



CARANICHE
AT WORK

Family violence

a workplace issue

Strategies and resources for HR Managers

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“When you have something like violence against women so prevalent in society, it is by default a workplace issue - and you cannot ignore it.”ⁱ

David Thodey, former CEO of Telstra

Executive summary

The support an employer provides when an employee is impacted by family violence will not only have a significant impact on the employee's perception of their workplace, but it can also be the difference between an employee staying in an abusive relationship or taking action to address it.

The Human Rights Commission has estimated that violence from an intimate partner affects one in six Australian female workersⁱⁱ. Therefore, at some point in their careers, many Human Resource (HR) Managers will, knowingly or unknowingly, encounter an employee who has experienced family violence.

Evidence shows that support provided by employers in such situations is increasingly becoming an expectation. A study conducted in 2012 revealed that 94% of employees felt their employers should take a leadership role around violence towards womenⁱⁱⁱ. While a survey by the Social Research Centre based in Melbourne found that of the 48% of respondents who had told their manager about an experience of domestic violence, only 10% found the manager's response helpful.^{iv}

“On average, it takes victims five to seven attempts to disclose their situation to anyone, and if the first instance isn't positive it reduces the likelihood of them disclosing it again. So it's critical that managers can respond appropriately.”^v

Jennifer Mullen, White Ribbon

Given the impact this social issue can have on our workplaces, and the level of complexity involved in its navigation, we developed this guide to assist HR Managers to become more aware of family violence and to start thinking of strategies that can be adopted in the workplace. As it is not possible to predict or plan for every workplace scenario, this guide looks at overarching issues and principals, and has been designed to make it easier for employers to:

- recognise family violence
- understand why family violence is a workplace issue
- be aware of the impact it can have on employees and their work
- raise or respond to family violence with increased confidence.

Although workplaces are not solely responsible for addressing family violence, there are strategies that can be adopted to provide support. The steps that workplaces can take to start to address family violence include:

1. Providing education to all employees to raise awareness and increase understanding of family violence and the potential impacts in the workplace.
2. Communicating that family violence is considered a workplace issue and practical support is available for all employees.
3. Consider designating family violence contact officers within the workplace and ensure they, along with other relevant workplace representatives (including HR managers and line managers), are equipped to respond to disclosures of family violence.
4. Empowering workplace representatives to provide support to impacted employees by exploring their short and long-term needs, providing resources, connecting them with their EAP and checking in regularly.
5. Consider implementing appropriate work based entitlements such as flexible work hours or flexibility around work locations in order to help manage the impact of family violence.
6. Consider implementing a leave policy to ensure family violence leave is easily accessible and free from stigma. Family violence is rarely a one-off incident and workplaces will need to prepare for instances where employees may need to take time off to attend hearings or appointments.

While HR Managers cannot be expected to act as counsellors, they should be trained and feel equipped to recognise family violence, respond sensitively, provide access to internal supports, and refer employees to relevant external services. Therefore, we have designed the following resources to support HR Managers at work.

- Recognising Family Violence - An information sheet
- Considerations when appointing Family Violence contact officers
- Developing a workplace safety plan
- External support
- Quiz: How equipped is your workplace to deal with Family Violence?



Introduction

Australia is waking up to the impact of family violence. We know more about this issue than ever before. CEOs, politicians, advocates and athletes are taking up the charge – urging all of us to pay attention.

For many organisations talking about family violence is uncharted waters. Fortunately, more Australian organisations are learning how to support their colleagues, through formal leave policies, specialist training and increasing awareness. In 2015, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency found that around one-third of major private sector employers had a policy or strategy in place to support employees experiencing family or domestic violence.^{vi} One year later, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence report identified 840 enterprise agreements, all with a provision of some kind for family violence, most of them for providing specific leave entitlements. Today, large private sector employers like Telstra, KPMG, Woolworths, IKEA, NAB, Westpac and PwC all provide paid family and domestic violence leave entitlements to their staff.^{vii}

With the right support in place, work can become a lifeline during episodes of family violence. Employers are

well placed to support their staff to manage the impacts of family violence – but their actions and reactions, a lack of awareness or understanding, also have the potential to compound the problem.

In 2012, 94% of employees felt that their employers should take a leadership role around violence towards women.^{viii} In a survey examining bystander knowledge, of the 48% of respondents who admitted having told their manager about an experience of domestic violence, only 10% found the response helpful.^{ix} This is contextualised by 2014-2015 data provided by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, which revealed that only 13.5% of employers had trained their staff to work with employees experiencing domestic violence.^x By 2017, this figure had only increased by 0.7%.^{xi}

With a targeted approach for responding to the impacts of family violence, including specifically tailored training, resources and support, along with greater understanding of legislation and policy, it is possible to tackle this societal issue, one workplace at a time.



What is family violence?

Family violence is an abuse of power by a partner, ex-partner or family member. It can take many forms, and includes: intimidation, control, social isolation and emotional, physical, sexual, financial or spiritual abuse.

Sometimes referred to as domestic violence, 'family violence' is a broader definition because it includes any current or past family members, like children and parents, as well as domestic or intimate relationships. In some communities, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the term family violence is preferred to domestic violence, as it better reflects the community's understanding and experience of violence.^{xii}

In Victoria, the **Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)** states that:

For the purposes of this Act, family violence is— (a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person, if that behaviour— (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or (iii) is economically abusive; or (iv) is threatening; or (v) is coercive; or (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or (b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).^{xiii}

This legislation also acknowledges that family violence:

- is a fundamental violation of human rights
- is gendered in nature
- impacts children and affects the entire community
- includes emotional, psychological and financial abuse
- may involve subtle or obvious exploitation of power imbalances.

In 2018, the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare stated: "Women are at greater risk of family, domestic and sexual violence." While men are more likely to experience violence from strangers in a public place, women are more likely to know the perpetrator and the violence usually occurs in the home.^{xiv} The ABS found that nearly one in four women (23%) and one in six men (16%) had experienced emotional abuse from a current or previous partner, since the age of 15. In 2017, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) found more than half (54%) of the women who experienced current partner violence had experienced more than one violent incident.

While family violence can affect anyone, including both males and females, some people are more at risk:

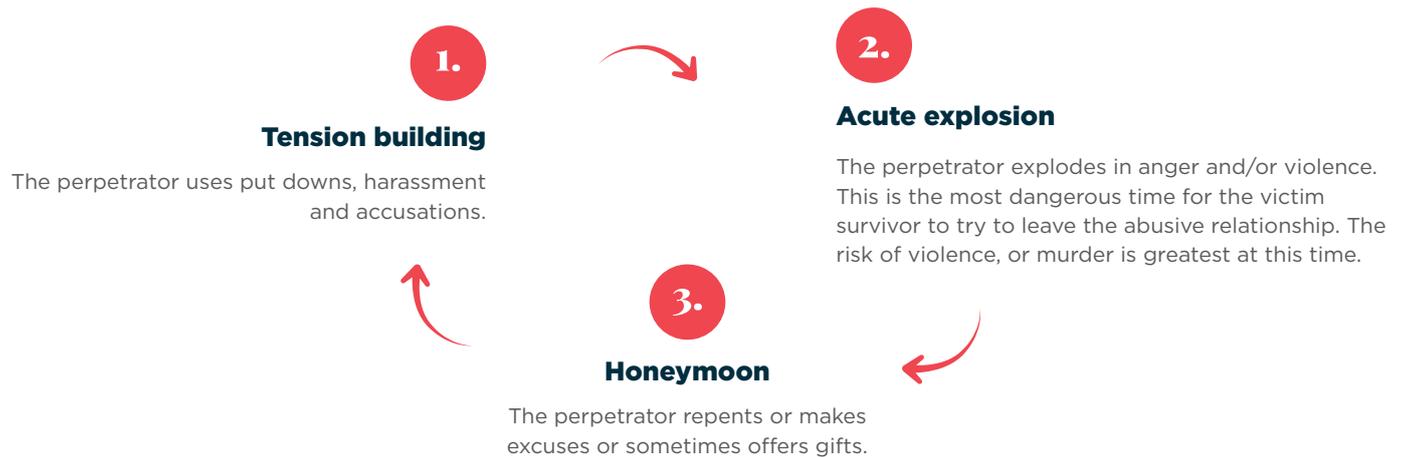
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Young women between 18 and 35 are more likely to experience violence than women overall.^{xv}
- Pregnant women
- Women with disabilities
- Women experiencing financial hardship
- Women and men who experienced abuse or witnessed domestic violence as children.^{xvi}

Family violence usually increases over time. It becomes more serious and more frequent - harming both the victim survivor and any children who witness the abuse. The perpetrator uses violence to control and dominate the other person, which over time can create a cycle of violence.

A cycle of violence

Many people don't understand that it's the repetitive nature of family violence that makes it difficult for victim survivors to leave abusive relationships. The cycle of violence theory^{xvii} was developed in the 1970s to explore why victim survivors stay in abusive relationships for reasons beyond obvious drivers like low self-esteem, isolation, family pressure and lack of support. The theory describes three phases in an abusive relationship, which detail how quickly a perpetrator's behaviour can change

and why this escalation makes it difficult to leave. The cycle of violence is known to often end in denial because the honeymoon phase brings an immense sense of relief. Both parties might choose to ignore the possibility of future violence and instead commit to continuing the relationship. Unfortunately, in many relationships the final phase is not the end. Over time, this phase passes, and the cycle begins again.



The cost of family violence

In 2016, the cost of violence towards women and children in Australia was estimated to be \$22 billion. This figure was calculated by KPMG using ABS data collected in a Personal Safety Survey (PSS).^{xviii} Of the \$22 billion, \$10 billion accounted for emotional abuse and stalking, while \$12 billion represented physical and sexual violence.

KPMG was commissioned by the Department of Social Services to undertake this research. They discovered that three groups of vulnerable women were underrepresented in the PSS estimates:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Women with disabilities
- Women experiencing homelessness

If these women had been included in the report, KPMG estimates an additional \$4 billion in costs to the Australian economy.

In 2014-2015, almost eight women and two men were hospitalised each day after being assaulted by their spouse or partner.^{xix} According to the most recent homicide statistics in Australia, one woman is murdered by her current or former partner on average each week.^{xx}

Family violence has a serious impact on the long-term health of victim survivors. For example:

- Intimate partner violence contributed more to the burden of disease for women aged 25 to 44 than any other risk factor.^{xxi}
- Mental health conditions were the largest contributor to the burden, with anxiety disorders and depressive disorders being the most prevalent.

In the workplace, the impact of family violence can be felt in staff absenteeism, impaired work performance and on-the-job harassment, and seen in employees who leave their jobs at short notice. Absent employees are vulnerable to losing their jobs when workplaces aren't aware of family violence – whether due to physical violence, illness or stress.

The cost of family violence

\$10B

Emotional abuse and stalking

\$12B

Physical and sexual violence



Is family violence a workplace issue?

Of the women in Australia who've experienced violence – the ABS estimated between 55% and 70% were currently in the workforce.^{xxii} This means that approximately one in six female employees have or are currently experiencing family violence.^{xxiii}

Family violence can enter the workplace through texts, emails, abusive phone calls and in some cases, the perpetrator may physically enter the workplace or be employed there. Often, both the perpetrator and the victim survivor are in paid work whilst the violence is occurring therefore affecting their work and the workplace. This makes it a workplace issue.

Family violence not only impacts the victim survivor, but can also extend to the overall health and safety of the workplace. Some examples include:

- Colleagues may try to protect the victim survivor from unwanted phone calls or visits and therefore may unknowingly take on risk and stress
- Absenteeism and presentism may cause others in the team to experience an increase in workload, which can negatively impact the morale of the whole team and may result in resentment towards the employee
- Unexpected resignation resulting in turnover can significantly increase both tangible and intangible costs
- Colleagues may be placed in danger if the perpetrator enters the workplace
- If an employee is the perpetrator of family violence, they may be distracted at work, underperforming or exposing colleagues to negative and hostile attitudes.

While many organisations have family violence policies and initiatives that support employees who are experiencing violence, workplaces both nationally and internationally, are still contending with how to respond to employees who may use violence and abuse in their personal relationships.^{xxiv} Little has been documented about workplace health and safety costs or impacts of perpetrator behaviour in Australian workplaces.

“Approximately one in six female employees have or are currently experiencing family violence.”



Current policy

In 2012, the Fair Work Act provided employees in Australia with the right to request flexible working arrangements for reasons of family violence. While under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, workplaces with 100 or more employees are required to report annually on the strategies they have in place to support employees experiencing domestic and family violence.^{xxv}

In November 2017, the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme brought in new laws so that domestic violence orders issued in one state or territory will apply and be enforceable in all states and territories across Australia.

The Australian Human Rights Commission is currently lobbying for family and domestic violence to be included in anti-discrimination legislation to protect employees from discrimination due to experiencing domestic violence.

While these laws take shape and lead to new policies in our workplaces, it is important for workplace representatives, including HR managers, line managers and contact officers, to be aware of their legislative requirements in this complex and changing landscape. In particular, if organisations become aware that violence is being perpetrated in the presence of a child, additional legislative requirements may apply.

Family Violence Leave

In early 2018, the Fair Work Commission ruled that employees covered by modern awards will be able to access five days of unpaid domestic violence leave a year. This new clause applied from the first full pay period on or after 1 August 2018.

What can workplaces do?

There are many reasons victim survivors do not leave abusive relationships, including cultural, religious, social, economic or legal reasons. In many instances victim survivors do not have the economic security needed to leave and support themselves. Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women with children^{xxvi} and being able to continue working is crucial to supporting women and their children when dealing with family violence.

“Economic factors are the most significant predictor of whether a woman experiencing family violence stays, leaves or goes back to an abusive relationship. Workplaces can support (or not) women’s choices.” xxvii

Australian Human Rights Commission

The support an employer provides when an employee is impacted by family violence will not only have a significant impact on the employee’s perception of their workplace, but it can also be the difference between an employee staying in an abusive relationship or taking action to address it.

The steps workplaces can take to help address family violence include:

1. Providing education to all employees to raise awareness and increase understanding of family violence and the potential impacts in the workplace.
2. Communicating that family violence is considered a workplace issue and practical support is available for all employees.
3. Designating family violence contact officers within the workplace and ensure they, along with other relevant workplace representatives (including HR managers and line managers) are equipped to respond to disclosures of family violence.
4. Empowering workplace representatives to provide support to impacted employees by exploring their short and long-term needs, providing resources, connecting them with their EAP and checking in regularly.
5. Implementing appropriate work based entitlements such as flexible work hours or flexibility around work locations in order to help manage the impact of family violence.
6. Implementing a leave policy as it may ensure that family
7. violence leave is easily accessible and free from stigma. Family violence is rarely a one-off incident and workplaces will need to prepare for instances where employees may need to take time off to attend hearings or appointments.

Paid Family Violence Leave has a number of benefits, including:

- Allowing employees to remain connected to work and maintain economic security. This is crucial, especially if the employee is considering leaving their relationship and / or home
- Providing employees with continued links to their work which can enhance their sense of purpose and pride at a time when they are likely to have doubts or experience low self-esteem.
- Creating the opportunity for employees to maintain work relationships that offer them support.

Workplace safety and risk management

Domestic and family violence can become workplace violence when a perpetrator attempts to harm an employee at work. It is important to recognise and respond to the safety and wellbeing of all staff.

Consider implementing a workplace policy along with a workplace safety risk management strategy if employees in your workplace are at risk of violence.



Case study

Louise was a dedicated employee who had been with her organisation for more than ten years. Her manager noticed that she was spending more time at work – arriving early and staying late.

When asked about this, Louise became defensive. A week later, her manager raised the issue again and asked if she needed assistance with her current workload.

This time, Louise became tearful. She said that everything was okay at work but that she was struggling at home.

Louise disclosed that her partner was becoming controlling, restricting her contact with friends and family and limiting her access to their joint finances, and at times, being verbally abusive towards her.

Louise's manager thanked her for confiding in her and listed some of the support the organisation could offer EAP, leave policies and safety planning.

While Louise didn't recognise her situation as family violence, she identified the need for additional support and agreed to access EAP and keep an open line of communication with her manager.

Strategies for HR managers

Given the prevalence of violence in our society, most HR Managers will, knowingly or unknowingly, encounter a colleague or employee who has experienced family violence, at some point in their career. While HR Managers cannot be expected to act as counsellors, they should be trained and feel equipped to recognise family violence, respond sensitively, provide access to internal supports, and refer an employee to relevant services.

HR Managers might be the 'owners' of organisational policies, but typically, employees may reach out to their supervisors, line managers and colleagues, before taking the issue formally to HR. So it's critical that workplaces

take a whole-of-organisation approach to supporting employees who are experiencing family violence. The following strategies can help workplaces lead the way:

1. Invest in training and build awareness of family violence and its impacts.
2. Consider implementing a formal leave policy and offering flexible working arrangements.
3. Ensure workplace representatives (family violence contact officers and line managers) are equipped to respond to disclosures of family violence.
4. Engage external specialist services, such as EAP and Manager Support.

Resources

While HR Managers cannot be expected to act as counsellors, they should be trained and feel equipped to recognise family violence, respond sensitively, provide access to internal supports, and refer employees to relevant external services. Therefore, we have designed the following resources to support HR Managers at work:

Recognising Family Violence

An information sheet

1/5

Considerations when appointing Family Violence contact officers

2/5

Developing a workplace safety plan

3/5

External support

4/5

Quiz: How equipped is your workplace to deal with Family Violence?

5/5



How we can help

Caraniche at Work works with forward-thinking organisations to create thriving cultures of wellness and productivity, including help to address family violence. We have a team of clinicians who have expertise and specialist training in working with individuals experiencing family violence.

From our many years of experience working in the field, we also understand that support at the individual level is most effective when delivered alongside strategies that engage managers and teams, and address wider organisational and systemic challenges.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

A confidential counselling and referral service, with access to specialist family violence clinicians.

Access to free, confidential EAP counselling can be a lifeline for an employee experiencing family violence.

All our EAP clinicians have training in family violence, and we offer a range of options including face-to-face, telephone and video counselling to suit the needs of the employee – this multimodal access is particularly important if the employee has limited flexibility as a result of the family violence they are experiencing.

EAP services can also provide guidance and support to employees who are concerned about a workmate who may be experiencing family violence.

In addition to general EAP support services, someone experiencing family violence may need support during a time of crisis or when experiencing extreme levels of distress. In these cases, we ensure that our responsive EAP counselling service is available 24/7/365. Our clinicians are specially trained to provide telephone counselling in these urgent situations and offer guidance about additional suitable support services.

Manager Support

Specialised support for managers to help them respond appropriately to family violence.

It's important that managers are equipped to respond appropriately to employee disclosures about family violence. Our specialised clinicians can provide support specifically for managers, team leaders and supervisors and assist them to navigate difficult and complex issues while at the same time develop and maintain relationships with their teams.

Our manager support service assists those in leadership roles to:

- Understand the impact of the issue.
- Respond sensitively to staff whose issues are impacting them.
- Support employees who are not coping.
- Manager support can be used as a once-off session or with follow-up support. Manager support can also provide guidance to managers who are concerned about an employee who may be experiencing family violence by exploring how to approach them and encourage them to access EAP support.



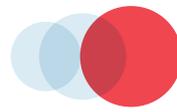
Peer Support

The role of a Peer Supporter includes assisting those who experience a range of issues, such as mental health issues, family violence, bullying and harassment, and responding to critical incidents.

Peer support initiatives involve recruiting, training and supporting suitable employees to provide initial support to colleagues experiencing a range of issues, including family violence, in a peer led manner.

We have extensive experience designing peer support programs that build internal capacity to respond to workplace mental health and wellbeing issues. In addition to program design and implementation, our services include peer selection and recruitment, training, ongoing supervision, professional development and consultation. Our peer support programs enhance the internal ability of a workplace to provide additional avenues for employees to seek support through the delivery of evidence-based, prevention focused and sustainable support by fellow employees.

Peers are provided with resources and training to provide initial containment of the issue and refer the employee on to other appropriate support services, such as EAP.



Training

Australian organisations are increasingly seeking specialist training in family violence to increase employee and manager understanding of the complex issues, and equip them with the appropriate skills to respond.

We offer a number of different family violence trainings and workshops, from one hour information sessions to multi-day courses. In our introductory one-day course, participants develop an understanding of what constitutes family violence, explore the legislative and legal issues, identify how to recognise family violence, and identify the appropriate referral pathways and available services, including your own organisation's policies.

Get In Touch

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