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How ADIs can support employees who are experiencing domestic violence

The “banking as a force for good” series

GEN ADVISORY®

Domestic violence is a major national health and welfare problem in Australia. A problem that can have lifelong impact on both victims and perpetrators. According to a 2016 Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2.2 million Australians have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner, whereas 3.6 million have experienced emotional abuse. Around 2.2 million Australians have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15¹. In Australia about 1 in 4 women and around 1 in 13 men have experienced domestic violence since the age of 15 (ABS, 2016)².



Source Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016

The seriousness of this problem is evident in the excessive and growing level of violence experienced. The likelihood of managers and employees in Australian financial institutions being confronted by colleagues affected by these forms of violence is increasing. How can Australian ADIs and financial institutions address this problem?

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Domestic Violence" <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/behaviours-risk-factors/domestic-violence/overview>

² IHR Australia "Impacts of Domestic Violence on the Workplace" <https://ihraustralia.com/domestic-violence-workplace/>

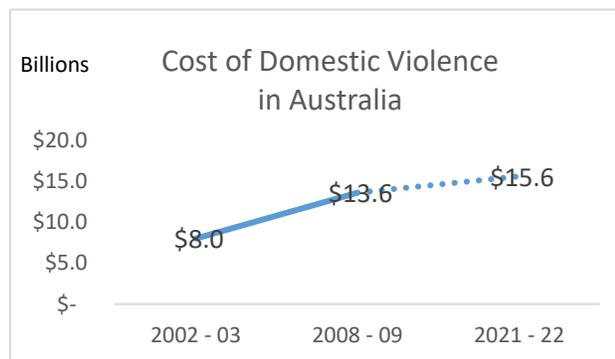
What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence occurs when one family member, partner or ex-partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate or harm another. According to the *Commonwealth Office for Women* (OFW), domestic violence can be exhibited in many forms. These include: physical violence; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; intimidation; economic deprivation; and threats of violence.

Domestic violence occurs in all geographic regions of Australia and all socioeconomic and cultural groups - although it is more pronounced among groups such as regional and rural Australians and Indigenous communities³.

What is the impact of domestic violence?

In 2002-2003 in Australia, the total cost of domestic violence for victims, perpetrators, friends and family, the community, government and the private sector was estimated at more than \$8 billion. In 2008-09, the total cost to the Australian economy of all violence against women and their children (including non-domestic violence) was estimated at \$13.6 billion. If no action is taken, this number is expected to rise to \$15.6 b in 2021–22⁴.



Domestic violence has a significant impact on the health and well-being of individuals, causing physical injury, anxiety, depression and disruption of social skills.

³ Parliament of Australia, "Domestic Violence in Australia - an Overview of the Issues", https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/Domviolence

⁴ Australian Institute Of Criminology, "Key issues in domestic violence"

It also increases the likelihood of victims engaging in damaging practices, such as self-harm or substance abuse (NSW Office for Women's Policy 2008). Additionally, physical abuse increases the risk of criminal activity. Most women in prison experienced some form of abuse before incarceration, both as adults and as children⁵.

The most damaging effects of domestic violence are on financial security, the ability to maintain employment and access to suitable accommodation. Witness submissions to the Victoria *Domestic Violence Resource Center* (DVRCV) highlighted financial security as the 'main problem' for women who live with abusive partners. Even after leaving these relationships, the DVRCV found⁶ that experiencing domestic violence significantly contributes to women's poverty, financial risk and financial insecurity.

ADIs can support employees who experience domestic violence

ADIs can tackle these problems in the workplace and play a positive role by providing a safe and supportive environment for employees, especially those who experience violence. This can produce strong benefits for employers, including higher retention rates, improved staff morale, and better health outcomes for employees. ADIs can take action to ensure that they provide adequate support for victims of domestic violence.

1. Establish clear policies and procedures

- Develop policies to support staff who have been victims of domestic violence.
- Develop policies for a safe workplace, free from harassment and intimidation.
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy to employees who behave violently at work.
- Ensure that policies and procedures are clearly articulated to staff and that employees are encouraged to understand and apply them.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Domestic Violence" <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

⁶ Parliament of Australia, "Domestic Violence in Australia", https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Domestic_Violence/Report/c02

2. Make provisions for leave or flexible work arrangements

- Provide special paid leave for staff who experience domestic violence.
- Offer flexible work arrangements, as set out in the Fair Employment Act.

3. Implement awareness raising and education programs

- Make sure all staff understand the impact of violence on the household, family, individuals and the workplace.
- Ensure staff are trained to recognise signs that a coworker might be experiencing domestic violence.
- Ensure adequate support is provided to affected employees.
- Address the short-term and long-term needs of affected employees.
- Develop a safety plan for occasions when one is required.
- Ensure ongoing communication and regularly check with affected employees.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality.
- Ensure employees know how to access support services. Some Employee Assistance Programs provide counselors trained in domestic violence counseling.

4. Carry out safety plans with affected employees

- Ensure managers receive training in developing safety plans for employees.
- Ensure staff who are asked to support other staff (e.g. Managers) know the appropriate support and referral pathways for employees who experience or commit violence.
- Supporting staff must also understand how they themselves will be supported.

5. Encourage monitoring and reflection

- Monitor and reflect on progress in this area after taking the above actions.
- Assess the level of domestic violence experienced by employees (e.g. surveys)

In summary: Take action to support employees who experience domestic violence

Domestic violence is a major health and welfare problem in Australia. It has an economic and financial impact. Within the workplace, domestic violence impacts employee performance and productivity and increases staff absences. ADIs can play a role in reducing the devastating impact of domestic violence on its employees through the following actions :

- Establish policies and procedures to support victims of domestic violence;
- Make provisions for leave or flexible work arrangements;
- Implement awareness raising and education programs;
- Carry out safety plans with affected employees;
- Encourage monitoring and reflection.

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, “Domestic Violence”.
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/behaviours-risk-factors/domestic-violence/overview>
- IHR Australia “Impacts of Domestic Violence on the Workplace”.
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