

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE WORKPLACE – INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is 'an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women, both in a relationship and after separation'.¹

Common forms of domestic violence include physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse, and economic deprivation.¹

Domestic violence can happen across all classes, ages, cultural backgrounds and genders.

Those experiencing domestic violence can suffer significant physical and mental health issues. These may include acute trauma, chronic conditions (such as heart conditions) and issues such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.²

How does it impact the workplace?

Due to the nature of working hours and a physical workplace being fixed and predictable, victims of domestic violence are particularly vulnerable at work. Many workplaces also have easy public access, making the victim easy to locate.

Some of the most common forms of domestic violence can be directed to the victim's workplace. These may include repeated phone calls, texts or emails.

A perpetrator may also try to sabotage work efforts through activities such as:

- creating sleep deprivation
- hiding work clothes
- promising to mind children and then refusing to do so
- preventing the victim from leaving the house on time or at all
- stalking or harassing the victim while at work.

Almost 6 million work days are lost in Australia each year due to depression.¹



Domestic violence – the facts

- One in three Australian women experience physical violence over their lifetime. This is mainly perpetrated by a male partner or ex-partner.³
- Domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged 15-44 years; a greater contributor than factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.⁴
- Two thirds of Australian women who report violence by a current partner are in paid employment.³

The strain of dealing with domestic violence at home, coupled with the intrusion into the workplace, may lead to:

- poor performance
- disrupted work patterns (lateness and absenteeism)
- conflict with colleagues or managers.

Victims may also be required to take time off work to attend doctor's appointments or court hearings.

What can you do as an employer?

Domestic violence does not easily fit the definitions of other forms of violence (such as workplace bullying, or violence from customers or clients). In addition, many employees are reluctant to disclose their situation, due to shame and fear of losing their job. Domestic violence can also be seen as a 'personal' issue, and not of relevance to the workplace or to management. Many managers believe they do not have the necessary skills to address the issue.

However, when an employee is experiencing domestic violence, it is critical for the workplace to play a role in prevention and safety. Maintaining paid employment is a critical pathway for a victim to leave an abusive relationship and start to establish a safe life.

Victims of domestic violence are unlikely to disclose personal details unless they feel safe to do so. As an employer, you can create and actively demonstrate a supportive environment where victims feel secure to share information before their situation gets out of control.

Supporting your employees to stay at work can also maintain productivity, reduce absenteeism associated with domestic violence, and reduce recruitment and retraining costs for your organisation.

Specifically, you can:

- introduce workplace entitlements
- develop domestic violence policies and procedures
- identify and collaborate with a domestic violence service for referral purposes.



Where can I go for more information?

The following organisations may be able to assist with more information about domestic violence, sexual assault and family relationship support.

Safe At Work, Safe At Home www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au	This website contains information for workplaces about domestic and family violence issues and practice, including key issues, policy, legislation, training and new initiatives.
Domestic Violence Legal Service Office Hours: 8am - 4pm Monday to Friday Level 1, Nichols PlaceCnr Cavenagh St & Bennett St Darwin NT 0801 GPO Box 2925, Darwin NT 0801 Phone: (08) 8999 7977Fax: (08) 8999 7979 Email: info@dvls.nt.gov.au	A free service for victims and people at risk of domestic and family violence.
Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) Mon-Fri 8:00am - 4:20pm Phone: (08) 8922 6472 Fax : (08) 8922 6499 Email: sarc.ths@nt.gov.au	SARC provides a free counselling service to anyone who may have experienced any form of sexual assault or sexual abuse either recently or in the past. They see both adults and children, males and females. They also provide free medical and forensic examinations for recent sexual assault.
Central Family Violence Counsellor Phone: (08) 8952 6075 East Arnhem Domestic and Family Violence Counsellor Phone: (08) 8987 0403 Katherine Domestic and Family Violence Counsellor Phone: (08) 8971 0777 Tennant Creek Women's Domestic Violence Counsellor Phone: (08) 8962 3123	Contact a counsellor within your area for further assistance or visit http://www.dvrcv.org.au/talk-someone/services-other-states/nt for a list of people to talk to.
NPY (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) Women's Council Domestic Violence Service	The focus of the Domestic & Family Violence Service is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide assistance and advocacy for individual victims of domestic violence that prioritizes their safety within a case management framework ■ Provide and facilitate community education with NPY communities, police, justice, health and other relevant workers ■ Building links and developing guidelines with other organisations and services to improve responses to domestic violence
Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Help Line (National coverage) 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) (24 hour)	This is a free and confidential service for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Qualified and specialist counsellors provide counselling, information, advice and referrals to relevant local services.
Dawn House Women's Shelter Phone: 08 8945 1388 Fax: 08 8945 2626 Email: info@dawnhouse.org.au	Dawn House Inc provides services to women and children escaping domestic and family violence.
Family Relationships Online (National coverage) www.familyrelationships.gov.au Family Relationships Advice Line 1800 050 321	This website provides all families with access to information about family relationship issues, ranging from building better relationships to dispute resolution.

This fact sheet has been adapted from the following sources:

- Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse fact sheet *Domestic violence: A workplace issue*
- Domestic Violence Workplace Rights and Entitlements Project fact sheet *Domestic violence and the workplace – Employer information*

References

1. Council of Australian Governments 1997, *National Domestic Violence Summit: Statement of principles agreed by heads of government*, available at http://archive.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/1997-11-07/docs/national_domestic_violence_summit.cfm
2. Costello, M, Chung, D & Carson, E 2005, 'Exploring alternative pathways out of poverty: making connections between domestic violence and employment practices', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 253-267.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, Publication 4906.0 - *Personal safety, Australia (2005 (Reissue))*, p34, available at [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20\(Reissue\)?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02005%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument)
4. VicHealth 2004, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, p 10, available from www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-violence/The-Health-Costs-of-Violence.aspx