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The Connection Between the Workplace and Violence

Introduction to Workplace Violence

Workplace violence has gained increasing attention and focus over the last ten years, with reports of disgruntled employees or former employees returning to their places of employment with a gun and killing co-workers. However, this is just one aspect of the violence that employees may experience that can impact the workplace.

How is workplace violence defined?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health defines workplace violence as violent acts, including physical assaults and threats of assaults, directed toward persons at work or on duty (NIOSH, 2001). Workplace violence ranges from offensive or threatening language to homicide. It may include domestic violence, sexual violence—including sexual harassment or sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

The U.S. Federal Government, through the Centers for Disease Control, Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, has categorized workplace violence into four types; (1) criminal intent; (2) customer/client; (3) worker-on-worker; and (4) personal relationship.¹ The overarching characteristics of all of these types of workplace violence is that they involve behavior that takes place at a workplace that rises to the level of a crime recognized under state and/or federal law. While some harassing or threatening acts might not rise to the level of criminal behavior, employers can refuse to tolerate this type of conduct from employees or against employees.

Workplace violence often results in serious injuries that may result in disabilities requiring ongoing care. Workplace violence may also result in life threatening injuries and even death.

Approximately 24% of workplace violence is related to personal relationships, which involve situations where an individual gains access to a workplace and commits a crime targeting an employee or customer who is a current or former intimate partner.² Other common examples of workplace violence in this category involve rape or sexual assault by a supervisor or coworker as well as:

- ➔ An employee uses a work cell phone and calls and threatens a coworker with whom he or she had a prior intimate relationship.
- ➔ A survivor of domestic violence has fled her abusive relationship and is now being followed by her abuser at work.
- ➔ A former dating partner stalks an employee.
- ➔ A supervisor sexually assaults an employee in an isolated part of a factory or farm.
- ➔ An employee's estranged husband attacks the employee at the parking lot leading to severe injuries
- ➔ An employee's former partner gains access to the workplace with a weapon and kills the employee and her coworker.

What are Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, Dating Violence and Stalking?

Domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence and stalking share many common characteristics, and often co-occur. There are, however, unique and important differences amongst the victims of these different forms of violence, the harms, the victims' legal rights, and the impacts on the workplace.

How is domestic violence defined?

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior, including acts or threatened acts, that is used by a perpetrator to gain power and control over a current or former spouse, family member, intimate partner, or person with whom the perpetrator shares a child in common. It occurs in heterosexual and same sex relationships and impacts individuals from all economic, educational, cultural, age, gender, racial, and religious demographics. Domestic violence includes, but is not limited to, physical or sexual violence, emotional and/or psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking, economic control, harassment, physical intimidation, or injury.

How is sexual violence defined?

Sexual violence means that someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability, and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs. Anyone can experience sexual violence including: children, teens, adults, and elders. Those who sexually abuse can be acquaintances, family members, trusted individuals or strangers. Statistics show that the majority of perpetrators, however, are people the victim knows. Forms of sexual violence include: Rape or sexual assault; Child sexual assault and incest; Intimate partner sexual assault; Unwanted sexual contact/touching; Sexual harassment; Sexual exploitation; Showing one's genitals or naked body to other(s) without consent; Masturbating in public; and Watching someone in a private act without their knowledge or permission.¹

How is dating violence defined?

Dating violence is an act of violence threatened or committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim. The existence of a "romantic or intimate"

relationship is determined based upon the victim's perspective, taking into account the length of the relationship, the type of relationship, and the frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, dating violence is defined as the physical, sexual or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship. Dating abuse occurs in both casual and serious relationships, and in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.²

How is stalking defined?

Stalking refers to harassing, unwanted and/ or threatening behavior that causes the victim to fear for his or her safety or the safety of a family member, or would cause a reasonable person in a similar situation to fear for his or her safety. Stalking behavior includes, but is not limited to: following or spying on a person, appearing at a person's home or work, showing up at a place where the perpetrator has no reason to be, waiting at places in order to make unwanted contact with the victim or to monitor the victim, leaving unwanted items and gifts for the victim, and posting information or spreading rumors about the victim on the internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth. Stalking may occur through use of technology including, but not limited to e-mail, voice-mail, text messaging, and use of GPS and social networking sites. Stalking is strongly correlated to sexual assault and domestic violence. Many pre-sexual assault behaviors can be considered predatory behaviors and stalking. Seventy-six percent of intimate partner femicide victims have been stalked by their intimate partner.³

¹ See National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: What is Sexual Violence" available at <http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/what-sexual-violence>.

² National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/DatingViolence.htm>. U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services. Available at <http://www.womenshealth.gov/violence/types/dating.cfm>.

³ See National Center for Victims of Crime, Stalking Resource Center, "Fact Sheet on Stalking" at <http://www.ncvc.org/src/AGP.Net/Components/DocumentViewer/Download.aspx?DocumentID=38733>.