Domestic Violence

and the Workplace

PARTNERSHIP
for PREVENTION

Domestic Violence and the Workplace

Domestic violence is a safety and health issue with medical, emotional, personal, economic, and professional consequences. Approximately 2 million women are assaulted each year, 75 percent by intimate partners.[1] Men can be victims of intimate partner abuse, as well: more than 800,000 men are raped and/or assaulted by a partner and 1 in 1,000 men are victimized by a partner every year.[2] Many of these victims are employed and spend a majority of their time at work. Although domestic violence usually occurs within the home, it carries over into the workplace in many ways.

At a Glance

Domestic violence concerns employers because it endangers employee health and safety and undercuts company productivity. Uncertainty about preventive roles, a desire to respect employee privacy, and the need for guidance are common reasons why employers hesitate to address domestic violence in the workplace.

To overcome these barriers, employers need data on effective workplace policies and educational and referral programs for employees (gaps health policymakers should fill). If domestic violence prevention yields a positive return on investment, employers would be further motivated to increase involvement in domestic violence prevention. ∎

With these high medical costs and diminished productivity levels, it is estimated that domestic violence costs employers between $3-5 billion every year. Moreover, employers lose another $100 million in lost wages, paid sick leave, and absenteeism linked to domestic violence.

Employers often provide health insurance for their employees. For employees who are victims of domestic violence, medical care costs can be high. Victims use the emergency room more often, visit physicians more often, and use more prescription drugs than persons without violence.[1,3,4] On average, a domestic violence victim incurs $1,775 more in annual medical costs than an individual who is not a victim.[4] As a result, employers often pay for the medical consequences of domestic violence.

Studies have found that domestic violence victims experience impaired work performance and require more time off than employees who are not abused.[5] Victims of domestic violence experience a broad range of emotional consequences, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, all of which can adversely affect employee productivity.[1,2,3] In addition, 75 percent of domestic violence victims face harassment from intimate partners while at work.[6]

With these high medical costs and diminished productivity levels, it is estimated that domestic violence costs employers between $3-5 billion every year. Moreover, employers lose another $100 million in lost wages, paid sick leave, and absenteeism linked to domestic violence.[7]

Employers recognize the negative impact of domestic violence: 49 percent of senior managers and 78 percent of human resource directors feel that it has a negative effect on their companies through absenteeism, low productivity, and higher health care costs.[5,6,7] (See **Current Employer Awareness.**) However, studies show the majority of employers do not feel that they should become involved in preventing domestic violence due to a number of existing barriers.[7]

Methods

To explore these issues and determine how to engage employers in domestic violence prevention, Partnership for Prevention, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, conducted four focus groups with employers.[8] In total, twenty-five health benefit managers representing employers from a range of regions, industries, and sizes discussed domestic violence and the workplace (see **Focus Group Participants**). The four groups were held on October 18, 2001 in Atlanta, Georgia, in conjunction with Partnerships for a Healthy Workforce[9] and Healthy People Consortium[10] meetings. Sally Johns Design, a professional consulting firm, recruited focus group participants and moderated the discussion sessions.[11]

Focus Group Participants

Employer sizes represented in the focus groups were:

- Nine small employers: fewer than 200 employees
- Six medium employers: between 200 and 1,000 employees
- Twelve large employers: more than 1,000 employees

Each group consisted of employers of each size, leading to dynamic discussions between participants. ■

The sessions used a discussion guide that organized the relevant questions. The general topic areas included: role of employers in domestic violence prevention; rationale for and barriers to engaging employers in domestic violence prevention; and ideas to engage employers in the domestic violence issue.

Studies have found that domestic violence victims experience impaired work performance and require more time off than employees who are not abused.

Current Employer Awareness

A survey of Fortune 100 companies found that employers are acutely aware of the impact domestic violence has on the workplace.

- 49 percent of senior executives and 78 percent of human resource directors feel that domestic violence has a negative effect on their company;

- 47 percent of senior executives believe that domestic violence affects employee attendance and productivity;

- 44 percent of senior executives think it adds to health care costs;

- 66 percent of senior executives and 75 percent of human resource directors feel that the negative consequences of domestic violence at the workplace would improve if it were addressed within the company.

In addition, 94 percent of security directors rank domestic violence at the workplace as a major safety and security issue. ■

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor[6], American Institute on Domestic Violence[7]

Domestic Violence

For this project, domestic violence was defined as 'violent behavior that is controlling, coercive, and/or abusive, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse; it is committed by one individual against another in a domestic/intimate relationship.' The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control uses the term 'intimate partner violence' and defines it as 'actual or threatened physical or sexual violence, or psychological/emotional abuse by a spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend, or date.' ■

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control[2]

Focus Group Results:
Role of Employers in Domestic Violence Prevention

Domestic Violence Issues at Work Acts of domestic violence infrequently occur at the worksite, though harassment from abusers does occur. Despite relative isolation from the issue, employers understand the effects on victims and their organizations (see **Current Employer Awareness**). Participants identified many problems resulting from domestic violence including absenteeism, inability to focus, poor self-esteem, low productivity, and low morale.

The majority of small employers in the focus groups stated that the health and safety of their employees takes priority over any other issues that stem from domestic violence, such as reduced productivity and absenteeism.

Current Policies and Services Most employers participating in the focus groups do not have a specific and defined domestic violence workplace policy. If one exists, it is often a "zero tolerance" policy without further specifications or details about any services provided by the employer (e.g., referrals, counseling, security). However, general workplace safety is a high priority and is consistently promoted by most employers.

In comparison to small employers, larger companies are the most likely to have a policy or take steps to prevent domestic violence. Victim referral services, written policies, security precautions, and educational materials for employees are most often provided.

In the focus groups, employers of all sizes reported employee assistance programs (EAPs) as one of the most useful resources for domestic violence. EAPs provide employees with a confidential resource to get information and help without the employer's direct involvement.

Employee Assistance Programs

Also known as EAPs, these programs provide services for employers that address a broad range of their employees' issues, such as health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, and others. Large employers often have an EAP program, about 80 percent, but small and medium employers primarily do not (22 and 54 percent have EAPs, respectively). Despite this, EAPs offer an excellent vehicle for many employers to provide services to employees on domestic violence. ■
Sources: Employee Assistance Professionals Association[12], Partnership for Prevention[13]

Employers' Roles Confidentiality and intrusion were foremost in participants' minds. Employers in the groups primarily view domestic violence as a personal and private issue in which the employer should not be involved. However, they do want to play a compassionate role and provide help when it is requested. The ultimate role of employers depends largely on senior management.

Because tangible acts of domestic violence rarely occur at the workplace, the role of employers is unclear. Employers do not see episodes of violence happening and often do not grasp that their employees may be at risk (this also raises liability concerns; see **Corporate Liability Concerns**). Participants stated it is not socially acceptable to discuss domestic violence openly at the worksite.

Focus Group Results:
Engaging Employers in Domestic Violence Prevention

Benefits of Employer Involvement Participants understood the negative effects that domestic violence can have on the workplace; they also recognized the benefits of taking a role in domestic violence prevention. Improvements in employee performance, productivity, health, self-esteem, employee trust and retention, and worksite safety are all potential positive outcomes for employers that take steps to prevent domestic violence. Further, employees will be safer, healthier, and happier individuals.

Barriers to Employer Involvement Employers are uncomfortable addressing issues of domestic violence. Participants identified many barriers to becoming more involved in domestic violence prevention. Confidentiality and intrusion are major concerns for employers; they do not want to become too involved in personal issues of their employees who may want not want to disclose they are victims of domestic abuse. As a result, most senior managers avoid the subject. Other barriers suggested by participants include the high cost for providing services, ignorance of the issue, and cultural and social beliefs.

Information for Employer Involvement Despite the issues and barriers raised by the participants, many want to become more involved in prevention. If the right guidance is available, potential benefits may outweigh barriers, motivating employers to do more. As described by participants, the information and resources employers need include:

- Educational materials, for managers and employees, on domestic violence facts and how to identify and address it;

- Cost-benefit analysis and quantification of return-on-investment, including productivity gains associated with domestic violence prevention policies and programs;

- Standards of domestic violence prevention programs in the workplace that are proven and effective;

- Model domestic violence materials for use in employee handbooks, resource materials, and orientations; and

- Facts on employer liability in different policy and program scenarios.

> Employers do not see episodes of violence happening and often do not grasp that their employees may be at risk.

> Participants identified many problems resulting from domestic violence, including absenteeism, inability to focus, poor self-esteem, low productivity, and low morale.

Corporate Liability Concerns

Although focus group participants discussed liability issues only briefly, they are important for employers to consider relative to domestic violence. For example, the average judgment in lawsuits against employers is $2.2 million. Some of the lawsuits may deal directly with security and liability issues related to domestic violence. If policies are in place, they must be complete and detailed to ensure that there is no room for misinterpretation or blame. Inadequate domestic violence policies can be costly. Employers that do not have any policies also have to be aware of the potential for acts of abuse to occur at the worksite. ∎

Source: American Institute on Domestic Violence[7]

> Employers of all sizes reported employee assistance programs (EAPs) as one of the most useful resources for domestic violence.

Focus Group Results:
Changing Social Norms Through Employers

Establishing Employer Involvement   Participants suggested ways employers could take part in domestic violence prevention. Using the guidance described above (if available), employers suggested they would:

• Adapt workplace policies to directly address domestic violence;

• Include domestic violence information and workplace policies in employee handbooks and at orientations;

• Offer counseling resources, particularly through EAPs;

• Choose health plans with domestic violence services, including counseling;

• Educate employees (including what domestic violence is and resources on how to get help) and managers (including how to identify domestic violence victims and offer assistance and referrals) through formal and informal means; and

• Train individuals on domestic violence prevention and confidential referral.

Partnerships   Some employers already work with local shelters and domestic violence centers through employee volunteering. They also refer their employees who are domestic violence victims to shelters and centers. Participants recommended that employers work with other community organizations to provide services and assistance to employees. They feel this would alleviate some resource needs and potentially neutralize the issue of confidentiality. Such partnerships or collaborations could include other employers in the community, faith organizations, homeless and domestic violence shelters, women's centers, volunteer organizations, law enforcement, chambers of commerce, wellness councils, and health plans.

Domestic Violence Prevention Recommendations

The focus groups conducted with employers provide insight into how they view domestic violence, the effect it can have on the workplace, and the conditions surrounding their involvement. The discussions produced several recommendations for both employers and health policymakers. Information on each of the following recommendations can be accessed through the **Useful Links and Resources** provided below.

Employers   Currently, most employers do not have specific domestic violence policies despite the knowledge that it adversely affects the workplace. Although there are barriers to addressing this issue, with proper guidance, employers can become involved by:

1) **Educating** all employees about domestic violence and how to access help.

2) **Offering resources** through a confidential EAP program as well as in employee materials.

3) Developing a **worksite domestic violence policy**, including leave policies and security measures (examples of policies have been created by organizations for public use, see **Useful Links and Resources**).

4) **Collaborating** with local domestic violence organizations and law enforcement agencies for education and service referrals.

Health Policymakers Employers are only one segment of the community with a responsibility to address domestic violence; not only does it affect the workplace, it also harms communities, schools, and families. Policymakers should assist employers with domestic violence prevention by:

1) **Creating and adequately distributing domestic violence information and resources** (including packets for use with employees and places for victim referral) tailored for employer use.

2) **Developing benchmarks** (through research) for employers to use in domestic violence prevention program creation.

3) Bringing together **coalitions** of service organizations and employers to create and maintain domestic violence programs in communities.

4) **Advocating** for domestic violence services in health plans and EAP programs.

References and Notes

1 Program in Brief: Preventing Violence Against Women. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January 2001.

2 Intimate Partner Violence Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Accessed June 4, 2002 at http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/ipvfacts.htm. (Ues statistics from National Violence Against Women Survey and National Crime Victimization Survey.)

3 Blume LT, Friedman LN, et al. Current Concepts in Women's Health: Domestic Violence and Primary Care. Victim Services, Aetna U.S. Healthcare. Massachusetts Medical Society, 1992.

4 October Is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Family and Intimate Violence Prevention Team, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Accessed September 25, 2001 at http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/fivpt/spotlite/home.htm.

5 Ending Violence Against Women: An Agenda for the Nation. The National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women, Violence Against Women Office, U.S. Department of Justice. Accessed June 15, 2001 at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/agendaforthenation/intro.htm and http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/agendaforthenation/tab15.thm.

6 Facts on Working Women: Domestic Violence: A Workplace Issue. Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor. Accessed September 25, 2001 at http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb/public/wb_pubs/domestic.htm.

7 American Institute on Domestic Violence. Accessed May 30, 2002 at http://www.aidv-usa.com and http://www.aidv-usa.com/Statistics.com.

8 Focus groups are a qualitative data collection source. Because of the limited number of participants, the information is not generalizable to all employers in the United States. However, they do provide insight into ways that employers can become involved in domestic violence prevention and areas for improved advocacy and targeting by policymakers.

9 Partnerships for a Healthy Workforce (PHW) is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded project managed by Partnership for Prevention. PHW brings together employers who are dedicated to promoting health in their workplace and among their workforce. For more information, go to http://www.prevent.org/phw_home.htm.

10 Healthy People Consortium is a group of organizations and state and local health departments that are working to advance health through involvement in and promotion of Healthy People 2010 (of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

11 Sally Johns Design recruited focus group participants from Partnerships for a Healthy Workforce; Healthy People Consortium; and Atlanta, GA area Chamber of Commerce.

12 What's an EAP? Employee Assistance Professionals Association. Accessed May 31,2002 at http://www.eapassn.org/public/pages/index.cfm?pageid=507.

13 Partnership for Prevention. Results from the Partnership for Prevention/William M. Mercer Survey of Employer-sponsored Health Plans. Washington, DC. To be released December 2002.

Useful Links and Resources

- **American Bar Association, Commission on Domestic Violence: Legal information, a guide for employers, and useful links and resources (http://www.abanet.org/domviol)**

- **American Institute on Domestic Violence: Education, information, and resources for employers (http://www.aidv-usa.com)**

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: Domestic violence facts, statistics, and useful links and resources (http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc)**

- **Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence: Information for employers on domestic violence and is a coalition of employers that are committed to ending domestic violence, partly through employer actions (http://www.caepv.org)**

- **Family Violence Prevention Fund: Information on domestic violence, with resources and a kit for employers (http://endabuse.org)**

- **New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence: Information for employers, including liability issues, example worksite policies, and technical assistance (http://www.opdv.state.ny.us/)**

- **Partnership for Prevention: Background document on domestic violence and the workplace, with examples of some organizations' domestic violence prevention policies and programs (http://www.prevent.org/violenceprevention.htm)**

- **U.S. Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office: "Toolkit to End Violence Against Women" with a section for the workplace (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo)**

PARTNERSHIP
for PREVENTION

1233 20th Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-2362
202-833-0009

www.prevent.org