

Domestic Violence and the Workplace

Quarterly Education Series
SMC Family Abuse Prevention Council
April 9th, 2014
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Domestic abuse is a pattern of behavior in which one intimate partner uses:

- emotional abuse
 - coercion, threats, intimidation
 - isolation
 - physical violence
 - sexual violence
 - economic abuse
- to control the other partner.

Key = controlling
behavior

It does not have to
involve hitting.....

Domestic violence is pervasive

- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will experience serious physical or sexual violence or stalking from a current or former partner [2010 CDC National IP and SV Survey]
- 23.7% of 401 Pennsylvania employees had experienced DV while employed [2013 Effects of Partner Violence on the Workplace]
- 64% of employees experiencing DV felt their work was affected [2005 CAEPV Survey]
- 51% of stalking victims had at least one stalking incident on the work premises [Reeves J Interpers Violence 2007 22:327]

Abusers sabotage work – why?

- Because they can - DV is about control
- Want employee dependent on them
 - Not want partner to have a source of money so they could leave
 - Economic abuse in other areas (deny bank accounts, credit cards in employee name)
- Or if abuser is unemployed, want employee to bring home money but not
 - Have satisfaction or self-esteem in their job
 - Develop friendships or social support

How do they sabotage work?

Examples of tactics:

- Harass by phone, email, or in person on the job
- Bother coworkers, lie to them about employee
- Refuse to drive to work at last minute
- Physically restrain from going to work
- Physically force to leave work
- Cause obvious injuries so employee stays home

- Sabotage car, steal car keys or transportation money
- Lie about children's health or safety to get employee to leave work
- Not show up for child care or carpool
- Not allow employee to take professional courses, travel out of town for work

“Why don’t you just leave?”

- Denial
- Belief batterer can change
- Intense family, cultural, religious pressure to “make it work”
- Economic, immigration issues
- Isolated, depressed, psychologically beaten down
- Threat of harm to children, self

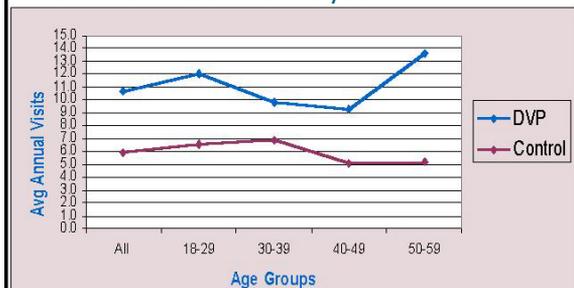
Why are we asking this question?
Why aren’t we asking why the abuser does this?

Impact on Employee

Personal impact

- Physical and emotional health impacted
 - Depression, anxiety, PTSD, sleeping problems, suicidality
 - Vague symptoms or chronic pain such as headaches, abdominal pain
- Isolation from friends and family
- Chronic fear of partner’s unexpected visit
- Without support victims may be too afraid to seek legal help, medical treatment or steps to insure safety

What domestic violence costs: 5 more medical visits a year



Professional impact

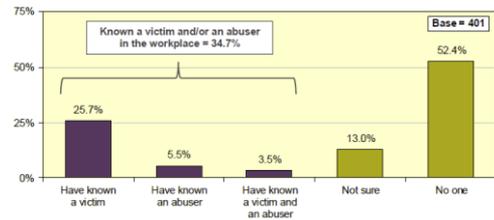
- Absenteeism, tardiness
- Decreased concentration or job performance
- Workplace interruptions
 - Controlling, harassing, stalking behaviors
- Worry re: employment discrimination by co-workers and employers including denial of promotions and firing if disclose
- Destroyed credit

Job retention

- Up to 50% may lose job –
 - fired for absenteeism, productivity, performance
 - resign due to feeling:
 - ashamed of events from partner
 - ashamed of performance issues
 - judgmentalism from others
 - fear for children at home
- 15% of homeless women in Santa Clara County are fleeing an abusive relationship
 - 50% have school age children with them
 - Past several years all county shelters full, turned away 1,524 women and children last year

Impact on Co-Workers

Co-workers may be first to notice



2013 Pennsylvania Employee Survey

- How other employees knew –
 - absenteeism
 - coming in late/leaving early/frequent breaks
- Concern for the employee
- Effect on other employees
 - 47.9% had to cover work/make excuses (resentment)
 - 39.3% relationships were affected, decreased morale
 - 20.5% other employees didn't get as much work done
 - 20.5% extremely concerned for their own safety
- 83% said they would have a very positive attitude toward an employer that put in place a DV awareness program

Impact on Organizations

Impact areas

- Decreased productivity, performance
- Turnover and recruitment costs
- Increased health care costs
- Security and liability issues
- Overall management time and energy

CDC DV Workplace Costs (2003 dollars)

- Annual costs from DV lost productivity \$727 mill
- Annual total direct costs \$8.3 billion (productivity, lost work days and direct health costs)
- Indirect health costs (depression, chronic pain), disability
- Turnover costs
- 7.9 million workdays lost each year from DV
 - Stalking 10.1 days/year
 - Sexual assault 8.1 days/year
 - Physical assault 7.2 days/year

Why not just fire these employees?

- Very pervasive problem with large numbers of employees
- You don't know who they are
 - Higher wage/status positions may be very hidden because want to be seen as competent professionals able to handle personal situations
- You've created a disincentive for disclosure that creates a safety concern
- It is less expensive to keep a current employee
- It may soon become illegal to fire someone just because they are experiencing DV

Better to...

- Be proactive
- Demonstrate a willingness to assist victims
- State that victims will not be penalized for seeking assistance
- Clearly identify avenues for assistance
- This leads to:
 - Improved productivity, safety, morale, retention
 - Decreased healthcare costs, liability

What Helps Employees?

What keeps women employed?

- Study of women with restraining orders
 - 314 employed
 - 171 unemployed but employed within past year
- Significant helpful factors:
 - schedule flexibility
 - assistance with developing a work security plan
 - screening phone calls from the violent partner
 - coworker lending a listening ear
 - coworker spending break time with employee

Swanberg J Interpers Violence 2007 22:292

Benefits to employee by working

- Without job - no resources to be able to leave, seek medical or legal help, childcare
- Work may be the only place employee "allowed" alone outside the home
- Improved social connectedness
- Increased self-esteem

Employee support works!

- Your support can substantially make a difference in employee's (and their children's) life and work
- The majority of women in abusive relationships who leave never have another abusive relationship
- If employees are supported, proven decreased absenteeism
- Many of these employees are high achievers (to counteract home life) and are very loyal if supported