



Featured in this issue: Domestic Violence and the Workplace

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From the Executive Director

Those of us who work in the field of domestic violence prevention are committed to enhancing the safety of victims and their children while working together to hold their abusers accountable. Although our jobs are as mutable and unique as the dynamics of each case we see, we are skilled at responding to the diverse needs and experiences of those who seek our help. We

recognize that the only thing we can predict is the unpredictability of our work, and we rely on training and policies to guide us through the challenges and barriers that so many individuals attempt to navigate alone.

But what happens when domestic violence comes to work? Colleagues and staff who experience domestic violence, as either victims or perpetrators, bring that experience into the workplace, even if they never tell anyone what is happening. And more often than not, coworkers and supervisors may realize something is wrong but are reluctant to express concern or interest out of fear, discomfort, and lack of resources.

New York State's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy addresses this issue by providing guidance to workplaces in both the public and private sectors. In this issue's feature article, Eesha Bhav of Futures Without Violence details her organization's role as the only national resource center dedicated to addressing the workplace impacts of domestic and sexual violence and stalking. In the Q&A, the state Department of Labor Deputy Commissioner Mary Batch discusses how the New York State workplace policy defines and guides her role and responsibilities as a source of support and information for her agency. Employers or employees interested in more information about the state's policy, or those who seek to implement a policy at their workplace can email dvworkplace@opdv.ny.gov for more information.

Thank you for your continued partnership. I wish you a safe and happy summer.

Signature of Eesha Bhav

A Handbook for Employers

OPDV created Domestic Violence and the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers to help employers create an informed, supportive workplace culture and to assist managers, supervisors and coworkers in recognizing signs of domestic violence and enhancing workplace safety. In addition to providing an overview of the nature and dynamics of domestic violence, the Handbook addresses workplace safety, security and liability, and legal responsibilities, and provides guidance on developing a workplace domestic violence policy and safety plan.

The New York State Department of Labor partners with OPDV and sends a card to promote the availability of the Handbook to all new businesses in New York State. Businesses can also download, customize and display this poster and find other free materials on the OPDV website. Copies of the Handbook can be ordered here.

1-800-942-6906
NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline

Confidential • 24 HRS/7 DAYS
English & español, multi-language
Accessibility
711: Deaf or Hard of Hearing
In NYC: 311 or 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)
TDD: 1-800-810-7444

Eleven Years of "Shine the Light"

October 2017 marked the 10th year of our annual, statewide Shine the Light on Domestic Violence campaign. Thank you to all who have partnered with us over the past decade by shining purple lights, wearing purple clothing, decorating public spaces, and holding purple-themed events to bring domestic violence out of the darkness, where it so often exists. We hope that you will continue to raise awareness in your communities and organizations, especially in October, and that you will check our website regularly for updates and ideas about this year's new resources to raise awareness in your community. Remember: to photograph your efforts and send us your captioned photos: opdvpurple@opdv.ny.gov

Did You Know...

Since the 2012 inception of the New York State Domestic Violence and the Workplace initiative, the program has received more than 3,000 requests for information and has made more than 3,300 referrals to NYS domestic violence service providers across the state.

Source: NYS Workplace Bi-annual Report

# Fostering Safer Workplaces for Everyone

Eesha Bhawe, Program Specialist, [Futures Without Violence](#)

Five years ago, the University of Maryland St. Joseph's Medical Center, an institution that promotes healing and recovery, was [rocked by two domestic violence-related deaths](#). An administrative assistant was fatally shot by her estranged husband, and shortly thereafter, a nurse was stabbed to death by her son. While the St. Joseph's Medical Center has a rich history of helping patients with violence and its aftermath, there were no policies or procedures in place for St. Joseph's employees to reach out for help at their workplace. And they aren't the only employers who find themselves in that situation.

For most, the workplace is not the first place that comes to mind when thinking of domestic violence. But we bring our whole selves and lives to work, and many of us spend the majority of our waking hours in the workplace. Domestic violence has a significant impact on the workplace, limiting a worker's earning potential, productivity and safety. Domestic violence [costs](#) a national estimate of \$728 million a year in lost productivity: usually from taking time off to attend court hearings and to seek services for recovery. When women - who already face gender-based economic barriers in the workplace, such as a lack of pay equity with male coworkers - have the added burden of domestic violence, they often don't have the [financial means](#) to leave abusive situations.

In some cases, the entire workplace's safety may be at risk. One study found that 67 percent of victims of domestic violence indicated that their perpetrator came to the workplace, and [another study](#) found that 87 percent of victims of domestic violence received harassing phone calls at work. Often, these visits end in violence against the victim or coworkers, negatively impacting the safety and well-being of all. As exemplified in the case of St. Joseph's Medical Center, it is in the best interest of employers to help create supportive workplaces for employees experiencing domestic violence.

## Best Practices

Futures Without Violence leads [Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center](#) (Workplaces Respond), the only center of its kind dedicated to addressing the workplace impacts of domestic and sexual violence and stalking. Workplaces Respond provides resources, training and tools for employers, advocates and survivors to create a prevention-focused approach to reducing the impact of domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault, and stalking on the workplace.

A workplace can serve as a resource for victims and survivors if there are clear lines of communication and resources available. To that end, employers should develop and implement [workplace policies](#) on domestic and sexual violence in the workplace. Having a policy in place signals that this issue is important to the organization and it is ready to act on issues as they arise, to support employees who may be experiencing violence. A policy is an effective way to create structure and support for individuals to feel comfortable asking for resources through an employee assistance program (EAP), a local victim services program, the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), the [New York State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline](#), or others. In the case of St. Joseph's Medical Center, we worked closely with their leadership and staff to develop a workplace policy to better guide responses to violence experienced by staff.

A policy can come to life with ongoing, in-person trainings for all employees. Training on the impacts of domestic violence in the workplace should go beyond reviewing the law and liability involved in addressing these situations. Instead, employers can adopt a focus on prevention within these trainings by providing real-life scenarios that emphasize survivor safety and support, and peer support. At Workplaces Respond, we have developed [model trainings](#) for various industries, including healthcare, restaurant, and agriculture, that may offer a good starting point for what a prevention-oriented training can include.

Employers do not need to develop these policies and supports alone. Local domestic violence/sexual assault service providers can collaborate with employers in developing the policies, trainings and best practices for safety in the workplace. Working collaboratively can help ensure that the policies and trainings are victim-centered in their approach, and improve the safety of the workplace overall.

## Moving Forward

Since most people spend a majority of their waking hours on the job, it is no wonder the short and long-term effects of domestic violence carry over to the workplace. Whether the violence occurs inside or outside of the workplace, an employer can foster a work environment that focuses on support and prevention. Taking these steps can help the workplace feel more like a community and safe place to find support. At St. Joseph's Medical Center, the implementation of these policies and support mechanisms has given coworkers and supervisors the tools to respond effectively to domestic violence in a more forward-thinking and thoughtful way.

Improving our responses to the impacts of domestic violence in the workplace can keep both the employer and employee moving toward safer, healthier and more productive workplaces.

# Q&A: The Role of Workplace Domestic Violence Liaisons and Policies

This Q&A was conducted with Mary Batch, Deputy Commissioner of Employment Security, [New York State Department of Labor](#).

**Q How long have you been the Domestic Violence liaison for your agency?**

**A** In 2011, I was asked by the Commissioner of Labor to represent the Department of Labor (DOL) on the state's Domestic Violence Advisory Council, which helps steer statewide policy on the prevention of domestic violence. I am very proud of what we have achieved so far, and I take great satisfaction in the DOL's commitment to domestic violence awareness.

**Q What does your role as a domestic violence liaison require?**

**A** My main role is to raise awareness of domestic violence and, where appropriate, advocate for domestic violence victims – agency customers and employees. I am a resource on this issue for our various divisions and local offices, and do everything I can to ensure they have the necessary resources, including policies, procedures and publications.

**Q Why is it essential for staff to be aware of domestic violence?**

**A** We are charged with protecting workers, assisting the unemployed, and connecting job seekers to jobs. Domestic violence can inhibit our mission in each of these areas, so staff must be aware of these issues in order to fulfill that mission and responsibilities to our customers.

**Q How does OPDV support your agency's domestic violence initiatives?**

**A** OPDV's trainings keep us current on policies and procedures for responding to domestic violence, and they provide us with information about legislative changes that impact this policy area. We also refer our customers to the information and resources available on the OPDV website.

**Q How has having a domestic violence policy impacted your agency?**

**A** The most important change we achieved is raising awareness about domestic violence throughout the

agency. Many employees were unaware either of the seriousness of the problem or the resources available. Through initiatives such as the annual [Shine the Light](#) campaign, we've helped staff be mindful of domestic violence and knowledgeable about the resources available to them, to their coworkers and to their customers.

**Q What feedback have you received from staff regarding your agency's domestic violence policy?**

**A** We partner with our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to provide referrals and information to employees and, as EAP Coordinator Stacey Huff said, "Sometimes you hear the most heartbreaking stories. It's great to know you can refer victims to resources and tools that can help empower them to deal with the issue they're facing." We have also experienced a lot of interest and support from staff and managers. I have been pleased to see how enthusiastically our staff participate in our annual Shine the Light event, where we hand out informational cards and purple ribbons to our employees.

**Q Have you encountered any barriers related to these efforts?**

**A** We discovered that many victims of domestic violence did not have an address to register for our services because DOL did not accept post office box addresses. Victims were reluctant to use addresses that might reveal their location to anyone for fear that the address could end up in the hands of their abusive partner. This resulted in victims not receiving their unemployment insurance benefits. In response, we initiated an Address Confidentiality Program that now allows the use of post office boxes in cases involving domestic violence. This is important because we opened up a whole new avenue for victims to get help, and to pursue their rights to unemployment insurance benefits to support them when they need it most.

**Q How else has your agency assisted domestic violence victims?**

**A** At our local career centers, people looking for jobs work closely with our employment counselors, who sometimes become aware that domestic violence is a factor. With the customer's permission, staff have been able to provide information about resources, contact local agencies for help, and even get police involved when necessary. We can also reschedule appointments as needed or, if safety is a concern, we can provide alternative locations for counseling or even online alternatives for training and job searching.

**Q How does your agency sustain and build upon your domestic violence awareness efforts?**

**A** We continue to look for innovative but inexpensive ways to raise awareness about domestic violence. One example is our inclusion of information about OPDV's free [Domestic Violence and the Workplace Handbook](#) in our Unemployment Insurance Employer Guide, which is mailed to employees. We have provided brochures and business card holders with domestic violence information to attendees at the New York State Fair and bookmarks with this information in mailings and at our New York State Career Centers. We also have had success with getting our employees involved in initiatives such as collecting donations for domestic violence shelters and wearing purple to raise awareness. It is sometimes challenging to find creative ways of getting the word out without incurring costs, but our agency has a network of both formal and informal domestic violence prevention leaders throughout the state who are eager to pitch in on these initiatives.

I commend the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence for the wonderful work they do to raise awareness and to advocate for victims' rights.

# Groundbreaking Firearms Bill

New York State law now requires the removal of guns from individuals convicted of certain misdemeanors in connection with domestic violence incidents.

An amendment took effect on June 11 and expanded the definition of “serious offense” to include the following misdemeanors when committed against a member of the same family or household: third-degree assault, second- and third-degree menacing, first-degree harassment, criminal obstruction of breathing or blood circulation, and second-degree criminal contempt.

Prior to this change, individuals convicted of a felony or the more narrowly-defined “serious offense” were prohibited from obtaining a pistol permit, or from purchasing rifles or shotguns. The law also now requires individuals to surrender all firearms-- handguns, rifles and shotguns -- when an order of protection includes firearms provisions. Previously, judges were authorized, but not required, to order the surrender of rifles and shotguns.

Courts must determine whether a felony or serious offense was committed against a member of the same family or household and must report that determination to the state Division of Criminal Justice Services.

The information is then available through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which firearms dealers use to determine if someone is disqualified from purchasing firearms.

In addition, the law establishes a procedure for the surrender of firearms, rifles and shotguns, and a new procedure for owners to seek their return, once the reason for the surrender no longer exists. This change puts New York State in the forefront of ensuring that convicted domestic violence offenders do not have access to firearms.

## When Domestic Violence Comes to Work: Policy Considerations

Providing domestic violence training and awareness activity for employees seems like a great idea. But without a domestic violence and the workplace policy, such well-intended efforts may actually create problems for managers and supervisors, employees who are victims of violence, and the workforce.

Without a policy, managers and supervisors have no guidance on how to respond to an employee who discloses violence at home. Employees who are victims of violence will be reluctant

to disclose because they may worry about losing their jobs, and whether the organization will be able to accommodate their safety needs. They may not know who has to be informed about the violence, and who may have access to their order of protection information, if they choose to share it. They may also not know whether they are allowed time off for court dates and other necessary appointments related to the violence.

Absent a policy, staff have no direction about how to address the impact domestic

violence can have on the workplace or about what is expected of them if they experience or witness violent or threatening behavior at work.

Adopting a domestic violence and the workplace policy is an effective way to proactively prepare organizations when domestic violence comes to work.

For more information, please see the [Domestic Violence and the Workplace Model Policy](#) and [Domestic Violence and the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers](#).

## The Office of Mental Health: A Shining Light

*“I once asked a nurse who was decked out in purple from head to toe if there was a reason she was wearing purple. When she cheerfully responded, ‘It’s the day to wear purple in support of victims of domestic violence,’ my heart swelled with joy.”* - Jennie Huling, NYS Office of Mental Health

The state Office of Mental Health (OMH) operates 24 facilities statewide and serves individuals in inpatient, outpatient, and community settings. OMH works with OPDV to coordinate a Domestic Violence and the Workplace program to support staff who experience the trauma of abuse at home.

As part of this effort, OMH joins the annual statewide Shine the Light on

Domestic Violence campaign, coordinated by OPDV, to recognize October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The emphasis on wearing purple, distributing informational materials and purple items, and decorating shared workplace areas adds a positive tone to a difficult discussion.

At OMH, staff contact with the agency’s domestic violence liaisons increases drastically during October, allowing those staff members to engage with employees who might not otherwise seek support or assistance.

October is the perfect opportunity to remind staff that it is not only their clients, but also themselves, whose

lives are affected by trauma and abuse in relationships. When staff feel unsafe at home it is difficult for them to be fully present at work, so it benefits everyone to support our employees and colleagues.

By raising awareness throughout October the people served by OMH also see the agency’s commitment to supporting victims of domestic violence.



NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov)

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