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Western Education Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children

Canadian Labour Congress / Congrès du Travail du Canada

Western FIMS Faculty of Information & Media Studies

## Domestic Violence in the Workplace: The Impact on Canadian Workers

The Learning Network  
March 10, 2016

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### Growing Evidence

- Internationally, the links between economic independence, being in paid employment and the impact of domestic violence have been steadily developing

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### Recent Surveys

- **Australia:** recruitment for online survey by various unions (e.g., education, nursing)
- **New Zealand:** email recruitment to 10,000 members of NZ's largest union (Public Service Association)
- **Turkey:** pilot, main survey recruitment via companies
- **Canada:** recruitment mainly via labour unions, open to any worker in Canada 15 years+
- **UK:** electronic recruitment via union, open to those who experienced or knew someone experiencing DV
- **Philippines:** national online survey, recruitment via the International Trade Union Confederation-Asia Pacific and local affiliates

<http://www.makeitourbusiness.com/content/research>

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### What did we know?

- \*Women with a history of domestic violence
  - have a more disrupted work history
  - are consequently on lower personal incomes
  - have had to change jobs more often
  - are employed at higher levels in casual and part time work

(Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1998)

\*Many earlier studies focused on women only.

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### What did we know?

- Being in employment is a key pathway for women to leave a violent relationship
- The financial security that employment affords
  - helps to prevent women becoming trapped and isolated in violent and abusive relationships
  - helps them to maintain their home and standard of living

(Patton, 2003)

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### What did we know?

- Perpetrators who extend their abuse to the work setting are increasing the number of domains in which they control their partners
- By harassing, stalking, and threatening the target at work, offenders may succeed in getting the victim fired and thereby increase the victim's dependence

(Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1997; Gemignani, 2000, Reeves, O'Leary-Kelly, Farmer, Paetzold, & Tiefenthaler, 2001)

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### Offenders in the Workplace

- **80% of respondents said their job performance was negatively affected by their domestic violence.**
  - Not paying attention to what he was doing because of his relationship issues
  - Preoccupied by thoughts about his partner, such as a previous fight they had
  - Angry or upset about his partner
  - Waiting for his partner to call or on the phone with his partner
- 19% caused or almost caused an accident at work.

(Schmidt, 2012)

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### What are the costs?

- A recent study by Justice Canada estimates that employers lose \$77.9 million annually as a result of domestic violence.
- Including the impact borne by the justice system, the impact borne by primary victims, and the impact borne by third parties and others, the total economic impact of spousal violence in Canada in 2009 is estimated at \$7.4 billion
- Amounts to \$220 per Canadian
- But the costs, both financial and personal go far beyond that

(Zhang, Ting, Hoddenbagh, McDonald, Scrim, 2012)

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## Our Survey

- **OBJECTIVE**
  - To survey Canadian workers regarding their experiences with domestic violence in the workplace
- **TARGET RESPONDENTS**
  - Workers age 15 and up, in all regions of Canada
  - Men and women encouraged to fill out the survey
- **A PARTNERSHIP**
  - Between CLC and Western University

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## Survey Methods

- Online survey launched on Dec. 6, 2013, ran until June 6, 2014
- CLC recruitment via posters, bookmarks, emails, meetings etc. + media launch
- Offered in both French and English
- Anyone, aged 15+, eligible to participate
- Over 60 questions

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## Who took part?

- 8,429 total respondents
- 78.4% female
- 49.8% Ontario, 21.6% BC
- 94.1% between 25 and 64 years
- 81.1% permanent employment
- 81.4% unionized (in current or last job)
- Over half from educational or healthcare/social assistance sectors

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### Definition

*For this survey, domestic violence was defined as any form of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse, including 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.*

(Schmidt, 2012)

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### DV prevalence

- One third (33.6%) had experienced DV in their lifetime
- Female, transgender, and Aboriginal respondents, those with disabilities, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual had higher rates
- Rates consistent with other large Canadian surveys

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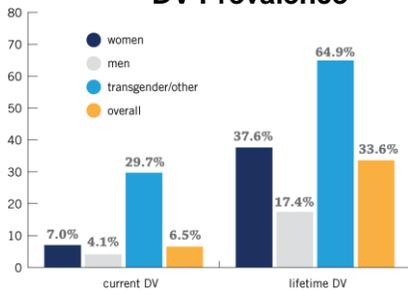
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### DV Prevalence



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### Workplace Impact

Among those who experienced DV...

**38%**  
reported that DV affected  
their ability to get work

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### Getting to Work

- *"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."*

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### Workplace Impact

Among those who experienced DV...

**53.5%**  
experienced DV at or near the workplace

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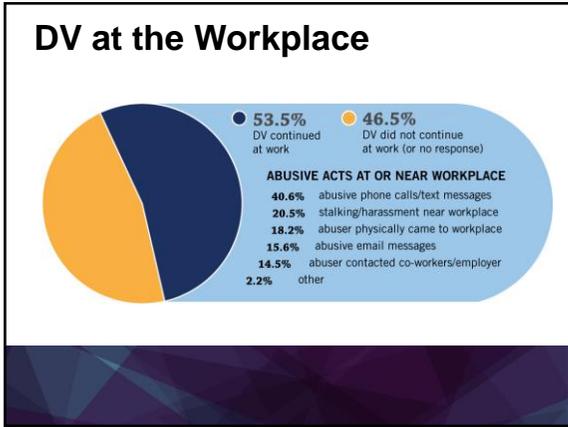
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### DV at the Workplace

- *“Constant phone calls prevented me from doing my job properly, as it tied 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.”*

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### Workplace Impact

Among those who experienced DV...

**81.9%**  
found that DV negatively affected their work performance

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### Negative Impact on Performance

- *"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 focussed 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."*

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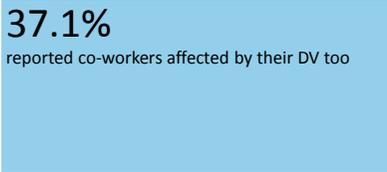
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### Workplace Impact

Among those who experienced DV...



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### Impact on Co-Workers

- *"People were sympathetic and horrified, but also very, very uncomfortable..."*
- *The domestic violence caused unease between me and my co-workers because I had to miss 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."*

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### Workplace Impact

**35.4%**

reported having at least one co-worker they believe is experiencing, or has previously experienced, DV

**11.8%**

reported having at least one co-worker who they believe is being abusive, or has previously been abusive toward a partner

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### What do co-workers know?

- “People just knew, I was ashamed, they didn’t have much respect for me.”

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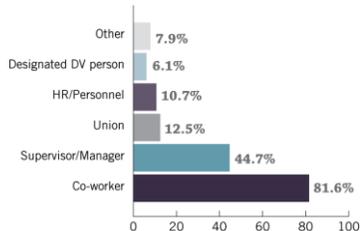
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### Workplace Support

- 43.3% of those experiencing DV discussed it with someone at work



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### Workplace Support

- *"...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."*

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### Providing Information

Workers received info about DV from:

28% employer  
27% union

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### Providing Information

- *"... 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."*

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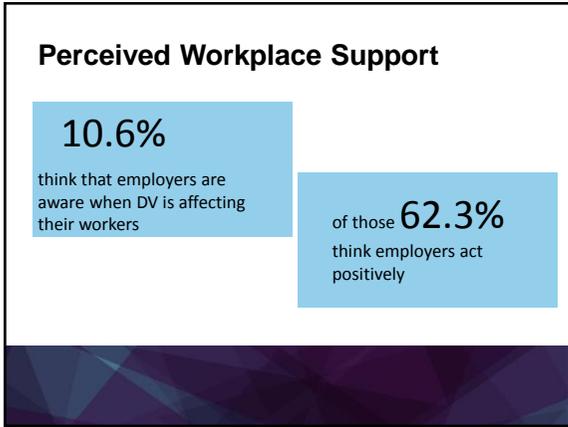
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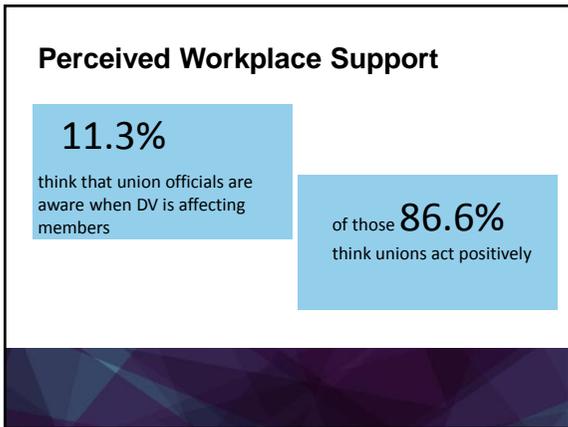
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### Workplace Support

- "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."*

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### Workplace Support

- *"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."*
- *"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."*

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### Workplace Impact

Among those who experienced DV...

**8.5%** lost a job due to DV

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### Job Loss

- *"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 was I going to return to work."*

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**Beliefs about DV in the Workplace**

**91.5%** (all respondents)  
DV impacts the work lives of workers

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**Beliefs about DV in the Workplace**

**74.4%** (all respondents)  
Workplace supports such as paid leave and safety policies can reduce the impact of DV

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**Summary**

- Many workers have directly experienced DV, or know of co-workers who have
- DV has significant impacts on the workplace
- Workplaces responses are mixed, but when in place, seen as generally positive
- People believe that supports like paid leave and DV safety policies can help

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**The Conference Board of Canada**

- Surveyed members on what current policies and procedures they implement in cases of domestic violence in 2015
- Organizations are receptive to supporting individuals who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence
- 96% of employers believe domestic violence impacts the performance and productivity of employees

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**The Conference Board of Canada**

- 71 per cent of Canadian employers surveyed reported experiencing a situation where it was necessary to protect a victim of domestic abuse
- The prevalence of employers providing support to victims of domestic violence is similar across industries

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**The Conference Board of Canada**

- Issues of domestic violence can also increase risk for physical and psychological violence in the workplace
- While many workplaces have been proactive, more training and education is required

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### New Directions

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba passed:

The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Leave For Victims Of Domestic Violence, Leave For Serious Injury Or Illness And Extension Of Compassionate Care Leave)

- entitled to both the following periods of domestic violence leave in each 52-week period:
- (a) leave of up to 10 days, which the employee may choose to take intermittently or in one continuous period;
- (b) leave of up to 17 weeks to be taken in one continuous period.

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### New Directions

- On March 8, 2016, MPP Peggy Sattler introduced the **Domestic and Sexual Violence Workplace Leave, Accommodation and Training Act, 2016**
- The bill provides for up to **10 days of paid leave**, which is identified in Australia as the “developing norm”
- The bill provides additional “reasonable” unpaid leave (the length of which may or may not be prescribed in regulation).
- Mandatory training is required for both domestic violence and sexual violence.

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### Education & Training



<http://makeitourbusiness.ca/certified-online-training>

Information and education to help you meet your obligations under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act.

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### Opportunities to influence attitudes

- What Motivates Men’s Involvement in Gender-based Violence Prevention?
- 70 percent said *exposure to the issue of violence through work*

Casey, Erin A., et al. "A Latent Class Analysis of Heterosexual Young Men’s Masculinities." *Archives of sexual behavior* (2015): 1-12.

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### An International Network



- A Canadian-led international network to mobilize knowledge about domestic violence in the workplace, including research questions, new/promising evidence, and best practices.
- Audiences are researchers, policy actors, legislators, labour organizations, employers, worker and domestic violence advocates, and survivors of domestic violence.
- For more information contact [bmacquar@uwo.ca](mailto:bmacquar@uwo.ca)

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### An International Network



- New surveys planned for Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, China
- International Labour Organization is debating a new International Convention on Violence against Women and Men at Work

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## Questions?



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## Contact

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