

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence doesn't happen only at home; it can cross over into the workplace. Prudent employers acknowledge this fact and take steps to minimize the risks.

Facts about Domestic Violence

- On average, seven per cent of Ontario women living in a common-law or marital relationship are victims of violence from a spousal partner
- Each year in Ontario there are approximately 25 female victims and two male victims of spousal homicide
- Just over one-third of spousal assaults are reported to the police – many go unreported
- The social costs, including health care for victims, criminal justice, social services and lost productivity, are estimated in the billions of dollars; the psychological impacts for victims, their family and friends cannot be measured by dollars (Statistics Canada 2006)

Domestic violence will affect the workplace, directly or indirectly when:

- The abuser harasses/assaults the victim on the job
- The victim is absent from work due to injuries
- The victim is less productive due to stress and distraction

In nine out of 10 violent workplace incidents, the victim later confides in a co-worker (Statistics Canada 2004). Therefore, it is important to educate employees about what to do if they suspect, have witnessed or have been told about domestic violence.

Recognizing signs of Domestic Violence

The victim may:

- Have bruising that cannot be explained

- Miss work on a regular basis or seem to be sick more often
- Be sad, lonely, withdrawn and afraid
- Have trouble concentrating on a task
- Receive upsetting phone calls throughout the day
- Use more alcohol or drugs to cope

What can a co-worker do?

- Let your colleague know that it is safe to talk to you
- Provide phone numbers of local shelters, community services and the company employee assistance program (EAP), if one is available
- Suggest that threatening voice mails or emails received at work be saved in case they are needed for future legal action
- Offer to screen phone calls or emails
- Suggest that your colleague park close to the building entrance and ask for security escorts if they are available at your workplace
- Provide helpful information from a reliable source, such as the brochure about developing a safety plan found at this link: <http://www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca/eng/dlmaterials/BlueEng.pdf>

What can the employer do?

- Include domestic violence issues in your workplace violence prevention policy and program
- Educate all employees on:
 - The policy and program
 - Appropriate actions to take at your workplace
 - Signs of domestic violence
 - Resources for victims of domestic violence

Fast Facts: Domestic Violence

- If an employee reports domestic violence, develop a safety plan to ensure the victim is protected while at the workplace
- Ensure that all employees are aware that the EAP is available for situations involving domestic violence (whether the employee is the victim or a witness); if a corporate EAP is not available, provide alternative community resources
- Encourage the victim to contact a professional who can assist in the development of a personal safety plan for the victim
- Encourage the victim to have the workplace included on restraining orders
- With the victim's permission, screen for the abuser by providing a photo or description to reception and security personnel
- Consider temporarily relocating the victim within the workplace, and allowing a flexible work schedule to make the victim's work day less predictable
- Communicate reported incidents of workplace violence and corrective actions to appropriate workplace parties including Human Resources and JHSC members

Domestic violence is workplace violence as soon as it impacts the workplace. To guard against it, employers should:

- Encourage all workplace parties to look for signs of abuse and take appropriate action
- Inform all workplace parties that they must report any abuse or violent behaviour that they witness
- Ensure that any report received, either verbal or written, is acted upon immediately

“Communities become safer when all parts of the community work together.” (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration 2007)

For further information contact:

Ontario Women's Directorate –
<http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/>

Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children – <http://www.crvawc.ca/>

Reference List:

Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) 2007, “Domestic Violence Action Plan Update, January 2007”, viewed 15 February 2008, <<http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/resources/publications/dvap/index.shtml>>.

Statistics Canada 2004, “Criminal Victimization in the Workplace”, viewed 15 February 2008, <<http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=85F0033M2007013>>

Statistics Canada 2006, “Measuring Violence Against Women – Statistical Trends 2006”, viewed 15 February 2008, <<http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/85-570-XIE/85-570-XIE2006001.pdf>>.