

Employee Safety



Do No Harm

In 2012, 351 women died on the job. Ninety-nine were murdered, many by people they knew. There are steps HR can take to minimize this national tragedy of domestic abuse, which affects men too, though to a lesser degree.

BY CAROL PATTON

One Monday morning in April 2007, Rebecca Griego, a 26-year-old employee at the University of Washington in Seattle, was gunned down in her fourth-floor office by her ex-boyfriend, who then turned the gun on himself.

Griego had previously obtained a protection-from-abuse order against her partner, who had thrown candlesticks at her, tackled her to the ground, punched her and called her office on two occasions to threaten her.

With more than 25,000 employees on the school's three campuses, the university supported an informal violence-prevention group that included representatives from its employee-assistance-program vendor, HR, police and a student-life group that met on an ad hoc basis.

At the time, "there was no single point of contact, no public-information

campaign, no rigorous record keeping or no real facilitation for safety planning," says David Girts, manager of the violence-prevention-and-response program at UW, which falls under HR's umbrella. Although Griego notified the campus police about her situation, this information was not shared or discussed with the group.

Since then, much has changed, not only at UW, but at other organizations that realize workplace domestic violence can happen anywhere, anytime, to anyone.

Generally, more men die at work than women, but more women are murdered. Specifically, according to thinkprogress.org, 4,277 men were killed at work in 2012 compared to 351 women; however, 9 percent of those men were murdered on the job compared to 28 percent of female employees.

In 2010, The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control conducted a survey called *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence* survey. Results revealed that more than one in four women and more than one in 10 men experienced sexual or physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner. These victims were also more likely to report frequent headaches, chronic pain, difficulty sleeping, activity limitations, and poor physical and mental health than those who did not experience such forms of violence.

While no employer is immune, HR professionals can minimize such heinous acts through effective planning, teamwork and coordination

of shared information and resources. By spearheading this effort, HR can help employees be safe and more productive at work, and prevent such situations from turning tragic.

Partner, Share and Train

Shortly after Griego was murdered, Girts says, UW modified its domestic violence policy and created the violence prevention and response program—publicly called UW-SafeCampus—that acts as the school's central reporting point for employees.

The domestic-violence policy and related initiatives are online and included in the school's optional online orientation program and, oftentimes, its onboarding process as well. Since departments are responsible for onboarding their own hires, Girts says, his office encourages them to brief new hires on the policy and available resources.

His office partners with HR representatives of employee victims, campus police, the office of student life and the school's legal department. The group meets weekly to assess threats and discuss strategy, improve the physical security of an employee's work location, relocate domestic-violence victims who may be in danger, and train employees on recognizing the signs of domestic violence and what to do in hostile situations.

In serious situations, his office issues alert bulletins, informing selected managers about potentially dangerous people who may harm their staff at work. Likewise, employees can also seek help from a victim's advocate—from the school's on-site police force—who is an expert on personal safety planning for domestic-violence victims.

"We get about 300 to 400 calls a year," says Girts, adding that, of the eight campus homicides that occurred over the past 40 years, six were related to domestic violence.

Still, it's impossible to determine how many lives the program has saved.

"We created a situation where potential victims and departments feel a lot more secure and prepared in case something bad happens," he says. "People feel better when they have a plan on how they would react in an emergency."

Verizon has also experienced its share of workplace violence. Several years ago, a female employee at its Santa Monica, Calif., store was shot by her husband in the parking lot, critically wounding her, before police killed him. In 2001, another employee was harassed at work by her husband, who then murdered her at home. Her story is revealed in a PBS documentary, *Telling Amy's Story*, co-sponsored by Verizon.

The employee portal on the company website houses its domestic-

violence policies and practices, says Martha Delehanty, senior vice president of HR at the global communications company in Basking Ridge, N.J.

She adds that employees can watch domestic-violence webinars that discuss the issue and identify the company's resources or attend 90-minute meetings periodically held after work throughout the year. A portion of the documentary is shown and local experts such as EAP representatives also attend.

While Verizon generates awareness of domestic violence through activities such as 5k walks, the company's managers and supervisors are trained to recognize the signs of domestic violence.

"It's very appropriate to ask, 'Gosh, I've noticed you've been out a few times and am concerned. Is anything going on at home?'" says Delehanty, adding that, while such questions may offend some employees, it opens up a dialogue with others. "From an HR perspective, I would rather be wrong and sorry [than] right [but too] late."

HR spearheads Verizon's domestic violence prevention activities. While working hand-in-hand with security and the company's operations leaders, HR also makes the company's legal counsel aware of documented policies and practices. There have been times, Delehanty says, when HR helped abused employees obtain temporary restraining orders or transferred them

to different locations for their personal safety. Employees and wireless customers can also use any Verizon phone to contact a domestic violence hotline.

Delehanty says it would be "foolish" for her to believe that the company's 168,000 U.S. employees are any different than the rest of the American workforce when it comes to domestic violence.

"Having an intentional focus [on] domestic violence shines an appropriate light on the tragedy and the options people have," she says. "By calling domestic violence out, we actually put a voice behind what people cover up as a nonwork-related issue."

Prepare for the Worst

To create effective company policies and practices, HR must first build a culture in which employees feel comfortable reporting this type of information. Some victims of domestic violence are afraid they'll lose their jobs or be passed up for a promotion, says Pam Paziotopoulos, an attorney and independent consultant at Forest Advisors, a company in Lake Forest, Ill., that focuses on workplace and campus violence and intervention.

"You're trying to assess who are the potential threats to your organization, who could be an active shooter, who could pose a problem," she says, adding that ex-partners should be at the top of HR's list. "But most people aren't going



Say hello to the human face that comes standard with your HR and payroll interface.

Introducing the all-new Paychex Flex platform. Now you can access and share data in the cloud, create custom workflows and gain superior business intelligence — all to help your employees work more efficiently. Plus, your employees can get the information they need on their smartphone or tablet. You even get the flexibility to choose a service model that best fits your needs — including an option for 24/7 support.

To learn more, call (855) 973-2392 today. Or visit paychex.com/FlexPro.

PAYCHEX FLEX
ENTERPRISE

Brutal Facts



Domestic violence hotlines nationwide receive more than 20,000 phone calls each day.



One in five women and one in seven men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

Between 2003 → 2008 142 women were murdered in their workplaces as a result of intimate-partner violence, representing **22 percent** of workplace homicides among women.



The **economic impact** is just as disturbing. Victims lost almost 8 million days of paid work because of the violence perpetrated against them by intimate partners, which equates to the **loss of more than 32,000 full-time jobs.**



Source: The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Denver

Employee Safety

to disclose that to their employer for fear of termination or discrimination.”

During new-hire orientations, she often recommends handing out written domestic-violence policies and then discussing them instead of publishing them in the back of an employee handbook that may never be read.

The effort must also be continuous. “This is not something you create, put on the shelf and you’re off to the next compliance issue,” says Paziotopoulos, also a contributing author of *Preventing and Managing Workplace Violence*, published by the American Bar Association. “It’s not going to be effective if it’s not an ongoing program.”

Part of that effort is training employees not only about the signs of domestic violence, but—just as importantly—what to do when violence erupts. Should employees hide under their desks? Their best option is to run, not hide, she says. But do they know where all the exit doors are? Can security alert everyone of a violent situation by using code words over a public-address system?

“If [HR] takes the right step by creating a channel of communication and being very public about this policy, then they’re going to get a spike in the number of people coming forward,” she says. “That’s a good thing.”

Just make certain the company’s policies comply with state laws, adds Nathaniel Glasser, a labor and employment lawyer at Epstein Becker Green in Washington (formerly with Proskauer).

According to him, some states and jurisdictions provide comprehensive protections for victims of domestic



Verizon, which has had its share of domestic-violence incidents, is committed to getting the word out about the issue and ways to prevent its scourge among Verizon employees.

violence in the workplace. For example, in Colorado, companies with more than 50 workers must permit up to three days of protected leave per calendar year to domestic-violence victims. But in Illinois, that number jumps to 12 weeks. Other states—including Maine, Oregon and Washington—don’t specify a number of days, requiring employers to provide a “reasonable” amount of leave. Whether leave is paid or unpaid varies between states.

Likewise, some states—California, New York, Hawaii and Illinois, for example—also have laws that protect domestic-violence victims against discrimination involving adverse employment actions, such as not being promoted, and require employers to make reasonable accommodations, such as modifying a work schedule or transferring the person to a different location.

Then there are protections under federal law that can prompt employee lawsuits, such as an employee complaining about co-worker harassment or a hostile work environment.

Glasser says employers get into trouble when managers are unfamiliar with leave laws, don’t elevate an employee’s question to someone in HR and deny an employee’s request for leave.

“Make sure you’re meeting the law and the needs of the employee within the context of the law,” Glasser says. “In the area of dissemination of the policy, training on its protections, I think a lot of employers can improve in this area going forward.”

Mandatory Notification

With so many employee lives at stake, Wells Fargo requires its 265,000 U.S. workers to immediately notify their manager or corporate security in the event any of these four situations has occurred or is occurring: if they experience incidents of family abuse, violence or threats; have obtained a restraining order that includes the workplace as a restricted area; are receiving harassing phone calls or emails at work; or are the target of an “unwanted pursuit” by someone seen at or near their workplace, says Tony Devencenzi, senior vice president of employee assistance consulting at Wells Fargo in San Francisco.

He leads a threat-assessment team that meets monthly and includes members from EAC, corporate security, legal and employee relations.

During 2014, his office conducted between 10 and 15 optional employee-training sessions educating employees about domestic violence, and posted an online domestic-violence toolkit that educates employees on how to recognize it, teaches them what they can do about it and identifies support resources.

What’s unusual is that victims may also receive financial assistance from the bank’s We Care fund, which provides financial aid to employees coping with natural or manmade disasters as well as domestic violence.

Devencenzi says his team also works closely with members of leave management who help employee victims apply for a variety of leaves, such as medical or administrative, or even help them with job searching if they need to relocate to a different city or location.

Meanwhile, he says, his staff and security independently use a structured tool called the Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk, a 21-item coded instrument developed by Stephen White, president, and Reid Meloy, consultant, at Work Trauma Services in San Francisco, that assesses the risk or predictability of workplace-targeted violence.

“Then we come together and share—what did they see? what did we see?—so we can put together a plan of action,” says Devencenzi. “It allows us to have a multidimensional system to look at a situation with a reliable, validated tool. That’s what really grounds us in assessing these potential situations to protect our team members in the workplace.”

Still, not every company goes to such efforts. Perhaps Michael Mason, Verizon’s chief security officer, best explains the consequences of poor policies and planning:

“When teddy bears are put at the doorstep, that’s fine, but it’s too damn late.”

Send questions or comments about this story to hreletters@lrp.com.



Without pets, smiles would be in shorter supply.

Pet insurance is one of the most highly requested voluntary employee benefits and it’s easy to offer with the nation’s leading pet insurance provider.

- ✓ No additional costs to your company
- ✓ No minimum participation requirement
- ✓ And it’s the easiest way to keep everyone healthy and happy

Visit petinsurance.com/hrexec or call 877-263-5995 to learn more.



Veterinary Pet Insurance, VPI and the cat/dog logo are service marks of Veterinary Pet Insurance Company. Nationwide, the Nationwide N and Eagle, and Nationwide Is On Your Side are service marks of Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company. ©2015 Veterinary Pet Insurance Company and Nationwide.

