



Domestic Violence and the Workplace

Domestic violence is a serious issue that spans all social and economic classes. Anyone, regardless of age, race, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, economic status (rich, middle class, or poor), or position they hold within society or an organization could be the victim of domestic violence. And, although much research has been done on domestic violence, including its impact on worker productivity – nearly two in three corporate executives (63%) say that domestic violence is a major problem in our society and 55% cite it has a harmful impact on productivity in their companies – there are still many companies that think domestic violence is none of their business.

Understandably, there is a very fine line between corporate responsibility and an employee's domestic relationships outside of the workplace. Crossing that line, even slightly, can result in claims of discriminatory practices, legal actions and damage to the company's image. However, when it comes to domestic violence and its real and potential impacts on workplace safety and productivity, businesses should take proactive measures to identify the risks domestic violence poses to their workplace, identify employee assistance programs to assist victims, and implement corporate workplace violence policies and procedures that include provisions for addressing domestic violence that spills over into the workplace.

Business Impacts of Domestic Violence

A 2005 survey by [Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence \(CAEPV\)](#) on the impact of domestic violence on the workplace and employee productivity found that:

- 21% of full-time employed adult respondents (men and women) identified themselves as victims of intimate partner violence.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of victims of domestic violence indicated that their ability to work was affected by the violence. Among key causes for their decline in productivity, victims noted "distraction" (57%); "fear of discovery" (45%); "harassment by intimate partner at work (either by phone or in person)" (40%); fear of intimate partner's unexpected visits" (34%); "inability to complete assignments on time" (24%); and "job loss" (21%).
- Regarding co-workers as victims, 31% of respondents felt "strongly" to "somewhat obliged" to cover for a victim of domestic violence by performing his or her work or offering excuses for his or her absence, 27% reported "extremely frequently" to "somewhat frequently" having to do the victim's work, and 25% resented the victim because of the effect of their situation on the workplace. Finally, 38% of respondents were "extremely" to "somewhat concerned" for their own safety when they found out a co-worker was a victim of domestic violence.

The [Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention, Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 2006](#) found that:

- Of the 30% of workplaces in the US that have some sort of formal workplace violence policy, only 44% have a policy to address domestic violence in the workplace.
- Only 4 percent of all establishments train employees on domestic violence and its impact on the workplace.



The [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence \(NCADV\)](#) reports that:

- Victims of intimate partner violence lose a total of 8,000,000 million days of paid work each year, the equivalent of 32,000 full-time jobs.
- Intimate partner violence is estimated to cost the US economy between \$5.8 billion and \$12.6 billion annually, up to 0.125% of the national gross domestic product.
- Between 21-60% of victims of intimate partner violence lose their jobs due to reasons stemming from the abuse.
- Between 2003 and 2008, 142 women were murdered in their workplace by former or current intimate partners. This amounts to 22% of workplace homicides among women.

Understanding Domestic Violence

Historically, domestic violence research and prevention and control measures have focused primarily on domestic violence against women in heterosexual relationships; with little attention has been paid to other forms of domestic violence. Although women are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence (35%) than men (29%) in heterosexual relationships, a broader understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence is required before appropriate business measures to address its impact can be developed.

Abuse by Sexual Orientation:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): [2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation](#) found that that 44% of lesbian women, 61% of bisexual women, and 35% of heterosexual women experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. This same report states that 26% of gay men, 37% of bisexual men, and 29% of heterosexual men experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. Additionally, an American Academy of Family Physicians 2013 study found that 40.4% of self-identified lesbians and 56.9% of bisexual women have reported being victims of partner violence. In 2014, national surveys indicated that anywhere from 25-50% of gay and bisexual males have experienced physical violence from a partner.

Elderly Abuse:

According to the June 2013 edition of the National Institute of Justice Research In Brief: [Understanding Elder Abuse](#), elder abuse in the population 65 and older "is both a pervasive problem and a growing concern. Given that the vast majority (96.9 percent) of older Americans are residing in domestic settings, it is not surprising that the majority (89.3 percent) of elder abuse reported to Adult Protective Services (APS) occurs in domestic settings."

Adult Children\Sibling Abuse:

As with the traditional methodology of domestic violence research, the majority of child abuse research and prevention and control measures focus on children under the age of 18; with scarce research or statistical information available on abuse committed by parents and siblings on adult children. As with all other forms of domestic violence, the physiological and psychological impacts of is this type of abuse



on the victim are usually devastating; leaving them with the same emotionally traumatic symptoms as other victims of domestic abuse.

What Can Businesses Do?

More often than not, work is the only safe place a victim of domestic abuse is allowed to go to without the abuser. Understanding this and the spillover effect domestic abuse has in the form of lost productivity and the safety risk if the abuser shows up at the workplace, businesses should incorporate domestic violence guidelines into their overall workplace violence policy and response procedures.

- Define domestic violence. Abusive or violent behavior occurring between two or more people in a domestic relationship.
- Review existing workplace violence policy and procedures and determine how they can be modified to incorporate domestic violence.
- Determine what assistance the business is willing to provide to victims.
 - Employee assistance program
 - Flexible work schedule
 - Relocation to another facility
 - Time off for court, counseling or to look for new housing
 - Short-time leave of absence to enter a victim shelter program
- Develop specific guidelines for responding to situations that occur in the workplace:
 - Confidentiality of victim information.
 - What the employee\victim should do (i.e., provide a copy of the protective order to Security or Human Resources; notify Security if the abuser follows them to work or harasses them while they are at work, etc.)
 - Human Resources responsibilities.
 - Supervisor and manager responsibilities.
 - Security responsibilities
 - Receipt of protective order
 - Response to instances of an abuser showing up in the workplace. How do you protect the victim and workforce from harm?
- Communicate the workplace violence policy to all employees and onsite contractors and vendors.

Although there is little to nothing that businesses can do to intervene in domestic abuse that occurs outside of the workplace, there is much that they can and should do to assist employees who are victims of abuse and ensure a safe and secure workplace for everyone should an abuser show up at the victim's worksite.

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