

Domestic Violence in the Workplace Webinar Follow-up Webinar Transcript

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Good morning everyone, so I'm going to spend some time this morning talking about the research that I conducted in collaboration with the Canadian Labor Congress and some colleagues of mine at the Faculty of Information and Media studies here at Western.

But before I jump into our survey, I wanted to do a very brief scan of what we knew going into this work. So there is a growing body of evidence that tells us that there are links between economic independence, being in paid employment, and the impact of domestic violence. So we are really beginning to understand that being employed is a protective factor for somebody being able to get out of a domestic violence situation.

The survey that we did is preceded by some other surveys and those surveys continue to happen. The very first survey happened in Australia in 2011 and they worked with the labour group there. The next survey happened in New Zealand and it happened with the largest union in New Zealand, the public Service Association.

I think the next one happened in the UK, again in collaboration with the labour movement. Then I think the next one was a Turkish survey. The researchers in Turkey started their survey in quite a different manner; they're at a business university. They connected with us and they were able to put some questions in their survey that allowed us to do some comparisons. We were the next country to do a survey in Canada, and after that the Philippines did it as well. So you can find a copy of all of those reports on [the Make It Our Business website](#) and Elsa will put the link up in the chat box for you. The earliest surveys focused on women experiences. The survey work that we've been doing since then does include workers – male, female and transgender.

So what we know going into this work was that women who experienced domestic violence have a more disrupted work history, have lower personal work incomes, have had to change jobs more often, and are more likely to be in casual or part time work. So there's when we start to see how domestic violence has an impact on someone's career path and work history. But we also knew that being in employment is a way out of a violent relationship. That financial security could actually prevent a women from becoming trapped and from becoming isolated in violent and abusive relationships and of course it helps to maintain the standard of living.

We also knew a little bit about perpetrators. So we do know that when a perpetrator starts to extend their domain of control to the workplace, the situation is becoming more risky. They may be trying to get their partner or ex-partner fired which would increase their economic dependence on them and they may just be trying to mess up their life.

We have a little bit of information from the USA on the impact of offenders in the workplace. We are replicating this research in Ontario but we won't have results for another year or so. But what we do

know from the study in Vermont is that 80% of offenders said that their job performance was negatively affected because of the domestic violence they were involved in. This study was done with a group of men who were in what would be the equivalent of a partnership response program in Ontario who agreed to do surveys and qualitative interviewing. So they told the researchers that things were happening like they weren't paying attention because they were preoccupied by their relationship issues, they were often angry or upset about their partner, or waiting for their partner to call. So because of this almost 20% of them said they almost caused or caused an accident at work. That's the most serious impact that we saw there.

We have also done research in Canada and there has been research done in other jurisdictions around the world. Justice Canada did research that shows that employers are using almost 78 million dollars a year as a result of domestic violence. The cost in Canada, including all of our systems (the justice system, social services system, personal costs to victims) is much higher at 7.4 billion dollars a year. So the cost of domestic violence to Canadians, these are only the costs we can measure; there's still a lot of costs we haven't been able to measure but of those that we can measure amounts to \$220 per person per year. But as we know the costs go far beyond the financial implications in terms of what happens to people in their lives.

So that brings us to the survey that we conducted, so what we wanted to do specifically was surveyed Canadian workers about their experience with domestic violence in the workplace.

So who we surveyed were workers of 15 years of age and up of all provinces and territories of Canada. Both men and women did respond to the survey and this was a partnership between Western University and the Canadian Labor Congress. It was an online survey which ran for 6 months from December 6 2013 to June 6 2014.

The Canadian Labor Congress was largely responsible for recruitment and they did that through public education campaigns with their members. So they had emailed when they had meetings they would have a media launch. They'd create posters and bookmarks and those were distributed to locals.

The survey was available in both French and English and anybody 15 years or up of age was eligible to participate.

We did have over 60 questions on the survey so we did continue to write and publish articles. So what I'm going to present to you is what I thought was the most essential information for people to have immediately. When we put the presentation up I'll give you links to at least the open source articles that we published as well.

So who took part? This was a very large survey. We had over 8000 responses and it was around 80% females and almost 60% weighted from Ontario. So not every province was equally represented, although we did have participation from every place.

It's not surprising that 95% of our participants were between the ages of 25 and 64 since that's the employment age.

This is important that 80% were of permanent employment and over 80% were unionized and over half were from educational or healthcare/social assistance sectors. So what that tells you about our respondents is that they had secure jobs. What else it tells us is that we don't know much about

domestic violence of workers who are in precarious work- that's work that still has to be done and I think it's really important work to do.

So the definition we used for our survey was that domestic violence is any form of physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse. It includes financial control, stalking and harassment. It occurs between opposite-or same-sex intimate partners, who may or may not be married, common law, or living together. It can also continue to happen after a relationship has ended. So I think most of you will recognize the elements of that definition being used in many other contexts as well.

Here's our prevalence rate. We found that 1/3 of workers in their lifetime have experienced domestic violence. Female, transgender, and aboriginal respondents, those with disabilities, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual actually had higher rates. So, some of this is not new to us we've known about it. Our rates are fairly consistent with other large Canadian surveys. So this is a look at prevalence rate in terms of currently experiencing domestic violence and over a lifetime. So on the left hand side we have our current, we have 7% women reporting that they were currently experiencing domestic violence as the survey was happening. About 4% of men. Now our pool of transgender respondents was small in number but their rates of reporting were really very high, almost 30. Overall that gives a rate of 6 and a half percent of Canadian workers experiencing domestic violence.

On the right you see the life time prevalence and again you see how high the transgender respondents were. Women were also quite a bit higher to experience domestic violence than men.

We of course asked about the impact that experiencing domestic violence had on work and almost 40% said that it actually affects my ability to even get to work. I thought that it might be good to illustrate this with some quotes directly from respondents. So they told us things like "I would have to find a safe house because of violence at night. Then I would be without work clothing or school uniforms for the kids. My children and I would be too emotionally upset to go to work and school the next day." "Sleep deprivation affected my ability to focus at work or get there on time." "I ended up taking a lot of time off and for the most part no one really understood exactly why I was gone for so long." "I lied about injury and absence due to fear and not able to admit to abuse at that time."

This I think is one of our most significant finding: over half of our respondents experienced domestic violence at or near the workplace. So what does it actually look like when I say it was happening at work? Well the most common way this happens is through abusive phone calls or text messages. But we also have a fairly high rate of stalking and harassment near the workplace. We have abusers physically showing up at work. We have abusive emails. And then we have the abuser contacting co-workers or employers asking "where is she" "what is she doing" and "who is she with?"

Again some comments to illustrate those numbers, the respondents said:

"Constant phone calls prevented me from doing my job properly, as it tie up the phone required for business"

"He pretended to be security and dragged me out of work"

"The abuser would phone my workplace to see what time I had left, and phoned when I arrived to make sure I was actually going to work"

"My ex-husband threatened to call my employer to tell them lies about me"

Not surprisingly, over 80% of those who experienced domestic violence found that it negatively affected their work performance. So this actually mirrors what I showed you earlier in the survey with offenders where 80% of them also found that domestic violence negatively affected their work performance.

Here's what respondents told us about that:

"I was tired and distracted yet work was a place where I felt safe."

"There's no doubt it had impact, but I took pride in my ability to stay focused and on task with a professional presentation. However, those were very difficult times"

"Dealing with my ex-husband left me feeling anxious, tired, due to lack of sleep. It affected the pleasure my work usually gives me."

So what I think we see here is that yes it was difficult, it impacted my work, but I wanted to be at work and work was important to me.

The domestic violence we find didn't just directly affect those experiencing it, it also had an impact on coworkers. So almost 40% said they knew that their situation was having an impact on coworkers. And again, some of what they told us was that:

"People were sympathetic and horrified, but also very, very uncomfortable"

"The domestic violence caused unease between me and my coworkers because I had to mis work or sometimes cried. Also, some people felt helpless, they would have liked to intercede, but did not dare for fear of endangering me or themselves"

"I could see how my situation could place others in danger and was lucky that none of the threats were brought forth or followed up"

We asked coworkers about whether or not they knew or that they suspected that they were working with someone who was either experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence. 35% said yes, they believed that they were working with somebody who either had experienced or was experiencing domestic violence. This was very close to the number who reported actually experiencing it. So I think what this tells us is that our coworkers do know what's happening; they are quite aware when somebody is experiencing domestic violence.

Now almost 12% of coworkers actually said that they believe that they work with someone who actually has been or is currently being abusive to their partner.

People said things in terms of their coworkers knowing:

"People just knew, I was ashamed, they didn't have much respect for me"

We asked our respondents whether or not they had talked about it with anybody at work. So 43% said "yes I talked with somebody at work," but we still have 60% of people who aren't talking about it at work, that's a large number. But although those who do talk about it, they are most likely to talk with

their coworkers. Not surprising considering the collegiate relationships most of us have at work. 44% said they talked to a supervisor or manager and only 12% said they talked to a union.

Now remember we did this survey with the Canadian Labor Congress and that was probably the statistic that most concerned them. They are working very hard to change that. And I think in the coming months and year you're going to see a lot of activity coming from the labor movement in terms of blogging for support and finding ways to support workers.

About 10% of people told HR and many workplaces in Ontario, because of the legislation, actually had designated domestic violence persons and so 6% of them spoke to them. And almost 8% talked to somebody else from the workplace. So that's a picture of who people are telling when they decide to disclose in the workplace. And here's some of what they said to us:

"Confiding in co-workers helped alleviate the stress of being attacked going to the car, the unending phone calls over and over and over and the extreme fatigue both physically and mentally."

"The support from the few co-workers and the employer psychologist was empowering. The gossip was malicious and not at all helpful."

Talking with somebody at work can be very helpful but we have to be careful about the gossip. We have to make sure that when somebody does disclose that the information is respected and shared only on an as needed basis when used to provide support. Not for purposes of gossip.

We asked workers whether or not they had actually received information about domestic violence either from their employer or union.

Remember this survey is weighted heavily from respondents from Ontario where we have legislations that state employers have to provide information about domestic violence. But still we only had 28% receive information from their employer and only 27% from their union. Unions are really working on this now so I think we will see a change there quickly.

Some of what people said about getting information about domestic violence at work:

"We bring to work everything that happens at home. We can't compartmentalize or mentally separate these different aspects of our lives. While it might not technically be the responsibility of the employer or union to provide shelter or assistance for employees being victimized by abusers at home, the workplace is a logical place to provide help, support, and resources for victims of violence."

"I think creating the ability in the union and in any work environment for discussions around these issues is more important than people realize."

And I would say after having the opportunity to train in workplaces that I would agree with that. These are very important discussions for workplaces.

We asked respondents about whether or not they felt that the employers knew that domestic violence was happening. And when they know they were responding positively.

So only about 11% said that they thought employers knew that DV was happening to their workers. But when they did know over 60% thought that employers were acting positively. So not much awareness but they were responding positively, so something to work from there.

We asked the same question about unions and not many people thought unions were paying attention to this. They thought however that when unions did know about it, almost 90% thought they were acting positively. So again a place to start, we certainly need to increase awareness, but both employers and unions can provide support when they know it is happening.

Here is what some of our respondents said about work place support:

"I was extremely nervous about sharing my situation, understanding that it may have a negative impact on how my supervisor viewed me and my work. However, that was unfounded and so far they have been very helpful and understanding and have also respected my privacy and been careful not to intrude."

So a good response but really that sense of "I didn't know that I could talk about this" and "I didn't know what would happen." That is what we really need to change. We need to send the message that this is a workplace problem and support is available to you through your workplace. You don't need to be afraid to come forward.

Other workers said:

"My employer simply said to me, take whatever time you need and if you need any help with anything just let me know. I was very fortunate to have such an understanding and flexible employer" We don't want it to be a case of good or bad fortune, we want it to be a matter of "of course you get support."

"There are some co-workers who will listen; however most don't really want to get involved. The only concern my boss had was how soon was I going to return to work."

So not the kind of response we would hope to see.

The most serious impact in terms of workplace impact was actually losing their job. Almost 10% of our respondents said that they had lost a job as a result of DV. When I talked at the beginning on what research as shown about the impact on women's careers and employment being part-time, low pay, and more often to change work, you see that reflective here.

So again what people told was:

"I was in trouble for missing a lot of work and now I can't miss work without a doctor's note."

"the only concern my boss had was how soon I was going to return to work."

We asked about attitudes about what people thought about the impacts of DV in the workplace and so over 90% did think that DV would impact the lives of workers.

75% said that workplace supports such as paid leave and safety policies can reduce the impact of DV has on workers and the workplace as a whole.

So just to summarize some big learnings from our work and our survey:

We learned that many workers have directly experienced DV or know of co-workers who have.

We do know that DV has significant impacts on the workplace.

We know that workplaces responses are mixed, but when in place, seen as generally positive and we know that people believe that supports like paid leave and DV safety policies can help.

Now I want to look at some results from another survey that was conducted in the Conference Board of Canada.

Our survey was with workers, and they surveyed employers.

They asked their members about their current policies and procedures in cases of DV they found overwhelmingly are receptive to supporting individuals who are experienced or have experienced domestic violence. They also found that over 96% of employers believe that domestic violence will impact the performance and productivity of employees.

This surprised me but they found in their survey, that of 300 employers, 71% of them said that they had actually experienced a situation where it was necessary to protect a victim of domestic abuse. So this is happening and they are aware of it. We don't know exactly how they are dealing with it but they feel like they had to take action to protect some of their employees. They interviewed a lot of different sections; white collars, blue collars.

They found that DV can increase the risk for physical or psychological violence in the workplace, not surprised by that. They also found that while many workplaces have had to take some kind of action to protect their workers they are not doing training and they are not well educated. So they concluded that more training and education in the workplace is required. I wanted to talk about new and emerging directions that I think are really promising. The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba passed an amendment to their employment standards act. They will now provide leave to victims of DV. They passed this law for leave for serious injury or illness as an extension of compassionate care leave. This is the first time in Canada we have seen that paid leave for workers provided under employment standards. So that will entitle in a one year period up to ten days of leave which the employee can take all at once, or a day here and a half day there to attend appointments. But they also have up to 17 weeks that can be taken in one continuous period.

And just on international women's day a couple days ago, Peggy Sattler, just here in London, introduced a domestic and sexual violence workplace leave accommodation and training act. This bill provides up to ten days of paid leave. So in Australia, who is really the leader in providing paid leave for workers experiencing DV. This is a developing norm, ten days. The bill also provides additional "reasonable" unpaid leave. Another really important provision of this act is that mandatory training is required for domestic violence and sexual violence and the way it impacts workers and the workplace.

So this bill was just introduced, but it has received support from all parties. So it is very promising. Because I've talked a lot about the need for training and how there's still a gap in the education, I wanted to mention the training and education program that we have developed here at the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women & Children. It's a program called "Make It Our

Business." So we have both in person and online options for training and I wanted to highlight for now, you can actually access free online training. We will be charging for this in the next month or so, but if you get to it quickly it will be free. It is a series of four webinars that take about 30 minutes to complete and a certificate is provided at the end of that. And if anyone wants to know about our in person training options that information is available on our [website](#).

Elsa will be posting those links as well.

This is a new piece of research that I just found out about and I think is really exciting. So some researchers asked the question to men involved in gender-based violence "what motivates you to get involved in this prevention work?" and 70% of them said it was exposure of the issue of violence against women through the workplace. So I think this provides us with a tremendous opportunity to influence attitudes to have people understand how important it is to prevent violence against women.

I also want to let you know about an international network. At the beginning I talked about the surveys that have been done in countries around the world and we were able to get a social sciences and humanities research council grant to support this work and set up an international network. So we had a 3 year partnership development grant and we were able to connect with trade unions, national trade union bodies, as well as "global union federations." We have been able to include employer groups and academic organizations working on this issue, as well as domestic violence experts, largely practitioners from the shelter and movement are all part of our international network.

So we have been able to meet twice, once two years ago in Toronto and more recently in November in Brussels. We are committed to continuing to do research and that research provides an evidence base for us to be able to develop prevention programs and education programs in workplaces. So some of this is union lead and some of it is employer lead.

So with global reach I think we're going to see real changes in this area so it's almost a paradigm shift when we think about the efforts that we have made to demonstrate DV isn't a private issue, it is something that affects us all. So when we take it into the workplace that becomes very real.

Through the network we have plans for new surveys. These are national surveys (I just went through the Canadian findings with you) and these surveys serve the same purpose that they have here in Canada. Provide an evidence base to say to governments we need employment standards legislations, paid leave, occupational safety legislation. So it says to employers "you have responsibility for supporting your employees who are experiencing DV and for taking preventative action."

So we have new surveys planned at this point for Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, and China. There are also discussions underway in other countries as well. I also wanted to mention that the international Labour Organization is debating next November, a new international convention on violence against women and men at work.

If this convention is passed than countries around the world who sign on to international conventions would have legal obligations to protect against gender violence against work. This would include both provisions against sexual harassment and DV.