

Supporting Domestic Violence Survivors in Hybrid and Remote Work (HRW)

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Introduction

The rise of hybrid and remote work (HRW) policies within organisations has come with increased risks for individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Consequently, it is important for companies to provide accessible resources for anyone who may be affected and to be well-informed on how to offer these resources effectively. It is also essential that these support mechanisms are integrated into broader wellbeing, safety, and inclusion strategies.

Domestic violence: scope and definition

Domestic violence, also called “domestic abuse or “intimate partner violence”, can be defined as “a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner”. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions.

What are the risks ?

- **Lack of a safe space**

For many who experience domestic abuse at home, the office is a safe space, providing security and connection. However, as the implementation of hybrid and remote policies increases, employees experiencing domestic abuse are losing this safe space. Furthermore, this increased time at home leaves survivors even more vulnerable, with a study conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic revealing that working from home may increase the frequency of the abuse faced by domestic violence victims.

- **Increased isolation**

Hybrid and remote work can cut employees facing domestic abuse off from friends, colleagues, and support networks.

- **Impacted work performance and career progression**

A 2021 survey of nearly 5,000 workers across nine countries reveals that 94% of workers who have experienced domestic abuse said it impacted their work performance.³ Moreover, one-third (32%) stated the abuse had a significant impact on their career progression.

- **Restricted Access to Help**

Only 16% of workers surveyed said their workplace had a dedicated policy to help survivors of domestic abuse. Furthermore, increased HRW further reduces this access to help, as it can be more difficult to reach survivors in a remote format.

How can we mitigate the risks ?

- **Avoid generalisations**

Research indicates that women are more likely than men to suffer from ongoing assaults and more serious injury. However, it is important to not fall victim to generalisations and acknowledge that men can experience domestic abuse from their female partner and that domestic abuse can also occur in same-sex relationships. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any age, sexual orientation, or gender.

Establish a clear policy for assisting survivors of domestic abuse

- In a HRW setting, domestic violence should become part of the workplace's overall safety and violence prevention program.⁴
- Implement a confidential method for employees to disclose concerns or abuse. This could be a code word, a secure online form, or in the form of regular employee wellbeing checks.
- Communicate regularly the domestic abuse policies and resources in place and make them accessible online.
- Identify mental confidential helplines and health professionals specialised in assisting survivors to refer employees to if need be.
- Implement a non-retaliation policy protecting employees who disclose domestic abuse to their employer from adverse action such as termination, demotion, harassment or any other form of penalty for coming forward.

Train managers and staff

- Train both managers and staff on the definition of domestic violence and the various forms it can take
- Train managers on trauma-informed responses to take if an employee discloses abuse and confidentiality.
- Offer bystander intervention training so colleagues know how to recognise signs of domestic abuse and respond safely.

Offer flexible work options

- Allow employees to work at the office if working at home is unsafe
- Provide access to coworking spaces, if need be
- Offer paid leave or adjusted work hours for employees to recover, relocate, attend legal meetings, etc

What are the roles of Managers and Human Resources?

Managers



These compulsory modules are mainly for managers who have just taken up their position, and they most often address the management of requests of conflicts.

Human resources



More and more training courses are taking the form of coaching that offers to learn «what type of manager you are» which is more a matter of psychology or personal development than management.



Further Reading

- <https://www.vodafone.co.uk/newscentre/press-release/employer-support-for-domestic-violence-and-abuse-survivors-must-adapt-to-reflect-changing-hybrid-working-patterns/%C2%A0%C2%A0%C2%A0%C2%A0>
- <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/domesticabuseguide.pdf%C2%A0%C2%A0%C2%A0>
- <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/domestic-abuse-reports-fueled-remote-workers>