

Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, & Sexual Harassment and Employment Sabotage

What Employers Should Know and How to Respond

Domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) are terms that describe a range of overlapping violent behaviors and actions. These acts are purposeful and deliberate with the goal of gaining power and control over another person. These forms of violence can include, but are not limited to, acts of physical and sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, coercion and threats, isolation, economic abuse, and employment sabotage. DVSASSH not only impacts an individual's personal life but also their ability to thrive in the workplace. Employment Sabotage is a form of abuse that describes behaviors and actions designed to negatively impact their target's employment.

What is Employment Sabotage (ES)?

Employment sabotage (ES) encompasses behaviors intended to prevent an individual experiencing DVSASSH from obtaining or maintaining employment.ⁱ The goal of ES is to deprive an individual of the financial resources and opportunities necessary to become free from an abusive relationship. ES can also isolate the person experiencing DVSASSH from others in the workplace who may provide valuable resources and support.

ⁱ Stylianou, A. Economic Abuse Within Intimate Partner Violence: A Review of the Literature. *Violence and Victims* Vol 33. Issue 1., Jan 2018.

ⁱⁱ Postmus, J., Plummer, S., & Stylianou, A. (2016). Measuring Economic Abuse in the Lives of Survivors: Revising the Scale of Economic Abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 22(6), 692–703.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hess, C., & Del Rosario, A. (2018). *Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security*. Institute for Women's Policy Research; Ridley, E., Rioux, J., Lim, K. C., Mason, D., Houghton, K. F., Luppi, F., & Melody, T. (2005). *Domestic Violence Survivors at Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment*. Main Department of Labor & Family Crisis Services.

What Does ES Look Like?

Harm-doers seeking to sabotage an individual's employment may use a range of tactics with the goal of causing their target to get fired, quit, or otherwise be ostracized within the workplace. ES includes actions that interfere with an individual's ability to go to work, constitute a misuse of workplace property or resources, and/or disrupt their target's ability to successfully perform their job.

Disrupting Access to Work	Misusing Work Resources	Impairing Job Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impeding access to transportation by hiding car keys, hiding bus passes, or letting air out of tires• Physically restraining their target so they cannot leave the home• Failing to provide childcare as promised• Inflicting visible injuries to discourage their target from going to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Destroying workplace property such as clothing or electronic equipment• Impersonating their target via email or other online forms of communications• Contacting their coworkers and supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Showing up at the workplace• Calling repeatedly at work• Causing fear that impedes their target's job duties and that of their coworkers• Creating distractions to prevent their target from focusing• Keeping their target up all night to impact job performance

People experiencing violence report being frequently late for work, having to take time off, struggling with concentrating and performing on the job, and ultimately losing their job or having to quit because of ES.^{iv}

How Can Workplaces Support Impacted People?

It is important for employers to recognize that behavior they may interpret as evidence of performance issues could be the result of abusive behavior. It is crucial for employers to understand abusive behavior is beyond the control of the targeted employee and that this behavior is intended to cause problems at work and that an employee's termination may be the harm-doer's ultimate goal.

Maintaining employment is a matter of safety.

^{iv} Stylianou, A. Economic Abuse Within Intimate Partner Violence: A Review of the Literature. Violence and Victims Vol 33. Issue 1., Jan 2018.

Employers

To support the safety and job stability of individuals experiencing violence, employers should examine their policies, protocols, and practices when it comes to responding to DVSASSH. Employers should familiarize themselves with how these forms of violence can threaten employment.

- An employer can show their commitment to supporting individuals experiencing violence by having a responsive and comprehensive DVSASSH policy; enforcing a code of conduct that stresses employee safety; and investing in employee benefits that promote health and well-being.
 - An employer should create a prevention strategy that:
 - (1) addresses how to prevent workplace harassment and recognizes DVSASSH in the workplace and at home;
 - (2) identifies resources within the workplace and community; and
 - (3) helps employees understand how to prevent DVSASSH.
- Individuals experiencing violence should not be held responsible or penalized for the actions of others and steps, such as safety planning, should be taken to support an individual's ability to work.
- Processes addressing absenteeism, misconduct, misuse of work resources, and performance issues should consider the potential impacts of both ES and DVSASSH. An employer should share workplace resources and safety accommodations, as appropriate, to support an employee's ability to succeed at work.
- When reviewing applications or conducting background checks for offers of employment, employers should consider the impact of DVSASSH on an employee's work history, credit score, or criminal record.
- Employers should educate employees about DVSASSH. This education should include:

- the impact DVSASSH may have on both the individual experiencing violence and the workplace;
- the workplace's strategies to prevent and respond to DVSASSH; and
- how supervisors and coworkers can support employees experiencing violence.
- Employers should foster a strong relationship with local victim service providers and other local supportive organizations that are resources for individuals experiencing DVSASSH. Both the [National Domestic Violence Hotline \(the Hotline\)](#) and [RAINN \(the Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network\)](#) offer directories to locate local service providers.

Supervisors/Coworkers

If you suspect an employee or coworker may be experiencing DVSASSH and/or ES, there are things you can do to help.

- Familiarize yourself with your workplace's policies as they relate to DVSASSH, including information on confidentiality, relevant leave protections, and accommodations that may be available to support an employee's safety at work.
- When assessing performance, consider how DVSASSH and ES can affect an employee's work performance. Consider exploring supportive accommodations before proceeding with any disciplinary action or a performance improvement plan.
- Have contact information for [the Hotline](#), [RAINN](#), your Employee Assistance Program, and your local domestic violence and rape crisis programs available to provide referrals. Ask how the impacted employee wants this information to be shared with them (virtually or on paper) as one method may be safer than the other for the individual experiencing violence. You can also reach out to these programs yourself to discuss how to best support the individual.
- Start the conversation by checking in and sharing your concern about the impacted employee's well-being.
 - **Practice Empathy:** Be an attentive and empathic listener. Let the employee know that what they are experiencing is not their fault. Ask how you can help. Build trust by following through with the support you offer and respecting their privacy.

- **Avoid Judgment:** Experiencing DVSASSH is NEVER someone's fault. Respect others' experiences and decisions. Trust that they know what is best for their situation.
- **Share Resources:** Offer information, provide the phone number for helplines, and inform them about any available workplace support.
- **Put Privacy First:** Always let the person experiencing violence decide what, when, how, and with whom to share information. If your employer mandates you report certain information, let the individual know what you must share and with whom.

Workplaces Respond provides technical assistance to workplace stakeholders seeking to better prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, And sexual harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the Resource Center



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