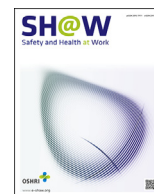




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Safety and Health at Work

journal homepage: [www.e-shaw.org](http://www.e-shaw.org)

Original Article

## Domestic Violence in the Canadian Workplace: Are Coworkers Aware?

Jennifer C.D. MacGregor<sup>1,2,3,\*</sup>, C. Nadine Wathen<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Barbara J. MacQuarrie<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University, London, ON, Canada<sup>2</sup> PreVAiL Research Network, Canada<sup>3</sup> Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University, London, ON, Canada

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 29 July 2015

Received in revised form

21 January 2016

Accepted 22 January 2016

Available online 6 February 2016

## Keywords:

domestic violence  
perception  
social support  
workplace safety  
workplace violence

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Domestic violence (DV) is associated with serious consequences for victims, children, and families, and even national economies. An emerging literature demonstrates that DV also has a negative impact on workers and workplaces. Less is known about the extent to which people are aware of coworkers' experiences of DV.

**Methods:** Using data from a pan-Canadian sample of 8,429 men and women, we examine: (1) awareness of coworker DV victimization and perpetration; (2) the warning signs of DV victimization and perpetration recognized by workers; (3) whether DV victims are more likely than nonvictims to recognize DV and its warning signs in the workplace; and (4) the impacts of DV that workers perceive on victims'/perpetrators' ability to work.

**Results:** Nearly 40% of participants believed they had recognized a DV victim and/or perpetrator in the workplace and many reported recognizing more than one warning sign. DV victims were significantly more likely to report recognizing victims and perpetrators in the workplace, and recognized more DV warning signs. Among participants who believed they knew a coworker who had experienced DV, 49.5% thought the DV had affected their coworker's ability to work. For those who knew a coworker perpetrating DV, 37.9% thought their coworker's ability to work was affected by the abusive behavior.

**Conclusion:** Our findings have implications for a coordinated workplace response to DV. Further research is urgently needed to examine how best to address DV in the workplace and improve outcomes for victims, perpetrators, and their coworkers.

Copyright © 2016, Occupational Safety and Health Research Institute. Published by Elsevier. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

"Beyond the obvious negative impacts on the worker experiencing abuse (e.g., decreases in physical/mental health, work performance, etc.), the workplace as a whole may be affected. Coworkers may be distressed by witnessing the effects of the abuse, or feel unsafe around abusive partners. Managers may not know how to effectively accommodate a worker experiencing abuse or make the workplace a safer space."

(Survey participant)

Domestic violence (DV; also known as *partner abuse*, *intimate partner violence*, etc.) has significant and wide-ranging impacts [1,2]. Clearly, victims suffer the most; in addition to the fear, humiliation, and pain of the abuse, experiencing DV is associated

with mental and physical health problems that can last for years, even after the abusive relationship ends [3,4]. Research in the last few decades has begun to call attention to other far-reaching consequences. For example, children who are exposed to DV experience similar psychological problems associated with other forms of child maltreatment [5,6], and DV costs national economies (e.g., Canada) billions of dollars per year [7–9]. An emerging literature is also establishing DV as a problem with implications for the workplace, including, for example, impacts on victims' and perpetrators' work performance [10–12], but also impacts on victims' coworkers [13]. The current research contributes to this literature by examining coworkers' awareness of DV in the workplace.

DV impacts the workplace in several ways. When it occurs in the home, its impacts can be felt at work—for example, both victims

\* Corresponding author. Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University, 1151 Richmond Street, North Campus Building, Room 240, London, Ontario, Canada N6A 5B7.

E-mail address: [jmacgre9@uwo.ca](mailto:jmacgre9@uwo.ca) (J.C.D. MacGregor).

and perpetrators experience absenteeism, concentration difficulties, and poorer work performance as direct consequences of DV [10,11,14]. DV itself enters the workplace when perpetrators harass their partner at work remotely (e.g., via email and texting) or present at the workplace to harass, stalk, intimidate, or even harm the victim [11,15]. Several studies have found that perpetrators also use their work time and resources to carry out these types of DV [14,16]. When DV enters the workplace, it is not uncommon for coworkers to become involved. Many DV victims report that their coworkers are harassed, lied to, and even harmed or threatened by the perpetrator [13,17–19]. Coworkers can also be affected without knowing why, for example by unexplained victim and perpetrator absenteeism and schedule or workload changes, or their awareness of the DV may cause them to feel stress and concern about the situation [19].

More research in general is needed to examine the impacts of DV on the coworkers of victims and perpetrators; however, there is also a specific gap when it comes to understanding how aware people are of their coworkers' DV experiences. Such awareness may have implications for how people respond when inconvenienced by the DV in some way (e.g., by absenteeism), but also on perceptions of workplace safety and culture as well as the design and implementation of DV awareness and response campaigns. Large-scale surveys on DV in the workplace conducted in Australia [20], New Zealand [21], and the UK [18], report rates of awareness of coworker DV victimization from 16% to 20%. However, by constraining responses so that DV victims could not also report being aware of others' DV experiences, these surveys are likely to underestimate awareness rates. Underestimation is a particular issue if DV victims are more likely than nonvictims to be aware of other victims' experiences, a question that, to our knowledge, has not been addressed in the literature. Nevertheless, a survey (without the above limitation) conducted among white collar workers in Turkey found that 18% of participants had witnessed or heard that a coworker was a victim of DV [22]. Another set of studies surveying employees and CEOs from Fortune 1,500 companies in the USA found considerably higher rates of workplace awareness of DV victimization—58% for CEOs and 41% for employees [23]. Finally, evidence from ongoing official reviews of DV-related deaths suggests that in such extreme cases, coworkers (as well as friends, family etc.) are often aware of the DV but do not understand the severity of the situation or know how to intervene [24–27].

Less research has been done to understand awareness of DV perpetration in the workplace. We know of two relevant studies, both of which surveyed male perpetrators involved in batterer intervention programs for the abuse of a female partner [14,16]. The surveys found that it was fairly common for the supervisors of perpetrators to be aware of the DV (83%) [14] or of DV-related arrests (73%) or protection orders (55%) [16]. To our knowledge, Schmidt and Barnett's [14] finding that 65% of perpetrators said a coworker was aware of the DV is the only estimate of its kind. Given that the sample was made up of men who were already in batterer intervention programs, however, these rates may overestimate general workplace awareness of DV perpetration. A startling finding of both studies was how frequently supervisors in particular did not say or do anything in response to the DV, and how many responses by supervisors and coworkers were highly inappropriate (e.g., blaming the victim, joking about the DV, or colluding with the perpetrator).

Workers may come to know of others' DV experiences in several ways—they may witness it, hear about it from either the victim, perpetrator, or from someone else at work, or they may piece it together from observing warning signs. There are many online resource guides for the recognition of signs of DV victimization and perpetration both generally, and for the workplace in particular

(e.g., [28–31]), and interventions to improve recognition of DV, at least among healthcare professionals, can be effective [32]. Nevertheless, evidence to date suggests that most workplaces do not provide management or employees with adequate training in DV [33], and some evidence finds that supervisors report specific difficulty recognizing signs of DV in the workplace [34]. We are aware of only one study reporting rates of recognition of DV (victimization) warning signs in the workplace—the most commonly recognized warning signs were depression, changes in work performance and signs of anxiety and fear [22].

Overall, many issues related to awareness of DV in the workplace remain understudied. First, more research is needed to clarify the extent to which workers are aware of DV victimization and perpetration in general, and in particular, the warning signs and impacts of DV in the workplace. Second, whether DV victims are more likely to recognize others' experiences of DV is unclear. Some psychological research shows an in-group advantage in some kinds of person perception [e.g., 35], but, to our knowledge, this phenomenon has not been studied with respect to DV victims recognizing others' DV experiences. Finally, research on the impacts of DV in the workplace and the supports that workers receive—from the perspectives of coworkers (as opposed to victims or perpetrators)—is lacking. To address these gaps, we used data from a large-scale pan-Canadian survey to examine the following questions: (1) How common is it for workers to report being aware of a coworker who is a DV victim or perpetrator? (2) What warning signs of DV victimization and perpetration do workers recognize? (3) Are victims of DV more likely than nonvictims to recognize DV and its warning signs in the workplace? (4) When aware: (a) what impacts of DV do workers perceive on the victims'/perpetrators' ability to work; and (b) do they know when victims/perpetrators receive DV-related support at work?

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Overview

On December 6, 2013, the authors, in collaboration with the Canadian Labour Congress<sup>1</sup> (CLC), launched the first Canadian survey on the impact of DV in the workplace. The survey, based on a questionnaire used in Australia [20], was available online in both official languages (English and French) and anyone, aged 15 years and older, regardless of DV experience, was eligible to participate.

In addition to launch-specific activities including significant national media attention, recruitment was conducted by the CLC and its affiliates via posters and bookmarks handed out at events, and provided to affiliates for national, regional and local distribution. Recruitment emails were also circulated to and through union officials for distribution through member lists. Given the broad recruitment strategy, we have no way of knowing the number of individuals in the various work sectors who were exposed to information about the study. All materials used the slogan “Can work be safe when home isn't?” and provided the web URL and QR code to access the survey. In appreciation for their time, participants had the option of entering a draw for a tablet computer; identifying information for draw entries was kept separate from survey responses. The survey was available online for 6 months. Full details on the development of the survey and an overview of its main findings are available elsewhere [19]. At the beginning of the survey

<sup>1</sup> The CLC ([www.canadianlabour.ca](http://www.canadianlabour.ca)) brings together Canada's 34 national and 33 international unions along with 98 provincial and territorial federations of labour, 111 district labour councils and 12 federations of labour. In total, the organizations represent 3.3 million Canadian workers across all sectors.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1091957>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1091957>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)