

Work Interrupted:

How Violence Undermines Economic Security for Survivors in the Workplace

A Toolkit for Employers Responding to Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Harassment



HOW IMPROVING
TO EMPLOYMENT
PREVENTS
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
SEXUAL ASSAULT



INTRODUCTION

Workplaces face many challenges in effectively responding to the varied needs that arise for employees who are facing violence of any kind, including economic abuse. Without the knowledge, policies, and resources needed to support employees in navigating and recovering from these harms, workplaces can further isolate a survivor experiencing economic abuse and amplify the harm they face.

This toolkit addresses how workplaces can support employees experiencing economic abuse before, during, and after an employee discloses their experience of economic abuse. It highlights crucial moments of intervention for employers, supervisors, and human resource professionals to intercede and provides practical tools for supporting survivors of economic abuse.

A detailed version of a fictionalized survivor journey scenario, created as a companion resource to Workplaces Respond’s webinar on addressing economic abuse, is included in this toolkit’s appendix.



WHAT IS ECONOMIC ABUSE?



Economic abuse occurs in 99% of domestic violence cases, meaning that nearly all survivors experience some form of economic abuse.¹ Economic abuse is behavior that is coercive, deceptive, or that unreasonably controls or restrains a person's ability to acquire, use, or maintain economic resources to which they are entitled.² When it intersects with the workplace, it can become **Employment Sabotage (ES)**.

DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE

Economic abuse can look different depending on a survivor's context. Generally, it can take three forms:³

Economic Control - withholding or limiting access to resources or money.

Economic control can look like limiting access to shared bank accounts, giving the survivor an "allowance" when that survivor is working and generating an income, preventing a survivor from getting to work, or refusing to allow the survivor to work at all.

Economic Exploitation - actively or intentionally damaging a person's financial stability, often by using the survivor's resources for the benefit of a harm doer.

Economic exploitation can look like destroying shared property, opening lines of credit in the survivor's name, or forcing a survivor to take out loans.

Economic Sabotage - interfering with a survivor's ability to secure, maintain, or succeed in employment, often through workplace disruption and employment sabotage.

Economic sabotage can include destroying a survivor's workplace equipment or work uniform, gaining access to and then misusing a survivor's work equipment, interrupting the survivor at work through repeated phone calls or messages, or by appearing in the survivor's workplace. It can also look like threatening the survivor and their co-workers or intentionally upsetting the survivor when they are at work or completing work-related assignments.

WHAT IS CREDIT SABOTAGE OR COERCED DEBT?

People who engage in economic abuse may incur charges on existing shared accounts. Studies show that this type of financial abuse creates substantial, long-lasting harm for survivors.

For example, nearly three-quarters of domestic violence survivors report staying longer in abusive relationships in part because of coerced debt. Women who reported coerced debt were 2.5 times more likely to stay longer due to financial concerns than those who did not report coerced debt.⁴

Women of color, who face higher rates of financial abuse resulting in nearly double the average debt burden, often feel these impacts most acutely. When survivors can remove these debts from their credit reports, one third see their credit scores improve by 20 points or more – enough to qualify for better rates on loans.⁵

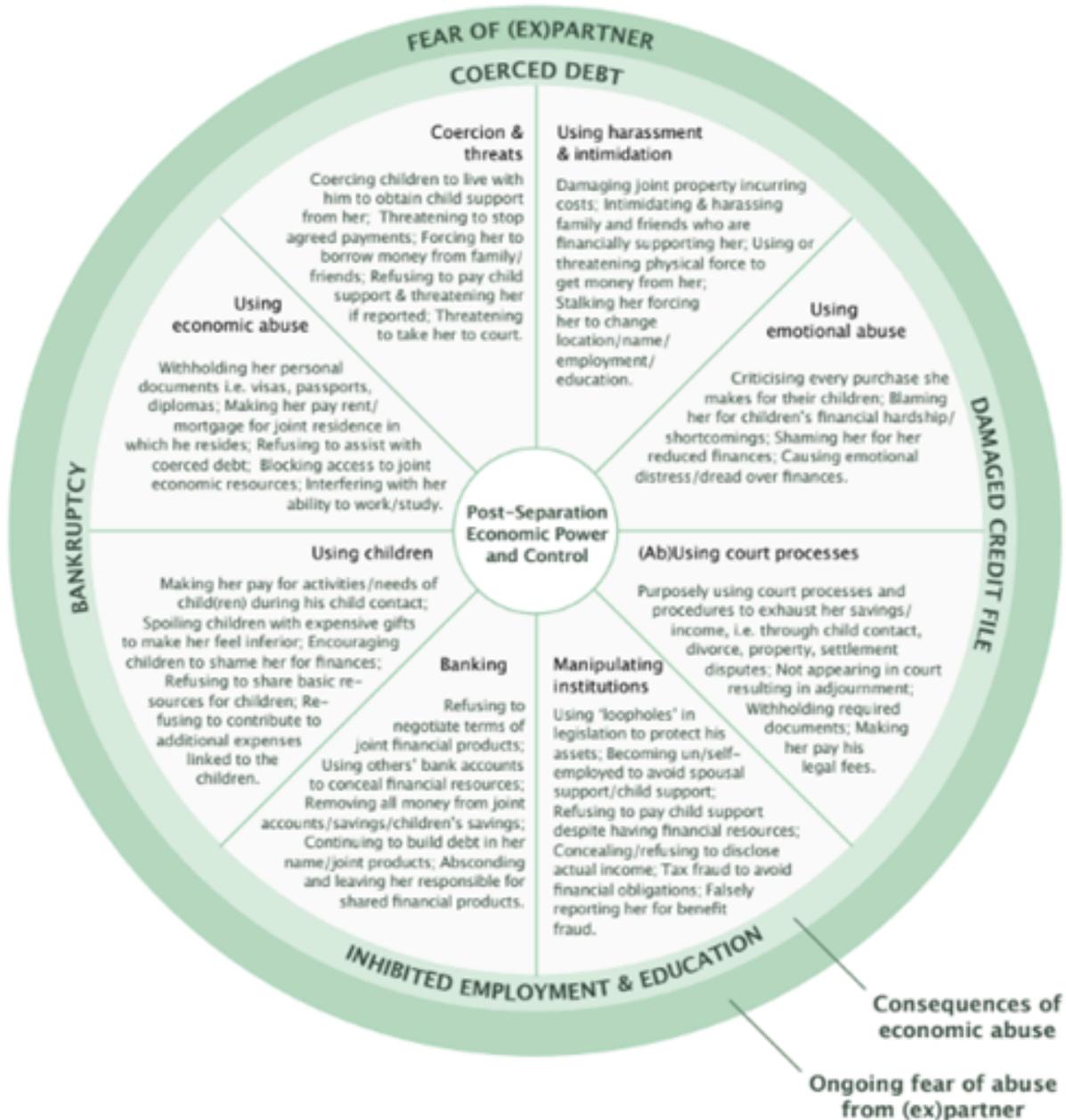


This is important to a survivors' economic security, as survivors looking for employment often must undergo a background check. These can include a credit check that employers can access. While potential employers cannot access the specific credit score, they are able to review your credit report and use this information to determine eligibility for a job.⁶

Despite the high prevalence of economic abuse, a 2014 study showed 78% of Americans did not recognize economic, or financial, abuse as a form of domestic violence.⁷ This disconnect has significant impacts on survivors, particularly when economic abuse impacts their ability to work.

POST-SEPARATION ECONOMIC POWER & CONTROL

Post-Separation Economic Power and Control



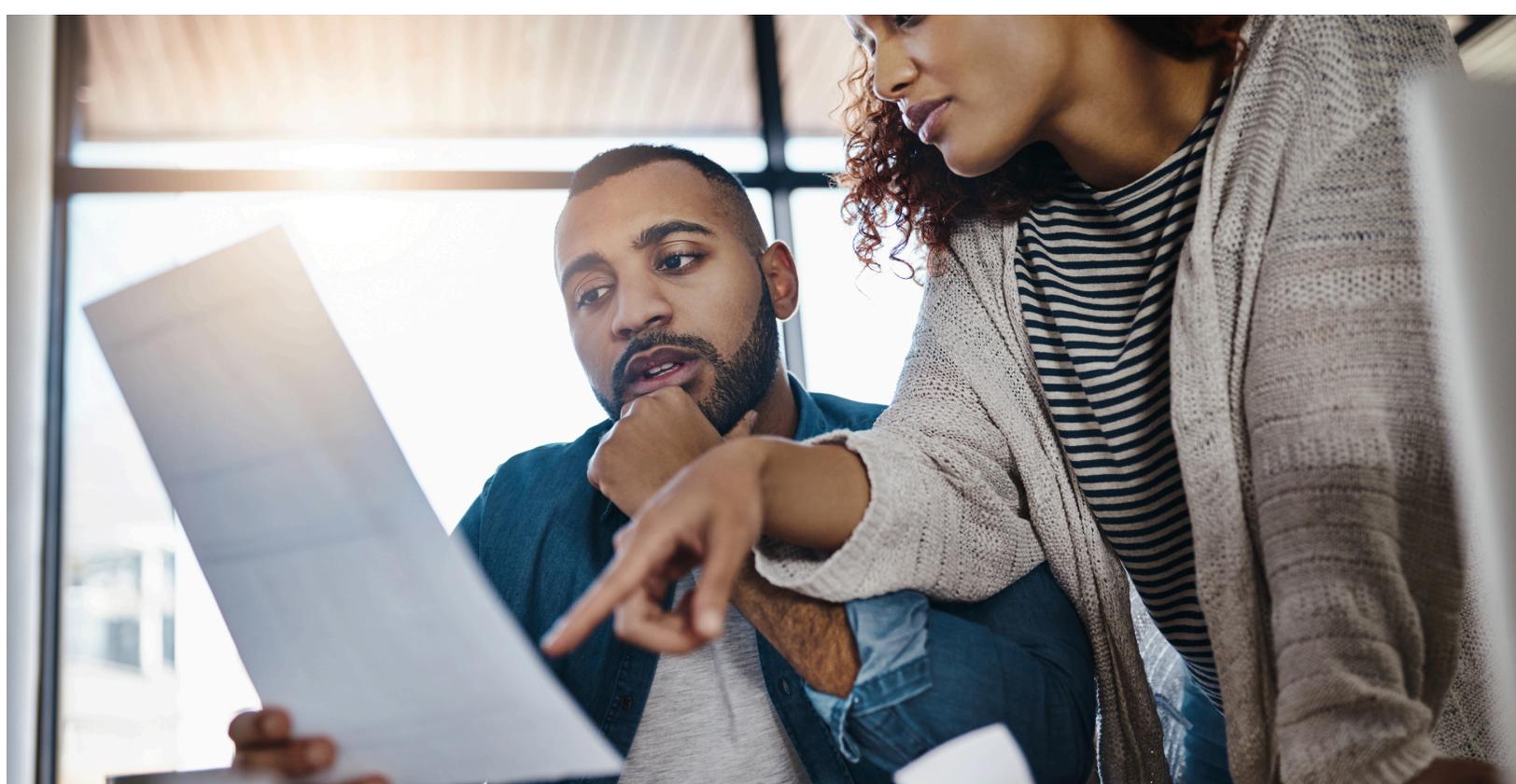
Jenn Glinski, University of Glasgow (2021).
This resource is based on research findings of University of Glasgow PhD candidate Jenn Glinski, who is currently completing her thesis.
Illustration design by Tony Mamo

Adaptation of the original Power and Control Wheel approved by The Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs
TheDuluthModel.org

THE BEST TIME TO PREPARE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE IS BEFORE IT OCCURS.

Too often, workplaces are reactive when protecting and supporting their employees from the impacts of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and sexual harassment (DVSASSH). Even the most supportive workplaces, co-workers, and supervisors may not be ready to respond to an unanticipated disclosure. Well-intentioned but unprepared workplaces can inadvertently contribute to a survivor's financial collapse. While violence can never be completely prevented, the best way a workplace can support an employee who is experiencing DVSASSH is by proactively creating a culture where survivors of violence know what support is available to them.

→ Workplaces provide this support by developing comprehensive policies, facilitating effective training, and providing local resources to their staff



☐ EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE SUPPORT STARTS WITH WORKPLACE POLICIES.

Many workplaces have policies addressing sexual harassment, but most do not have policies that specifically address domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Workplace policies inform what an employee, and what HR or supervisors, can do to support other employees. The impacts of domestic violence, in all its forms, stalking, sexual assault, and sexual harassment are all foreseeable realities people in the world of work must navigate. By creating comprehensive policies that include domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking and provide broad avenues of support, employers signal that their support for their employees extends beyond available benefits and code of conducts.

Comprehensive Workplace Policies on DVSASSH:

- ✓ Define the relevant forms of violence a workplace policy is intended to cover, to whom the policy applies, and what spaces (both physical and virtual) are considered the workplace.
- ✓ Communicate clearly that survivors of DVSASSH will not be discriminated against or retaliated against because of the forms of violence they experience.
- ✓ Include timely protocols for updating sensitive information a person causing harm could access, including direct deposit information and emergency contact information.
- ✓ Provide explicit paid leave for reasons related to safety and reference the availability of this leave wherever leave from work is mentioned.
- ✓ Outline different workplace safety accommodations that can be put in place to support an employee navigating the impacts of the violence they are experiencing and how those accommodations can be accessed.
- ✓ Explain how a survivor's disclosure of violence will be treated confidentially, and how a survivor can request support.
- ✓ Address how a workplace will respond to individuals perpetuating harm.
- ✓ Identify local and national resources to provide for those experiencing these forms of violence.



RESOURCE ALERT!



Check out our [policy checklist](#) for workplaces to audit their current policies. Our newly updated “How to Guide” walks employers and workplaces through how they can incorporate best practices and comprehensive protections for employees experiencing these forms of violence.

Employers should also be aware that most states and territories have at least one employment law that explicitly supports survivors in the workplace.¹⁸

As the National Resource Center for workplaces responding to these forms of violence, we offer free resources, training, and technical assistance to employers, workers, and advocates to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH) impacting the workplace.

[Request TA](#)

DID YOU KNOW

Many states already require most employers to provide some form of safe leave to allow employees surviving violence to relocate, seek legal assistance, or heal from injuries.⁹ Even if a survivor does not live in a state with mandatory paid safe leave laws, their employer can always provide paid safe leave.

→ **Paid leave is important;** when employers only offer unpaid leave, it reinforces the economic harm a survivor is experiencing.

Cost: Average \$2,000-4,000 per affected employee

Benefit: Maintains income stability, allows proper safety planning, prevents resignation

IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

Create a separate leave category for DV/SA/stalking (not sick leave or vacation). Reference this leave any place where other leave types are mentioned and included in staff onboarding materials.

- Provide 5-10 paid days annually for safety-related needs.
- Allow use for: court dates, housing search, legal consultations, safety planning, counseling, medical care, and any other reason related to the violence an employee is experiencing.
- No documentation required beyond employee attestation.
- Job protection guaranteed during leave.

Creating these policies before an employee comes to their employer in crisis is crucial. The challenges that come with navigating DVSASSH are foreseeable needs that employees may have, which should be addressed by a comprehensive policy and effective training.



EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE SUPPORT IS POSSIBLE WITH EFFECTIVE TRAINING AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES.

An employee who is experiencing economic abuse may not disclose the violence they are experiencing to their co-workers or supervisors right away. They may decide that managing things on their own is what works best for them.

Trying to hold everything together as a person survives a traumatic experience can be incredibly stressful. Survivors report that the violence they experience impacts their ability to concentrate, retain information, and stay focused.¹⁰ The first sign that someone is experiencing trauma are these workplace impacts.

RESOURCE ALERT!



Check out our guide on [Promoting Worker Wellness and Resilience through Trauma-Informed](#) and our guides on trauma-informed training for supervisors.



Supervisors and co-workers can help survivors by being trained on **trauma responses** and providing trauma-informed supervision.

Compare these two supervisor responses following a survivor's disclosure of abuse:

Trauma-Informed: *“Thank you for sharing what you are going through with me. I am so sorry you are going through this. How can I help support you? I will keep everything you share with me confidential.”*

What is right about this response?

This response gives the survivor autonomy to say what they need. It acknowledges that experiencing domestic violence is not a statement about the survivor's ability or aptitude. It also communicates an awareness that making this type of disclosure is an act of trust on the part of the survivor. Often, survivors share they are worried about becoming the target of workplace gossip or of being perceived as less capable. Ensuring that disclosures will be treated confidentially is key to being trauma-informed and survivor centered.

When a survivor is ready to talk about what support they need, supervisors need to be trained on what the employer can offer.

Some immediate forms of support may be logistical, like updating emergency contact information or direct deposit information. Others may be focused on the physical environment or workplace structure, like a change in start time or office location.



Not Trauma-Informed: *"I'm so sorry you're going through this. You should connect with HR. And don't worry about work pressure right now, you have too much on your plate to be thinking about a promotion anyway."*

What is wrong with this response?

Even though this supervisor is sympathetic, this response goes wrong in two key ways.

1. It assumes the supervisor knows what the survivor should do. Survivor-centered responses start by acknowledging what is being shared and then putting the survivor in the position to share what they need. It starts with asking, not telling.
2. It connects the employee's disclosure with reduced opportunities. Often, in an attempt to make things easier for a survivor, a supervisor can instead withdraw workplace opportunities for advancement or professional development opportunities. This response may further isolate the survivor and indicate that they will lose out on opportunities if they share more about the violence they are experiencing.

While a survivor may want to lighten their workload to address the violence they are experiencing, pre-emptively taking away responsibilities signals that a survivor can't handle the same responsibilities that another employee may be able to handle.



WHAT SHOULD WORKPLACES DO WHEN A PERSON CAUSING HARM POSES A SECURITY THREAT?

Sometimes, survivors of DVSASSH can choose whether or not to reveal what they are going through to their supervisors or co-workers. Other times, the person causing harm makes that choice for them by showing up at work or sending harassing calls or messages to the survivor's workplace.

→ When that happens, it is important to work with the survivor and continue to center their autonomy.

With the survivor's consent, there are some emergency security and employment protection measures that can be enacted:

- Provide a photograph of the person causing harm with security personnel and front desk staff with instructions to deny this person entry. Make sure that the survivor gives consent before the connection between the person causing harm and the survivor is shared.
- Change the survivor's contact information and remove public-facing emails and phone numbers.
- Block or blacklist the harm-doer's email and phone number so they cannot continue to disrupt the workplace.
- Employers can **obtain a protection order** against a harm doer who poses a threat to a workplace. It is important to coordinate with a survivor to make sure that an employer obtaining this order doesn't put the survivor in further risk.
- Keep any documentation the survivor provides or requests that the survivor makes separate from their general personal file to ensure that their privacy is honored.

EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE SUPPORT CRYSTALLIZES GETTING SURVIVORS THE RIGHT RESOURCES AT THE RIGHT TIME.

No one expects to experience these forms of violence. When they do occur, making sure that the survivor is connected with the appropriate resources at the right time is crucial.

This means that employers can support their employees experiencing these forms of violence by:

1. Ensuring their internal resources are trauma-informed and equipped to address the complexities of violence
2. Forming connections with local and national violence prevention organizations.

Checking Your Internal Resources

Human resource professionals and employers will refer an employee experiencing these forms of violence to their employee assistance program (EAP). Before referring an employee experiencing DVSASSH to an EAP, employers need to explicitly confirm that the EAP is equipped to support survivors.

Consider an Employee Emergency Assistance Fund

- Cost: Variable
- Benefit: Prevents survivor financial collapse, reduces turnover, maintains productivity.

Fund Structure:

- Company-funded emergency pool
- Employee donation program with company match
- Combination of both approaches

Program Design:

- State Fund Purpose
- Specify amount
- Accessible application process: Simple attestation with HR approval
- Easy, interest free repayment options including payroll deduction.

RESOURCES FOR IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

State Guide - [State Law Guide from Legal Momentum](#)

Quick Reference Charts - [Advancing Safety Through Employment Rights](#)

Victim Connect Resource Center

1-855-4VICTIM (855-484-2846)

Available M-F, 9:00AM-5:00PM ET via phone, chat, or text

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Available 24/7 via call, chat, and text.

TTY: 1-800-787-3224; Text "START" to 88788

National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Available 24/7. Also available via chat on the website.

The Deaf Hotline

1-855-812-1001

Available 24/7 via phone and email.

Strong Hearts Native Helpline

1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483)

24/7 safe, confidential and anonymous domestic and sexual violence helpline for Native Americans and Alaska Natives

Cyber Civil Rights Initiative Helpline

- 1-844-878-2274
- Available 24/7 for victims of image-based sexual abuse.

Legal Momentum Helpline and Email

- 1-800-649-0297
- Help@LMHelpline.org
- Free nationwide resource for those seeking information about their legal rights related to sex and gender discrimination, violence, and harassment.



APPENDIX

FICTIONAL SURVIVOR JOURNEY – RITA’S STORY

Rita has worked at a regional marketing firm for five years. Known for her creativity, reliability, and strong client relationships, Rita has consistently received positive performance reviews. Recently, she was identified as a top candidate for the Senior Account Manager position. This promotion would mean a \$15,000 salary increase and the leadership responsibilities Rita has been working towards since joining the company.

The workplace culture at her firm is generally supportive, though like many companies, they lack comprehensive policies addressing domestic violence and workplace safety beyond basic sexual harassment guidelines. Rita’s supervisor is well-intentioned but has never received training in recognizing or responding to domestic violence in the workplace.

Two years ago, Rita’s partner Mike moved in with her. Their combined annual income is \$121,672.

| Professional Status | Financial Status | Workplace Environment |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stable Employment• Consistently positive performance reviews• In the running for a promotion and raise | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joint checking: \$8,900• Personal savings: \$4,500• Credit score: 717 (good)• Combined household income: \$121,672 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally supportive culture• ! No comprehensive DV policies• ! No DV training for staff or supervisors |

Recently, Mike lost his job and his behavior towards Rita changed. What initially felt like attentiveness evolved into a need for control. Mike started to accuse Rita of being unfaithful when she worked late and demanding access to her work emails. He became aggressive when she did not respond to his texts immediately. He began monitoring her spending and demanding her paychecks go into a joint checking account. Ultimately, Mike's job loss became an excuse for him to exert economic control over Rita.

Rita is not alone. A 2016 study found that, during the Great Recession, an increase in unemployment rates correlated with an increase in domestic abuse.¹¹

Deciding to Leave

Rita has decided to end her relationship and temporarily move in with a friend who lives an hour away. Rita is now spending \$90/month on increased gas costs.

Mike demands Rita cover utilities and rent for their shared apartment. Rita agrees, if Mike agrees to move out. Mike initially says he will but then starts to talk about getting back together.

| Professional Status | Financial Status | Workplace Environment |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable Employment • Consistently positive performance reviews • In the running for a promotion and raise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint checking: \$6,740 • Personal savings: \$4,500 • Credit score: 717 (good) • Annual Income: \$57,200 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally supportive culture • ! Without a comprehensive domestic violence policy, there is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ No workplace support for address changes or flexible work schedule ◦ No local resources for domestic violence survivors ◦ No definitions of domestic violence that includes economic abuse. |

What Rita's Workplace Could Have Done:

- Normalized the topic of domestic violence through trainings, resources, and their workplace policy
- Offered temporary accommodations, like remote work to eliminate commute costs
- Allowed use of workplace address for mail
- Provided emergency housing assistance
- Connected Rita with resources immediately

Employment Sabotage

After two months apart, Mike begins stalking Rita at work, watching when she arrives and leaves from a parked car across the street. He repeatedly calls the main office line, demanding to speak with Rita about "urgent family matters." When the firm's receptionist stops putting the calls through, Mike starts showing up in the office lobby, demanding to see Rita. Security has to escort him out. Colleagues begin to question Rita's professionalism. "Why is she bringing her personal problems to work?" they ask.

Rita contacts the firm's accounting department to update her direct deposit information. She wants her paychecks to stop going into the checking account she shares with Mike. However, the firm's accounting department hasn't responded to her request. Now, banned from her office, Mike starts emailing Rita's work account with pleading attempts to reconcile. These emails become threatening when Rita ignores them. One reads: "I can see when you read these emails. I know your schedule better than you think."

Rita's struggles to concentrate. During client calls, the constant ping of new emails makes her heart race. Sleep becomes elusive as she lies awake wondering what Mike will do next.

During a critical week at work, Rita leaves a few important client calls unanswered and misses a project deadline. Normally sharp and detail-oriented, Rita submits the project late and with uncharacteristic errors.

When Rita’s supervisor asks about the decline in her work quality, she breaks down and discloses Mike’s abuse. Her supervisor tries to respond sympathetically: *"I'm so sorry you're going through this. You should connect with HR. And don't worry about work pressure right now, you have too much on your plate to be thinking about that promotion anyway."*

The promotion Rita had worked hard for ends up going to her colleague.

| Professional Status | Financial Status | Workplace Environment |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation at risk due to abuser’s actions and trauma | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint checking: \$4,580 • Personal savings: \$4,500 • Credit score: 717 (good) • Annual Income: \$57,200 • Losing promotion impacts all future raises and opportunities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The subject of workplace gossip • Request for direct deposit change is ignored • Lost promotion after disclosure to supervisor. |

What’s Wrong with Rita’s Supervisor’s Response?

Though sympathetic, Rita’s supervisor’s response perpetuated the harm Rita is experiencing. First, despite a clear security risk, no immediate safety measures were discussed. This treats Rita’s experience as a “personal problem” rather than a workplace safety issue.

Second, her supervisor immediately told Rita what she “should” do rather than asking how she could be supported. Third, there was no mention of workplace accommodations or support for the trauma responses Rita is having. Finally, Rita’s supervisor took away a promotional opportunity following Rita’s disclosure that she is a survivor of abuse. Depending on what state Rita lives in, this type of adverse employment action could be illegal.

¹²

If Rita’s supervisor had received effective trauma-informed supervision training, Rita could have been supported during a challenging time, rather than further isolated.

What would an appropriate response be?

"How can we support you while keeping you on track for this promotion?" This response gives Rita autonomy to say what she needs while demonstrating that her supervisor is aware that experiencing domestic violence is not a statement about Rita's ability or aptitude.

What Should Rita's Workplace Have Done?

- Enacted Immediate Security Measures
 - With Rita's consent, a photo of Mike could have been shared with all security and front desk staff with instructions to deny him entry
 - Rita's direct line could be changed
 - Mike's phone number could be blocked
- Process direct deposit request immediately
- Connect Rita with local resources for safety planning.
- With Rita's consent, obtain a protection order against Mike so he cannot come on the property.
- Hold their promotion decision as they support Rita through a crisis. "We're postponing all promotion decisions for 30 days while we support you through this crisis."

Seeking Support at Work

After three months of staying on her friend's couch, Rita goes to HR to ask for support and learn why her direct deposit information hasn't been updated. The HR manager is sympathetic but limited by company policies written without domestic violence in mind. *"We do have an Employee Assistance Program," they say, "Have you called them?"*

Rita's shoulders sag. *"I tried last week. They gave me a list of general counseling services but said they don't help with workplace safety planning. They referred me to a counselor with a three-week waiting list who **doesn't specialize in domestic violence.**"*

The HR manager pauses, *"Well, this is a unique situation. Why don't you take some **unpaid** 20 **leave** to deal with it?"*

Unpaid leave means a loss of income that Rita can't afford. However, she is exhausted, and her friend is becoming increasingly impatient about her extended stay, hinting that their temporary arrangement needs to end soon. Rita decides to take two weeks of unpaid leave to look for a new apartment and talk with an attorney. She dips into her savings to make up the difference.

Rita's friend connects her to an attorney. After charging a \$300 consultation fee, the attorney says the law can't help Rita because **there has been no physical violence**.

| Professional Status | Financial Status | Workplace Environment |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation at risk due to abuser's actions and trauma | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint checking: \$2120 • Personal savings: \$2960 • Credit score: 717 (good) • Annual Income: \$55, 660 • Losing promotion impacts all future raises and opportunities. • Attorney's failure to recognize economic abuse as a form of violence renders her unable to get legal protection. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The subject of workplace gossip • Further isolated due to Unresponsive EAP |

Why is HR's Response Inadequate?

HR's response was inadequate in a few ways. First, HR recommended the Employment Assistance Program without first confirming that the EAP was equipped to support someone experiencing this form of violence. Next, Rita came to HR with a very practical problem: she needs to change her direct deposit information. HR instead focused on the emotional impacts of violence. These impacts are important, but by not being survivor-centered and asking Rita her priorities, the direct deposit issue was overlooked.

Next, by treating Rita's situation as "unique" HR reinforced the idea that the violence Rita is experiencing is a "personal problem" and not a foreseeable need that their employees may have, which should be addressed by a comprehensive policy and effective training.

Next, many states require employers with a certain number of employees to provide paid safe leave to allow employees surviving violence to relocate, seek legal assistance, or heal from injuries.¹³ Even if Rita doesn't live in a state with mandatory paid safe leave laws, her employer can always provide paid safe leave. Only offering unpaid leave reinforces the economic harm Rita is experiencing.

Finally, Rita was forced to rely on a friend's connection to an attorney who was not trained in the nuances of domestic violence. HR could have immediately connected Rita with a local domestic violence agency where she could have received holistic support from a DV advocate and gotten a referral to a qualified attorney.

Credit and Housing Sabotage

After returning to work, Rita gets a call about her application to a new apartment. "I'm really sorry," the landlord says, "we can't accept someone with your credit score." Rita is confused. Her credit has always been good! She checks and her stomach drops. She learns Mike has been pocketing the money Rita was giving him for rent and utilities. Her bills are now delinquent, and she is three months late on rent. When she calls her bank, she is told that because she has a joint checking account, there is nothing they can do to get the money back. Rita must now pay 3 months of rent, utilities, and late fees-- or her landlord will evict her.

Even emptying out her checking and savings account doesn't cover this amount. Rita has to put the difference on her credit card, where it accrues interest.

| Professional Status | Financial Status | Workplace Environment |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation at risk due to abuser's actions and trauma | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint checking: \$0 • Personal savings: \$0 • Credit score: 455 (very poor) • Additional debt \$1,400 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The subject of workplace gossip |



Critical Lesson: The direct deposit issue from Month 2, if addressed immediately, could have prevented this entire crisis. Rita's paychecks would not have been accessible to Mike, protecting her from this financial devastation.

Job Loss

Rita is scared she will be fired because Mike won't stop harassing her at work. Without paid leave, adequate workplace support, or assurance that her job is secure, Rita faces impossible choices. Does she wait to be fired? Does she go back to Mike, hoping the harassment and sabotage will stop? At least if she quits her job, she won't have to tell her next employer she was fired. Rita decides to resign.

The resignation letter Rita sends her supervisor is brief: "I am resigning from my position effective immediately due to personal circumstances beyond my control." Rita's last day is marked by awkward conversations and distance. Her supervisor, once an approachable mentor, now seems uncomfortable maintaining eye contact.

HR processes Rita's departure efficiently, checking the boxes for offboarding: COBRA information provided, final paycheck calculated, and exit interview declined by departing employee. HR also fails to mention that unemployment insurance benefits may be available to Rita because she had to quit her job in relation to domestic violence.¹⁴

| Professional Status | Financial Status |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of mentorship because of disclosure and poor supervisor response• Lost relationships with co-workers and clients due to abrupt departure outside of Rita's control | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joint checking: \$0• Personal savings: \$0• Credit score: 430 (very poor)• Additional debt \$1,400 |

Rita faced "impossible choices" because she had no assurance her job was secure. Without explicit job protection, she felt forced to resign rather than wait to be fired for actions outside of her control. If her workplace had a clear policy that harassment by perpetrators of abuse wouldn't result in termination, Rita would not have felt like her job was at risk.

Rita is not alone.

Nearly **9 in 10 survivors** of domestic violence report experiencing “**Employment Sabotage**” with up to 60% reporting job loss as a result.¹⁵

Following a sexual assault, **1 in 7 women** and **1 in 17 men**: sought new job assignments; changed jobs; or quit a job.¹⁶

In the two years after cohabitation, domestic violence victims’ **earnings were 20.2% lower** compared to non-abusive relationships.¹⁷ Among victims stalked by an ex-partner, nearly **50% described job losses** because of the actions of that abuser.¹⁸

Postscript

With no income and unable to continue staying with her friend, Rita faces an immediate housing crisis. Her friend gives her a small loan to move back in with family three states away. This move means abandoning her social circle, professional network, and the career momentum she has built. When Mike learns Rita is moving out of state, he threatens to come after her and her family.

Rita starts the process of rebuilding her life, knowing that starting over in a new city means an entry-level position with a much lower salary.

After Rita's departure, the firm doesn't backfill her position, instead spreading her workload across already overburdened staff. Employees who knew what Rita was experiencing have reduced trust in their workplace's policy or responsiveness to violence.



ADDRESSING CRITICAL POLICY GAPS WITH EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Rita's experience demonstrates that well-intentioned but unprepared workplaces can inadvertently contribute to a survivor's financial collapse. This section addresses the specific policy failures revealed in Rita's case and provides concrete solutions that workplaces can implement immediately.



Gap #1: Direct Deposit Changes Not Taken Seriously

The Problem: Rita requested direct deposit changes in Month 2. The accounting department didn't respond. By Month 4, Mike had stolen \$6,480 from their joint account, destroying Rita's credit and financial stability.

The Solution: Institute an Emergency Financial Access Protocol

Cost: Minimal (administrative time only)

Benefit: Promptly safeguards the employee's financial resources and future earnings.

→ Immediate Implementation Steps:

- Designate direct deposit changes as emergency requests when employee discloses domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- Same-day processing requirement for safety-related financial changes
- Partial pay advance option while paperwork processes
- Confidential flag system so accounting understands urgency without details
- Follow-up verification within 24 hours that change was completed.

Gap #2: Promotions Withdrawn Based on Disclosure of Survivor-Status

The Problem: Rita's supervisor removed her from promotion consideration after disclosure, saying she had "too much on her plate."

The Solution: Include prohibitions against survivor-based employment discrimination and train supervisors on the dynamics of domestic violence.

Cost: Training time only

Benefit: Prevents discrimination, maintains employee career trajectory

→ Immediate Implementation Steps:

- Freeze promotion timelines when employee discloses safety concerns
- Extend decision deadline to allow crisis stabilization
- Base decisions on demonstrated performance, not speculation about capacity
- Train decision-makers that withdrawing opportunities is discrimination

Gap #3: No Paid Safety Leave

The Problem: HR offered only unpaid leave, which cost Rita \$1,540 and forced her to deplete savings.

Many states already require most employers to provide some form of safe leave. Paid leave policies can exceed state minimums and provide better support.

Cost: Average \$2,000-4,000 per affected employee

Benefit: Maintains income stability, allows proper safety planning, prevents resignation

The Solution: Paid Domestic Violence Leave Policy

→ Immediate Implementation Steps:

- Create a separate leave category for DV/SA/stalking (not sick leave or vacation). Reference this leave any place where other leave types are mentioned and include in staff onboarding materials.
- Provide 5-10 paid days annually for safety-related needs.
- Allow use for: court dates, housing search, legal consultations, safety planning, counseling, medical care, and any other reason related to the violence an employee is experiencing.
- No documentation required beyond employee attestation.
- Job protection guaranteed during leave.

Gap #4: No Manager/Supervisor Training

The Problem: Rita's supervisor was "well-intentioned but unprepared." Without training, the supervisor made harmful decisions that cost Rita her promotion and ultimately her job.

The Solution: Comprehensive Manager Training Program

Cost: Training Time Only. Workplaces Respond provides free training and curricula.

Benefit: Prevents further harm, improves response quality, protects company from liability

→ Critical Messages for Supervisors:

- Domestic violence is a workplace safety issue, not just a personal problem
- Your response can save an employee's career and possibly their life
- Removing opportunities from survivors **IS** economic abuse
- Quick accommodations prevent crises from escalating
- You don't need to be a counselor, just a supportive supervisor with resources

Gap #5: Non-Responsive EAP

The Problem: EAP provided generic counseling referrals, 3-week wait times, and no DV expertise. No local agency referrals or specialized support available.

The Solution: A DV-Informed EAP or New Relationship with a Local Agency

Cost: Unknown

Benefit: Specialized expertise, immediate access, comprehensive support, prevents crisis escalation

→ Immediate Implementation Steps:

- Audit current EAP for DV-specialized providers
 - Does the program have domestic violence specific resources and counselors?
 - Have immediate access options?
 - Provide trauma-informed support?
- Build partnership with local DV advocacy organization

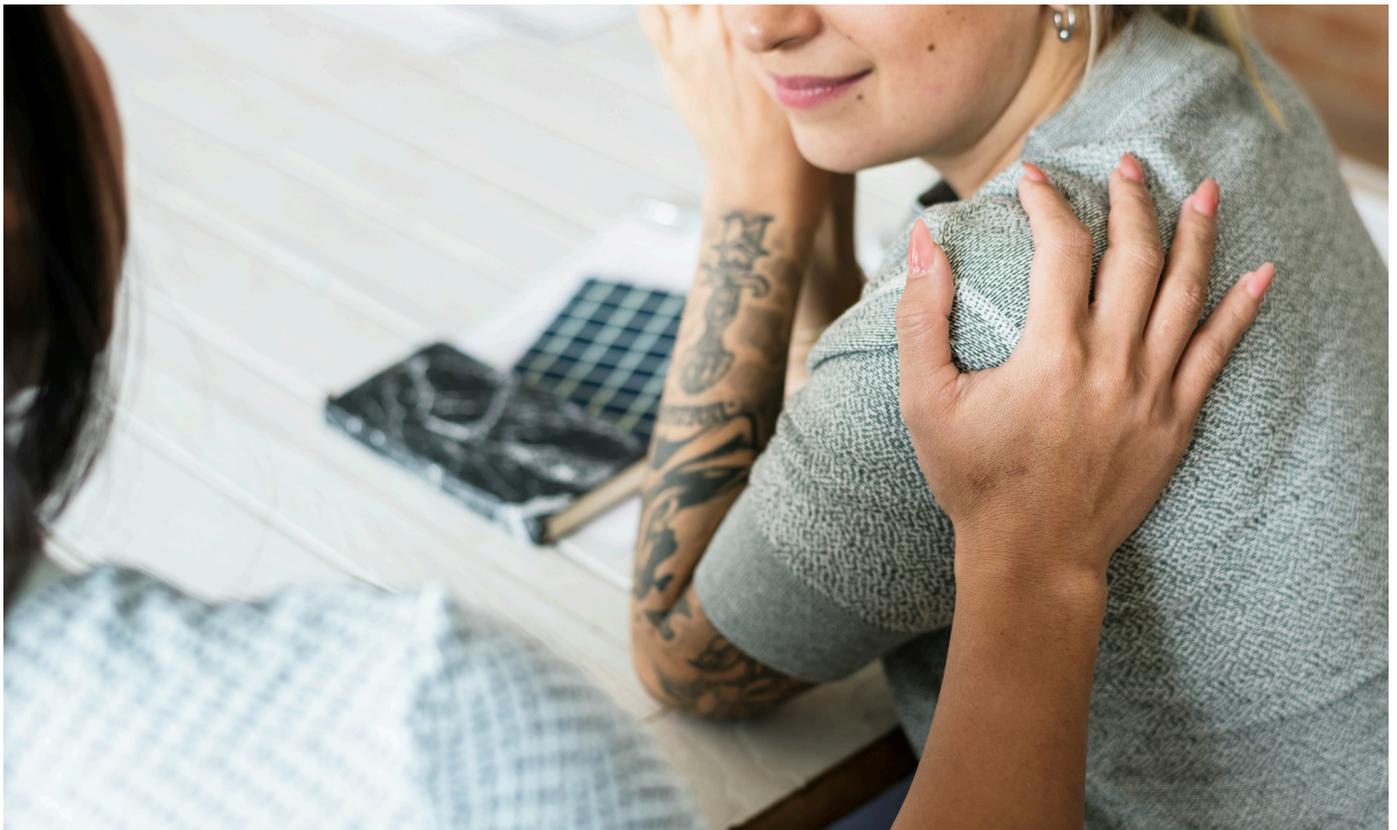
Gap #6: No Emergency Financial Assistance

The Problem: When Mike stole \$6,480, Rita had nowhere to turn. She exhausted all savings and still went into debt. A simple emergency loan could have prevented complete financial collapse.

The Solution: an Employee Emergency Assistance Fund

Cost: Variable

Benefit: Prevents survivor financial collapse, reduces turnover, maintains productivity.





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