



# STOPPING Domestic and Family Violence can **START** at work.<sup>i</sup>

*Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is a major social issue. While workplaces are not the cause of the problem, they can be part of the solution. This factsheet addresses some of the questions managers and employers may have about DFV as a workplace issue.*

## **“No-one in my workplace is experiencing DFV.”**

Statistically, it is very likely that there are employees in your workplace who are experiencing (or perpetrating) DFV. Approximately 1.4 million Australian women are living in an abusive relationship<sup>ii</sup>, and two thirds of women who report violence by a current partner are in the paid workforce.<sup>iii</sup> Men are also victims of DFV, with approximately 1 in 20 having experienced DFV since the age of 15.<sup>iv</sup> Based on these statistics we know that, even in smaller workplaces, chances are there are victims and possibly perpetrators of DFV in your staff. Many of these employees will hide their experiences for fear of losing their job.

## **“Isn’t DFV a private issue?”**

DFV used to be thought of as a private issue, but we now know that DFV impacts on the workplace in many ways.

DFV does not stay at home when a victim comes to work.

It can result in lateness, absence, sick leave, health issues, distraction, lack of concentration and underperformance at work.<sup>v</sup> This can affect a workplace’s overall productivity, causing increased staff turnover and absenteeism.<sup>vi</sup>

DFV can also be perpetrated *within* the workplace, via email or phone, or by the perpetrator turning up at the workplace.<sup>vii</sup>

We spend most of our waking hours at work – and we know that workplaces can be sources of support, friendship and safety. The workplace is one important sector of society - just like sporting clubs, schools and health care settings - that can help stop DFV.

## **“But how can the workplace help?”**

There are many ways a workplace can help staff experiencing DFV. These include:

- designated paid DFV leave;
- DFV policies;
- flexible work opportunities, in compliance with the Fair Work Act;
- safety planning procedures;

- awareness training for all staff, and training for HR and Line Managers on how to respond;
- policies which address employees perpetrating domestic violence at work, including the use of workplace phones, faxes or email to harass;
- appropriate referrals to counselling and DFV specialist services;
- ensuring confidentiality;
- ensuring that disclosing a violent situation will not result in adverse consequences for staff.

## “But this will cost us money!”

DFV *already* costs the economy money – around \$21 billion each year.<sup>viii</sup> By 2021, lost productivity linked to DFV will cost Australian businesses \$609 million a year.<sup>ix</sup>

## “How does all this help my staff?”

When workplaces send strong messages that DFV is not tolerated, and when these messages are supported by policies and training, staff are more likely to seek help and retain employment. Victims of DFV who are able to keep their jobs are far more likely to escape the violence.<sup>x</sup>

***Economic security is the single most important factor in whether a victim of domestic violence is able to withdraw from a dangerous situation.***

## “How does this help me and my business?”

Retaining valuable staff is important for all workplaces – saving the cost of recruitment

and training, and avoiding the loss of corporate knowledge and skills.

Having a DFV strategy at your work sends a clear message to your staff (and your clients and communities) that DFV is not acceptable. It demonstrates that you care about your employees’ health and wellbeing.

***‘We put an enormous amount of investment in people, and it disrupts small to medium size businesses a lot if they lose their good people... There is a straight out business imperative to get involved here’ CEO, Blundstone<sup>xi</sup>***

A strong DFV strategy can result in significant benefits for employers, including retention rates, staff morale and loyalty, and health outcomes for their employees. Showing leadership on DFV also meets your Corporate and Social Responsibilities, provides a competitive advantage, and supports a positive public image and internal reputation.

Indigenous employment strategies and retention of Indigenous staff will also be helped by a strong DFV policy.

## “But I’m not a counsellor ... I wouldn’t know what to say!”

Most managers want to help; they just don’t know how, and lack the confidence.

It is important to remember that DFV workplace policies are not designed to “solve” domestic violence and you are not being asked to “fix” the problem.

You are also not expected to be an expert. Managers and HR require specialised training so they know how to respond to this issue within the workplace, and how to refer to specialist services when necessary.

Training should be supported by clear policies, an aware workforce and referral pathways to specialist DFV services.

## “But what if my staff exploits it?”

Employers who have introduced DFV strategies have not found it burdensome. For example, at Telstra, 0.06% of employees accessed their DFV leave, taking an average leave of 2.3 days.<sup>xii</sup> Most policies also enable managers to request supporting evidence to access DFV leave.

## “What is everyone else doing?”

DFV leave has existed in Australia for over a decade, and now over 1 million employees (around 1 in 12) have a DFV clause in their Enterprise Agreement. All but one Australian government has extended paid leave and other provisions to their public servants.<sup>xiii</sup> 39% of all large employers have a DFV policy or strategy.<sup>xiv</sup>

Many large companies, such as Telstra, Goldman Sachs, Qantas, Rio Tinto, ANZ, KPMG and the Commonwealth Bank, have publically committed to this issue.

The right to request flexible work arrangements due to DFV has been included in the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth). The Fair Work Commission is due to make a decision on whether or not paid DFV leave should be included in all Awards in 2017. The Federal Government is considering inserting paid DFV leave as a national employment standard in the Fair Work Act, to apply to all employees.

### Queensland Public Service<sup>xv</sup>

Queensland public service employees under the Commission Chief Executive Directive:

Support for employees affected by domestic and family violence. Allows for the following:

- 10 days paid leave, employees do not have to use other leave entitlements before accessing this leave, and it can be taken in consecutive days, a single day, or part of a day.
- Free and confidential counselling services are available through their agency Employee Assist Program.
- Access to support should not be denied in the absence of documentation, only in some circumstances where further information might reasonably be sought.

## “Where can I get help?”

The DV Work Aware program has been established to support employers in building their organisations’ capacity to respond to DFV. We provide consultation, policy development, and training to assist you and your managers with the tools you need.

**Contact us at Queensland Working Women’s Service Inc.**

**P: 0732 111 440**

**M: 0424 699 708**

### References

<sup>i</sup> Credit to Dave Oliver, ACTU, for this phrase, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/stopping-domestic-violence-can-start-at-work-20161130-gt121q.html>

<sup>ii</sup> 1 in 4 women in Australia has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. 1 woman is killed every week by a current or former partner. Indigenous women are far more likely to be victims of DFV, and are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to DFV. While men are also victims of DFV, women are at least 3 times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner, and 5 times more likely than men to require medical attention or hospitalisation as a result of intimate partner violence. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/Facts-and-figures>

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<sup>iii</sup> National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey (2011), Ludo McFerran, ADFVC and Micromex, [https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/FASSFile/Key\\_Findings\\_National\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_and\\_the\\_Workplace\\_Survey\\_2011.pdf](https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/FASSFile/Key_Findings_National_Domestic_Violence_and_the_Workplace_Survey_2011.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> In 2012, 17% of all women and 5% of men had experienced violence by a partner since the age of 15. [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(2013\) Personal Safety, Australia 2012, Cat. No. 4906.0](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics/publications/collections/4906.0)

<sup>v</sup> McFerran, ADFVC and Micromex, 2011, ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> McFerran, ADFVC and Micromex, 2011, ibid. The survey found that nearly half of the respondents who reported experiencing DFV said the violence had affected their ability to get to work. The main impact was on work performance - 16% of victims and survivors reported being distracted, tired or unwell and 10% needed to take time off work.

<sup>vii</sup> McFerran, ADFVC and Micromex, 2011, ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> [A High Price to Pay: the economic case for preventing violence against women](#), PWC and Our Watch, 2015

<sup>ix</sup> [Playing Our Part: Workplace Responses to Domestic and Family Violence](#), the Male Champions of Change and KPMG Australia

<sup>x</sup> Shirley Patton, 2003 [Pathways: How Women Leave Violent Men](#), Government of Tasmania, Hobart, p71

<sup>xi</sup> In 2015 the iconic Australian boot company adopted a clause providing for 10 days paid DV leave for its 90 workers. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-02/bootmaker-blundstone-offers-domestic-violence-leave-to-employees/6513744>

<sup>xii</sup> From docs provided to Fair Work Commission

<sup>xiii</sup> Ludo McFerran, Domestic Violence is a Workplace Issue, 2016. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/mcferran-domestic-violence-workplace-issue-australian-developments.pdf>

<sup>xiv</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency 15-16 data. <https://www.data.wgea.gov.au>

<sup>xv</sup> Directive 04/15 – Support for employees affected by domestic and family violence

<<https://www.qld.gov.au/gov/system/files/documents/2015-04-support-for-employees-affected-by-domestic-and-family-violence.pdf?v=1450337881>>

