White Paper: The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Workplace
Domestic violence, also known as relationship violence and intimate partner violence, is not just a tragedy that takes place in the privacy of the home. The fact is that domestic violence follows the victim to the workplace and the effects are devastating to the victim, the coworkers and the company’s bottom line.

No business is immune from the spillover of domestic violence in to the workplace. Overall, one in four women in the U.S. will be abused by an intimate partner during her lifetime. And among employed adults (men and women), the number is one in five. More than half of the victims surveyed say that their ability to work is affected by domestic violence; an astonishing 75 percent report some form of harassment from their abusers while they are at work.¹,²,³

Whether it’s a physical injury, a threatening phone call, stalking in the parking lot, missing work due to abuse at home, stress or distraction, the result of intimate partner violence is high absenteeism and turnover, lost wages, a heightened risk of violence to coworkers and lost productivity. The price for everyone is steep.

In terms of lost productivity alone, domestic violence costs businesses more than $729 million a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It jumps to more than $4 billion with the inclusion of medical and mental healthcare costs. Workplace incidences that lead to litigation can drive costs up further.⁴

Yet, despite the alarming numbers, and a growing concern that risk factors such as economic insecurity and job loss could increase threats, the majority of workplaces do not have a program to address domestic violence. “Employers must recognize that domestic violence is a health and safety issue and to address it just as they have with other health issues,” says Kim Wells, executive director of the Corporate Alliance of Employers to Prevent Violence (CAEPV).⁵,⁶

This White Paper provides crucial data about the human and financial costs of intimate partner violence and offers critical information about prevention and intervention strategies that can help employers safeguard their workers, productivity and bottom line.⁷,⁸
By definition, domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior that includes acts, or threatened acts, to gain power and control over a current or former spouse, family member, intimate partner or person with whom the perpetrator shares a child in common. “Typically, the violence is not just a one-time incident,” says Shari Lyn Pirone, Esq. of the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County, Pennsylvania. It usually escalates, beginning with name calling and intensifying to violent behavior. It’s important to know that employers are likely to have employees who are victims of domestic violence, which impacts the workplace in many ways, and that violence could come to the workplace.5,7,8

While domestic violence crosses all socioeconomic, age and religion lines, there is a gender difference. Eighty-five percent of the victims are women. And when the abuse occurs in the workplace, 92% of the victims are female with male perpetrators.9,10

Overall, the number of women experiencing intimate partner violence is stunning. An estimated 5.3 million acts of domestic abuse occurs among U.S. women each year.10

In addition to physical assaults that can range from slaps to rape to murder, victims may also suffer psychological abuse, constant verbal abuse and harassment, isolating from friends and family, and deprivation of financial resources.

Without access to finances, the victim may be forced to stay in the relationship or face economic hardship, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.7,8
There is no one root cause for domestic violence. Intimate partner violence stems from a combination of individual, society and situational factors. For example, violence may begin when an abuser has the need to control the victim, arising from extreme jealousy or if the abuser feels inferior to the victim regarding the level of education or income.\(^7\)

Abuse is also a behavior that is learned from the family of origin or community and where the abuser is not held accountable for their behavior.\(^12\)

Other contributing factors to violence include fragmentation of family structure, easy access to weaponry, TV media, an unstable economy and substance abuse, including the overuse of alcohol—considered a primary factor associated with violence.\(^12\)

At the workplace, violence may be prompted by layoffs/downsizing, insensitive terminations, rigid management styles, lack of individual responsibility where the employee does not feel as valued as their output, a feeling of not being heard or understood, or office romances.\(^12\)

“All of these factors cause stress, and increased stress can be a causative factor for domestic violence that carries over to the workplace,” says Bert Alicea, M.A., CEAP and Vice President of EAP+Work/Life Services at Health Advocate.\(^12\)

Workplace homicide is the leading cause of occupational death in U.S. women and it is growing.

The results of a study published in the 2012 issue of the *Annals of Epidemiology*, sheds light on the workplace locations where intimate partner violence against women is likely to occur. Most workplace homicides among women are the result of criminal intent such as those resulting from robberies of retail stores, which occurs in 39 percent of the cases. In 33 percent of the cases, the homicides were perpetuated by personal relations, and in nearly 80 percent of the time, intimate partners were the perpetrators.\

Women who work in certain occupations are at higher risk for homicide. The riskiest occupations include protective-service occupations, followed by healthcare, production and office/administration. In more than half of the incidents, the homicides occurred in parking lots—also the site where 20 percent of intimate partner assaults occurred.

Stalking the victim in the parking lot of the workplace when a victim is arriving to or leaving from work is one form of workplace-related partner abuse. No matter what the location of the abuse, however, 42 percent of workplace assaults occurred at the start of the workday. Furthermore, the assaults do not always come unexpectedly. In 12 percent of the cases, the victim was subject to a recent incident of abuse at the workplace or the victim warned someone that the threat was to occur.

Yet, only 10 percent of the employers took any precaution prior to the incident.
The Toll
Everyone Pays

No matter what form domestic violence takes or where in the workplace it occurs, abuse among employed victims can result in impaired performance, tardiness, missed days at work, lost wages and even an inability to hold on to a job.

According to a 2005 study of female employees in Maine who experienced domestic violence, 98 percent reported that the abuse affected their ability to perform their job duties. Nearly 60 percent reported losing their job due to domestic violence (fired or quit). Six out of the 10 women surveyed said they lost or quit a job as a result of domestic violence.7,8,14

In fact, research has found that job loss is a significant consequence of partner violence for an estimated 24-30 percent of abused women.15

All totaled, 8 million days of paid work are lost each year because of domestic violence, according to the CDC study cited previously. This is the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs.4

The Ripple Effect

Domestic violence in the workplace affects victims and coworkers alike, according to a survey conducted by the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence. In their poll of 1,200 full-time employed U.S. adults, (both men and women), 21 percent said they were victims of intimate partner violence and 44 percent of the victim’s coworkers reported personally experiencing the effects of domestic violence in their workplaces.2

Among the abuse victims, 64 percent reported that domestic violence caused productivity problems that included “distraction” followed by “fear of discovery,” “harassment by the intimate partner at work” (either by phone or in person), fear of the partner’s “unexpected visits,” and an “inability to complete assignments on time.” 2

Regarding the impact on the coworkers, the respondents revealed that they felt obligated to cover for a victim by performing the victim’s work or offering excuses for the victim’s absences. The coworkers also reported that they resented the victim because of the effect of their situation on the workplace. The highest number of the coworkers said they were “extremely to somewhat concerned” about their own safety.2
Abusers’ workplaces are also impacted

Employees who abuse their partners also affect the company’s viability. Abusers lose work time, are less productive, experience high turnover and have increased accidents. They also make inappropriate use of company resources.14

Figures released from the Maine Department of Labor and Family Crisis service showed that 78 percent of abusers (all males) use workplace resources at least once to express remorse, anger, check up on or threaten their victim. Seventy-four percent reported having easy access to the intimate partner’s workplace; 21 percent reported that they contacted their partner at the workplace in violation of a no-contact order.16

In other findings, researchers at the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence and the University of Vermont who polled nearly 200 offenders, found that almost half of the offender’s workday time was spent keeping track of their partner and what she was doing. Eighty percent said their job was negatively affected.10

Other key findings include:
• 29% contacted their partner while at work to say something that might have scared or intimidated the victim
• 20% left or were late to work to be abusive to their partner
• Three out of four had a hard time concentrating while at work because of their abuse of their intimate partners
• 55% telephoned their partner with the purpose of threatening, controlling or abusing the victim
• 13% had stopped by where they thought their partner would be while they were on the clock to check up on their partner or to do something that was threatening, controlling, or abusive to them

Based on the study’s findings, the authors commented that “employers must balance their workplace’s response to domestic violence, ensuring that victim safety is paramount and also that perpetrators are held accountable.” 10

Abuse Drives Up Healthcare Costs

Healthcare costs are higher for victims of partner abuse, and employers often pay the price. In the CDC study cited previously, intimate partner violence against women results in nearly 2 million injuries each year, more than 550,000 of which require medical attention.4

Whether the abuse causes physical, mental or emotional injury, as a whole, victims have more doctor visits, use more prescription drugs, and visit the emergency room more often than non-victims. The yearly cost adds up to $1775 more in medical costs for the abused victims who utilize hospital services, compared to non-victims.17

When all the direct medical and mental healthcare costs related to intimate partner violence are totaled, the overall healthcare cost is more than $4 billion a year.4
Despite the startling statistics and steep costs, only 30 percent of businesses have a formal workplace violence policy in place. Of these, only 44 percent have a policy that specifically addresses domestic violence, according to the Bureau of Labor statistics. When it comes to training managers about domestic violence, as few as 4 percent of businesses offer such a training program.

In the public sector, while only 21 states have domestic violence policies for government employees, the picture may soon change for federal employees. A memorandum issued in April, 2012 by President Obama requires that all federal agencies establish policies to provide a safe workplace and support for any employees who suffer from domestic violence. “This offers hope that the nation’s largest employer will become a model for all businesses,” notes Kim Wells of the CAEPV.

Domestic violence can expose a company to legal liability which can carry a hefty price tag. The Maricopa Association of Governments Regional Domestic Violence Council states, “Domestic violence may raise legal issues in various circumstances. A batterer may stalk or assault his partner or others in the workplace. Or, abuse may occur between two coworkers in a dating or marital relationship.”

If the domestic violence occurs in the workplace and employers were aware of the threat but did not take action, the employee could file a lawsuit, notes Robin Runge, Esq., Assistant Professor of Law at the University of North Dakota School of Law. Or, the employer may be required to pay workers’ compensation for any injuries that result from an incident at the workplace.

For these and other reasons, employers need to be aware of the following rules:

**Occupational Safety and Health Act Laws (known as OSHA).** Employers must maintain a safe workplace, which may include a violence-free workplace.

**Family and Medical Leave Laws (known as FMLA).** The law may require employers to grant leave to employees who are coping with domestic violence situations.

**Victim Assistance Laws.** The law may prohibit employers from taking adverse job actions against women who disclose their domestic violence situation or who take time off from their jobs to attend court appearances.

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Some research indicates that there may be a disconnect between employers’ awareness of domestic violence in their business and taking action.

In the Vermont study of abusers mentioned previously, 83 percent of the offenders’ supervisors were aware that the abusers took time off of work due to their domestic violence. However, only 32 percent of the employers offered a response to the employee about his domestic abuse.10,20

Other figures show that 66 percent of senior executives and 75 percent of Human Resources personnel feel their workplace would benefit from addressing domestic violence.22

So why are most employers reluctant to install policies to prevent it? In a focus group involving employers conducted by the Partnership for Prevention and the CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, the most commonly cited reasons for the reluctance include: uncomfortability with the subject, uncertainty about preventive roles, concern about confidentiality and intrusion, a desire to respect the employee’s privacy, and the need for guidance.4
**Crucial Strategies**

Domestic violence is a serious, recognizable and preventable problem, similar to other workplace health and safety issues that affect businesses and their bottom lines.\(^{23}\)

Addressing it effectively requires a collaborative effort involving employees, senior management, supervisors, law enforcement and community resources. Programs should be customized to the individual business and it starts with forming an assessment committee, notes University of North Dakota School of Law law professor Robin Runge, Esq.\(^{19}\)

Employers need to assess their organization’s unique needs, culture and goals; develop tailored workplace policies and procedures; train all senior management, supervisors and employees; offer useful information to their employees; and strive to ensure that their workplace supports all employees facing domestic violence.

“The program should be integrated in to every part of the existing corporate culture, from the leave and PTO policies to health benefits to resources listed on the intranet,” suggests Professor Runge. “The single message is that employees will be supported, kept safe and will not lose their job because of abuse.”\(^{19}\)

Managers need to know that they do not have to be experts in domestic abuse or solve the problem, she adds. There are resources including Employment Assistance Programs (EAP) with experts trained to handle all facets of domestic violence on both the employer and employee level for organizations of all sizes.\(^{19,6}\)

**Key program components**

A comprehensive domestic violence program should include the following components:

**A multidisciplinary policy.** The policy should be clear and visible and spell out:

- The prevention and intervention strategies to address domestic violence
- The support and assistance available for victims
- Any appropriate accommodations and leave options available, such as flex time or transferring employees to a different desk, shift or department
- Qualification for FMLA; unemployment compensation and time off, according to individual state laws
- Procedures for employees with performance issues related to domestic violence
- Disciplinary procedures for those who commit acts or threats of domestic violence\(^{23}\)
Form partnerships with community resources. Work with the local domestic violence centers that offer resources relating to emergency shelters, counseling, legal assistance and transitional housing for victims.

Work with local law enforcement personnel. Encourage employees to also do so regarding situations outside the workplace.

Have security guards available as escorts to cars or transportation stops. Additionally, register a protective order with security or office reception staff and post a photograph of the abuser with instructions not to let the person in the building.

Develop a broad communications campaign. Get the message out about abuse and local services in multiple ways: through newsletters, hotline numbers posted in highly visible locations like break rooms and health/first aid offices, in pay stubs and emails, phone directories, and on-line information databases. The communications should include a list of resources for both victims and abusers and be genderless.

Refer employees to hotlines that provide confidential and multi-cultural services. An important one to post: the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE

Educate employees about EAP use. Make confidential EAP professionals or external experts available to assist the employee with developing a safety plan.23

Workplace violence is an issue that affects the entire community.30

- John Howard, M.D., Director, National Institute for Safety and Occupational Health (NIOSH)
Training and threat assessment is vital

A policy that addresses threats, domestic violence, and has internal and external resources is still incomplete without manager training.12

A key strategy is to enlist EAP professionals to work with management to prepare a response plan. The plan should include how to intervene in domestic violence situations at work, and to inform managers and supervisors about consulting with an EAP counselor when they have concerns about either victims or perpetrators.12

Additionally, the EAP program can help employers form a threat assessment team comprised of management, HR and security to analyze past incidents, assess the potential for violence, and also assess their company’s preparedness.

“It’s important to focus less on the extreme violence like murder that makes the headlines but, comparatively, occurs only occasionally,” says Professor Runge. “In the vast majority of cases, when domestic violence spills over to the workplace, the effects are non-direct.” For example, a victim may be missing days because she is afraid her kids will be taken away if she goes to work. The next level is harassing phone calls or stalking.

“The goal should be for managers to learn to take all threats seriously and to respond appropriately. An experienced team of professionals can become the front-line educators about the non-direct warning signs and the best responses,” says Professor Runge.19

“Victims clearly know they are in danger...
If they feel like they can trust their employer they can warn them and take action."

Johnny Lee, Executive Director of Peace@Work31
A number of companies have demonstrated their commitment to creating “zero tolerance” programs and policies to intervene and prevent domestic violence. Here are four at the forefront of these efforts.

**Models of Success**

**Partners HealthCare**

The Boston-based company, in partnership with Massachusetts General Hospital, has appointed a domestic violence contact person within their EAP program, holds monthly employee awareness events, makes security personnel available to escort victims to and from court hearings, and offers victims additional paid days off.

“We want to keep victims working. If someone is not working, it gives the perpetrator more access to the victim, and the victim has less financial support to help provide additional safety,” remarked Donna Kausek, domestic violence specialist for Partners HealthCare in an article in the *Boston Globe*. “Keeping workers working is beneficial to everyone.”

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**Warning Signs**

The following behaviors could signal that an employee may be experiencing domestic violence:

- Obvious injuries such as bruises, black eyes, broken bones
- Inappropriate clothing for the season (sunglasses while indoors, etc.)
- Uncharacteristic absenteeism or lateness
- Requests for special accommodations, such as leaving early
- Isolation, including unusual quietness
- Uncharacteristic signs of anxiety, fear, emotional distress
- Unusual number of phone calls, emails from current or former partner, strong reactions to those calls, or reluctance to converse or respond to messages
- Disruptive personal visits to workplace by current or former partner

**The appropriate response**

Managers should meet with the employee in private and gently probe the issue, inform the employee of what they observed and express their concern. If the employee acknowledges the abuse, the manager should listen, show support and provide information about the company and community resources. If there is a direct threat to safety, the manager should contact the domestic violence response team, corporate security or local law enforcement.8,24
Verizon Wireless

The company’s multi-level domestic violence program includes accommodations for victims such as moving them to a new location to create a safer work environment for both the affected employee and coworkers. Verizon also ensures that their corporate security team enforces any court-issued restraining orders at all of their locations. 25

Commenting in Human Resource Executive Online on their SafeWork management training program, Martha Delehanty, vice president of Verizon’s human resources noted, “The most important outcome is the renewed awareness among our leadership team of the significant impact domestic violence has on our employees, the workplace, our business, and our communities.” 26

Liz Claiborne, Inc.

When a company-wide survey revealed that nearly a quarter of their employees were victims of domestic abuse, Liz Claiborne designed its all-encompassing “Safe Place to Work” program. A key component is its Domestic Violence Response Team. Since its inception, more than 50 of their employees have stepped forward seeking help.

Additionally, the program offers advice and support to employees who suspect that their co-workers are being abused or abusing others. 27

State Farm

The CAEPV has included State Farm among its “best practices” organizations, noting that it trains both managers and employees about domestic violence and includes accommodations such as assigning special parking spots, screening calls, and having paychecks delivered to another location.

The company also allows time off so employees can seek safety and protection, attend court appearances, arrange for new housing and receive medical care. 28,29

Conclusion

Companies who wish to enhance the health and safety of all their employees, reduce the impact on productivity and profitability and prevent liability, should not hesitate to install comprehensive domestic violence programs and policies. The workplace is one place where victims can find safety. It is also the place where the abuser is certain of their location. 12

Even if a victim leaves her abuser, she can be in danger, as leaving is the ultimate threat of power to the abuser. In fact, after a woman leaves her abuser, it is 20 times more likely that she will be a victim of workplace violence. 12

“Employers must be prepared to detect and address domestic conflicts not only after they arise, but before they arise,” says Professor Runge. 19

With proper awareness, guidance, tools and training, this mission can become a viable corporate initiative. 12
References


19. Runge, Robin, Esq., Assistant Professor of Law, University of North Dakota School of Law. Phone Interview. (2012).


28. State Farm and the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence. (1998)


White Paper: The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Workplace

This is a two-part publication, providing a White Paper and a Checklist of Strategies

Health Advocate™, Inc., the nation’s leading independent healthcare advocacy and assistance company, has published this White Paper to provide research about important issues relating to domestic violence that impact the workplace and how employers can meet the challenges. The White Paper offers comprehensive research about the scope, causes and costs of domestic violence, and its role in absences, lost productivity, accidents and illness. The companion “Checklist of Strategies: The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Workplace” provides a range of specific strategies to help employers develop policies to help reduce and prevent domestic violence in their organization.

A special thank you to the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County for their research, feedback and support.

Additional White Papers

The following previously published Health Advocate White Papers are available for free on our website at: Health Advocate.com/webinars_seminars.aspx. There is a companion Checklist that accompanies each White Paper.

- **Guide to Pandemic Business Planning & Communications**
  Learn how you can protect your employees and keep your business viable.

- **Guide to Workplace Wellness: Healthy Employees, Healthy Bottom Line**
  Find out how a wellness program is a cost-effective solution to rising healthcare costs.

- **Obesity in America: Workplace Solutions**
  Gain insight about incorporating weight management in a wellness program.

- **Stress in the Workplace: Meeting the Challenge**
  See how helping employees better manage stress can help preserve your bottom line.

- **Caregiving: The Impact on the Workplace**
  Learn cost-effective strategies to help support employees balance work/life.

- **Sleep Deprivation: A Wake-up Call for Business**
  Know how you can address sleep deprivation and preserve productivity.

- **The Impact of Breast Cancer on the Workplace**
  Discover the value of supporting employees returning to work during/after treatment.

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