive analysis also shows that the tone of organizational and union policies can be paternal and punitive, however there is an opportunity for communication and collaboration too.

After having explored this issue, when I go to work now I am keenly aware of how we talk about the ever present incivility and abuse. It is curious to me that the organization I work for does not name the abuse or strategize with its workers as to how best work with our clients

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and actively tackle the issues highlighted here in this thesis. I am also paying attention to how language is used in our line of work. The front-line staff are often offered opportunities to attend nonviolent crises intervention workshops, resiliency and mindfulness training, such events as self-care contests. While I see nothing wrong with these opportunities it does seem that the problem is handed to us to manage. Learning how to communicate with our clients in a nonviolent way is important, however, personal development workshops shifts the focus from an organizational, systemic issue to one that is up to the individual to manage, perhaps communicating to the worker that she or he is not resilient enough for the job. Ensuring safety for workers requires that an organization engage with workers about their experiences and actively collaborate to find solutions to very complex problems. More work will need to be done to bring consciousness to this issue so that organizations are held responsible.

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Appendix A Union (CUPE) Policy

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR CUPE LOCAL 2950 EMPLOYEES

1. Introduction
2. Evaluating and Understanding Absenteeism
3. Promoting Regular Attendance at Work
4. Managing Absenteeism Consistently
 - Step 1: Review Records and Identify Problematic Absenteeism
 - A. Compile and Review the Attendance Records for Each Employee
 - B. Identify Candidates for the Attendance Management Program
 1. Objective Assessment
 2. Subjective Assessment
 - Step 2: Conduct Absenteeism Meetings
 - A. Review of Absences and Impact
 - B. Understanding
 - C. Moving forward: Prognosis and Monitoring
 - D. Documenting the Discussion
 - Step 3: Fulfill the Ongoing Duty to Inquire
 - Step 4: Reassess the Employment Relationship
5. Sample Interview Questions
 - A. First Interview
 - B. Second Interview
 - C. Third Interview
 - D. Fourth and Final Interview
6. Template Follow-up Letters
 - A. First Interview Letter
 - B. Second Interview Letter
 - C. Third Interview Letter

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D. Fourth and Final Warning Letter

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1. Introduction

Managing absenteeism can be complicated. These Guidelines have been developed to assist managers in the long-term management of absenteeism. The objectives of these Guidelines are as follows:

- Evaluating and understanding the different forms of absenteeism
- Promoting regular attendance at work
- Managing absenteeism consistently across the University

In managing absenteeism, other health-related issues may be raised, including wellness initiatives, health and safety measures and accommodation of disabilities. HR Advisors are available to guide managers through these issues and make the necessary referrals to specialists and experts, as required.

2. Evaluating and Understanding Absenteeism

In order to administer this Program it is important to understand the difference between culpable and non-culpable absenteeism.

Non-culpable absenteeism is an absence resulting from disability, injury, illness, or another legitimate health reason. Examples include:

- Sick leave (paid or unpaid)
- Injury leave (WorksafeBC – discussed in greater detail below)
- Other absences attributable to illness or injury

The term “non-culpable” simply means that the employee’s absence is not blameworthy. Therefore, the response from management must be non-disciplinary. How can one be disciplined for something outside their control?

By contrast, culpable conduct involves employee fault or wrongdoing. Examples of culpable issues in absenteeism may include:

- Failure to report to work or follow established call-in procedures
- Sick leave fraud
- Falsification of time records

Excessive lateness

This Program is ONLY concerned with non-culpable absenteeism. Therefore, the approach will always be non-disciplinary. Culpable absenteeism is addressed using a disciplinary approach and, consequently, does not fall within the Program. It is very important to delineate these two concepts.

If you have concerns about potential culpable conduct (for instance, concerns that an employee on sick leave is not actually sick) contact your HR Advisor to discuss the appropriate steps. These types of allegations involve a disciplinary approach, and must be handled outside of the Program.

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3. Promoting Regular Attendance at Work

An open discussion is the key to successful attendance management and promoting regular attendance. Specific actions a manager should take include:

- Engaging employees to recognize their value to the University's operations.
- Communicating regularly with employees about the expectation for regular and consistent attendance.
- Managing absences consistently and concurrently.
- Identifying and resolving contextual factors in the workplace that may contribute to absenteeism through dialogue with employees.

4. Managing Absenteeism Consistently

The success of the Program also depends upon the consistent application of the following steps which are designed to identify and formally address excessive problem absenteeism: **STEP 1: Review Records and Identify Problematic Absenteeism A. Compile and Review the Attendance Records for Each Employee**

For each employee, managers must identify in a spreadsheet:

- All absences (paid and unpaid) due to illness or injury.
- All absences due to injuries on duty or WorksafeBC leave.
- All other unplanned, unscheduled absences or leave; e.g. absence without leave, failure to report to work, absence to care for family members, personal emergencies.

The above will form the employee's record of non-culpable absenteeism. In compiling this record, it is important to ensure the information used is accurate, current and consistent.

Examples of absences not included in this record are:

- Scheduled vacation.
- Maternity, adoption or parental leave.
- Compassionate leave.

B. Identify Candidates for the Attendance Management Program

The next step in the Program is to identify those employees who may be candidates for the Program. This requires a two-stage analysis: (1) an objective (statistical) assessment; plus (2) a subjective (contextual) assessment.

1. Objective Assessment

Managers should review their attendance records and list those CUPE 2950 employees within the department who have been absent either,

- 12 or more days in a 12-month period; or** **At a rate exceeding the departmental average.**

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Since the University is comprised of such a diverse group of employees working within a wide range of departments and occupations, the above threshold comprises employees working within CUPE 2950 only.

If you have an employee who does not meet this threshold, but you have concerns with respect to their attendance, please contact your HR Advisor for assistance.

2. Subjective Assessment

Once managers have compiled a list of employees who are over the “threshold”, managers must consider the record for each listed employee to determine subjectively whether there is, in fact, an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed and corrected.

Key criteria include:

- Duration (short, intermittent vs. longer term)
- Frequency (number of separate occurrences)
- Predictability (whether planned or unplanned)

The number of incidents and the duration of each are important considerations. Frequent, unplanned absences may cause more operational disruption and hardship than one longer planned absence.

Questions to consider in assessing each record include:

- How many times, days, and for what reason has the employee been absent?
- Is the problem recent? Can it be traced to a particular change in the employee’s circumstances?
- Are the absences of short duration with no medical attention?
- Are the absences due to family responsibilities?
- Is there a solution that will likely enable the employee to maintain regular attendance in the foreseeable future?
- Has the employee identified a chronic underlying condition (disability)?

Has the employee identified a need for accommodation of a disability or other condition? (Discuss with your HR Advisor)

There are times when excessive absenteeism presents itself objectively but is not a problem requiring correction; for instance, where excessive absenteeism is caused by injury due to a motor vehicle accident. Managers should ask whether, on a review of the record, there is an ongoing problem with excessive absenteeism that needs to be addressed and managed. If so, then the employee may appropriately be placed in the Program.

Managers are encouraged to contact their HR Advisor if they require any advice or guidance as to whether a particular employee has “problem attendance” and/or should be moved to the next step of the Program.

STEP 2: Conduct Absenteeism Meetings

If a review of the record discloses problematic absenteeism, the employee is required to attend a meeting (or series of meetings). Of course, managers must review attendance records prior to the employee meeting and consider the operational and financial impact of the employee’s absences.

A list of sample questions is provided at the end of these Guidelines.

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Each meeting is divided into four sections:

A. Review of Absences and Impact

The manager begins by stating that the meeting is non-disciplinary. The manager reviews the attendance record with the employee, confirms the total number of days absent, the number of occasions, and the type of leave taken. The manager explains the detrimental impact on operations given the nature of the work the employee performs. The tone of this message is important because it should highlight the employee's value in the workplace, as well as the consequence of their absence on the workforce when they are away.

B. Understanding

Through this discussion with the employee, the manager seeks to understand the reasons for the absences. It is important to explore workplace or personal factors that may impede the employee from regularly reporting for work.

Managers will not necessarily have access to confidential medical information, such as a diagnosis of an illness, at this stage of the Program. However, it is absolutely necessary to inquire whether the employee is experiencing an ongoing medical condition that is causing or contributing to the absenteeism. You may also ask whether they are currently under the care of a physician or if they are following a prescribed treatment program. It is important to emphasize that we are not challenging their right to use the sick leave provision for a legitimate absence due to illness or injury.

C. Moving forward: Prognosis and Monitoring

The employee and manager should discuss the prognosis for regular attendance and respective responsibilities and commitments. The manager reminds the employee about programs and supports in place to promote wellness at the University, including the Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) Program. The employee is informed that his/her attendance will be monitored and that a significant and sustained improvement in their attendance is required, and that if such improvement does not occur the employee will move to the next step of the Program.

D. Documenting the Discussion

After the meeting, a follow-up letter is normally issued to the employee with copies delivered to Human Resources and the personnel file. Letters must be tailored to include the circumstances of each employee and what was said in the meeting. Depending on the circumstances and the employee's explanations, it may be that no letter is issued.

A subsequent meeting or second meeting should not automatically or necessarily be held. If, however, the required improvement in attendance does not occur, a second and third meeting may be necessary. These subsequent meetings will adopt a similar approach to the first meeting. This includes the duty to re-inquire whether a medical condition is contributing to their absences. It is important to reference the previous meetings held with the employee within the scope of these Guidelines. While the period of time between meetings is not prescribed, it's important to assess the particular circumstances of each case, before determining the monitoring period between meetings. The monitoring period should always be the same; however, the decision to have a 2nd or 3rd meeting with someone is based on their particular circumstances. While the period of time between meetings is not prescribed, it does need to be long enough to demonstrate that the expected improvement did not take place. Templates for follow-up letters can be found at the end of these Guidelines. Note that these letters must be tailored to the personal circumstances of each employee.

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STEP 3: Fulfill the Ongoing Duty to Inquire

The University's duty to inquire is ongoing and is exercised through informal discussions and during attendance meetings. For those employees whose excessive absenteeism is related to a specific medical condition or injury, additional medical information may be requested to ensure that the University can properly assess how to proceed. Should an employee share that their absenteeism is related to a medical condition or injury please inform them that we may need further information and that you will get back them shortly. Managers must consult with an HR Advisor regarding these matters.

STEP 4: Reassess the Employment Relationship

The aim of the Program is to assist as many employees as possible in returning to an acceptable level of regular attendance. However, in some cases this does not occur. Where the Program does not result in an acceptable level of improvement in attendance, the University must reassess the viability of continuing the employment relationship. The relevant considerations at this stage are as follows:

1. Whether the employee has had an excessive absenteeism record over a sustained period of time.
2. Whether there is any reasonable likelihood that the employee will be able to achieve an acceptable level of attendance (i.e. the prognosis).
3. Whether a duty to accommodate (to the point of undue hardship) exists.

Consultation with your HR Advisor must occur at this stage. It may be that a fourth and final meeting is warranted. HR will assist with the preparation of the meeting and final notice as required. This notice will be issued following the meeting indicating that the employee's failure to improve their attendance will result in their termination of employment. If there is still no improvement, the HR Advisor will assist management with any decision to conclude the employment relationship.

5. Sample Interview Questions

First Interview

Employee: _____

Date: _____

Attendees: _____

Location:

I have called this meeting to review your attendance record for the last several years with you. This meeting is non-disciplinary.

- 1) I am providing you with a copy of your attendance record. Do you agree with this information as recorded? Are there any corrections you want me to note? [Go over the total number of days absent, number of occasions, types of leave taken]
- 2) If there are any corrections that you discover after this meeting, please bring those to my attention.

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- 3) Having reviewed your attendance record, I need to address it with you. The University values your contribution as an employee. Regular attendance at work is critical in terms of our ability to deliver effective service and operate successfully. Your current level of absenteeism causes us concern as your employer. First, are you aware that you have had a lot of absenteeism?
- 4) Looking at your record, can you go over the reasons for this absenteeism with me?
- 5) At this stage, we need you to improve your attendance record. Do you understand that, and what steps will you take to do this?
- 6) I want to remind you about programs and supports that are in place at the University, including the Employee and Family Assistance program (EFAP). Do you need any further information about those?
- 7) If your attendance does not improve we will continue to meet with you as part of the Attendance Review Program. This is an issue that may ultimately impact on your continued employment at the University if it is not corrected. Do you understand that?
- 8) Is there anything else that we can do to help you, or that you would like to add?

Second Interview

Employee: Date:

Attendees:

Location:

- 1) I have called this meeting to review with you your attendance record since our last attendance meeting on insert date of 1st interview. In this meeting when asked about your poor attendance and how you were going to improve it, you stated, "insert comments from 1st interview" Do you recall this discussion?
- 2) As we discussed at our last meeting, the University values your contribution as an employee. Regular attendance at work is critical in terms of our ability to deliver effective service and operate successfully. Your level of absenteeism continues to be a concern. Here is a copy of your attendance record since our last attendance meeting. Do you agree with this attendance record? Are there any corrections you want me to note? [Go over the total number of days absent, number of occasions, types of leave taken]
- 3) If there are any corrections that you discover after this meeting, please bring those my attention.
- 4) Do you acknowledge that there continues to be a problem with your attendance?
- 5) Looking at your record, can you go over the specific reasons for this absenteeism with me?
- 6) Let me ask you more specifically, do you have any medical issues, substance abuse issues or any family issues that keep you from coming to work on a regular and consistent basis?
- 7) If you have any problems in the areas just mentioned, you have a responsibility to seek assistance. Do you understand this?

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- 8) I want to remind you about the programs and supports that are in place at the University, including the Employee and Family Assistance program (EFAP). Do you need any further information about those?
- 9) At this stage we need you to improve your attendance record. Do you understand that, and what steps will you take to do this?
- 10) If your attendance does not improve we will continue to meet with you as part of the Attendance Review Program. This is a serious issue that may impact on your continued employment at the University if it is not corrected. Do you understand that?
- 11) Is there anything you would like to add?

Third Interview

Employee: Date:

Attendees:

Location:

- 1) I have called this meeting to review with you your attendance record since our last attendance meeting on insert date of 2nd interview. In this meeting when asked about your poor attendance and how you were going to improve it, you stated you would be, "insert comments from 2nd interview" Do you recall this discussion?
- 2) I've monitored your attendance since our last meeting and continue to have serious concerns about your attendance at work. Regular attendance is an important part of your employment, as we have discussed. Here is a copy of your attendance record since our last attendance meeting. Do you agree with this attendance record? Are there any corrections you want me to note? [Go over the total number of days absent, number of occasions, types of leave taken]
- 3) If there are any corrections that you discover after this meeting, please bring those my attention.
- 4) Do you acknowledge that there continues to be a problem with your attendance?
- 5) Looking at your record, can you go over the specific reasons for this absenteeism with me?
- 6) Let me ask you more specifically, do you have any medical issues, substance abuse issues, or any family issues that keep you from coming to work on a regular and consistent basis?
- 7) If you have any problems in the areas just mentioned, you have a responsibility to seek assistance. Do you understand this?
- 8) I want to remind you about programs and supports that are in place at the University, including the Employee and Family Assistance program (EFAP). Do you need any further information about those?
- 9) At this stage, your attendance record must improve. Do you understand that, and what steps will you take to do this?

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10) Your attendance will continue to be monitored and we expect to see an immediate improvement. If your attendance does not improve and you fail to attend work on a regular and consistent basis, you will be subject to further action. This action could include termination. Do you understand?

11) Is there anything else that we can do to help you, or that you would like to add?

Fourth and Final Interview

Employee: Date:

Attendees:

Location:

1) I have called this meeting to review with you your attendance record since our last attendance meeting insert date of 3rd interview. In this meeting when asked about your poor attendance and how you were going to improve it, you stated you were going to, "insert comments from 3rd interview". Do you recall this discussion?

2) I've monitored your attendance since our last meeting and continue to have serious concerns about your attendance at work. As you have been told at past meetings, regular attendance is an important part of your employment. Here is a copy of your attendance record since our last attendance meeting. Do you agree with this attendance record? Are there any corrections you want me to note? [Go over the total number of days absent, number of occasions, types of leave taken]

3) If there are any corrections that you discover after this meeting, please bring those to my attention.

4) Do you acknowledge that there continues to be a problem with your attendance?

5) Looking at your record, can you go over the specific reasons for this absenteeism with me?

6) Let me ask you more specifically, do you have any medical issues, substance abuse issues, or any family issues that keep you from coming to work on a regular and consistent basis?

7) If you have any problems in the areas just mentioned, you have a responsibility to seek assistance. Do you understand this?

8) I want to remind you about programs and supports that are in place at the University, including the Employee and Family Assistance program (EFAP). Do you need any further information about those?

9) Your attendance will continue to be monitored and we expect to see an immediate improvement. If your attendance does not improve and you fail to attend work on a regular and consistent basis, you will be subject to further action. This action could include termination. Do you understand?

10) Do you have anything else that you would like to add that is relevant to your attendance?

. Template Follow-up Letters

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A – First Interview Letter

This letter documents a non-disciplinary meeting held with you on (date) at which your attendance record from (date) to the present was discussed. Present at this meeting were...

A review of your attendance record reveals the following absences due to (illness) or (injury) as follows:

This absenteeism is of concern to the University as it is detrimental to the operations of the department. At the meeting, you explained that your absences were caused by/attribution to/contributed to by (...).

You were advised that the University would continue monitoring your attendance and that a significant and sustained improvement in your attendance record is required. We remain optimistic that your attendance will improve.

(If an employee claims an ongoing or chronic medical condition (or injury) is contributing to their absenteeism, you should consult with your HR Advisor regarding any possible additional steps required).

There are many means to fulfill your responsibility to attend work on a regular basis. We encourage you to explore means to improve your attendance. During the meeting, you committed to/did not commit to... We are committed to supporting the health and wellness of our employees, and encourage you to ask for support when facing health related issues. During the meeting, we committed to ... Since these events may be complex for both you and the department, we take this opportunity to refer you to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), which may be reached at 1-800-663-1142 or TTY (Hearing Assistance) 1-888-384-1152, as an additional resource.

B – Second Interview Letter

This letter documents a non-disciplinary meeting held with you on (date) to discuss your attendance record from (date) to the present. Attending this meeting were... We last met to discuss your attendance on (date) with a follow up letter to you dated (date).

A review of your attendance record reveals the following absences, since your last meeting, due to (illness) or (injury) are as follows:

This absenteeism is of concern to the University as it is detrimental to the operations of the department. At our most recent meeting, you explained that your absences were caused by/attribution to/contributed to by (...)

A review of your attendance record overall reveals the following absenteeism, as addressed in our letter dated (date).

(If an employee claims an ongoing or chronic medical condition (or injury) is contributing to their absenteeism, you should consult with your HR Advisor regarding any possible additional steps required).

Unfortunately, since our last meeting and written correspondence your attendance has not improved to an acceptable level. In the (time) since that meeting you have been absent ___ days. Please be advised that the University will continue to monitor your attendance and that a significant and sustained improvement in your attendance record is required. We remain optimistic that your attendance will improve. If, however, your absenteeism continues to fall below an acceptable standard, your employment with the University may be in jeopardy.

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As discussed this program does not include formal communication when there has been improvement. Therefore an employee is only progressed to the next meeting is there continues to be a concern with their level of absenteeism.

There are many means to fulfill your responsibility to attend work on a regular basis. We encourage you to explore means to improve your attendance. During the meeting, you committed to/did not commit to... We are committed to supporting the health and wellness of our employees, and encourage you to ask for support when facing health related issues. During the meeting, we committed to ... Since these events may be complex for both you and the department, we take this opportunity to refer you to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), which may be reached at 1-800-663-1142 or TTY (Hearing Assistance) 1-888-384-1152, as an additional resource.

C – Third Interview Letter

This letter documents a non-disciplinary meeting held with you on (date) to discuss your attendance record from (date) to the present. Present at this meeting were ... We last met to discuss your attendance on (date), with a follow up letter to you dated (date).

A review of your attendance record reveals the following absences, since your last meeting, due to (illness) or (injury) are as follows:

This absenteeism is of concern to the University as it is detrimental to the operations of the department. At our most recent meeting, you explained that your absences were caused by/attributable to/contributed to by (...).

A review of your attendance record overall reveals the following absenteeism, as addressed in our letter dated (date).

(If an employee claims an ongoing or chronic medical condition (or injury) is contributing to their absenteeism, you should consult with your HR Advisor regarding any possible additional steps required).

Unfortunately, since our last meeting and written correspondence your attendance has not improved to an acceptable level. In the (time) since that meeting you have been absent ___ days. Please be advised that the University will continue to monitor your attendance and that a significant and sustained improvement in your attendance record is required. We remain hopeful that your attendance will improve. If, however, your absenteeism continues to fall below an acceptable standard, your employment with the University may be terminated due to non-culpable absenteeism.

There are many means to fulfill your responsibility to attend work on a regular basis and consistent basis. We encourage you to explore means to improve your attendance. During the meeting, you committed to/did not commit to... We are committed to supporting the health and wellness of our employees, and encourage you to ask for support when facing health related issues. During the meeting, we committed to ...

Since these events may be complex for both you and the department, we take this opportunity to refer you to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), which may be reached at 1-800-663-1142 or TTY (Hearing Assistance) 1-888-384-1152, as an additional resource.

D – Fourth and Final Warning Letter

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This letter documents a non-disciplinary meeting held with you on (date) to discuss your attendance record from (date) to the present. Present at this meeting were ... We last met to discuss your attendance on (date), with a follow up letter to you dated (date).

A review of your attendance record reveals the following absences, since your last meeting, due to (illness) or (injury) are as follows:

This absenteeism is of concern to the University as it is detrimental to the operations of the department. At our most recent meeting, you explained that your absences were caused by/attributable to/contributed to by (...).

A review of your attendance record overall reveals the following absenteeism, as addressed in our letter dated (date):

Unfortunately, since our last meeting and written correspondence your attendance has not improved to an acceptable level. In the (time) since that meeting you have been absent ____ days.

You have now had __meetings and received __ letters with respect to the need to improve your attendance; however, your attendance continues to fall below an acceptable standard. In light of the above, and based upon the fact that you have been advised previously about your poor attendance, this letter serves as a final warning of the need for an improvement in your attendance. The matter of your attendance is now at a critical stage. The University will continue monitoring your attendance. Unless there is a significant and sustained improvement in your attendance the University will terminate your employment due to non-culpable absenteeism.

There are many means to fulfill your responsibility to attend work on a regular and consistent basis. We encourage you to explore means to improve your attendance. During the meeting, you committed to/did not commit to... We are committed to supporting the health and wellness of our employees, and encourage you to ask for support when facing health related issues. During the meeting, we committed to Since these events may be complex for both you and the department, we take this opportunity to refer you to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), which may be reached at 1-800663-1142 or TTY (Hearing Assistance) 1-888-384-1152, as an additional resource.

Appendix B Organization's Attendance Program Policy

Introduction

The Society recognizes and accepts its obligations in respect of employees experiencing ill health. This policy will ensure that absences are dealt with fairly, consistently, and that decisions are made based on the information available at the time.

The Society will:

- Assist employees in minimizing absences from work by making every reasonable effort to provide support, clear expectations, assistance and where applicable, accommodation.
- Promote a healthy workplace.
- Provide guidance and training to management staff who are responsible for dealing with attendance issues.

2 Policy

- Regular attendance is a core expectation for all employees in fulfilling their work responsibilities.
- Where an employee may not be attending work regularly or meeting reporting requirements including sufficient notice or documentation, when required, such as medical notes the manager or coordinator has a responsibility to meet with the employee to determine what if anything the Society can reasonably do to assist them in their efforts to come to work.
- It is the responsibility of all managers and coordinators to ensure the consistent application of the Attendance Management Program.
- All employees are expected to cooperate with respect to attendance management conversations and meetings.
- When the manager or coordinator determines there is a satisfactory reason for inability to report or attend work, the absence is deemed non-culpable (as defined below).
- When the manager or coordinator determines that the reasons are unsatisfactory, the absence is culpable (as defined below), and the manager or coordinator will follow the procedures outlined in Section 4 Attendance Reviews.

Definitions

Non-Culpable or Innocent Absenteeism: Absence from work due to illness, or non-occupational injury, including absences that may be a result of a disability other than a compensable illness or injury. These absences are subject to Attendance Review. (See Procedure, Management of Innocent Absenteeism).

Culpable or Blameworthy Absenteeism: Absence from work due to factors within the employee's control. Culpable absenteeism includes failure to notify, absences without leave and abuse of leave. Culpable absenteeism includes failure to notify, absences without leave and abuse of leave. Culpable or blameworthy absenteeism difficulties may be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination.

Approved Absences: Absence from work to which an employee is entitled by policy HR-CB08 and/or in accordance with the terms of the Collective agreement or which may be granted subject to management approval. Such approved absences include absences in accordance with the WorkSafe BC, vacation, statutory holiday,

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bereavement leave, jury duty, pregnancy leave, parental leave, ill dependent days, legal strike, and such other absences management may determine.

3 Attendance Standards

2.1 The manager or coordinator is responsible for attendance management. Through the maintenance of accurate records and regular monitoring, absenteeism issues will be corrected at an early stage.

Responsibilities include:

- Regular communication with employee
- Maintenance of records
- Assistance in return to work

2.2 The manager or coordinator should take the following into account:

- Whether the absences relate to sickness arising from a disability/or an underlying health condition
- Whether there is a likelihood of reoccurrence
- Whether the absence record indicates a trend/pattern of absence e.g. before or after a holiday, following weekends or non-working days
- Where there has been a failure to follow sick notification procedures, especially if on repeated occasions reminder(s) have been given
- Absence record linked to a recently completed probation period.

2.3 Employee attendance will be compared to the annual average absenteeism within the program area. Absenteeism that exceeds this average is an indicator of a possible attendance concern. However, there may be occasions when absenteeism above the average level *does not indicate* an ongoing attendance concern (for example, where an employee is absent for a period of time due to a single injury or illness).

2.4 In determining the average for the purpose of the attendance management policy, the following absences should be included:

1. Sick with pay
2. Sick without pay
3. Accident no credit (ex. WorkSafe denials)

2.5 The average absenteeism should be defined in terms of the number of days or shifts for the program for one year.

2.6 Employees whose attendance pattern shows that their total *quarterly* absences were greater than the standard for the program will have their attendance reviewed.

2.7 Employees incapable of regular and consistent attendance, and following a clear review process, may be subject to formal discipline. The Society will communicate expectations to employees and offer assistance in meeting acceptable attendance levels.

3. Accommodation of Employees with Disabilities

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3.1 The manager or coordinator will work with the employee, Human Resources, BCGEU, and DMI to seek an appropriate accommodation for those employees who establish the existence of a disability and a need for temporary or permanent accommodation arising from that disability.

3.2 Employees are expected to provide full medical information that will assist the Society in determining the limitations that arise from the disability and in searching for an appropriate accommodation. Employees are expected to participate in the search for accommodation and to cooperate with accommodation efforts.

3.3 The BCGEU will be invited to participate in meetings along with the employee to identify accommodation needs and to explore potential means of accommodation.

4. Attendance Review

Managers or coordinators will be expected to review employee's attendance records at least quarterly with Human Resources. Attendance reviews will include review of the following:

- Total number of days absent
- The incidence of absences (i.e. number of occurrences of absenteeism as opposed to the duration of the absence)
- Absences frequently attached to days off, vacation or other leaves
- Absences occurring at the same time each year

5.Meeting Procedures

Where an employee's attendance is not meeting expectations, the manager or coordinator will meet with the employee to discuss attendance concerns.

5.1 Informal Meeting

The manager or coordinator will meet with the employee one-on-one and review the attendance concern(s). The discussion with the employee will include the following:

- Advise the employee of their absenteeism to date and how this compares with the average absenteeism
- Advise the employee of any patterns of absences that are of concern
- Identify expectations for satisfactory improvement
- Review the Society's requirements for regular attendance
- Ask the employee whether there is any underlying condition for other issue of which the organization should be aware that may be responsible for the absenteeism. If applicable, document reason and contact Human Resources for guidance.
- Advise the employee of the availability of the Employee and Family Assistance Program
- Ask What plans the employee has to improve attendance
- Set goal for improvement of attendance
- Set a date for a follow-up meeting within the next two (2) months

5.3 Third Meeting – Formal

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If during the next three months the employee's attendance has improved to a satisfactory level by the time of the third interview, the manager will confirm attendance has improved and encourage the employee to continue their efforts in this regard. The discussion will be documented in an email or a letter. The manager will advise the employee that attendance will continue to be reviewed and that a further meeting may be scheduled should further attendance concerns arise.

If during the next three months attendance has still not improved to satisfactory level, the manager or coordinator will meet with the employee to discuss the ongoing attendance concerns. The discussion with the employee will include a review of the items set out for the first two meetings and, in addition, the following terms:

- Be cognizant that there may be an underlying health condition. An occupational fitness assessment or referral to DMI may be warranted
- Confirm whether there is any chronic medical condition or disability that is affecting the employee's ability to attend work regularly
- Identify attendance is unacceptable
- Discuss reasons for absenteeism
- Identify requirements for satisfactory improvement
- Explain the impact of absences on the work operation
- Alert the employee that ongoing absenteeism that does not meet expectations may jeopardize their employment
- Contact Human Resources to consult and arrange for formal letter for warning
- Arrange follow up meeting with employee and shop steward (for union programs)
- Identify specific course of action and possible consequences: attendance is on record and could lead to transfer, demotion, denial of promotion
- Identify other options, which may be pursued, if there is no satisfactory improvement including suspension or termination
- Identify resources for assistance (suggested referral to Employee Health and Rehabilitation, Employee Assistance Program)
- Emphasize the Society's ongoing concern regarding absenteeism and lack of improvement

5.4 Fourth Meeting – Formal

The purpose of the meeting is to re-state again all the points from meetings 1, 2, and 3 clearly state the expectations and consequences including suspension.

Prior to suspension or termination for non-culpable absenteeism, there will be a careful examination of all of the circumstances surrounding the employee's absenteeism. The employee will be provided a final warning, by way of suspension, setting out the attendance required and the period during which the attendance will be monitored.

The employee will be advised that should their attendance fail to meet the established target level, their employment may be terminated. The employee will be asked to provide any information that is relevant to their

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ability to attend work regularly in the future, given the ongoing failure to meet an acceptable level of attendance in the past.