

Impacts of family violence in the workplace



TIP SHEET

In the 2020-21 financial year, the number of family violence-related incidents reported to Victoria Police increased 5.9 per cent to 93,440 incidents¹.

As well as affecting individuals and families, family violence can also impact workplaces, as it is likely that some employees will have experienced this issue, either directly or indirectly.

What is family violence?

Family violence is destructive behaviour in an intimate relationship where one person tries to dominate and control the other. It includes a range of behaviours such as physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, social and financial abuse.

Family violence affects people of every community, age, gender and sexual preference throughout Australia. While family violence can happen in many different family relationships, it is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by violence, and men who use it.

Visit www.rav.org.au/affected-family-violence for more information.

Financial impact

Family violence is associated with considerable financial costs to workplaces and the economy, in addition to personal costs to people directly affected.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) estimated that in 2015-16, the total cost of family violence in Victoria was \$5.3 billion, the cost to individuals and their families was \$2.6 billion, and the cost to the Victorian community and broader economy was \$918 million².

A workplace has the potential to be a separate and safe space, away from violence.

Impact on individuals in the workplace

Family violence can have a severe impact on a person's paid employment as a result of:

- ongoing abuse in the workplace
- stress
- anxiety
- depression
- an impact on performance
- being late for work
- increased leave to attend appointments and to manage increased parenting responsibilities and commitments
- having to leave their job.

Women with a history of family violence have a more disrupted work history and consequently may earn lower personal incomes than women not affected by family violence.³

Financial abuse is also a significant issue for women, with financial dependence or uncertainty often impacting a woman's ability to leave the relationship.⁴

Despite these challenges, a workplace has the potential to be a separate and safe space, away from violence.



Employment can provide financial security and social contact and networks, which are important for a person's wellbeing and may be critical for safety.

Employees may also be eligible for family violence leave. Check with your employment contract and employer for your eligibility requirements.

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Organisational impact

Family violence can also impact workplaces through:

- increased staff turnover
- lost productivity
- misuse of resources (users of violence may use workplace resources to facilitate violent behaviour)
- increased absenteeism
- the impact of the violence/circumstances on other staff.

A 2011 survey found that almost half of the employees who had recently experienced family violence discussed it with someone at work.⁵



Furthermore, it was discussed with colleagues, rather than with supervisors, HR staff or union representatives.

This research demonstrates how important it is for all employees to understand family violence and be able to talk about and respond to this issue in the workplace.

Discussing and asking questions about family violence, however, can be difficult. Often people are concerned about raising the issue of family violence, and what to say and do if someone identifies that they are experiencing family violence.

Barriers to disclosing family violence

We know that not all people experiencing family violence disclose what's happening.

There are many reasons why people are reluctant to tell others what's happening, including:

- not identifying the behaviours as violence (especially non-physical forms of family violence such as emotional and financial abuse)
- fear of reprisals, e.g. losing their children/partner/home/job
- fear of the violence escalating
- shame that the violence is happening and may have been for some time already
- social consequences, e.g. family/friends may find it hard to know what to do, some cultures may have different perspectives on family violence
- poor or negative responses to them disclosing in the past, for example, not receiving the support that was needed
- not being believed.

Read our tip sheet on *Asking About Family Violence in the Workplace* for information on how to listen and respond appropriately.

www.rav.org.au/resources

Indicators of family violence

Indicators that someone is experiencing family violence can include:

- appearing nervous, ashamed or evasive
- being uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner
- giving an unconvincing explanation of injuries that they, or their child, have sustained
- having recently separated or divorced
- suffering anxiety, panic attacks, stress and/or depression
- withdrawing from conversations
- regularly being late for work
- regularly needing to take leave for short periods
- requesting changes to working hours
- receiving more personal calls at work
- appearing not to be taking care of themselves as well as they usually do.

It's not easy to leave

It's important to remember that leaving a violent situation is not easy. Someone may find it difficult to seek help or leave for a variety of reasons including that they:



- fear for their lives
- fear that they and/or their children will experience further violence
- fear that they will lose their children to authorities
- are experiencing financial violence and are financially dependent
- don't want to leave their community or family, or don't want to move their children away from their school.

What you can do

If you think that a staff member may be experiencing family violence, there are a few things you need to consider before speaking to the person.

Read our tip sheet on *Asking About Family Violence in the Workplace* for information on how to listen and respond appropriately.

To download this tip sheet and other free family violence resources, visit www.rav.org.au/resources and select 'Family violence' from the topic menu.

More information

I need support now

If you feel unsafe at any time, please call emergency services on 000 (triple zero).

For 24/7 crisis support, call:

- **1800RESPECT** on 1800 737 732 for counselling support and information.
- **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre** (Victoria) on 1800 015 188 for safety support, information and crisis accommodation if needed.

To find other services that can help, visit:

- askizzy.org.au
- www.rav.org.au/resources/services-for-people-affected-by-violence-abuse-and-trauma

How we can help

Relationships Australia Victoria recognises the complexities of family violence, including living in fear and intimidation, and its impacts.

We are funded to provide a range of support and recovery services and programs for women and children who are affected by family violence. Visit www.rav.org.au/affected-family-violence to find out how we can help or download free resources at www.rav.org.au/resources

We also provide training workshops to help professionals and services to understand the impact of family violence and to know how to respond. Visit www.rav.org.au/customised-training to find out more.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.

¹ Crime Statistics Agency. (2021, June). Media Release: Decreases in crime in the last 12 months are offset by increases in breaches of orders.

www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au

² Victorian Government. (2016, March). About the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

www.vic.gov.au/about-royal-commission-family-violence

³ Franzway, S. Z. (2007). Domestic violence and women's employment. Proceedings of the Our Work Our Lives Conference (pp. 20-21). Adelaide: National Conference on Women and Industrial Relations.

⁴ Macdonald, F. (2012). An overview of economic abuse. Collingwood: Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services and Kildonan UnitingCare.

⁵ McFerran, L. (2011). Safe at home, safe at work: National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey. Sydney: Australian National Domestic and Family Violence Clearance.