

Domestic and Dating Violence and the Workplace

This factsheet series explores how domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) – impacts employees and the workplace. This factsheet defines domestic and dating violence, describes how to recognize it, and importantly, lists steps workplaces can take to better respond to the impacts of domestic violence among employees.

Domestic and Dating Violence

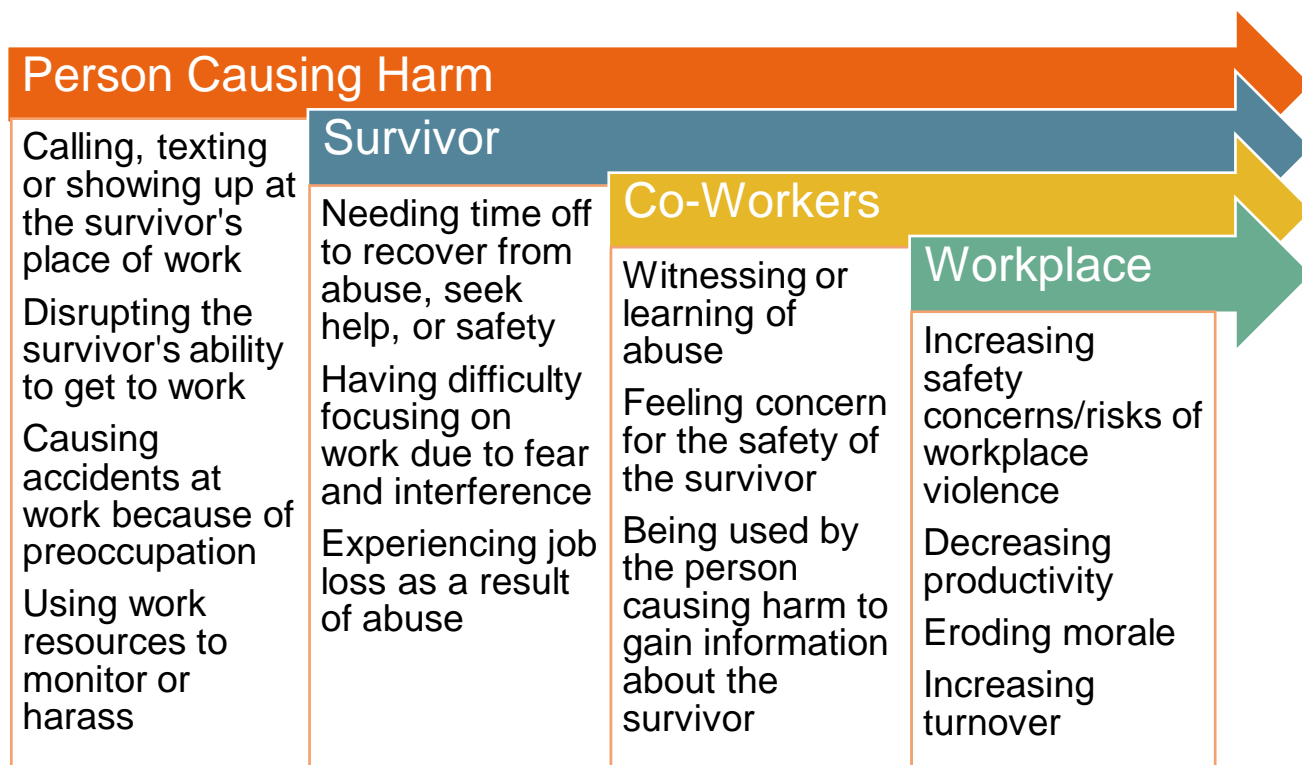
Domestic and dating violence is a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by one partner to maintain power and control over another current or former intimate partner. This includes people with any current or former romantic involvement, for example dating, previously dating, on again/off again, married, divorced, or living together or apart. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behavior that intimidates, manipulates, humiliates, isolates, frightens, terrorizes, coerces, threatens, hurts, injures, or wounds someone. It can also include “digital abuse”, the use of technology, such as smartphones, the internet, or social media, to intimate, harass, threaten, or isolate another.

Prevalence

An estimated 59 million women (41 percent) and 31.1 million men (26.3 percent) will experience the impacts of domestic and dating violence in their lifetime.ⁱ While no studies have specifically measured prevalence among U.S. workers, a 2009 survey of 2,400 employees found that 10 percent of male and female employees experienced domestic or dating violence that year.ⁱⁱ Given this wide spread prevalence, domestic and dating violence impacts millions of workers and their workplaces every day.

Recognizing Domestic and Dating Violence in the Workplace

Regardless of where it occurs, domestic and dating violence has profound impacts on employee safety and productivity, not only for the individual experiencing violence but the workplace as a whole.ⁱⁱⁱ



Individuals who commit acts of domestic and dating violence negatively impact their own workplaces by using employer resources such as laptops or phone or work time to monitor or harass the survivor, decreased productivity, and even causing accidents because they were preoccupied. In addition to the physical, emotional, and cognitive impacts of domestic and dating violence, survivors often experience employment sabotage threatening their ability to work and keep their job.

Co-workers are also impacted when other employees experiencing domestic and dating violence. They may try to help by taking on job duties when a survivor is dealing with abuse, want to provide resources but are unsure what to do, or they may even fear for their own safety if the person causing harm shows up at the workplace.

Together these ripple effects can result in serious safety risks, decreased productivity, leading to eroded morale and employee turnover.

Responding to and Preventing the Impacts of Domestic and Dating Violence on Employees

Employers have a crucial role in preventing and responding to the impacts domestic and dating violence, and all forms of violence, have on employees and the workplace. Here are five steps every employer should take:

1. Create or update workplace policies

Address DVSASSH in your workplace policies. Consider your codes of conduct, anti-bullying policies, policies, leave policies,^{iv} workplace violence policies, investigation and disciplinary processes, and other relevant policies affecting people experiencing DVSASSH.

2. Provide supports and accommodations

To mitigate the impact DVSASSH has on employees, be sure to provide reasonable accommodations, such as having a different work location or schedule and Employee Assistance Programs, to help support their safety and ability to work.

3. Understand the risk and protective factors

Certain industries and occupations have higher risk factors for sexual harassment; meaning that there are more opportunities for a coworker, supervisor, or other party to harass an individual. Some of these risk factors include working for tips where one's job and income rely on customer satisfaction where customers may feel they can exhibit unwanted advances or sexual conduct; working in an isolated context such as hotel housekeepers, domestic workers, janitors, and agricultural workers where the work is expected to be done alone; workplaces that have a "high-value" employee^v or have significant power differences between employees and supervisors; and working with a temporary visa or lacking legal immigration status as these situations may cause fear that the worker's immigration status might be at risk.^{vi}

To learn more about risk and protective factors in the workplace from our Risk and Protective Factor Assessment, please visit <http://workplacesrespond.org>.

4. Raise awareness

Shame and stigma often prevent individuals from seeking support. By raising awareness and challenging myths around DVSASSH, employers can demonstrate their commitment to supporting survivors, deter others from using employer resources (such as laptops, phones, or company vehicles), as a means to harm others, and create an environment where coworkers and supervisors feel comfortable holding people causing harm accountable.

5. Train employees

Employees need to be aware of relevant workplace policies that address all forms of violence, what resources are available to support survivors, what their responsibilities are if they witness harassment, and how they can best support coworkers.

For training guidance, please visit for sample curriculum at <http://workplacesrespond.org>.

6. Create a culture of care

Above all, employees need to feel safe and supported in the workplace. By creating an environment in which all employees are treated with dignity and respect, employers can help to ensure that employees experiencing DVSASSH don't have to suffer in silence and have access to the support and resources necessary to be safe at work.

To learn more about how to create a comprehensive workplace violence prevention and response program visit www.workplacesrespond.org.

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.



This project is supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-22-GK-04852-NRCW awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed herein or in any materials herein, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

© 2024 Futures Without Violence. All rights reserved. This product provides only general information; it does not constitute or supplant legal advice or consist of the practice of law and should not be used or relied upon as such. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation and upon the law in specific jurisdictions. Do not rely on legal information without consulting an attorney licensed to practice law in your jurisdiction.

ⁱ Ruth Leemis et al (2022). "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence" (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.)

ⁱⁱ Reeves and O'Leary-Kelly. (2009) Study of the Effects of Intimate Partner Violence on the Workplace. (Washington, DC: Office on Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Hess and Del Rosario, "Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security." (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018); Ridley et al., "Domestic Violence Survivors at Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment" (Augusta, ME: Main Department of Labor & Family Crisis Services, October 2005), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. "Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States." (Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2003).; Schmidt, AB. "Effects of Domestic Violence on the Workplace: A Vermont Survey of Male Offenders Enrolled in Batterer Intervention Programs." (Burlington, VT: Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont, 2012); Swanberg JE, Logan TK., "Domestic violence and Employment: A Qualitative Study." Journal of Occupational Health Psychology. 2005;10(1):3–17;

^{iv} In many states and jurisdictions, employers are required to provide job-protect leave to survivors of domestic and dating violence. To learn more visit: <https://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/state-guide/>

^v A "high-value" employee is someone who does not feel they need to comply with workplace policies because they have a name that is used to raise money, gain notoriety, or otherwise bring positive external reinforcement for the workplace.

^{vi} Shaw, E., Hegewisch, A, and Hess, C. (2018). *Sexual Harassment and Assault at Work: Understanding the Costs*. Retrieved from https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/IWPR-sexual-harassment-brief_FINAL.pdf