



How Employers Should Address Domestic Violence At Work

Publication

12.03.12

If a company employs five women, at least one of them has probably suffered violence at the hands of a spouse or boyfriend. Every day, three women in this nation are murdered by a current or former intimate partner. Unquestionably, domestic violence affects the workplace.

One-fourth of all domestic violence victims said abuse has caused them to arrive late to work or miss work, and more than half of employed battered women have been harassed by their partner while at work. Over 25,000 acts of rape or sexual assault occur against women at work each year. The second leading cause of death on the job for women is homicide. Such statistics still do not convey the extent of this wide-ranging, underreported cancer.

This is not a gender-neutral issue. While some males are victims of domestic violence, nearly nine of 10 victims are female. Three quarters of perpetrators are male.

Employers have both legal and ethical responsibilities to maintain a safe work environment. Yet, well over half of employers in this country have no program or policy addressing workplace violence, and among those who have a policy, less than half address domestic violence. Instead, they focus on violence by co-workers, customers or criminals, all of which are statistically less likely to occur. This is not due to ill intent, but in large part because the workplace impact of domestic violence is usually less than obvious.

Because most supervisory training discourages delving into employees' personal lives managers often avoid involvement and hope the problem will resolve itself. Unfortunately, such situations rarely resolve on their own. If the violence escalates, of course, the entire workplace can be traumatized.

So how can an employer take meaningful action without creating the headaches that result from overreaching into an employee's private affairs? Depending upon the employer's circumstances, the employer can start by engaging and publicizing the services of an employee assistance program (EAP), which can publicize and make presentations describing options and resources available to victims. This can help reduce the embarrassment or shame that many victims feel. Employers should conduct supervisory training regarding how to recognize and respond to signs of domestic violence.

Additionally, companies should review and update their workplace violence policy or create one if necessary. In either case, they should ensure that it encompasses domestic violence and identifies ways to spot and respond to warning signs. Companies should include this topic in annual training, as well as newsletters and other communications to employees.

Perhaps most importantly, employers should nurture an environment in which employees will not be afraid or embarrassed to tell HR about domestic violence concerns. This will be most effective when part of an overall workplace culture that demonstrates respect for employees as individuals.

These actions can even help prevent a workplace tragedy. On an even more basic level, recognizing and taking into account the reality of domestic violence, and its effect on the workplace, is the right thing to do.

This article appeared on December 3, 2012 on [Employment Law360](#).

Related People



A. Kevin Troutman
Senior Counsel
713.292.5602
Email