

When domestic violence comes to work (and work is at home).



Evidence tells us that at times of increased stress and anxiety in households, incidents of domestic and family violence rise. This is something that we all need to be aware of during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent data from China showed that reports of domestic and family violence (DFV) increased up to three times during lockdown because of COVID-19. In Italy, anecdotally reports of DFV are down, but agencies suspect this is because the presence of the person using the violence at home may inhibit help seeking behaviours. People may also be worried that with police and hospitals fully engaged in crisis service provision that their experience of violence may not be as important or may not result in assistance.

Working from home (and other pressures associated with the current COVID -19 situation) can change the safety and support needs of people experiencing DFV. With the security, socialisation and routine offered by attending work disrupted, DFV abusers will have increased opportunities for coercive or violent behaviours.

DFV awareness informs us about some of the tactics used by abusers such as coercion, surveillance and isolation could include denial of access to outside services (such as health care, increasing dependence on the abuser) or in work from home scenarios sabotaging work or creating disruptions that reduce productivity or concentration.

HOW WORKPLACES CAN MANAGE THIS RISK

Workplaces can assist their remote employees by raising awareness of the increased risk and keeping up regular communications.

It is also important to consider DFV as a risk factor in any work from home safety assessment.

It is important to recognise that it may be dangerous or difficult for an employee working from home to tell their employer they are experiencing or worried about violence or abuse.

Guiding people to DFV specialist services remains the best option for seeking expert advice about safety planning and emergency accommodation. We suggest referring staff to 1800 RESPECT in the first instance. This is a 24/7 service operated by specialist counsellors, many of whom are ASU members.

It is important to recognise that accessing DFV support may be more difficult when the abuser is also at home, monitoring what family members are doing and who they are reaching out to.

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Employers may also be able to raise awareness and provide support by ensuring that all employees are aware of the potential for DFV to occur in a work from home context.

Keep special (and confidential) communication channels open (if possible) and maintain up to date emergency contact and referral information.

It may be important for managers and team leaders to refresh their understanding of the possible warning signs of DFV including, unexplained lack of attendance to work from home duties, reduction in productivity, excuses that are inconsistent or don't add up. While it is important not to jump to conclusions, changes in communication style or difficulty in talking on the phone may also indicate risk.

Regular check in's are important for general well being of remote employees but also can provide a necessary avenue of communication to the outside world if the situation at home is difficult.

Workplaces can also support with providing secure IT facilities, safe phones, assisting with home security upgrades, offering financial assistance if needed and showing continued care and understanding.

In some circumstances if employees are unable to work because of the DFV, or in order to access emergency accommodation, it is important to ensure employees are aware of their rights to unpaid or paid leave to be able to keep their jobs while they seek safety from the violence.

Now is a good time for workplaces to review their DFV policy to incorporate new and changing circumstances of their workforces.

Important contact numbers and resources:

1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

This is a national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. It operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Due to the volume of calls, it is at times necessary to leave a message. Messages left will be returned. Discretion is assured. Return messages will not be left with anyone other than the original caller.

Police attendance in SA + NT - 131 444

www.nt.gov.au/law/crime/domestic-and-family-violence/get-help-for-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence - has a comprehensive list of services and shelters throughout the Territory.

Women's Safety Services SA - domestic violence hotline - 1800 800 098

Providing access to safe accommodation, telephone counselling, and advice on legal, housing and financial issues.