

EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE WORKPLACE:

A Vermont survey of male offenders enrolled in batterer intervention programs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Michele Cranwell Schmidt, MPA, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont
Autumn Barnett, Spectrum Youth & Family Services
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This report informs policy makers and employers about the way Vermont workplaces are affected by domestic violence. It provides important information to help employers make decisions about policy and procedural responses to employees involved in domestic violence.

The pervasiveness and severity of domestic violence perpetrated through workplace resources and work time and the impact of these actions on the workplace is not well known in Vermont or in the U.S. This study offers Vermonters valuable information on domestic violence and the workplace and adds to this growing body of knowledge. The study findings come from a representative sample of men enrolled in batterer intervention programs in Vermont who have abused their intimate partners (95%, +/-4.5%). We focused on domestic violence perpetrated by men against their female intimate partners because the Vermont Criminal Information Center (2009) reported that women are the victim of men in 80% of domestic violence cases. The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence partnered with the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont and Spectrum Youth and Family Services' Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs to combine our topical and research expertise to design and implement this study. This study examined the impact of domestic violence on the perpetrator and victim's workplace, including abusive contact at the workplace, paid and unpaid time taken off from work, and productivity and safety. We also examined the workplace response to domestic violence from supervisors, co-workers, and policies and procedures. In addition, offenders' gave their perspective on useful measures employers can implement to improve the workplace response to domestic violence.

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.
- Domestic violence causes a significant loss of paid and unpaid work time, lost work productivity, and safety hazards for employees. As a result, efforts by employers to prevent domestic violence can positively impact their bottom line.
- The experience of study participants reflects a culture that largely supports or ignores domestic violence. Vermont employers can have a profound impact on the lives and well-being of their employees by fostering an environment that makes clear that domestic violence is not accepted.

Key Study Findings:

- 73% of respondents reported never having been in trouble with their employer for other issues such as drugs, alcohol, or violence at work; 45% of respondents had a criminal background check performed when they got their job.
- **29% of respondents contacted their partner while at work to say something that might have scared or intimidated her; 40% of supervisors were aware this type of contact occurred at work.** 25% left or were late to work to be abusive to their partner.

- 31% of respondents took paid and/or unpaid time off to be abusive or to deal with the aftermath of abuse during a specific incident. **Partners lost an average of 20 work days per person.**
- **Participants lost a total of 52,731 days of work — equivalent to 27 years of full time employment and \$5.4 million in estimated lost wages —** because of consequences related to domestic violence. **23% (30) collected unemployment to make up for lost wages.**
- As a result of domestic abuse, 14.5% of time offenders took off from work and 13% of time partners took off was paid by employers.
- Common reasons why respondents' partners took time off work were to address emotional and/or mental issues, address physical injuries, attend court/legal meetings, and recover post incident.
- **83% of supervisors** were aware of why respondents took time off of work due to their domestic violence offense; however, only **32% of supervisors gave any response** to the employee about his domestic violence incident, his behavior, or his relationship in general.
- **80% of respondents said their job performance was negatively affected by their domestic violence.** 19% caused or almost caused an accident at work.
- **93% of respondents suggested it would be helpful for supervisors to confront an employee whom they suspect is abusive toward their intimate partner.** Confronting the abuser includes: offering counseling, resources, help and support, and warning about the consequences of domestic violence.
- **87% of respondents** recommend a company policy that requires people who get in trouble with the law because of domestic abuse **must complete a batterer intervention program in order to keep their job.**
- **77% of respondents** felt that the **presence of a written company policy that sets a workplace culture against domestic violence** would be an effective measure that workplaces could take to prevent domestic violence.
- Two out of three respondents said that their workplace did not have a domestic violence policy.

"...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 ...it occurred so often that the Office Manager had to tell him not to do that anymore."

- Survivor of domestic violence on how abuse impacted her work life

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Private, nonprofit and state employers can play an important role in providing clear guidelines and creating a supportive and productive workplace by implementing model practices and policies that respond to domestic violence.

Domestic violence impacts the workplaces of both victims and perpetrators. Employers must balance their workplace's response to domestic violence, ensuring that victim safety is paramount and perpetrators are held accountable. Employers should affirm that a victim of domestic violence is not responsible for the abuse and that only the perpetrator can stop the violence. Employers should also be aware that their workplace's response to an employee who has been abusive to an intimate partner may have unintended consequences for the victim. Therefore, we encourage employers to draw on the expertise of domestic violence advocates in their community when crafting their business' response to domestic violence.

The following recommendations represent a range of appropriate actions that employers can take to address the impact of domestic violence on their workplace:

- **Protocols and Policies:** Adopt a protocol and implement leave, benefit, and referral policies that address domestic violence in the workplace. Sample protocols and policies can be found at the Vermont Attorney General's website <http://www.atg.state.vt.us/issues/criminal-law/domestic-violence> and in the appendix of this report.
- **Train:** Mandatory domestic violence trainings for managers, supervisors, and human resources staff raise awareness and sensitivity, making the workplace safer and more productive. Staff training ensures that supervisors give the right messages to employees who are victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. Experts in Vermont are available to offer and support training. Contact the Vermont Attorney General's Office at <http://www.atg.state.v.us/issues/criminal-law/domestic-violence.php> or (802) 828-5512 for more information.
- **Educate and Inform:** Educate staff through brown bag lunches, workshops, and newsletters. Inform employees who may be victims or perpetrators of domestic violence about resources available to them through their employment and in the community. Post and distribute resource and referral information in areas of high visibility and on websites. Ensure that human resource and/or Employee Assistance Program staff has updated referral information for employees.
- **Consider Security:** Review worksite security measures to protect employees. Work with victims to address potential safety concerns unique to their situation. Keep requests for assistance confidential.
- **Work Environment:** Create a fair and supportive work environment where it is safe to disclose abuse. Employees should not be disciplined, terminated, or denied opportunities because they are victims of domestic violence. Respect the authority and autonomy of adult victims to direct their own lives in all responses to domestic violence. Treat employees who commit acts of domestic violence at or from the workplace in the same manner as employees who commit other acts of violence at or from the workplace. Be clear that domestic violence will not be tolerated. View the Futures Without Violence "Pledge to Address Domestic and Sexual Violence in the Workplace" at <http://www.workplacesrespond.org> for more information.
- **Utilize Community Resources:** Taking a stand against domestic violence is not always easy, but we can make a difference when we stand together. Learn how employers can connect with community-based efforts to end domestic violence. Contact the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence at <http://www.vtnetwork.org> or at 802-223-1302 to find domestic violence service programs in your area. Or contact the National Network to End Domestic Violence at <http://www.nnedv.org/>.
- **Know the Law:** Be aware of state laws such as the Survivor Transitional Employment Benefit Program from the Vermont Department of Labor at <http://www.labor.vermont.gov> and statutory protections preventing discharge or discipline if an employee or family member is subpoenaed to court, as described in 13 VSA Section 5313.