



Domestic Violence Is a Worker Rights Issue

(Updated February 2022)

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior in which an intimate partner or family member uses physical violence, coercion, threats, intimidation, isolation, and/or emotional, sexual or economic abuse to control a partner or family member. It is not defined by physical acts, but rather a pattern of behavior. It harms families, communities and workplaces.

Domestic violence can happen to people of any gender identity, although due to discriminatory social norms and institutional practices, women are disproportionately impacted and perpetrators are more often men. It occurs between people of every economic and social class, sexuality, racial or ethnic background, religion and age, although domestic abuse often mirrors socially constructed identity-based inequalities.

Prevalence of Domestic Violence Worldwide

- The World Health Organization estimates that [1 in every 3 women](#), around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or to sexual violence from a non-partner across their lifetime—a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. Regional statistics are available [here](#) and graphics are available [here](#).
- [1 in 4 young women](#) who have been in a relationship will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-20s.

Domestic Violence in the World of Work.

- Abusers may seek out their victims at their place of work, particularly if they have recently left a shared home, placing survivors and co-workers at risk.
- Survivors also may need to take time off from work to address the victimization, including attending court dates to obtain protection from abuse, or healing from injuries caused or exacerbated by the violence.
- Domestic violence may impact the productivity of both victims *and* perpetrators. A form of power and control exhibited by a perpetrator may include sabotaging a victim's work performance in order for them to lose their job, reinforcing the abuser's power and control over them. Domestic violence victims also may be disciplined or fired because they miss work or are unable to concentrate, which then jeopardizes their financial independence—a critical factor in many survivors' ability to leave or seek safety from a violent relationship.
- A [2020 report](#) on the impact of domestic violence on the workplace in India conducted by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and Indian unions found that 47 percent of workers who responded reported direct experience of domestic violence, with 24 percent of respondents reporting a direct experience in the past 12 months. The



majority (92 percent) of respondents who experienced domestic violence reported that it affected their ability to work; 77 percent reported discrimination from their employer after reporting their experiences of domestic violence; and 23 percent reported losing their job because of their experiences with domestic violence.

- A [2014 survey](#) by the Canadian Labor Congress and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) found that 1 in 3 workers experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. In addition, 82 percent reported that domestic violence negatively affected their work performance; 53 percent said they experienced violence at or near the workplace; 38 percent reported that domestic violence affected their ability to get to work; 37 percent said that it negatively impacted their co-workers; and 8.5 percent lost their job as a result of domestic violence.
- Other research has produced similar results, including in the [Philippines](#) in 2015 and, two years later, in [Mongolia](#).
- A [study in Peru](#) found that perpetrators missed an average of 35 days of work a year due to the violence, “a much stronger impact” than the effect on victims. Three-quarters of that time is missed due to presenteeism—being physically present at work but not working—while absenteeism accounts for a quarter.
- In [Sri Lanka, a study](#) on intimate partner violence found that 16 percent of victims had to take days off work, and 32 percent had to seek medical attention for their injuries.
- A [2005 study](#) from the U.S. found that 44 percent of employed adults personally experienced the effects of domestic violence in their workplaces, and 64 percent of victims of domestic violence indicated that their ability to work was affected by the abuse.
- A [federal study](#) from [the United States](#) found that between 25 percent and 50 percent of employed victims of domestic violence lose their jobs due at least in part to the violence. A [2005 study](#) found that 96 percent of employed domestic violence victims experienced problems at work related to the violence, with 78 percent of victims reporting being late as a result of abuse, 47 percent reporting being assaulted before work and 78 percent reporting a perpetrator came to their workplace.
- A [2020 survey of home-based workers](#) in Nepal, 55 percent of respondents reported that harassment and violence from family members affected their work; 35 percent reported that it meant they took on less work.

The Cost of Domestic Violence

- A [2013 study in Peru](#) found that companies lose more than \$6.7 billion a year due to the impact of domestic violence on the workplace.
- In Bolivia, according to a [2015 study](#), that cost for employers came to nearly \$2 billion a year, while in [Bangladesh](#) (2011), the estimated cost was \$2.3 billion.



- A 2010 [study of the cost of domestic violence in Vietnam](#) found that out-of-pocket expenditures by victims and lost earnings accounted for 1.41 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Overall productivity loss was estimated at 1.78 percent of GDP.
- The cost of intimate partner [violence in Morocco](#) is estimated at \$6.8 billion..

Unions' Role in Addressing Domestic Violence

- In addition to ensuring that victims remain employed while seeking safety, do not face retaliation or discrimination related to the abuse, and have access to support, unions can develop relationships with community-based organizations working to address and prevent domestic violence. A global directory of such organizations is available [here](#).
- A 2019-2020 [study](#) supported by the Solidarity Center and conducted by the Center for Global Workers' Rights found that 58 percent of women in non-union banana packing plants reported experiencing gender-based violence and harassment at work, compared to just 8 percent of women at unionized plants. The study also found that non-union workers are 81 percent more likely to face verbal abuse compared to union workers.
- IndustriALL has a series on [domestic violence as a union issue](#) available in English, Spanish, French and Russian.
- IUF's guide [Breaking the Silence](#) is available in English, Spanish and French.
- The UK Trade Union Congress has a [guidebook for union representatives](#).
- Workplaces Respond has [guidance for union representatives](#) who are in the difficult situation of responding when their members are perpetrators of domestic violence, perhaps even on the same worksite as their victim.
- The ITUC has a [list of union activities](#) undertaken to address the increase in violence and harassment during the pandemic.
- The European Trade Union Congress has a comprehensive guide [Safe at Home. Safe at Work](#) that includes the impact of domestic violence.

How Governments and Employers Should Mitigate the Impact of Domestic Violence on the World of Work

- [National legislation](#) in a number of jurisdictions, including Brazil, Canada, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Philippines and Spain—as well as regional laws in Argentina and in many U.S. states—provide paid or unpaid leave so victims of domestic violence can address the impact of victimization on their lives, such as attending medical appointments, child custody hearings or divorce proceedings. Some laws also prevent employers from discriminating or retaliating against workers who are survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault.
- International Labor Organization [Convention 190](#) and [Recommendation 206](#) states that governments and employers should adopt the following measures to address the impact of domestic violence on the world of work:
 - Paid leave for victims of domestic violence to attend to issues related to the abuse.



- Workplace accommodations, flexible work arrangements, and protective measures for victims of domestic violence.
- Temporary protection against dismissal for victims on grounds related to domestic violence and its consequences.
- Workplace risk assessments on violence and harassment that take into account risk presented by the impact of domestic violence.
- Measures to ensure that protections extend to workers in the informal economy, including equitable access to work-based support measures.
- A referral system to public mitigation measures for domestic violence.
- Measures to hold perpetrators accountable and, when appropriate, provide counseling or other measures to prevent recurrence.
- Gender-responsive training for labor inspectors and other government officials on how to identify and address risks of violence and harassment, including the impact of domestic violence.
- Awareness-raising about the effects of domestic violence on the world of work.