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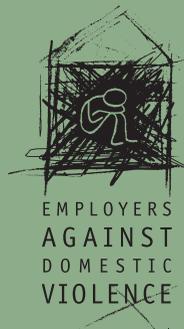
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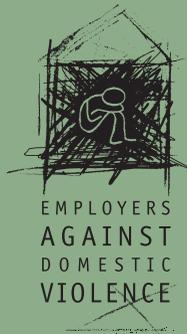
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EMPLOYERS
AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

How Employees Who Batter Affect the Workplace

An Employers Against
Domestic Violence Initiative

Executive Summary

It's widely known that domestic violence affects the abuser quite differently than the victim. Less widely known is the one similar result — poor job performance. Therefore, it's important that employers understand their liabilities, as well as their options to create policies to protect everyone involved. However, the first things to understand are the specific ways employees who batter can affect the workplace.

BACKGROUND

Employers Against Domestic Violence (EADV) is an organization of Massachusetts-based employers who recognize that domestic violence is an important workplace issue. EADV raises awareness among employers about the impact of domestic violence in the workplace and helps them respond by developing resources and models for prevention, education, and outreach.

In 2001, EADV conducted four focus groups with a **combined total of 29** convicted male domestic violence offenders. Participants were chosen from four certified batterer intervention programs in Massachusetts. Their professions ranged from managers to craftsmen, with the majority of the sample representing the latter.

THE GOAL WAS TO INVESTIGATE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

How do employers respond to domestic violence offenders?

How do employees who batter detract from productivity?

How do abusers use workplace resources to abuse their victims?

What did abusers think employers do for and about them?

What mediums and messages are likely to inspire abusers to seek help?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Several abusers made costly and dangerous mistakes on the job as a result of perpetrating domestic violence.
- Most abusers used company phones, e-mail, and vehicles in order to perpetrate domestic violence.
- Most abusers used paid work time in order to attend court for matters relating to their perpetration of domestic violence.
- Most employers expressed support for the abuser, but few expressed concern for the victim.
- 10% of employers posted bail for abusers or granted them paid leaves of absences for court dates related to domestic violence.
- According to focus group participants, “zero-tolerance” policies can endanger victims of domestic violence because many abusers would blame and punish the victim for the company’s action.
- Abusers stated that they could benefit from information on domestic violence and referrals for batterer intervention made available through the workplace.
- When asked to respond to an assortment of domestic violence prevention posters, abusers agreed that those depicting children who witness domestic violence were the most affecting.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this pilot study were limited by several factors. The sample size was small. All data was self-reported. All participants were drawn from a pool of certified batterer intervention program clients, which doesn't represent all batterers. Selection bias is a potential threat to validity, as all participants volunteered for enrollment. However, this threat is considered minimal because those who participated in the pilot study appear demographically and characteristically similar to the general population of batterer intervention program attendees.

1

HOW DO EMPLOYERS RESPOND TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS?

Findings

- Supervisors were often sympathetic to abusers, rarely penalizing them and at times posting bail for them.
- Supervisors reprimanded abusers only for the substance abuse that went along with it. They rarely addressed the violence directly.

Observations

Almost all participants indicated that they told their supervisors about their acts of violence. The abusers had either been forced (due to incarceration) or had chosen to admit the details. Of those abusers who admitted their acts, almost all said their supervisors were sympathetic to them, and were concerned about their welfare. Three participants reported that their supervisors had personally posted bail when they were arrested.

Participants admitted they were rarely, if ever, penalized or docked vacation or personal days for leaving work early or missing days in order to attend court dates. Some were given paid leave. Most were assured of job stability, even if they were sentenced to serve up to six months in prison. One participant explained, “I missed four weeks of full-time work, spread out over five months. I got paid for most of that time.”

Only three participants said that their supervisors refused to post bail or give them time off, and two other participants explained that they were fired as a direct result of their domestic violence offenses. Several participants revealed that their supervisors confronted them when they were arrested only to sternly advise them to refrain from substance abuse. In two cases, supervisors threatened them with a loss of employment if they began drinking again. The reproaches did not touch on the violence.

Repeatedly, and in a variety of ways, each focus group was asked the extent to which supervisors expressed concern for the victims of their violence. Only one participant was able to recall any comments of this nature. Some employers even blamed or expressed antipathy toward victims. In the words of one participant, “They said she probably got what she deserved.”

2

HOW DO EMPLOYEES WHO BATTER DETRACT FROM PRODUCTIVITY?

Findings

- Participants missed work due to court proceedings, incarceration, and other activities directly related to their perpetration.
- Participants made dangerous and expensive mistakes on the job because they were distracted by their abusive relationships.

Observations

On average, participants tended to miss approximately seven business days for court activities related to their perpetration of violence. In addition, several participants had been incarcerated for periods that ranged from one night to six months and their job position had been “held” for them while they were in jail or prison. Some participants indicated that they never missed an entire work day due to their violence perpetration, but missed between 20–25 hours (roughly three business days) per month for an extended period of time as a direct result of their violence perpetration. Subjects in this sample often missed weeks — in some cases months — of work.

While one original intent of this study was to investigate the extent to which perpetrators’ absences from work reduced productivity, there was an unanticipated finding: Many employees who batter endure emotional distress or distraction due to their behavior, which can also create significant costs for employers.

Almost all participants acknowledged that they made mistakes due to this type of emotional distress. Some were distracted because they were worried about going to prison, others were bothered by shame and guilt because of the way they treated their intimate partners, and still others were affected by depression due to the separation from their children — which made it difficult to concentrate on work.

One example of this was given by a participant who is a tree removal specialist. He said that, because of his emotional distress, he almost killed a co-worker. “I was up there, just doing my thing, and not thinking about the people in the group. I was thinking about the whole [domestic violence] situation. I took the top off. It came pretty close to a guy I work with.”



3

HOW DO ABUSERS USE WORKPLACE RESOURCES TO ABUSE THEIR VICTIMS?

Findings

- Abusers use large quantities of company time and resources to monitor their partners — including phones, e-mail, vehicles, and even other employees.

Observations

According to the focus group participants, perpetrators of domestic violence not only decrease productivity by missing work or making errors on the job, but also by using work time to “monitor” their victims. Abusers contact their victims often, to be certain of where they are at all times. This is so they can “catch” victims doing something they have been forbidden to do, or so they can determine who victims can spend time with. One participant described his monitoring in the following way:

“I would call her to see if she’s at home. How many times she would be on the phone calling whoever and how long she was on the phone with each person and how long it took her to answer the phone. ‘How come you were on the phone with your friends? Are they more important than me? Huh? F--- your damn friends, huh?’ She would be on the other end of the phone and like if the phone rings three times and all of a sudden she clicks in... I [knew she was talking to someone else]. I would use my [work] phone to do that probably four times a day.”

Almost all participants in these focus groups who had access to a company phone admitted to using it for “checking up on” their victims during the workday. Participants who didn’t have access to a company phone were likely to use cell phones or pay phones in order to check up on their victims. Several participants whose work involves driving a vehicle admitted to using the company vehicle in order to stop at their victims’ homes and check on them during the day. One participant stated that he had a co-worker check on a victim for him during work hours.

WHAT DID ABUSERS THINK EMPLOYERS DO FOR AND ABOUT THEM?

Findings

- Many participants felt that “zero tolerance” policies would actually endanger victims because many abusers would blame and punish the victims for the companies’ actions.
- Many participants explained that changing their behavior requires education, and suggested confidential counseling as a solution.
- Many participants suggested “prevention-oriented” policies, explaining that domestic violence policies should be outlined during new-hire orientation and that education sessions should be available to all employees regularly.

Observations

Zero Tolerance — Not all participants agreed that zero tolerance policies (one strike and you’re out) would be effective at preventing domestic violence. The majority of participants agreed that they might “think twice” about committing violence if they knew their jobs were at stake. However, several mentioned that the threat of going to jail (and losing one’s job) isn’t enough to deter many perpetrators, and therefore would not protect victims. Some participants expressed a concern that zero tolerance policies could actually endanger victims. They reported that batterers who get fired because of their violence are likely to blame — and therefore punish — their victims. The participants went on to say that batterers’ loss of income and ensuing depression would make them even more dangerous.

Participants also argued that firing employees because of their violence perpetration meant only that they would find employment elsewhere and remain fundamentally unchanged as individuals. A few participants suggested a possible “middle ground” policy such as suspension for the first offense and termination if the employee in question didn’t participate in counseling or intervention.

Counseling and Referrals — Individuals in the focus groups said they would respond positively to policies that guard their confidentiality and provide them with information and referrals for counseling intervention. As they explained, changing abusers’ behavior requires education about what constitutes abuse, about alternatives to violence, and about victim safety. Participants also expressed interest in examining their own history as both victims and perpetrators of abuse.

Prevention — At the participants’ most recent workplaces, only four (14%) of them were informed of domestic violence policies when they were hired. Participants stated that companies should clearly explain domestic violence policies and consequences during new-hire orientation.

Each participant had a suggestion on how to provide all employees with monthly or annual domestic violence education sessions. They all agreed that the program would work best if it included both men and women, and featured videos to help the participants recognize behaviors in themselves. One financial broker explained, “Once a year we have to go to ‘Ethics,’ which explains to us how we can trade, what we can trade. We have to get that clear. They should have the same thing on domestic violence.”

Participants highlighted that many employers may be unaware of what constitutes domestic violence, and they pointed out that employers will not be effective at screening, referring, or penalizing employees until they recognize domestic violence and are trained how to respond. Two participants stated that (regardless of what training or policies were instituted) nothing would make a difference for some abusers.

WHAT MEDIUMS AND MESSAGES ARE LIKELY TO INSPIRE ABUSERS TO SEEK HELP?

Background

As a component of this study, each focus group was asked to review and comment on ten posters designed to raise awareness about domestic violence and prevent further harm.

Findings

- Participants who are fathers stated that posters featuring children with their fathers or suffering because of their abuse were most effective.
- Participants indicated that graphic posters and those which conveyed consequences for perpetrators were highly effective, while abstract posters were least effective.

Observations

Almost all participants who are fathers stated that the posters featuring children with their fathers — or suggesting that abusing women harms children — were the most effective. One participant said, “It reminds me of when I was a little kid and the fact that I’m not able to be around my son. That would either stop me right there in my tracks, the abuse or whatever, or I would — excuse the figure of speech — get my head out of my a-- and go get help.”

The overwhelming majority commented that these posters broke their hearts and would have inspired them to think about their behavior even before they were arrested or had attended any counseling sessions. Other participants felt that graphic posters, such as ones that featured women with blackened eyes or implied serious injury or loss of life, would be the ones most likely to capture their attention.

Posters with a more abstract, artistic, or unspecific message were almost uniformly deemed unlikely to be effective by the participants. For example, there was a poster that presented a ticking time-bomb with the caption “Honey, I’m home” beneath it, which was unappealing to participants without exception. Across groups, the perpetrators felt that this poster minimized domestic violence by making light of it. They suggested it would not discourage any abuser from committing violence, and some even said it might encourage them to laugh at the universality of abuse.

Several participants felt posters featuring the effects of violence on women were unlikely to make any abuser seek counseling. They suggested posters featuring the consequences of violence for the perpetrator would work better — consequences such as jail, inability to spend time with their children, or the loss of their home or job.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study raises questions about how batterers may use workplace resources to harm victims, and how this behavior affects their employers. The findings indicate that abusers may find it difficult to keep their problems from affecting their job performance. Employers concerned about the negative effects of domestic violence perpetration on workplace productivity should respond with policies and intervention strategies that will help abusers change their behavior.

We believe that these results will inspire others to join us as we continue to research the effects of domestic violence on the workplace and continue to protect victims of abuse.