

Risk and Protective Factor Assessment for Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, and Sexual Harassment in the World of Work

A critical component of preventing and responding to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) in the world of work is addressing the organizational, occupational, and cultural factors that can increase employees' risk of experiencing DVSASSH while at work. This tool is intended to help workplace leaders assess and address the risk factors that exist within their workplace to prevent employees from experiencing the impacts of DVSASSH in workplaces. Since each workplace is unique in the work being done, its size, and its structure, some of the risk factors included in this assessment may be more relevant than others.

What are Risk Factors and Protective Factors?

There are evidence-based risk factors that are known to create conditions that are “linked to a greater likelihood of violence perpetration” and expose employees to potential experiences of DVSASSH in the workplace.ⁱ These factors—such as relying on tips and centralized power structures—are a combination of individual, relational, community, and societal characteristics, some of which may be within an employer’s control. It is important to note that these are contributing factors and not direct causes of violence.

There are important steps that can be taken to reduce these risks through protective measures. Protective factors are conditions that may reduce the risk of experiencing violence or act as a violence prevention tool. Protective factors can include a range of approaches that impact policy, practices, employee education and training, job structure, and organizational culture.

Organizations must recognize these risk factors and take proactive measures to prevent DVSASSH in the workplace. This toolkit includes an online assessment that employees at any level can complete. After completing the assessment, you will receive a list of existing risk and protective factors within your workplace. You will also receive suggested steps you can implement to reduce an employee's risk of DVSASSH in the workplace.

Some communities are at a greater risk for experiencing DVSASSH. These disproportionate effects are the result of conditions of inequality and precarity that makes specific communities more vulnerable to violence.

For support, please visit the Workplaces Respond: National Resource Center website and submit a request for technical assistance:

<https://futureswithoutviolence.formtitan.com/WorkplacesTAForm#/>

Workplaces Respond offers free resources, training, and technical assistance to employers, workers, and advocates to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the technical assistance request portal.



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Resource Type: **Workplace Tool**
Primary Audience: **Employers**

Risk and Protective Factor Assessment Questionnaire

Instructions:

This questionnaire is most effective when completed by a taskforce or committee of workplace leaders and employees of various identities, roles, and tenures throughout the company. Using available workplace policies, human resources data, culture survey results, and observations from employees, read the statement and determine whether the statement is true or not true for the employer. If you are uncertain, mark no.

Alternatively, the employer can survey employees to assess their perspectives and potentially identify areas where more effective communication is needed if there is a difference between perception and reality. An example of this difference is if there is a workplace policy on DVSASSH in the employee handbook, but employees indicate there is not one.

After completing the assessment, you will receive a list of existing risk and protective factors within your workplace. You will also receive suggested steps you can implement to reduce the employee's risk of DVSASSH in the workplace. For support, please submit a request to the Workplaces Respond: National Resource Center team [here](#).

Yes	No	Workplace Policy and Practices
		Does the employer have a code of conduct that is modeled and upheld by workplace leaders?
		Is there a workplace policy on preventing and responding to DVSASSH impacting employees in addition to a sexual harassment policy?
		Are employees paid a living wage and provided essential benefits such as paid leave and healthcare?
		Is an employee's pay or success independent of third-parties, such as customers, clients, or vendor relationships?

Yes	No	Workforce Culture
		Are there minimal power differences between staff and executives?
		Are all employees, regardless of position and influence, held to the same standard of conduct and held accountable when they do not?
		Are all employees covered by existing worker's rights laws (such as the Fair Labor Standards Act or Family Medical Leave Act)?
		Are employees educated about their rights as workers and is information about laws affecting workers made readily available for all employees?
Yes	No	Work Environment
		Is the workplace regularly assessed for health and safety hazards including employee exposure to violence and harassment?
		Do employees experience a work environment free of sex-based and racial discrimination, bullying, and harassment?
		Is the workplace free of alcohol or drugs?
		Do employees work in well-populated environments where they are not physically isolated?
		Does the employer regularly conduct culture surveys to assess and improve the workplace for employees?

How to interpret the results:

Yes responses to these questions indicate a protective factor that supports employee safety and wellbeing. **No** responses indicate areas of risk that employers should seek to mitigate through appropriate changes in policies, practices, and supports.

Workplace DVSASSH Risk Factors

There are evidence-based risk factors that are known to create conditions that are “linked to a greater likelihood of violence perpetration” and expose employees to potential experiences of DVSASSH in the workplace.ⁱⁱ These factors are a combination of individual, relational, community, and societal characteristics, some of which may be within an employer’s control. It is important to note that these are contributing factors and not direct causes of DVSASSH. Addressing each of these risk factors will improve employee safety and wellbeing and contribute to a better workplace for all.

Workplace Policy and Practices

- **There are no workplace policies and procedures to proactively prevent and address DVSASSH.** It is important for workplaces to proactively and affirmatively state that DVSASSH, and other forms of workplace harassment and violence, are unacceptable and that the employer is committed to providing employees with a safe and supportive work environment.ⁱⁱⁱ Without supportive policies such as sick and safe leave, workplace adjustments, or anti-retaliation policies, and clear and confidential pathways to seek support or report harassment, individuals experiencing DVSASSH may risk losing their job to pursue safety and are then exposed to further harm.^{iv}
- **Compensation does not provide economic stability and contributes to financial precarity among employees.** Financial precarity limits an individual’s ability to be safe and healthy and can increase their exposure to DVSASSH.^v Employees may not report harassment due to fear of retaliation and job loss or not seek help from an abusive relationship because they cannot afford to take time off.^{vi} This risk is more pronounced among workers with low wages and a lack of benefits (such as healthcare and paid leave), and a significant obstacle to many workers when salaries fall below a living wage.^{vii}
- **Third parties have significant influence over employees’ pay, reputation, or employment.** When third parties – such as clients, customers, patients, users, and vendors – have the power to influence an employees’ pay (such as through tips or commissions), reputation within the industry, or employment, employees may be afraid to speak out against harassment or violence they experience out of fear of negative consequences.^{viii} Similarly, an employer may be hesitant to address harm caused by a funder or important client.^{ix} Third-party-on-

employee harassment is particularly prevalent within the healthcare, service, and hospitality industries.^x For example, tipped workers with a sub-minimum wage are significantly less likely to report harassment compared to non-tipped counterparts because they rely on customer tips.^{xi, xii}

Workforce Culture

- **There are significant power differences between management and employees.** While workplaces are generally governed by broad state and federal regulations, daily operations and supervisory practices can play a key role in either supporting the resilience of individuals who experience DVSASSH or further increasing the harm they experience.^{xiii} Because DVSASSH is an abuse of power, survivors may be uniquely impacted by a lack of agency in their job, while harm-doers may exploit their institutional power because they believe they are above the rules and are too valuable to be held accountable.
- **High value employees are deemed too important to discipline or to hold accountable for harm.** High-profile founders or employees who bring significant sales or funding are often not held accountable for acts of DVSASSH due to their power. The dynamic of a high-status perpetrator who is “too big” to be held accountable is a dynamic often noted in popular culture and exposed in #MeToo revelations.^{xiv}
- **There are employees who are not covered by worker rights protections.** In the United States, labor laws often act as the “floor” for the treatment of workers, setting a baseline that is ideally exceeded. There are a variety of industries and types of work that are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act ([2009](#)), [OSHA](#) regulations, the [Family and Medical Leave Act](#), [Title VII](#) of the Civil Rights Act, and other labor or civil rights protections. Unfortunately, this floor does not apply to all workers. Common exceptions include all workers who are not classified as “employees”- including contractors, volunteers, gig, part-time workers, and interns - as well as various industries such as agricultural and domestic workers, and employees at firms that fall under the employee threshold.
- **The workforce is homogenous.** A lack of meaningful representation from workers with different experiences and backgrounds in the workforce contributes to the isolation of workers in the minority.^{xv} This can create an “in-” and “out-” group dynamic which can increase risks for all forms of harassment, including DVSASSH, particularly when a

workplace is male-dominated.^{xvi} For example, women working in male-dominated fields, such as construction, finance or tech, often report high rates of sexual harassment and violence.^{xvii} When women are underrepresented in the workplace, harassment can function as a way of upholding the existing status quo and push these individuals out of the workplace.^{xviii} Research indicates that DVSASSH within the workplace leads to further segregation, deterring individuals from applying for jobs in which they would be in the minority.^{xix, xx}

This is also true when management does not reflect the background or experience of non-managerial employees, furthering a power gap between those at the top and the bottom of the organization chart.

- **Employees are not aware of workplace rights and available supportive measures.** To effectively support safety and wellbeing, employees must be made aware of their federal, state, and local workplace rights and protections, as well as internal processes to report violations and accommodations they are eligible to receive. Depending on the state, a worker's rights might include access to paid safe leave, protection from discrimination on the basis of their status as a survivor or their right to reasonable accommodation. Unfortunately, many employers and employees are unaware of these rights.^{xxi} Even when workers are aware of these rights, some employers fail to recognize, become aware of, or acknowledge workplace rights and protections.^{xxii}

Work Environment

- **Employees experience discrimination and broader inequality within the workplace.** DVSASSH is linked to inequality.^{xxiii} It is rooted in power and control, and reflects and contributes to societal norms that view males as dominant and females as subordinate.^{xxiv} Such harmful societal norms and stereotypes can contribute to DVSASSH in the workplace and lead to a work environment where employees from minority backgrounds feel unsafe.^{xxv} These stereotypes can also embolden other employees to exercise discrimination, harassment, and violence.^{xxvi}
- **Employees experience bullying, incivility, and/or a culture of disrespect.** Incidents of violence in the workplace are often preceded by seemingly minor acts of incivility that when left unchecked foster an environment in which abusive behavior can thrive.^{xxvii} Sexist jokes, racial epithets, and homophobic comments result in all employees, not just the individual targeted, feeling unsafe thus contributing to a toxic work

environment.^{xxviii} Bullying, incivility, and disrespect can be particularly dangerous when the behaviors are driven by someone with high status in the workplace establishing such behaviors as a norm.^{xxix}

- **Use of alcohol or drugs is tolerated or encouraged within the workplace.** While alcohol does not cause sexual harassment or other forms of DVSASSH, alcohol consumption can create conditions where harassment and violence are more likely to occur.^{xxx} This is particularly pronounced in workplaces in which employees cohabitate, such as guides in the outdoor recreation industry or firefighters, or when parties are held after hours creating situations where employee's feel like they are “off-duty” and workplace rules do not apply.^{xxxi}
- **Employees work in isolation.** Harm doers often take advantage of physical isolation in the workplace and can use those opportunities to harass or assault other employees.^{xxxii} This is due to several factors including decreased oversight, lack of potential witnesses, and disconnection from sources of support. Examples include office building janitors, hotel room cleaners, domestic workers, agricultural workers, and construction workers.^{xxxiii}

To learn more about risk factors, see the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s findings and recommendations from the Select Taskforce on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace at <https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace>.

Protective Factors

There are important steps that can be taken to reduce these workplace risks that contribute to DVSASSH through protective measures. Protective factors are conditions that may reduce the risk of experiencing violence or act as a violence prevention tool. Protective factors can include a range of approaches that impact policy, practices, employee education and training, job structure, and organizational culture. The elements below can have a positive impact not only on employee safety and wellbeing but also on the overall work environment contributing to greater productivity, morale, and success.

Workplace Policy and Practices

- **The workplace has a comprehensive DVSASSH policy that aligns with and reinforces other workplace policies designed to reduce harassment and violence.** Having a comprehensive workplace DVSASSH policy is an important foundation for an employers' response to harassment and violence impacting employees.^{xxxiv} An ideal Workplace DVSASSH Policy includes the following:
 - a. covers all employees, including contractors, interns, and vendors;
 - b. defines protocols for those who wish to disclose violence or harassment,
 - c. protocols for requesting workplace accommodations for survivors/victims;
 - d. steps an employer may take to support an individual's safety;
 - e. employers' response to individuals using harm including investigations, consequences, and accountability measures; and
 - f. affirm non-discrimination and non-retaliation against individuals exercising their rights through the DVSASSH policy.^{xxxv}
- **Employee compensation and workplace practices support economic security.** The [U.S. Department of Labor](https://www.dhs.gov/easyspeaks/speaks/department-of-labor) and Aspen Institute list the following characteristics as key elements of [good jobs](#): economic stability (workers have the income and benefits necessary to meet their basic needs); economic mobility (clear career pathways, opportunities to learn and advance, and to build wealth); and, equity, respect, and voice (workers are valued, treated fairly, and feel safe enough to share concerns or ideas). These characteristics help to create economic stability for employees, which is a critical factor in seeking safety and recovery.^{xxxvi}

Workforce Culture

- **Employees are engaged in decision making.** Decision-making structures should include a representative sample of all workers, from entry level employees to the c-suite. By allowing for a variety of perspectives to be heard, workplaces encourage creativity, and problem solve in new ways. This can help to foster an environment in which all workers are valued and as a result, can help foster change that supports the increased safety of all employees.
- **Disciplinary practices apply to everyone in the workforce.** All workers, including high-ranking employees, should be subject to the same policies and practices. Policies and practices should also protect individuals from retaliation after they report harassment or violence. If a complaint is made against an executive or other high-level employee, someone outside of their chain of command or a third party is tasked with investigating the complaint.
- **Respect is promoted not only with words, but through policies and actions.** While essential, it is not enough to have a [code of conduct](#) that outlines community expectations and norms for a respectful work environment. A culture of respect goes beyond legal requirements and actively prevents discrimination and supports protected categories of workers. The c-suite must model and demonstrate leadership in creating an environment where all workers are safe, valued, and supported.
- **Employees are provided with information and training about laws, rights, workplace policies, and norms which are clearly presented in multiple formats (audio, visual, in-person, online, etc.) and most common languages spoken by workers.** Information sharing should extend to consultants, interns, customers, and other third parties to ensure that everyone who has regular access to the workplace can easily understand their rights and the expectations they have to uphold respectful norms. This information should clearly describe in plain language who is protected (workers, customers, third parties) and how the world of work is defined (including break rooms, restrooms, parking areas, and commute to and from work).

Work Environment

- **Employee safety is considered in the design of the work environment.** Workplaces that invest in safe and human-centered

workplace design, including lighting, safe public transportation corridors, and comfortable rest spaces, advance accessibility and inclusivity for employees. This includes addressing areas in which employees may be physically isolated and providing a workspace that creates safe and appropriate expectations around drugs and alcohol to mitigate a risk factor of DVSASSH. To assess your workspace, [conduct a culture walk](#) and ask workers of different identities and backgrounds how they think the workplace would be made safer and/or comfortable.

- **The employer conducts regular, anonymous workplace environment assessments/surveys to inform the ongoing DVSSASH program effectiveness and provide opportunities to address other workplace concerns.** Prevention-oriented surveys are anonymous, confidential, and explore workplace culture and environment in order to identify employee needs, gaps in response, and workplace expectations. If possible, contract a third party to conduct this survey and provide data analysis. The results should be made available to all workers and transparently demonstrate how the findings will be addressed through policy, practice, and supportive resources.

To learn more about ways to prevent DVSASSH within the workplace, see the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s findings and recommendations from the Select Taskforce on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace at www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace or visit the National Resource Center: Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence at www.workplacesrespond.org.

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