



Intimate Partner Violence and the Workplace

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Every year, thousands of employees are impacted by intimate partner violence. Frightening stories about stalking, threats, assault, and violent death are in the newspapers on a regular basis. Organizations lose billions of dollars in absenteeism, productivity, health care costs, plunging morale, and bad publicity. In addition, the added costs of poor security, inadequate safety, and liability can be insurmountable.

According to the Department of Labor/OSHA, 5.3 million women are abused yearly and 74% of these women are harassed at work by their abuser.

What are some of the signs that indicate an employee may be experiencing intimate partner violence?

- Visible injury
- Unhappy and pregnant (partner violence escalates when the woman is pregnant)
- Unplanned vacation requests
- Depressed, tearful
- Talks about property being destroyed (car, pets, and other valuables)
- Unfocused, preoccupied
- Poor performance
- Emotional/physical problems
- Chronic stress, anger
- Fearful, always looking over her shoulder
- Engages co-workers in problem
- Frequently absent, late
- Talks about being stalked
- Hostile phone calls, emails, fax from abuser (sometimes relentless)
- Abuser may show up at workplace

What can an employer do if an employee discloses partner violence?

- Offer support and listen without judgment
- Let them know the situation will be kept confidential unless employee safety or legal issues indicate otherwise
- Ask if they have thought about a safety plan. Do they have a restraining order?
- Allow flexible use of benefits for court, medical care, or other services they and

their children may need

- Assess whether you can change their hours, phone extension, or transfer them to another location
- Work as a team with legal, human resources, security, and your consultant/EAP
- Contact your local police, if appropriate
- May need to let security know, provide picture of abuser at front desk, etc.
- Have resource information available on domestic violence services, hotlines

Organizational Steps:

- Create a policy on domestic violence and train all employees on this policy
- Be aware of local, federal and state laws pertaining to domestic violence in the workplace
- Do a risk analysis of the organization. Evaluate and create safety and security plans
- Create a crisis management team to handle all crises. This will provide consistency in times of crisis. Scimia Consulting Group can help you with this.
- Provide a culture of respect and confidentiality
- Have a relationship with your local police as well as related resources in your community.

Federal, state and local resources are available for those experiencing intimate partner violence. For resources in your area, call:

National Domestic Violence Hotline (24/7 availability)

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

www.ndvh.org

Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (CAEPV 2005)

Between July and September 2005, CAEPV polled 1,200 full-time employed adults across the US in the first-ever national benchmarking telephone survey regarding domestic violence and its impact on the workplace. Among the major findings were that 66% of those surveyed indicated they were not aware of their employer having a workplace domestic violence policy, 44% of full-time employed adults surveyed personally experienced domestic violence's effect in their workplaces, and most remarkably, 21% of full-time employed adult respondents (men and women) identified themselves as victims of intimate partner violence.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of victims of domestic violence indicated that their ability to work was affected by the violence. Among key causes for their decline in productivity, victims noted "distraction" (57%); "fear of discovery" (45%); "harassment by intimate partner at work (either by phone or in person)" (40%); fear

of intimate partner's unexpected visits" (34%); "inability to complete assignments on time" (24%); and "job loss" (21%).

Regarding co-workers as victims, 31% of respondents felt "strongly" to "somewhat obliged" to cover for a victim of domestic violence by performing his or her work or offering excuses for his or her absence, 27% reported "extremely frequently" to "somewhat frequently" having to do the victim's work, and 25% resented the victim because of the effect of their situation on the workplace. Finally, 38% of respondents were "extremely" to "somewhat concerned" for their own safety when they found out a co-worker was a victim of domestic violence.

Scimia Consulting Group, Inc. is a human resources consulting firm whose mission is to help organizations create and maintain an environment of trust, mutual respect, and civility. Donna Scimia, Principal and founder of Scimia Consulting Group, Inc., is a results oriented consultant with expertise in problem solving and conflict management. For more information call (914) 747-2960 or visit www.scimiaconsulting.com

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