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Domestic Violence and its Influence on Women's Workplace Performance and Mental Health: Implications for Feminine Leadership

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Abstract

Domestic violence remains a pervasive yet often invisible social issue with far-reaching consequences beyond the private sphere, significantly affecting women's participation, performance, and progression in the workplace. This study examines the impact of domestic violence on women's workplace performance and mental health, and critically explores its implications for the development of feminine leadership. Women experiencing domestic abuse frequently face psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and chronic stress, which directly impairs concentration, decision-making, productivity, and interpersonal relations at work. Absenteeism, presenteeism, reduced confidence, and limited career mobility further reinforce gendered disadvantages within professional spaces. Despite these challenges, the study argues that lived experiences of adversity can also shape distinctive leadership capacities among women, such as heightened empathy, resilience, emotional intelligence, and ethical sensitivity—qualities central to feminine leadership. By reframing domestic violence not merely as a personal or welfare concern but as an organizational and leadership issue, the paper highlights the responsibility of workplaces to adopt trauma-informed policies, supportive institutional frameworks, and inclusive leadership cultures. Legal safeguards, organizational support systems, and mental health interventions are emphasized as critical enablers in mitigating harm and unlocking women's leadership potential. The study concludes that addressing domestic violence within workplace discourse is essential not only for protecting women's rights and well-being but also for fostering transformative feminine leadership that promotes inclusivity, compassion, and sustainable organizational growth.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Women's Mental Health, Workplace Performance, Feminine Leadership, Gender Equality.

Introduction

Even though it happens in private, domestic violence at work hurts workers' safety, mental health, and ability to do their jobs. The effects of domestic violence on workers have led to the creation of global legal frameworks. The victims are safe at home and at work with these frameworks¹. Workplace safety laws protect people from domestic violence in general, and they also spell out how employers should handle cases of domestic abuse involving their employees. Government law also says that employers must give victims safe and supportive places to work. This chapter talks about laws against domestic violence and rules at work that keep workers safe from this kind of abuse.

- **Domestic Violence Laws and Protections for Employees**

Most laws about domestic violence have put protection orders, legal options, and helping victims at the top of their lists. But many laws now include protections for the workplace because they know that victims of domestic violence may have a hard time at home and at work. There are a lot of victims of physical violence, threats, stalking, and harassment at work, so laws need to cover more than just personal spaces. Laws in many countries protect victims of domestic violence from being fired because of what they did. Some places let people take paid or unpaid time off for things like court cases, medical care, moving to a safer place, or counselling that are related to domestic violence². People who have been hurt can take this kind of leave to get better without worrying about losing their jobs or careers. An increasing number of US states have laws that protect employees from being fired while they get legal, medical, or shelter help. The Fair Work Act in Australia says that people who have been victims of domestic violence can take up to ten days of paid leave. Canada and New Zealand have also made policies for victim leave because domestic violence is becoming more common at work.

Protection orders, which are also called restraining orders, make sure that victims of domestic violence are safe at work. A protection order could say that the abuser can't go to the victim's workplace or talk to them there. People who are harassed or stalked at work will benefit from this law because it gives them more protection. The law that says domestic violence victims can't be discriminated against is another important legal protection for workers. Employers who are worried about workers not showing up for work, not being productive, or acting up may fire or demote victims of workplace violence. Several countries have laws against discrimination that protect victims of domestic violence from being hurt at work. In the name of justice and job security, these laws protect victims from being punished

¹ Castro-González SJ, Arias Díaz O, Irizarry Quintero A. Organizational effects and labor behavior of domestic violence. *Academia Revista Latinoamericana de Administración*. 2016 Nov 7;29(4):419-34.

² Pillinger J, Bowlus A, MacQuarrie B, Stancanelli E. Survey held in 6 companies: "How does domestic violence impact the workplace?" [Internet]. 2019 Nov 14

unfairly. Legally, victims have these rights, but they still have trouble getting workplace accommodations. Because of the shame, not knowing their rights, and employers not caring, workers rarely use protections. To protect victims of domestic violence at work, there needs to be more awareness in the workplace, stricter enforcement of the law, and employer compliance.

- **Workplace Laws Addressing Employee Safety from Domestic Abuse**

Governments around the world have passed laws to protect workers from abusive partners or ex-partners since it became clear that domestic violence can affect safety at work. Because of these laws, employers have to take steps to protect their workers from domestic violence at work. Laws against domestic violence at work say that risk assessments must be done. Laws that govern employment often require risk assessments of outside threats, such as domestic abusers¹. Unrestricted access to the office, a lack of emergency plans, and not enough protections for employees who are being harassed or stalked at work are all security holes that need to be looked at. In some places, employers must make safety plans for workers who are vulnerable. Plans need to include limited visitor access, security guards, emergency contacts, and private ways for workers who are affected to report problems.

Some laws require businesses to have ways for employees to report domestic violence without worrying about being punished or being found out. Along with risk assessments. Some of these are policies that support victims of domestic violence, workplace coordinators, and training programs for both managers and employees. We want to make a place where victims can talk about what happened to them and get help without fear of being judged or losing their jobs. Laws say that employers have to help victims of domestic violence. Many places of business are required to offer flexible work hours to help victims get away from abusers. Some of these are working from home, changing shifts, or temporarily switching jobs. These laws allow changes to be made to the workplace that make it safer for everyone to do their jobs.

In some countries, both employers and workers must get training on how to stay safe at work when there is domestic violence. In order to follow these rules, businesses must teach their workers how to spot domestic violence, offer them resources to help them deal with it, and take safety measures to keep it from happening on the job. By teaching bosses and workers about their legal rights and duties, training raises awareness and encourages people to take action. It is hard to put these new legal protections into effect. A lot of employers don't know what their compliance duties are, which vary by industry and location. Workplace safety laws that are stronger, more closely regulated, and based on incentives can better protect workers from domestic violence.

¹ Mitress KD. *Domestic violence, Stress and Work performance among Public Servants at Nansana Municipal Council–Wakiso District* (Doctoral dissertation, Makerere University).

- **Employer Responsibilities and Legal Liabilities**

Employers must keep victims of domestic violence safe at work. Legal problems can happen if you don't do this. Many workplace laws say that employers are negligent if they don't stop and deal with threats of domestic violence. Employers need to make policies about domestic violence at work¹. Domestic violence policies should spell out how the company will respond, what resources are available for employees, and how to report the violence. Employees will know what their rights are if there is a clear policy, and employers can take legal and safety steps. Employers must make reasonable accommodations for workers who are threatened with domestic violence. Some examples are making it easier to take medical or legal leave, changing work hours, letting people work from home, and making the workplace safer. In a lot of places, not making these accommodations can be seen as discrimination or not making the workplace safe.

Employers must also offer safety. Many times, the law makes it so that businesses have emergency response plans, panic buttons, surveillance cameras, and ID-controlled entry systems. These steps make sure that emergencies are dealt with quickly and keep abusers out of the workplace. Businesses could be sued if they don't protect their workers from threats of domestic violence. If an employer doesn't do anything about domestic violence safety at work and an employee gets hurt, the employer could be sued, fined, or have their reputation hurt. Employers have been held responsible in several countries for not making the workplace safe, which shows how important it is to take precautions. Employers must take reasonable steps to protect their workers from domestic violence hazards, even though the law varies from place to place. After doing what the law requires, employers can make their workplace safer and friendlier by following the rules, putting in place policies that are good for employees, and boosting security.

Impact of Domestic Violence on Employee Performance

Contrary to what most people think, domestic violence happens in many places, including the workplace. Employees who are victims of domestic violence miss work, are less productive, get into fights at work, and experience mental distress, all of which affect their ability to do their job. Survivors of abuse have trouble focussing, finishing tasks, and getting along with others at work because of the trauma they went through at home. Domestic violence has an effect on the work performance, morale, efficiency, and stability of the economy. This article looks at how domestic violence leads to missed work, arguments at work, and financial losses for businesses.

¹ Blodgett C, Lanigan JD. The prevalence and consequences of intimate partner violence intrusion in the workplace. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*. 2018 Jan 2;27(1):15-34.

- **Absenteeism and Productivity Loss**

Not showing up to work is one of the most obvious effects of domestic violence on workers. Abuse victims miss work because they are hurt, have medical appointments, are in court, or are upset emotionally. Abusers sometimes make threats or put pressure on abuse victims so they can't leave their homes¹. Other victims take time off to heal. Research shows that people who are victims of domestic violence are more likely to miss work, call in sick, or leave early because of fights at home. Their frequent absence slows down their work, making their coworkers work harder to make up for the time and effort they lost.

In addition to not showing up for work, victims often aren't very productive when they do. Abuse can make people tired, anxious, and unable to pay attention. When workers are scared and worried all the time, they can't think straight, solve problems, or make good choices. When someone stalks, harasses, or contacts you all the time, it can make the workplace unsafe and make it harder for the victim to concentrate. People who are victims and feel like they can't do their jobs can be punished, demoted, or fired. Domestic violence victims are less likely to move up in their careers and become financially independent because it makes them stuck in a cycle. They are weak, and not knowing if they will have a job makes it harder for them to leave abusive relationships. Workplace interventions and support networks are needed to help them get their lives back and break the cycle of abuse.

- **Workplace Conflicts and Employee Morale**

Victims of domestic violence often have trouble keeping good relationships with coworkers and bosses, which can lead to problems at work. The stress of ongoing abuse may make employees withdraw from society, become more irritable, or have bad reactions to small problems at work. Their emotional pain can make it harder for others to work together and keep the peace in the workplace as a whole. People on the team may not understand why a victim is acting the way they are, which can cause misunderstandings, strained relationships, and a loss of team cohesion. Violence at home can spread to the workplace, which can make problems even worse². Some abusers bother their partners at work by calling them over and over, sending them threatening messages, or even just showing up without warning. This not only puts the victim in danger, but it also makes the workplace tense for people who see it happen. Fear of violence at work can spread among workers, lowering morale, making people less satisfied with their jobs, and making everyone feel unsafe.

¹ Silva AM, Contreiras JP, Duarte AP. Empowering employers to address domestic violence and its impact on the workplace. *Tourism & Management Studies*. 2024 Apr 2;20(3):15-26.

² Martinez KS. Not just domestic violence: the role of the workplace in mitigating abusers. *U. Md. LJ Race, Religion, Gender & Class*. 2015;15:170.

Also, coworkers who know about a colleague's domestic violence situation may feel emotionally burdened, especially if they don't know how to help. Some people may try to help, while others may feel helpless or angry that they can't make things better. It may also be hard for managers and supervisors to deal with the problem in the right way, especially if there aren't any clear or existing policies at work about domestic violence. Without the right help, these situations can cause divisions at work, less engagement among employees, and a general drop in morale within the organisation. Companies need to understand that a bad work environment caused by domestic violence can have an effect on more than just the victim. It can also have an effect on the culture of the whole company. Fear, doubt, and emotional stress can spread through a team, making everyone less motivated and happy with their job. When domestic violence causes problems at work, it's important for bosses to make sure there is clear communication, emotional support, and access to professional resources to stop the problems from getting worse.

- **Economic Impact on Organizations**

Domestic violence at work has big effects on the economy. When employees are not motivated, don't do their jobs, and are likely to quit, businesses lose money. Studies show that inconsistent and disrupted workflows lead to lost work time and productivity because of domestic violence, which costs businesses billions of dollars. Domestic violence that forces workers to leave their jobs costs a lot to replace. When assaults, harassment, and other forms of violence at work happen over and over again, victims often quit. Firms with a lot of employee turnover have to work harder to find, hire, and train new staff. When companies lose experienced workers, they lose efficiency and knowledge, which makes the company perform worse¹. A big cost of domestic violence at work is the cost of health care. Employees who have been victims of domestic violence are more likely to need medical care for stress-related illnesses, injuries, and mental health problems like depression and anxiety. When there are a lot of medical claims and mental health treatments, healthcare benefit organisations can have trouble making ends meet. Distractions caused by stress can also lead to more accidents and mistakes at work, which can lead to more liability claims and higher costs to fix the damage.

Costs for legal and security issues make budgets bigger. To stop harassment at work, you can hire security guards, increase surveillance, or limit access to certain employees. Businesses may be responsible if they don't provide a safe place of work for victims of domestic violence. When domestic violence turns into violence at work, it can lead to lawsuits and damage to the company's reputation, both of which can cost money. Because of these financial effects, businesses should have policies

¹ Lahamar N, Perrin N, Hanson G, Anger WK, Glass N. Workplace domestic violence leave laws: Implementation, use, implications. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*. 2015 Jun 8;8(2):109-28.

against domestic violence at work. More companies are helping victims by giving them counselling, legal help, and money through employee assistance programs. Some employers will let victims of domestic violence take time off work for free. They don't have to worry about losing their job when they move, get medical care, or look for legal help. Some companies teach their workers how to spot signs of domestic violence and help coworkers who are in need.

Mental Health Consequences of Domestic Violence in the Workplace

Trauma from domestic violence can hurt a person's mental health and ability to do their job. People who are abused at home often go to work to get away from their abusive homes. But their mental pain hurts their emotional health, their ability to do their job, and their relationships with their coworkers. If the harasser keeps making threats, scaring people, or following them around, the workplace could become dangerous. Violence in the home can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and problems at work with coworkers. This part talks about how domestic violence affects the mental health of victims at work, as well as the morale and output of the company.

- **Psychological Distress and Burnout**

When it happens at work, domestic violence leads to immediate mental pain, such as emotional exhaustion and burnout. Domestic abuse victims often feel stressed all the time because they have to balance the emotional toll of abuse with their work obligations¹. Their mental health is affected by not having enough money, being abused emotionally, and being afraid all the time, which makes it hard for them to concentrate at work. People who work with domestic violence often get burned out, which is caused by long-term stress that makes them emotionally and physically tired. Victims often have trouble doing what they need to do because they feel hopeless, lack motivation, or aren't paying attention. People who have been victims of domestic violence may be tired from stress, worry, and not getting enough sleep. Not getting enough sleep and being emotionally upset can make it harder to think clearly, remember things, and make decisions, all of which are important for getting work done. Psychological stress is caused by both personal problems and the need to appear "normal" at work. Many victims keep their problems from their bosses and coworkers out of fear of being judged, losing their jobs, or being stigmatised. They might be emotionally worn out from hiding their pain at work. Burnout is caused by constant emotional exhaustion, which makes it hard for victims to keep a job for a long time.

- **PTSD, Anxiety, and Depression in Victims**

A lot of the time, domestic violence leads to PTSD, anxiety, and depression. PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, can happen after being abused physically, emotionally, or mentally. Long-term victims of domestic violence have unwanted

¹ Kulkarni S, Ross TC. Exploring employee intimate partner violence (IPV) disclosures in the workplace. *Journal of workplace behavioral health*. 2016 Oct 1;31(4):204-21.

thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, and are more sensitive to things that remind them of the abuse. Symptoms at work include being more aware, not trusting coworkers, and not paying attention because of flashbacks to traumatic events. Violence in the home can lead to anxiety and other mental health problems. People who are being stalked can feel dread, panic attacks, and extreme anxiety even in safe places. Meetings, deadlines, and coworkers can all cause stress at work, and being around them too much can make you anxious and hurt your performance. People who are victims may develop a fear of public speaking and avoid or greatly limit professional conversations.

People who have been victims of domestic violence are more depressed because they feel trapped and helpless. People with depression are sad all the time, not interested in work or social life, very tired all the time, and have trouble making decisions¹. People who feel estranged from their jobs and coworkers may struggle to find purpose in their careers. Disinterest in work can lead to poor performance, absenteeism, and even termination. When PTSD, anxiety, and depression combine, victims may abuse drugs, cut themselves, or consider suicide. Companies that ignore these warning signs and don't help their employees risk losing talented people to mental health issues.

- **Impact on Workplace Relationships and Social Interactions**

Domestic violence affects victims' mental health and ability to form and maintain work relationships. Workers affected by domestic violence often struggle with trust, communication, and social withdrawal. These factors can hinder teamwork. Healthy workplace relationships require cooperation, respect, and open communication. However, domestic violence victims may be too scared, anxious, or exhausted to socialise at work. They may avoid coworkers, social events, team meetings, and informal chats. Without understanding the victim's isolation, coworkers may assume they're unsociable, uncooperative, or uninterested.

In some cases, victims may react more emotionally to coworkers. When insulted, misunderstood, or attacked at work, they may react defensively or withdraw due to past experiences. Demoralised team members struggle to collaborate. Managers and supervisors may not understand the victim's changed behaviour, causing workplace conflict and even discipline. Workplace bullying or harassment may worsen mental health issues in domestic violence victims. Employees who exploit victims' weaknesses may make their low self-esteem and confidence worse. Working in an abusive workplace that reinforces powerlessness and terror may make it harder for domestic violence victims to recover.

¹ Kulkarni SJ, Mennicke AM, Woods SJ. Intimate partner violence in the workplace: Exploring gender differences in current health-related quality of life. *Violence and victims*. 2018 Jun 1;33(3):519-32.

- **Creating a Supportive Workplace Environment**

Due to the mental health risks of domestic violence, companies must help affected employees. If companies take some steps, domestic violence victims will find a safer and more welcoming workplace. First, understanding domestic violence and its effects on employees can promote empathy and reduce stigma. Many victims delay treatment for fear of stigma or unemployment. Business policies and dialogue about domestic violence can help victims feel safe seeking help without retaliation.

Counselling, trauma-informed therapy, and other confidential mental health services can help victims cope. EAPs and counselling are examples. Giving victims the option to work remotely, take paid leave, or other flexible work arrangements can give them time to deal with personal issues without jeopardising their job security. Managers and employees can be trained to recognise domestic violence and respond appropriately to make the workplace safer. Managers should be trained to support employees without being intrusive or unsettling. An HR policy that addresses workplace domestic violence provides clarity and structure for management and staff.

Restorative Justice as a Remedy for Domestic Violence

Traditional domestic violence legal responses include restraining orders, arrests, and criminal prosecutions. These programs are vital, but they do little to help domestic violence victims and offenders recover or address the root causes. Restorative justice (RJ) emphasises rehabilitation, accountability, and dialogue. Restorative justice can help workplace domestic violence conflicts. It involves survivors in problem-solving and holds offenders accountable.

Restoration rather than punishment is the goal of restorative justice. Mediators help victims and offenders discuss what happened to make amends and restore trust. Restorative justice allows domestic violence survivors to discuss their experiences, needs, and ways to get justice in a way that empowers them¹. Restorative justice can be used in the workplace through mediation, conflict resolution workshops, and restorative circles. Employers can provide safe spaces for domestic violence victims to seek support, voice concerns, and find solutions. A workplace RJ program might include,

- Getting workers and HR reps together to talk about safety issues at work and other related issues.
- Victims and offenders may have restorative dialogues (when appropriate) to acknowledge wrongdoing and look into possible ways to make things right.

¹ Conroy S, Trzebiatowski T, Liou R. Intimate partner violence disclosure in the workplace: examining frequency, workplace occurrences, and pay level. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*. 2023 Oct 2;38(4):353-71.

- Survivors can go somewhere safe to talk about what they've been through and get help from other people who have been there.

Part of the restorative justice framework is teaching employees how important it is to build healthy relationships and reject harmful norms. Adding RJ principles to the culture of a company helps make it a safer and more accepting place for employees who are dealing with domestic violence.

- **Success Stories and Challenges of RJ in Domestic Violence Cases**

Many nations and organisations have implemented restorative justice programs to combat domestic violence with varying degrees of success. Restorative justice conferences with offenders before sentencing are allowed under the New Zealand Family Violence Act. These conferences allow survivors to speak and require offenders to admit guilt and change their behaviour. Studies show this method reduces offender recidivism and boosts victim satisfaction¹. Canadian restorative justice programs coexist with traditional judicial intervention. Communities that facilitate restorative conversations between offenders and survivors are more likely to achieve rehabilitation-focused resolutions. These programs excel at helping survivors co-parent and plan for their future. Businesses are also using restorative justice to resolve domestic abuse disputes. Restorative justice programs in Australian and British corporations allow affected employees to seek mediated resolutions with HR support. These programs prioritise survivors' well-being, respect, and offender accountability.

Restorative justice still faces challenges. Criminals may use false guilt to avoid jail, according to RJ program opponents. If the offender is more powerful than the victim, conversations may be difficult or even traumatic. RJ processes must be overseen by qualified experts and participation is optional to prevent further harm. Successful workplace domestic violence policies in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada include proactive legal protections, paid leave, and employer-led initiatives. While international conventions like ILO C190 establish safer workplaces, more widespread adoption is needed. Restorative justice, an alternative to punishment, promotes victim and offender healing through accountability. RJ programs have been successful in the legal and workplace contexts, but power dynamics and retraumatization remain. Through international legal frameworks and restorative justice practices in workplace conflict resolution, employers and policymakers can make the workplace safer for domestic violence survivors.

Conclusion

Workers who are abused at home are less likely to stay healthy, do their jobs well, and keep their jobs. Business people should talk about it at work because of

¹ Duvvury N, Vara-Horna A, Brendel C, Chadha M. Productivity Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence From Africa and South America. *SAGE Open*. 2023 Oct;13(4):21582440231205524.

this. This study went into great detail about international best practices, legal frameworks, CSR initiatives, ADR processes, and policies on domestic violence at work. Rules at work, court decisions, and business actions all show that victims of domestic violence and everyone else at work are greatly affected. We need a plan with many parts to solve this problem. These parts should include new laws, workplace support networks, changes in culture, and new laws.

Summary of Key Findings

In many places of business around the world, policies on domestic violence at work are still in their early stages. This was one of the most important things that the study found. Even though it's illegal in some countries, many businesses still don't have a way to help women who are abused at work. It's harder to follow the rules because HR staff don't know enough about domestic violence, feel ashamed of it, or get enough training. Because of cultural and social issues, victims are still afraid to report abuse. This shows how important it is to have education and awareness programs in the workplace.

Another important thing to remember is that CSR can help make homes safer. Companies are helping victims in a number of ways, such as by giving them money, setting up employee assistance programs (EAPs), hiring lawyers, and providing mental health counselling. There is still a gap between making rules and following them because many businesses don't spend enough money or include rules about domestic violence in their overall safety plans for the workplace. Businesses need to get more involved, set up monitoring systems, and work with outside groups that offer legal and mental health help.

