Effects of Domestic Violence on the Workplace

A Vermont survey of male offenders enrolled in batterer intervention programs

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Vermont Council on Domestic Violence
Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont
Spectrum Youth & Family Services, Violence Intervention & Prevention Programs

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Study Introduction

- Statewide study on the effects of DV on the workplace by interviewing male participants in batterer intervention programs (BIP)

- Study sample of 193 is representative of men enrolled in BIPs in VT
  - 95% confidence level, +/- 4.5% margin of error

- Examined the impact of DV on the perpetrator and victim’s workplace
  - Abusive contact at the workplace
  - Paid and unpaid time taken off from work
  - Productivity and safety

- Examined the workplace response to DV
  - Supervisors and co-workers
  - Policies and procedures

- Gathered offenders’ perspectives on useful measures employers can implement to improve the workplace response to DV
# Employment Two Years Prior to Present

- 92% (178) were **employed**
  - 67% (129) worked for an employer only
  - 16% (31) worked both for an employer and self-employed
  - 9% (18) self-employed only

- 63% (101) had a **supervisory role**
  - “My other co-workers chose not to get involved. I am their boss, and I think they worried that there would be ramifications [if they confronted me], that I would be equally as abusive toward them.”

- 73% (117) had **never been in trouble at work** for other issues (i.e. drugs, alcohol, or violence at work)

## Size of Employer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Employer</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 employees</td>
<td>15% (24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>16% (26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-50</td>
<td>36% (58)</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>12% (19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>16% (25)</td>
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<td>500+</td>
<td>5% (8)</td>
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Offenders’ Lost Work Time - Unpaid

- Men lost a total of **52,731 unpaid days of work** – equivalent to **27 years** of full time employment – because consequences related to his domestic violence
  - Average 273 days/person

- Estimated lost wages for unpaid time out of work related to domestic violence totaled **$5.4 million**
  - Average $29,876 per person
Men lost a total of 337 days of work paid by employers because consequences related to his domestic violence.

- Average 1.7 paid days/person

Estimated wages paid by employers for time out of work related to domestic violence totaled $37,564.

- Average $197 per person
Abusive Behavior at Work

- 49% (87) spent time keeping track of where partner was and what she was doing
- 29% (50) contacted her to say something that scared or intimidated her
  - Example: “If you’re laying on the couch texting when I get home, I'm going to smash it in your face”
  - Example: “If you're not home when I get home there will be consequences”
- 40% of supervisors were aware that employees were contacting their partner in this way while at work
- 25% (44) left or were late to work to be abusive
  - 12 men used a company vehicle when they left
Impact on Safety and Productivity

- 80% (140) said their job performance was negatively affected because of their abuse

- 19% (34) caused or almost caused an accident at work
  - “A couple times to where I was thinking about something [else], I cut myself [while] using a meat slicer or slammed my hand in the door.”
  - “One of the guys I was working with got hit by a tree [because] I was pissed off, [which was a] pretty bad feeling because I thought I killed him.”
  - “I got in a petty argument with a friend and pushed his car over with a fork lift”
Supervisor awareness and response

Co-worker awareness and response
Response from Supervisors

- The majority of supervisors’ responses were neutral – their involvement was limited and comments were not constructive in addressing abuse.
  - “[My] supervisor said, you have to do, what you have to do.”
  - “[My supervisor] wishes me well and hopes everything works out for me”

- Some responses focused separation between work and home life.
  - “Nothing specific to the situation, but that I was taking off too much time from work.”

- A few responses challenged his abusive behavior.
  - “My supervisor was very upset. He confronted me about the abuse.”

- A few responses colluded with him.
  - “[My supervisor would ask me, ‘did she bleed?’ [He would tell me] to kick [her] because it hurts them less. We joke about it all day, every day.”
Response from Co-Workers

- The overwhelming majority of responses were not constructive or were colluding, including disparaging remarks about his partner, blaming her, or taking responsibility for his abuse off of him.

- Examples:
  - “[They would] tell me ways of spying on her, or ways of being vindictive.”
  - “They tried to tell me to get rid of her- co workers put the ideas in my head that I couldn't or shouldn't trust her.”
  - “They would say to leave her, that I didn't need [this] sh*t. Others would call her names.”
  - “Get away from her - she's going to put you in jail”
  - “They patted me on the back [and said] ‘good job’ [and] ‘that's taking control’”
## Other Responses

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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Co-Worker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referred to EAP, human resources or a counselor</td>
<td>7% (11)</td>
<td>7% (9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warned that they might face disciplinary action or get fired from work</td>
<td>22% (35)</td>
<td>23% (30)</td>
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<td>Warned that they might get in trouble with the law because DV is a crime</td>
<td>31% (49)</td>
<td>42% (54)</td>
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<td>Made it seem like their personal relationship was not a big deal or none of their business</td>
<td>43% (68)</td>
<td>41% (70)</td>
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<td>Blamed or talked badly about their partner</td>
<td>21% (33)</td>
<td>41% (70)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offered to help him out in any way</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>51% (66)</td>
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Partners’ Lost Work Time

- **Offenders estimated** that partners **lost 1,125 days** of work due to his domestic violence.
  - 147 days (13%) of lost work time **were paid** by her employer, totaling $19,080 (ave $350/person)
  - Lost wages from unpaid days off totaled $101,367 (ave $1,810/person)
  - Partners lost an average of **20 work days** per person

Reasons for lost work time:
- Address emotional and/or mental issues (26%)
- Address physical injuries (26%)
- Attend court/legal meetings (24%)
- Rest and recover post incident (9%)
Impact on Partners’ Employment

- 46% (65) said their abusive behavior had a negative affect on her productivity or career advancement:
  - Preventing her from going to work or getting a job or promotion
  - Making it difficult for her to get her work done
  - Making her look bad in front of co-workers
  - Creating problems that resulted in her getting disciplined

- 17% (22) said that DV created problems for partner that resulted in her quitting or getting fired
Victims Recounted How DV Affected Their Employment

- “He told lies about me so that everyone started treating me badly. My job description was changed and diminished. I finally had to leave a job I loved.”

- “My partner would instant message me and call me incessantly on my work phone. He would try my cell phone and when I did not answer, he immediately called my work phone.”

- “Living with abuse at home is so terrifying. But when [I] became viewed as a bad employee and [my] job changed, and then [I] had to leave and move away, nothing in [my] life felt safe anymore.”

- “I had to leave the office unexpectedly to file the Relief from Abuse Order and pick up my children. [My supervisor] was unsympathetic and demonstrated no compassion to my situation.”
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<th>Strategies to Prevent DV</th>
<th>Rated Somewhat to Very Effective</th>
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<td>Supervisor privately discussed your abusive behaviors with you and informed you about resources available</td>
<td>93%</td>
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<td>Company policy requires that people who get in trouble with the law because of domestic abuse must complete a domestic abuse program in order to keep their job</td>
<td>87%</td>
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<td>Required that employees attend a meeting to learn about company policies on not tolerating domestic abuse by employees</td>
<td>82%</td>
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<td>Written policy stating that the company does not allow use of company resources and work time to harass, intimidate, or abuse a partner in any way</td>
<td>76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor made it clear that what happens in the home should stay in the home and is none of anyone's business.</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Study Implications

- Domestic violence is not just a private, family matter. It impacts the workplace of both offender and victim and, therefore, employers must be responsive and proactive.

- Workplace responses demonstrate a culture that largely supports or ignores domestic violence.

- DV causes a significant loss of paid and unpaid work time, lost work productivity, and safety hazards for employees.

- Offenders’ suggested workplace strategies to prevent and address DV are opposite of their experiences.
Recommendations for Employers

- **Protocols and Policies** - Adopt a protocol and implement leave, benefit, and referral policies that address domestic violence in the workplace
- **Train** - Mandatory domestic violence trainings for managers, supervisors, and human resources staff
- **Educate and Inform** - Staff through brown bag lunches, workshops, and newsletters
- **Consider Security** - Worksite security measures to protect employees
- **Work Environment** - Create a fair and supportive work environment where it is safe to disclose abuse
- **Utilize Community Resources** - Connect with community-based efforts
- **Know the Law** – Be aware of state laws regarding employees and DV
Resources Developed from this Study

- **Full Report**


- **Executive Summary**

- **Model Policies**

- **Sample Brochure**