



EMPLOYERS
AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

WHY IS DOMESTIC ABUSE A WORKPLACE ISSUE?

Domestic violence often becomes workplace violence. It isn't a "private matter" that stays in the home when its victims go to work. The lethality of domestic violence often increases at times when the batterer believes that the victim has left the relationship. Once a woman attempts to leave an abusive partner, the workplace can become the only place the assailant can locate and harm her. Or the effects of abuse can spill over into the workplace when the victim is harassed by threatening phone calls, absent because of injuries or less productive from extreme stress.

Employers know that personal, "real life" problems affect job performance, and that job performance affects the bottom line. Most employers now routinely offer employees a full spectrum of assistance programs to help them deal with issues such as drug addiction, depression, and other personal and/or family problems. Employers long ago found that doing so is ultimately more cost-effective than leaving employees to solve these problems on their own.

Sixty-six percent of senior corporate executives believe domestic violence is a major problem in today's society. One-third of them thought this problem has a negative impact on their bottom lines, and 56% said they were personally aware of employees and other individuals affected by domestic violence. 68% believe their company's financial performance would benefit from addressing the issue of domestic violence among their employees (Corporate Leader Survey, Liz Claiborne, Inc., 2002).

Business should respond to domestic violence for its own self-interest, and it should do so in a businesslike way. By working to mitigate the economic, legal, and productivity risks related to domestic violence, an employer will also create a workplace that is safer for victims, and will send a powerful message to their local community that responding to domestic violence is "good business".

Domestic violence is a serious, recognizable, and preventable problem like thousands of other workplace health and safety issues that affect a business and its bottom line.

Through EADV, an employer can assess its 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 violence.

HOW DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECT THE WORKPLACE?

Domestic violence affects productivity and increases health care costs:

- In February of 2008, the CDC released the most comprehensive US survey regarding intimate partner violence. **23.6% of women and 11.5% of men reported at least one lifetime episode of intimate-partner violence.** How many employees is that in your company?
- **The annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence is estimated as \$727.8 million with over 7.9 million paid workdays lost per year.** (*Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States, 2003. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.*)
- **74% of employed battered women were harassed by their partner while at work.** This caused 56% of them to be late for work at least five times a month, 28% to leave early at least five days a month, and 54% to miss at least three full days of work a month.
- **The health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide by intimate partners exceed \$5.8 billion each year.** Of this total, nearly \$4.1 billion are for direct medical and mental health care services and productivity losses account for nearly \$1.8 billion, according to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (*Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States, US Centers for Disease Control. Report released April 28, 2003*)
- **71% of EAP providers surveyed have dealt with an employee being stalked at work** by a current or former partner and 83% have assisted an employee with a restraining order.
- **78% of Human Resources professionals** polled by Personnel Journal said that domestic violence is a workplace issue (April, 1995, page 65).
- **94% of Corporate Security Directors surveyed rank domestic violence as a high security problem** at their company. National Safe Workplace Institute survey, as cited in "Talking Frankly About Domestic Violence," Personnel Journal, April, 1995, page 64).

Batterers also may be less productive or miss work because of violence, incarceration, or legal proceedings resulting from the violence. Results of a survey on the impact of domestic violence offenders on workplace safety and health revealed that perpetrators negatively affect workplace safety, productivity and are responsible for lost time:

- 78% use workplace resources at least once to express remorse or anger to, check up on, or threaten the victim.
- 74% has easy access to their intimate partner's workplace, with 21% reporting that they contacted her at the workplace in violation of a no contact order.
- 48% reported difficulty concentrating at work, with 19% reporting a workplace accident or near miss
- 42% of offenders were late for work.

DOES THIS ISSUE EXPOSE MY COMPANY TO LEGAL LIABILITY?

Aside from the safety, ethical and bottom-line incentives to employers in developing positive policies regarding employees facing domestic violence, there are liability issues to consider. Domestic violence may raise legal issues in various circumstances. A batterer may stalk or assault his/her partner or others in the workplace. Or, abuse may occur between two co-workers in a dating or marital relationship.

Several laws may apply:

- **Occupational safety and health laws** generally require employers to maintain a safe workplace, which may include a violence-free workplace.
- **Family and medical leave laws** may require employers to grant leave to employees who are coping with domestic violence situations.
- **Victim assistance laws** may prohibit employers from taking adverse job actions against women disclose their situation or who take time off from their jobs to attend court appearances.
- Under certain circumstances, acts of violence against women may **constitute a form of sexual harassment**, which may violate federal or state anti-discrimination laws. This is true if the abusive partner creates a hostile environment at her workplace, and the company knowingly fails to take reasonable corrective action, such as informing security personnel of the problem and instructing them to take appropriate steps.

These are not marginal business concerns -- public perceptions, productivity, costs, safety, and liability lie at the core of many vital corporate interests. They are, in fact, exactly the areas that any prudent leader will take into account when considering any issue that affects employees and the workplace. Establishing a policy, enacting procedures, creating a network of resources, and insisting on a culture that is intolerant of violence in any form is not only good business – it could save a life.