

balance Xsheets

A series of information sheets for employers interested in helping employees balance their work, family, and personal responsibilities

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“Most explanations have focused on the causes of violent behavior. That narrow focus unnecessarily limits the inquiry. A more significant question must be asked: how well does the system deal with the symptoms of stress in an individual? Rather than focusing on cause alone, we should examine the capacity of the organization to respond to the signs of stress or potential trouble, whatever the possible causes.”

Denenberg & Braverman, 1999

“Violence is a process, as well as an act. Violent behavior does not occur in a vacuum. Careful analysis of violent incidents shows that violent acts often are the culmination of long-developing, identifiable trails of problems, conflicts, disputes, and failures.”

Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995

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Domestic Violence:

A Workplace Wellness Issue

Traditionally, workplace wellness programs have focused on promoting behaviors that will reduce rates of illness, maintain good health in the long term, and reduce injuries among workers. Today, preventing violence is also a wellness issue. In this issue of the Balance Sheets, we focus specifically on the impact of domestic violence on workplaces.

“...intimate partner violence includes rape, physical assault, and stalking perpetrated by current and former dates, spouses, and cohabiting partners, with cohabiting meaning living together at least some of the time as a couple. Both same-sex and opposite-sex cohabitants are included in the definition.”

Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, p. 5

According to Richard Denenberg and Mark Braverman of Workplace Solutions (1999), a nonprofit organization that creates model violence-prevention programs, workplace violence can be grouped into four categories:

- **Type I** violence is committed by individuals with no formal connection to the workplace. This is the most common type of fatal violence and includes robberies. Workers especially at risk include cabbies, police officers, and retail workers.
- **Type II** violence is carried out by people who have some connection to an employee. This is the most common type of non-fatal violence, and includes assaults by patients on health care workers and by clients on service providers.
- **Type III** violence occurs between employees. Actual violence is less common than threats – this category accounts for only about 6% of fatalities at work.
- **Type IV** violence is violence by personal relations or domestic violence.

Domestic violence is more common than most of us know. A 2000 study by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control reports:

- Approximately 1.5 million women and 800,000 men are raped and/or physically abused by an intimate partner each year in the United States. Because many are victimized more than once, total incidents are estimated at 7.7 million per year.
- Approximately 550,000 of the rapes and assaults perpetrated against women and 125,000 of those perpetrated against men by intimate partners each year result in injury requiring medical treatment.
- Most victimizations are not reported to the police. Only about 20% of all rapes, 25% of all physical assaults, and 50% of all stalkings perpetrated against women were reported to the police.

Children are frequently the victims of domestic violence. A report issued in 2001 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states the following:

- In 1999, 11.8 of every 1000 children in the U.S. were abused or neglected; over 1,000 children died.
- Victimization rates are highest among children younger than 3.
- The most common pattern of maltreatment was a child victimized by a female parent.

Domestic violence takes several forms. It can range all the way from pushing, grabbing, and shoving that arises during arguments between partners to systematic abuse that includes life-threatening beatings, rape, and the use of guns or knives. In a 1999 study by MacMillan & Gartner of 8,500 Canadian women, 1 of every 100 women had experienced systematic abuse.

Coercive control by intimate partners — such as restricting access to persons outside the household or to money — is a red flag for violence. In the Canadian study, the presence of coercive control increased the likelihood of systematic abuse by 1485%. When a female partner is employed and a male partner is unemployed, the odds of experiencing coercive control increase by 48%.

MODEL PROGRAMS

Abbott Laboratories, Abbott Park, IL

Abbott Laboratories' EAP team created a Domestic Abuse information packet that helps readers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The following topics are included:

- Statistics, myths and facts
- Characteristics of those who abuse and are abused
- Red flags for partner violence
- The progression of violence
- Long-term implications of violence
- Tools for leaving a batterer safely
- Resources

Pitney Bowes, Stamford, CT

Pitney Bowes recognizes the need to raise employee awareness and to educate managers and human resources staff on responding to domestic violence issues. As a result, the company has implemented a truly comprehensive approach. The company partners with local Domestic Violence Crisis Centers and the Governor's Prevention Partnership in Connecticut.

Managers and human resources professionals have been trained to recognize warning signs and handle incidents of suspected domestic violence.

Resource and contact materials have been made available to Pitney Bowes' 32,000 employees through information tables, newsletter articles and brochures in core areas, cafeteria table tents, restroom displays, and a family violence web site.

Seminars for employees during October — Domestic Violence awareness month — have included:

- Keeping Peace at Home
- New Parenting Skills That Work
- Bully-Proofing your Child
- Dating and Relationships: What Parents Need to Know
- The Power of Parents in Prevention
- Violence in the Home: Issues and Answers

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston, MA

As one of his first acts as Governor in August of 1997, Governor Paul Cellucci issued an Executive Order that instituted a zero tolerance policy for domestic violence among 50,000 state employees. One of the unique features of this policy is that it offers not only protection and services, but also 15 days per year of paid leave and up to 6 months of unpaid leave to employees and their children who are victims of domestic violence. A training program accompanied the roll-out of this policy to all employees.

The services and protections offered to employees include:

- Alerting security personnel
- Screening telephone calls
- Moving workers away from unsecured entrance
- Re-assignment to another community

Employees who engage in violence can face reprimands, required treatment, loss of vacation time, suspension, demotion, or termination.

Covance Central Laboratory Services, Indianapolis, IN

Covance recently rolled out a formal Violence Prevention Program that focuses on both domestic and workplace violence. The program began by providing mandatory training for managers, and workshops for all 1,000 employees. Some of the training was provided by the Picture This Players, an acting troupe that does community presentations for a local hospital. The training was provided over the course of two days, giving staff the option of choosing which day to attend. Simultaneously, new Standard Operating Procedures to prevent workplace violence were rolled out.

San Mateo County, Redwood City, CA

In 1995, a joint labor-management committee developed the county's first-ever policy to respond to workplace violence acts or threats. It included procedures for dealing with both internal (those initiated by an employee towards an employee) and external (those initiated by a client, customer, or member of the public) acts or threats.

The policy was revised and expanded in 2001 to include protection for individuals facing domestic violence and to provide an appropriate organizational response. The current policy "establishes a strong commitment to provide a safe work environment free of violence and threats of violence" for the 4,800 employees of the county.

The policy emphasizes the use of early prevention; provides for training and education of all employees; and sets up procedures for reporting, investigating, and resolving incidents and reports of acts or threats of violence in the workplace.

CRISIS PRONE OR CRISIS PREPARED: CONSIDERATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Crisis-prone organizations are especially vulnerable to dangerous and disruptive situations, such as inter-employee violence and conflict, assaults by non-employees, harassment, threats, and intimidation. Lacking adequate preventive systems, crisis-prone organizations experience lowered morale, increased disability costs and a far greater risk of legal liability. A crisis-prepared organization, in contrast, encourages internal communication and an early, effective response to signs of distress. It listens carefully to the needs and concerns of employees and managers (Denenberg & Denenberg, 2001)

Most incidents of workplace violence do NOT occur without warning. Case studies of violent incidents often reveal prior behavior escalating toward violence, precipitating events, and missed opportunities for intervention.

Specific behaviors might include:

- direct or indirect verbal threats
- threatening behavior or history of workplace difficulties
- unusual fascination with violence, weapons, and killing
- bizarre thoughts or paranoia
- isolation from peers
- extreme depression

Examples:

"My former spouse keeps calling me, cursing, and hanging up."

"Coworkers report that Jones seems obsessed with getting even with Rogers."

"Smith is talking about blowing away the Governor. I think he has a gun. He was just turned down on the appeal of his case for worker's compensation."

"The judge got her fifth letter this year from Harris telling her that he loves her passionately."

"The CEO's office just got a call from Doe saying that the Chairman's life is in danger."

"I know I only met him once, but I know that he loves me; once his wife is out of the way, we can be together always."

(Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995)

ACTION STEPS

Braverman translates his analyses of case studies of workplace violence into seven specific action steps (1999):

1. Get support from the top

Visible support by the leaders of the organization goes a long way toward convincing employees that change efforts are serious. Leaders can signal support by appointing a high-level team and making it clear that the organizational culture will change.

2. Form a team

A team including many stakeholders will probably be necessary for change to be effective. Domestic violence advocates encourage organizations to make sure that teams include employees who have been abused.

3. Perform a violence risk audit

Audits should include the physical structures of the workplace as well as information about employee opinions and concerns, past experience with violence and conflict, and current policies and systems.

4. Develop policies and procedures

Examples of existing policies are widely available (see resources on back page). Good policies define what is meant by "violence," lay out clear expectations for employees and consequences for violating them, and define the action steps for workplace responses to violence.

5. Offer training in the policy and procedures

Training is one of the main instruments of culture change. Through training, managers can learn that they will be held accountable for failing to respond early and effectively to risks for workplace violence.

6. Arrange for easy, nonpunitive access to medical and mental health expertise

Early assessment by professionals of the risk of violence from a particular individual is critical to prevention.

7. Have clear, commonsense policies and procedures for terminations and layoffs

Terminations and layoffs are critical events in the life of an organization, both for the employees who are let go and those who remain. Often, the fallout has less to do with the event itself than with the communication (or lack of it) surrounding the event and how employees are made to feel.

Zero Tolerance?

Caution should be exercised when using this phrase. Without intending to, employers may convey the idea that harsh punishments will follow even the slightest infraction. The result may be reluctance among batterers to seek help and among employees to report concerns (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999).

Continuing Questions

Misconceptions and controversy remain about domestic violence. Some advocates argue that not enough attention is paid to domestic violence directed toward men. Others argue that not enough attention is paid to the violence perpetrated by women, often against children.

Disagreements also continue about whether treatment is possible when batterers and their victims continue to live together.

Even for employers who do an excellent job of preventing and responding to workplace violence, a moral dilemma remains. What can and should be done to assist employees who are being abused when the threat of workplace violence seems low?

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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Websites:

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs/factsheets/canstats.cfm

U.S. Department of Justice Programs – Violence Against Women Office
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/statistics.htm

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
www.ncadv.org/gettinghelp/workplace.htm

Workplace Solutions
www.wps.org

Family Violence Prevention Fund
www.fvpf.org

General Information

This series is a joint project of the Boston College Center for Work & Family, in Boston, MA, One Small Step, in San Francisco, CA, and the Midwestern Work-Family Association, in West Lafayette, IN, with participation by Work/Life Balance of Philadelphia, PA.

The Boston College Center for Work & Family (Center) is home to the national Work & Family Roundtable and the regional New England Work & Family Association, which together represent over 165 employers. These corporate partnerships provide a sounding board to ensure the Center's research responds to the needs of the workplace, and create a valuable opportunity for corporate leaders to convene to shape corporate and public responses to the demands of the workplace, family, and community in order to enhance employee effectiveness.

One Small Step (OSS) The Bay Area Employer Work & Family Association promotes the development of employee and family supportive initiatives in San Francisco Bay Area workplaces. Through conferences, publications and other services, OSS assists its nearly 100 members and other employers in taking at least "one small step" to respond to employee, family and business needs. OSS was founded by The United Way of the Bay Area in 1986 and currently operates under the auspices of the Northern California Council for the Community.

The Midwestern Work-Family Association (MWFA) advocates for quality work environments that are consistent with business objectives. MWFA was created through a partnership of The Center for Families at Purdue University and leading midwestern employers. With research, education, and outreach, the Center for Families at Purdue University strengthens services to families provided by employers, legislators, and others.



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