

Good Practice Guide

Family Violence in the Workplace

This guide provides information about how government organisations can respond to family violence in the workplace.

Overview

Family violence is common and can spill over into the workplace either indirectly through effects such as productivity loss, employee turnover or directly through acts of violence and intimidation happening in the workplace.

It is important for government organisations to acknowledge family violence in the workplace. Likewise it is good practice for government organisations to have a strong and clear stance on family violence and to have the systems and processes in place to help deal with family violence.

Organisations will have Human Resources (HR) and wellbeing policies and practices in place that may help workers work through family violence issues. This guide focuses on the physical security aspects of family violence. It is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance on the issue of family violence.

If you are dealing with family violence with a worker, or you yourself are dealing with a family violence issue, then you should involve your HR advisers and talk with your management about the organisational response.

Family violence is common and it affects work

Family violence is common and can include violence perpetrated by family members such as siblings, children, parents, people in domestic relationships such as flatmates, and intimate partner violence. Its prevalence makes family violence a risk that needs to be considered in the wider context of physical security in workplaces.

While most family violence is directed against women it can affect men as well. As many as one in three adult women, for example, have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Given almost half the workforce are women and most people spend a large amount of time at work it is inevitable that family violence has a direct impact on workplaces. A 1996 study found a significant proportion of victims of violence had been stalked near their places of work.

Family violence is not always seen as a workplace issue – but it is

Some people can think of family violence as an unfortunate private problem that is unrelated to work. However, that should not be the case.

Family violence directly affects many workers and, as such, it affects their working lives.

Family violence can also spill over into workplaces with perpetrators engaging in activities such as:

- sabotage
- stalking
- on-the-job harassment and abuse¹

These anti-social and abusive actions adversely affect victims and can impact co-workers. This means the impact of family violence can have a magnified impact on the workplace.

Not only does family violence affect workplaces but workplaces are also an ideal location for taking meaningful action to support workers facing family violence. Work is often a safe place where a victim is separated from a perpetrator.

Organisations have an opportunity to raise awareness about family violence as an issue and can support workers who are the victims of family violence.

Keeping workers safe from family violence while they are at work is an important part of a broader approach to supporting a worker to deal with their issues.

Taking a positive approach to dealing with family violence can pay organisational dividends such as recruitment cost savings, improved retention, reduced costs of retraining, improved health and safety and improved productivity and engagement.

Take action

It is good practice for government organisations to recognise family violence as a workplace issue.

A clear policy statement about family violence is an important first step.

It is also good practice to ensure any policy considers and address physical security aspects.

¹ Source Swanberg J, Logan T, Macke C Intimate partner violence, employment in the workplace consequences and future directions, Trauma Violence and Abuse 2005, 286-312 as reported in Intimate partner violence in the workplace by Margaret Rayner-Thomas, Janet Fanslow and Robyn Dixon, New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse www.nzfvc.org.nz 2014

Raise awareness of signs

It is good practice to ensure managers are aware of family violence as an issue and have access to guidance and training that can help them to recognise and manage family violence that affects the workplace.

Be prepared to respond

It is good practice for government organisations to have systems, processes, plans, and training in place that can help workers and management to respond to family violence. These typically cover issues such as:

- access to leave and flexible hours for victims
- safety plans to protect workers from being victimised (any changes to access controls should be considered as part of this)
- technological solutions (e.g. to minimise or eliminate the potential use of email and phones to harass)
- safety elements of physical workplace design (e.g. car park security and security lighting etc)
- support services such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- legal solutions such as harassment orders
- trespass orders.

However, policies should also consider the role effective security can play to help keep workers safe from family violence while they are at work.

Effective security and safety can help

In many ways a perpetrator of family violence is similar to potentially abusive or violent threats such as customer-initiated violence. This means many of the systems, processes, and procedures your organisation has in place to mitigate against workplace violence can help also manage the threat of family violence in the workplace. For example, access control can help mitigate the risk of violent customers and violent family members inappropriately accessing the workplace.

It is good practice to explicitly ensure your access control policies consider what protocols should apply for access of family members and make sure workers are clear on these.

However, people in workplaces can treat family members differently to others such as potentially dangerous customers. For example, familiarity may mean colleagues unwittingly allow spouses or children into non-public zones. This is why drawing attention to family violence as an issue is important.

It helps raise awareness about these types of risks and issues.

Encourage and support workers to come forward

Family violence often goes undetected at work because:

- workers are uncomfortable coming forward
- managers and colleagues are uncomfortable dealing with a matter they consider personal.

It is good practice for organisations to ensure the organisation looks to build and sustain a climate of trust and confidence where workers are prepared to ask for help and where managers and colleagues are prepared to help.

This kind of organisational commitment is best led from the top. For this reason, it is good practice for senior leaders to make clear and unambiguous statements about their personal commitment to dealing with family violence in the workplace as a workplace issue.

Get help if you need it

If your organisation needs help to develop or improve its policies, procedures, and responses there are plenty of organisations and resources out there willing to help, such as:

- unions, campaigns such as [It's Not OK](#)
- service providers such as the network of [Women's Refuges](#)
- employer's toolkits such as [Igniting Change](#)
- institutions such as the [Human Rights Commission](#).

Related Policies and Procedures

It is good practice for government organisations to have policies dealing with family violence. These should form part of a suite of policies and procedures.