

The Audacity of Caring

Productivity Gains from Workplace Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence

Context for Debate 21 July 2015, Suzanne Snively (for circulation)

Domestic Violence Impacts Workplaces

She looked at the clock – 8:10, time to leave to take the kids to school so she could clock in at work at 8:30.

He stormed into the kitchen.

“Where’s my coffee, xxxxx, where’s my blue shirt, have you put chips in my lunch today and why have you given my pen to our son – get him another one.”

Rushing around to meet his demands, in no time at all, it’s 8:30– the kids will be late for assembly and she is already late to work.

Arriving late, her colleagues are pissed off with her as they have had to start the rounds in her absence. The hospital is overloaded with flu-ridden patients and every nurse is needed.

In the middle of her first patient, the phone rings. He is yelling at her – “What did you spend the \$150 on you xxxxx – that is my money.”

Lunch time, he arrives and accuses her of spending the money on cosmetics to attract another man. She consoles him by showing the receipt for new shoes for their 3 children.

He threatens her anyway and says he will go pick the children up from school to be sure that they have new shoes.

His obsessive consternation over the money leads to continual phone calls all afternoon.

Concerned about his anger, she leaves work early at 3:30 to pick up her children from after-school care, just to be sure that they are safe.

He arrives after she has collected their children and confronts her in the street. Remembering the annoyance of her colleagues in the morning and knowing they might even now be telling the boss that she arrived late and left early, she is feeling guilty. She snaps and yells at him.

When they arrive home, he hits in her in front of the kids. The kids go quietly to their rooms without speaking.

She gets on with making dinner.

Dinner is unpleasant with his continual demands peppered with complaints about the food and the children’s manners.

Workplace Protections: Domestic Violence Down, Productivity Up

Fast forward two years from now. New Zealand's Health and Safety Legislation is in place and key provisions of the Workplace Protections Act have been implemented at the same time. The refreshed induction material provided to staff throughout New Zealand includes information about the nature of domestic violence and about how work colleagues can best show their care and support. There are provisions for victims and survivors to seek HR and other professional support and there is up to 10 days leave available to take steps to break the cycle of abuse.

She has moved to another city. With more time to herself, she has successfully motivated her children to help out in the mornings. They are all on time to school and work.

He still tries to harass her at work. There are continual phone calls, but the receptionist is aware and trained, making sure that he doesn't find out where she has moved to and fielding his calls instead of putting them through while she is working.

Those of her colleagues, who have been made aware of her resolute approach to moving on from the abusive relationship, are attentive and supportive. She is able to make use of her 5 year nursing degree and put in a committed and productive 37.5 hour working week. With the children safe, happily in after school care, she can often work overtime and is making good progress paying off the mortgage on her own home.

Domestic Violence is a Workplace Issue

Like it or not, domestic violence is a workplace issue. At least 1 in 10 women in the work place are current victims of domestic violence. Victims (as well as perpetrators) create direct costs to employers because their unpredicted absences and other behaviours reduce their own productivity and often also contribute to reducing the productivity of their workmates.

In any year:

- Over 111,000 women in the workforce (7% of all New Zealand women) will be experiencing domestic violence.¹
- Because of the absence of effective workplace protections for victims, domestic violence will have cost employers at least \$368 million annually. If nothing is done, there will be a loss of 2.3 million days of work in the 10 years until 2024.
- Of this, over half, almost 1.3 million days of productive work time, will be lost due to victims being distracted at work by harassment and fears about their safety and that of other family members.
- Over and above that, there will be days of productive work lost because of the consequences of physical abuse, sexual abuse and stalking as well as losses to employers through job termination costs such as recruitment and re-training.

These figures are conservative. Men can too be victims of abuse. Furthermore, the behaviour of those who are perpetrators is also a workplace issue. Evidence the case of the grief and anger experienced in the Dunedin workplace of the man who in 2014 killed his two children before killing himself.

¹ The PSA / The NZ Family Violence Clearing House Summary Paper
Productivity Gains from Workplace Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence report. (Kahui, Ku and Snively, 2014)

Tonight's is a Milestone Event – Together You Can Lead the Way

Remember 21 July 2015. **Thanks to co-hosts** Graduate Women Wellington, National Council of Women Wellington and the Zonta Club of Wellington for bringing us together for this milestone in New Zealand's history. I'd like to acknowledge Sherilee Kahui, my co-researcher and co-author, who is here this evening. Thanks too to the PSA who commissioned the 2014 report that provides context for this evening's debate.

I'd like also to acknowledge the Parliamentarians who have dedicated their time to think about and discuss their views on this topic.

- Kelvin Davis – New Zealand Labour Party
- James Shaw – Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Alastair Scott – New Zealand National Party
- Winston Peters – NZ First Party
- Marama Fox – Maori Party, whose not here tonight

July 21 2015 is the day where there is cross-party support for our caring society to create the workplace conditions that ensure that all our citizens are cared for and safe from intimate partner abuse while they are at work.

There has been growing awareness of the significant social, emotional and physical impact of domestic violence since the inception of Women's Refuge. The Refuge was supported by the National Government, led nearly 45 years ago by the Minister of Social Welfare, the Hon Venn Young. The prevalence and impact of domestic violence in the workplace is more recently understood, led by the Australians.²

Everyone here tonight will be well aware of the scourge of domestic violence. In contrast, even 21 years ago when my first major costing study was published, there was profound disbelief and denial about its prevalence. Sadly, the indications are that the largest proportions of funding for domestic violence over the last 21 years have been directed to address the symptoms of pain and suffering.

In the recent years, though, there has emerged a much more purposeful approach to finding the cause of domestic violence and to specifying and recommending ways to invest more in solutions that break the cycle of violence.

Workplaces are a Way of Government and Citizens Working Together

Workplaces provide a major impetus for breaking the cycle. They can be places for collegiality and innovation. When they are, staff are actually team members who work together to provide the quality services and goods in an environment that epitomises people-culture, productivity and profitability. These, in turn, are the factors that drive economic prosperity in New Zealand.

Not surprising given these workplace attributes, the one certainty about ways to address domestic violence that has been proven over and over in the past 30 years, is that employment is a key pathway for women to move on from abusive relationships.

² Indeed, when I led the first New Zealand costing study in 1993/4, a woman government official, who was part of the working group, strongly persuaded us not to research productivity loss as in her view, the majority of victims of domestic violence would be unemployed.

Security of employment enables those affected by domestic violence to build confidence, commitment and continuity into their lives. This means that they are equipped to maintain home and economic stability. It adds up to finding a pathway where they can successfully re-build their lives.

But, experience in New Zealand to date indicates that there are barriers to the implementation of work place protections due to some employer attitudes. These barriers are due in part to ongoing denial about what for them is a hidden problem. Those employers commonly articulate a misunderstanding of the effectiveness of workplace Health and Safety initiatives, overstating the direct costs of new initiatives and understating the more dispersed benefits of both cost savings and productivity gains.

Net Productivity Impact of Workplace Protection

The findings from earlier studies for Australia and my team's 2014 New Zealand-based analysis show that the costs to employers as a result of domestic violence are very high – an average of \$3000 annually per victim. If nothing is changed, these costs will continue to escalate. More importantly, employers will miss out on the productivity improvements that can be achieved which are greater than the combination of their existing costs and the costs of implementing workplace protections.

Given the high and growing proportion of women victims in the workforce, workforce protections also have the potential to address the non-workforce components of this cost to society. Costing studies put the total economic cost of child abuse and domestic violence as high as \$8 billion a year.

In other words, the introduction of workplace protections creates a trifecta – victims of domestic abuse win, employers win AND society wins.

Thanks again Graduate Women, NCW and Zonta for organising this debate. Thanks too to our Parliamentarians for taking the time to become more fully informed about a problem that has a worse impact on our society than smoking or drink driving.

This is an opportunity to come out of the evening with a visionary cross-party approach to effectively addressing solutions to domestic violence through workplace protections.

Such caring within the structure of the workplace builds the confidence, commitment and continuity for domestic violence victims and survivors, not to mention allowing the capability of all employees and employers to reach their full potential.

As organisations like the BNZ and MSD have already found, employers can strengthen their people, productivity and profitability through policies aimed at maximising the returns on their investment in recruitment, training and retention.

New Zealand can in this way exemplify what we all know it is at heart, a truly caring society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation of domestic violence specific workplace protections will lead to increased levels of productivity and lower costs to employers while also finding a pathway to break the cycle of violence. The way ahead is:

- To inform and seek acknowledgement by employers, unions and peak bodies that domestic violence is a work issue with impacts that are potential workplace hazards which generate costs of recruitment, retraining and retention while reducing productivity
- For employers to create and implement tailored domestic violence human resources policies that can be integrated with existing health and safety policies, including induction and training to accurately inform employees:
 - about domestic violence in the workplace
 - of their rights in relation to domestic violence in the workplace
 - of the protocols and procedures surrounding domestic violence in the workplace
- That unions and employers collaborate in workplaces on developing protocols advocating for victims of domestic violence and relevant induction and training programmes, as has been the case in Australia.³
- That an on-line induction module be prepared that is freely available to all organisations which includes knowledge about domestic violence and to work with large employers to implement the domestic violence information section into their induction processes as soon as possible, both for new and long serving employees
- To work with peak bodies to motivate take up of existing programmes focused on training to recognise, respond to and reduce domestic violence
- Based on successful overseas practice and New Zealand organisations such as the Bank of New Zealand, develop and implement a national policy that entitles victims of domestic violence to up to 10 days special leave (non-accrued) for specific requirements to address and resolve domestic violence problems (Note that the presentation of documentation by those affected by domestic violence triggers this entitlement and that days actually taken will show as a current expense for employers rather than a liability on the balance sheet)
- To align the national policy with a monitoring tool based on the framework developed for this project so that understanding of what does and does not contribute to workplace gains for victims and employers and to assess the costs and benefits of the leave entitlement and other workplace protections
- Set up an evaluation process to identify effective workplace protections and to inform the specification of replacements for ineffective ones

³ Also, that organisations, such as Business New Zealand, Chambers of Commerce etc incorporate training modules and induction templates into their services to small and medium enterprises. In addition, employers work with Women's Refuge, Shine and others to assist in services for survivors of domestic violence for support on the pathway.