

Why Are Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, and Sexual Harassment Workplace Issues?

While the #MeToo movement, rightfully, highlighted sexual assault and harassment occurring in the workplace, it neglected to open the conversation beyond violence that occurs directly in the workplace to discuss violence that spills into the workplace from our private lives. As we moved from the initial awareness of the #MeToo movement into a pandemic that created a blurring of work and home for many workers, domestic and sexual violence hotlines saw an increase in service calls and resource needs. The increase of survivor needs of and access to resources, blurring of home and work, and societal focus on anti-harassment in the workplace has created an atmosphere where our workplaces can, not only, provide training, education, and resources to prevent assault and harassment in the workplace, but can also be a safe haven and potential escape valve for survivors experiencing violence in their personal lives.

QUICK FACTS

- **\$137.8 billion** is lost in productivity due to the impacts of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment.
- Domestic violence accounts for **27%** of incidents of workplace violence
- Nearly **20%** of abusers responded to a 2004 study saying they had almost caused a workplace safety accident due to concentration issues caused by their abusive behaviors
- Nearly **7 million women and 3 million men** reported some time of sexual violence by a workplace-related perpetrator
- **9.4%** of the targets of stalking knew their stalker through professional avenues

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When workplaces fail to address domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH), they become less safe and productive; as well as succumb to decreased morale among employees. No matter where it occurs, DVSASSH can have impacts for not only the survivors, but also coworkers and the overall workplace. For example, domestic violence accounts for 27% of workplace violence that harms the survivor in addition to coworkers, supervisors, and the workplace environment.¹ When this is paired with the knowledge that approximately 30% of mass shootings occur in the workplace² and 59.1% of mass shooters were found to have a history of domestic violence,³ the likelihood of domestic violence spilling into the workplace increases.

Safety concerns are not limited to the workplace of the survivor. Rather, the person causing harm can become so distracted that they can create safety issues within their own workplace: a 2004 study found that nearly 20% of abusers responded that they had almost caused a safety accident due to concentration and distraction issues caused by their desire to control the survivor.⁴ These safety accidents can increase work stoppages as well as payment from the business for workers comp, health and worksite insurance, and employee leave due to injury. Not only can the harm-doers create an unsafe atmosphere for their coworkers, but many also reported using workplace resources (time, materials, equipment, etc.) to facilitate their harm. Overall, when someone is causing harm to another, they are contributing to safety and productivity concerns in their own workplace.

In addition to the safety concerns that stem directly from someone causing harm to an employee outside of work, centering survivors of DVSASSH can also save a business time and money. It is estimated that every year \$137.8 billion is lost in productivity due to the impacts of violence on a survivor.⁵ This can be in the form of lost or distracted work days, decreased work output, as well as damage to company property due to the actions of the person causing harm.



¹ Department of Labor. (n.d.). Workplace Violence Warning Signs, *DOL Workplace Violence Program*. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/human-resources-center/policies/workplace-violence-program#WorkplaceViolenceWarningSigns>

² Ladika, S. (2023). Mass Shootings—Many in the Workplace—Are on the Rise. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/risk-management/pages/mass-shootings-many-in-the-workplace-are-on-the-rise.aspx>

³ Geller, L.B., Booty, M. & Crifasi, C.K. (2021). The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014–2019. *Inj. Epidemiol.* 8(38). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>

⁴ Ridley, E., et al. (October, 2005). *Domestic Violence Survivors at Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment*. Maine Department of Labor and Family Crisis Services: Augusta, Maine. Retrieved from https://www.maine.gov/labor/labor_stats/publications/dvreports/survivorstudy.pdf

⁵ Peterson, C., et al. (2018). Short-Term Lost Productivity per Victim: Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, or Stalking, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 55(1), 106–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.03.007>

While domestic and dating violence create the above concerns, sexual violence (sexual assault and harassment) also has a wide range of impacts in the workplace. An analysis of National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) data estimated that 5.6% of women (almost 7 million) and 2.5% of men (nearly 3 million) reported some type of sexual violence by a workplace-related perpetrator.⁶ This indicates that the workplace is often the site of sexual violence. However, the trauma experienced by survivors of sexual violence outside of the workplace must also be addressed by the workplace through trauma-informed practices that understand how trauma manifests and how trauma survivors may respond to external stimuli in the workplace.

Women who experience sexual harassment are __ more likely than their male counterparts.

9X

to quit

5X

to transfer

3X

to lose their jobs

Sexual violence within the workplace can cause legal, monetary, and safety concerns for organizations. Sexual violence that occurs external to the workplace can cause trauma that impacts a survivor's workplace capacity and focus, ability to complete tasks, and attendance. A 2006 survey found that more than 19% of adult female rape survivors and more than 9% of adult male rape survivors said their victimizations caused them to lose

time from work.⁷ Additionally, women who experience sexual harassment in the workplace are nine times more likely to quit, five times more likely to transfer, and three times more likely to lose their jobs than their male counterparts.⁸ Ultimately, sexual violence that occurs within or outside the workplace has ramifications on morale, safety, and employee turnover.

Finally, stalking is a type of violence that often co-occurs with dating and domestic violence as well as sexual violence. However, it can also occur on its own. Customer facing roles in retail and fast food, in particular, can create an atmosphere where the "customer is always right" attitude and positive customer interactions can be misinterpreted by a customer for something akin to loving affection. This can create an environment where an employee feels caught between staying at a job seeing this person who is causing them fear multiple times a day and being able to pay their bills.

⁶ Basile, K.C., D'Inverno, A.S., Wang, J. (2020). National Prevalence of Sexual Violence by a Workplace-Related Perpetrator, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 58(2), 216–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2019.09.011>.

⁷ Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. (2006). *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Rape Victimization: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey*. National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/210346.pdf>

⁸ McLaughlin, H., Uggen, C., & Blackstone, A. (2017). The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women. *Gender & Society*, 31(3), 333-358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243217704631>

In addition to customer-to-worker stalking in customer focused roles, targets of stalking know their stalker 67% of the time.⁹ A 2016/17 survey found that 9.4% of targets of stalking knew their stalker through professional avenues, including coworkers, clients, supervisors, and third-party vendors.¹⁰ While these numbers alone indicate a need for workplace intervention in stalking, because of the co-occurrence of stalking with other forms of violence, many of the same safety, productivity, and morale concerns apply as from the impacts of dating, domestic, and sexual violence.

Furthermore, the myriad ways that DVSASSH can occur and impact the workplace are often met by a wide array of reactions that a survivor can have to the trauma they are experiencing. The appearance of a survivor of DVSASSH can range from disconnected to combative to being hyper-focused to remaining fearful or overtly emotional. There is not one single way for a survivor to respond to the trauma they are experiencing. As a result of abuse and trauma, survivors often experience job loss or disciplinary action in times when they simply need a supportive environment and resources from the workplace.

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Ultimately, while many would like to believe that we leave our personal lives at the door of work, this is not how the human mind and body operate. Rather, if we focus on supporting the whole experience of a worker, we are more likely to see increased productivity, decreased turnover, and a safer working environment for everyone. Often, people who cause harm will actively seek to sabotage a survivor's workplace standing to ensure that the survivor is reliant upon them for economic security. Employment sabotage is just one way in which workers are distracted, controlled, and at risk of becoming reliant on their harm-doer. When workplaces understand this dynamic, they can be a source of economic security for the survivor, helping them find ways to safely maintain their employment and potentially find safety and healing. Focusing on creating a trauma-informed workplace, providing prevention education opportunities, and understanding the manifestations of violence and trauma in the workplace are key to creating safer and more productive workplaces with longer employee tenure.

⁹ Morgan, R. E., & Truman, J. L.. (2022). *Stalking Victimization, 2019*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/sv19.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.