



FACT SHEET

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A WORKPLACE ISSUE

Domestic violence: the background

- In a national survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 15% of Australian women said they had experienced violence by a previous partner and 2.1% by a current partner.ⁱ
- While men who experience violence are most likely to be assaulted by a stranger, women remain most likely to be assaulted by a current or former partner or family member.ⁱⁱ
- VicHealth found that domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged 15-44 years, being a greater contributor than factors like high blood pressure, smoking or obesity.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Those experiencing domestic violence suffer significantly from physical and mental health issues. Among the most debilitating are acute injuries, chronic physical health conditions including heart conditions and significant mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.^{iv}

“The day I broke up was the day I went to the refuge. He rang me at work and said ‘Do you want to get the sack because I’m going to tell them what you are really like’. I went to see my boss and said I was too scared to go home. She put me onto the counsellor at the hospital who put me in touch with the single women’s refuge and I moved straight there. My boss was really good. They are very supportive as far as domestic violence goes, because there are a lot of single women in the hospital. I didn’t take anytime off because I wouldn’t get paid. Looking back now I should have had a week off. But I had a lot of bills to pay so couldn’t take time off.”

- Casual clerical worker in a large hospital

Domestic violence affects women in the workplace

- Two thirds of Australian women who report violence by a current partner are in paid employment.^v
- American research has found that between 50% and 74% of employed women experiencing domestic violence are harassed by their partners while they are at work, physically or by phone.^{vi}
- The impacts of domestic violence may stop women working or adversely affect their work performance due to sleep deprivation, injuries, clothes being hidden, promises of child minding being withdrawn, or women being physically prevented from leaving the home.^{vii}
- Harassment from partners or ex-partners in the workplace can lead to women experiencing conflict with their co-workers, absenteeism, tardiness and distraction while at work. Women may need to take time off to attend court or doctors' appointments. They may be fired or have to resign from their job for safety reasons.^{viii}
- Women with a history of domestic violence have a more disrupted work history and are consequently on lower personal incomes, have had to change jobs more often and are employed at higher levels in casual and part-time work than women with no experience of violence.^{ix}

"A client had to pack up and leave her workplace at very short notice as she'd received a call that indicated she was at high risk. Her employer is now saying she abandoned her work and is refusing to pay her notice period. She was too scared and embarrassed to let anyone at work know she had to leave so technically they have an argument not to pay her. This is a pretty typical situation that women find themselves in. If they let the boss know, they tend to get dismissed anyway."

- Working Women's Centre

The cost of domestic violence to workplaces and human capital

- By acting to reduce the impact of domestic violence in the workplace, employers can save the costs associated with lost productivity, misuse of resources, absenteeism and staff turnover.^x
- We know that being in employment is a key pathway to leaving a violent relationship.^{xi} The financial security that employment affords women can allow them to escape becoming trapped and isolated in violent and abusive relationships, and to maintain, as far as possible, their home and standard of living.

Domestic violence affects women in this workplace

- There have been reported incidents of domestic violence on the UNSW Campus involving staff and students. UNSW Security Services believe that there are more incidents of domestic violence occurring than are being reported.

“There have been situations of domestic violence on campus where students and staff have been harassed or intimidated by boyfriends or ex-husbands and have needed to take out apprehended domestic violence orders.”

- Deputy Manager, UNSW Security Services

ENDNOTES

i Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Personal Safety Survey, Australia 2005*, Cat No 4906.0 Reissue, AGPS, Canberra, p. 11

ii Ibid, p. 10

iii VicHealth 2004, *The health costs of violence: measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, p. 10

iv M Costello, D Chung & E Carson 2005, 'Exploring alternative pathways out of poverty: making connections between domestic violence and employment practices', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 40, issue 2, pp. 253-267

v Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Personal Safety Survey, Australia*, p. 34

vi Family Violence Prevention Fund 1998, *The Workplace Guide for Employers, Unions and Advocates*, San Francisco, CA. Cited in S Franzway, C Zufferey & D Chung 2007, 'Domestic violence and women's employment', paper presented at *Our Work, Our Lives Conference*, September, Adelaide, p.3; TK Logan, L Shannon, J Cole & J Swanberg 2007, 'Partner stalking and implications for women's employment', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 22, issue 3, pp. 268-291

vii RA Brandwein & DM Filiano 2000, 'Toward real welfare reform: the voices of battered women', *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, vol. 15, issue 2, pp. 224-243; A Moe & B Myrtle 2004, 'Abject economics: the effects of battering and violence on women's work and employability', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 10, issue 1, pp. 29-55

viii Franzway *et al.*, 'Domestic violence and women's employment'

ix Ibid

x C Reeves & AM O'Leary-Kelly 2007, 'The effects and costs of intimate partner violence for work organisations', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 22, issue 3, pp. 327-344

xi S Patton 2003, *Pathways: how women leave violent men*, Government of Tasmania, Hobart, p. 71