

Gender-Based Violence & Harassment and Employment Sabotage

What Employers Should Know and How to Respond

Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) is a range of overlapping violent behaviors and acts including domestic or intimate partner violence, dating violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking. These acts are purposeful and deliberate with a goal of gaining power and control over another. This can include, but is not limited to, acts of physical and sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, coercion and threats, isolation, and economic abuse. GBVH not only impacts an individual's personal life but also their ability to thrive in the workplace; where harm-doers can use tactics such as employment sabotage to negatively impact that individual's employment.

What is Employment Sabotage (ES)?

Employment sabotage (ES) encompasses behaviors that are intended to prevent an individual experiencing GBVH from obtaining or maintaining employment.ⁱ ES deprives an individual of the financial resources and the opportunities necessary to become free from an abusive relationship. ES also contributes to isolation of the person experiencing GBVH from others who may provide valuable resources and support.

Nearly 9 in 10 survivors of domestic/dating violenceⁱⁱ report experiencing ES, with up to 60 percentⁱⁱⁱ reporting job loss as a result.

What Does ES Look Like?

Individuals seeking to sabotage an individual's employment use a range of tactics with the goal of causing that individual to get fired, quit, or otherwise be ostracized within the workplace. They include actions that interfere with

an individual's ability to go to work, misuse workplace property or resources, and/or disrupt an individual's ability to successfully perform their job duties.

Disrupting Access to Work	Misusing Work Resources	Impairing Job Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disrupting access to transportation such as hiding the car keys or letting the air out of the tires • physically restraining them so they cannot leave the home • failing to provide childcare as promised • inflicting visual injuries to discourage them from going to work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • destroying workplace property such as clothing or electronic equipment • impersonating them via email or other online forms of communications • contacting their coworkers and supervisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing up at the workplace* • making repeated telephone calls* • causing fear and trauma that impedes their job duties and that of their coworkers • creating distractions to prevent them from being able to focus • keeping them up all night

*learn more about [stalking and the workplace](#)

As a result of ES, individuals experiencing violence report being frequently late for work, having to take time off, having difficulty concentrating and performing on the job, and ultimately being fired or having to quit.ⁱⁱ

How Can Workplaces Support Impacted Persons?

It is important that employers recognize that what they may interpret as performance issues could be the result of abusive behavior. Understanding that the abusive behavior is beyond the control of the employee and is intended to cause problems at work or potentially result in the employee's termination is crucial. **Maintaining employment is a matter of safety.**

Employers

To support the safety and job stability of individuals experiencing violence, employers should examine their policies, protocols, and practices for responding to GBVH as well as become familiar with how it can threaten employment.

- Employers should make clear its commitment to supporting individuals experiencing violence and trauma by having a responsive and comprehensive [GBVH policy](#); a code of conduct that stresses employee safety, respect, equity, and inclusion; and investments in employee benefits that promote health and wellbeing.
 - Individuals experiencing violence should not be held responsible or penalized for the actions of others and steps should be taken to support their ability to work such as [safety planning](#).
 - Processes addressing absenteeism, misconduct or misuse of work resources, and performance issues should consider the potential role of ES and share workplace resources and safety accommodations, as appropriate, to support their ability to succeed at work.
 - [When reviewing applications or conducting background checks for offers of employment, consider the impact of GBVH on an employee's work history, credit score or background check.](#)
- Create a prevention strategy that addresses how to prevent workplace harassment and recognize GBVH in the workplace and at home, identifies resources within the workplace and community, and helps employees understand how to stop GBVH before it starts.
- Educate employees about GBVH, its impact on the individual experiencing violence and the workplace, the workplaces' prevention and response strategies, and how supervisors or coworkers should support employees experiencing violence.
- Foster a strong relationship with local victim service agencies and other local supportive organizations that can be a resource to individuals experiencing GBVH. 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 GBVH and ES, there are things you can do to help.

- Familiarize yourself with your workplace's policies related to GBVH, including information on confidentiality, relevant [leave protections](#),

and potential accommodations to support an employee's safety at work.an employee's safety at work.

- [When assessing performance, consider the ways GBVH and ES may be affecting their work and explore supportive accommodations.](#)
- Have contact information for [the Hotline](#), [RAINN](#), your Employee Assistance Program, and your local domestic violence and rape crisis programs available to provide referrals, if desired. Offer to share this information virtually or on paper as one method may be safer 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 to share your concern about their well-being.
 - **Practice Empathy:** Be an attentive and empathic listener. Let them know this is not their fault. Ask how you can help. Build trust by following through with the support you offer.
 - **Avoid Judgment:** Experiencing GBVH is NEVER someone's fault. Respect others' experiences and decisions. Trust that they know what is best for their situation.
 - **Share Resources:** Offer information and helplines and inform them about any available workplace supports.
 - **Put Privacy First:** Always let the person experiencing violence decide what, when, how, and whom to share information with. 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 gender-based violence and harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the technical assistance request portal.



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.

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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.

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