RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Family Violence Prevention Using Workplaces as Sites of Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Family or domestic violence is a major social issue affecting many Australian women. Since the 1970s, women's refuges have led the movement to bring about change in relation to this form of violence against women and children, and more recently, Australian governments and other community sector agencies have worked towards providing both services to support victims and programmes to prevent violence occurring. In Australia, as is the case internationally, workplaces are now emerging as sites for intervention and prevention in relation to family violence. Indeed, organisations and managers are becoming increasingly aware of the impacts of family violence on workers and workplaces, as well as the potential benefits of developing strategies to appropriately respond. In this article three models of family violence intervention and prevention through workplaces are discussed. Case studies from organisations and community agencies are drawn upon to illustrate the employer led, partnerships and union based models. Some key issues to promote successful implementation are identified and the need for evaluation with a consideration of safety issues is highlighted. It is concluded that there is great scope for managers and the business sector generally, to actively support the prevention of family violence through Australian workplaces, with direct economic as well as broader social benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the increased representation of women in the workforce over the last thirty years, international research shows that many workplace policies and practices continue to have uneven impact across gender (Bielby 2000, Britton 2000, Swanberg 2004), with management often marginalising issues affecting women comparative to men (Williams 2000). During the same period, women's refuges in Australia have led the movement to bring about change in relation to family violence, and more recently, Australian governments and other community sector agencies have worked towards providing both services to support victims and programmes to prevent violence occurring (Murray 2002). While various education campaigns have been undertaken to alert the broader Australian community that family or domestic violence is 'everybody's business' (Donovan & Vlais 2005), organisations have for the most part continued to treat family violence as a personal matter (Swanberg, Logan & Macke 2005). Nonetheless, workplaces are now emerging as sites for prevention and intervention in relation to family violence in the Australian context as well as internationally.

Family violence is a leading cause of preventable ill health and premature death for Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years (VicHealth 2004). Whilst men also do experience violence, available data demonstrates that they are far more likely to experience that violence at the hands of other men than in the context of an intimate relationship (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, Flood 2006). By contrast, in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, 40 per cent of women reported at least one incident of violence since the age of 15 years, with 19 per cent of women reporting they experienced sexual violence and 15 per cent experiencing violence from a current or previous partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Similar results were also found in a recent Australian Institute of Criminology study which revealed that a third of women who had a current or former intimate partner reported experiencing at least one form of partner violence during their lifetime (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Furthermore, in an earlier survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, researchers found that over the last 20 years around 80 per cent of women who experienced family violence did not seek assistance or report the violence, and thus, indicating a need for a variety of strategies to prevent violence before it occurs (Australian

Bureau of Statistics 1996).

Internationally, domestic violence is typically defined as violence by a man against his female partner or expartner. In Australia, this is the term most closely linked to the refuge movement because of work with women and children leaving these situations of violence. Over the last decade, the more inclusive term, family violence, has been adopted in Australian public policy to acknowledge that violence may be perpetrated by intimate partners as well as other family and community members, in particular, in relation to Indigenous women (MacDonald 1998). Both domestic violence and family violence are commonly defined to include physical, sexual, financial, social and emotional forms of abuse as well as the fear of violence (e.g., Office of Women's Policy Victoria 2002). Family violence may also be used to refer to child abuse although typically, this is not the case in the Australian literature. There is, however, increasing concern about the impact of domestic violence on children and understandings about the frequent coexistence of domestic violence and child abuse (Laing 2000, Tomison 2000). While acknowledging the issues around terminology and definitions, the term 'family violence' is used throughout this article to refer to violence by a man against his current or former female partner.

This article provides an overview of three models of family violence prevention through workplaces. The overview is based on a series of interviews undertaken with employers and programme operators who have implemented family violence prevention programmes in Australian workplaces, as well as a review of the emerging international literature on this topic. The presented models include human resources strategies which seek to prevent repeated experiences of violence through the provision of support and flexible work options to employees, as well as workplace policies and programmes which may also seek to prevent initial experiences of family violence through promoting non violent values. Finally, some key issues in relation to the implementation of workplace models of family violence prevention are considered. First, however, the following section provides the context and background to why family violence is an issue for workplaces.

WHY IS FAMILY VIOLENCE A WORKPLACE ISSUE?

Occupational violence, including workplace bullying and harassment, has been the focus of a growing number of organisational policies, interventions, and prevention strategies in recent years (e.g., WorkCover New South Wales 2003, WorkSafe Victoria 2003). In addition to occupational health and safety concerns and employer liability issues, there is recognition, today, of the very real effect of verbal abuse, threats and physical violence on workers and workplace productivity (Timo, Fulop & Ruthjersen 2004). Furthermore, research suggests a reciprocal relationship between work and family life "...with the effects of one sphere positively or negatively influencing the other." (Swanberg, et al. 2005:286). While it is less widely recognised, family violence can similarly affect workers and workplace productivity whether directly or indirectly, though it is rarely considered amongst the literature on violence and the workplace. Direct impacts of family violence can occur across three commonly identified categories of occupational violence; 'internal' violence, 'client-initiated' violence, and 'external' violence (Mayhew 2000, Mayhew & Chappell 2001). Internal violence, that is violence between employees of an organisation (Mayhew & Chappell 2001), can potentially occur in large employing organisations, in rural and regional 'one company towns' and small or family run businesses, where partners (or expartners) may both work at the same workplace, and thus, potentially increasing risks in those relationships where family violence occurs. Client initiated and violence from others external to the organisation meanwhile can also occur where partners or expartners are targeted at their place of work.

While, in general, acts of physical family violence rarely occur on site, workplaces can also be impacted in less direct ways. Family violence impacts upon working lives. Even if the family violence does not occur at the workplace itself there may be impacts experienced in the workplace through behaviours which affect the employees' ability to perform their work such as a partner or expartner destroying work taken home, inflicting injuries or making them late for meetings (Mighty 1997, Gibbons, et al. 2002, Swanberg & Logan 2005, Swanberg, et al. 2005). A victim of family violence may also experience a broad range of physical, emotional and psychological consequences including physical injury, depression, anxiety and low self esteem, all of which can adversely impact upon their work, whether through reduced concentration, time taken off work to attend court or doctors appointments or resulting in them leaving their job (Karamally 2004, Sherve 2004).

In particular, a workplace may be a place of danger for women. Indeed, particularly after separation, it may be the one place where the abuser knows where she can be found (Johnson & Gardner 1999). And Australian research has shown that women are particularly at risk of violence at the end of a relationship (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Victims of family violence may experience violence while at work, for example, through harassing phone calls, violent attacks and stalking (Swanberg, et al. 2005). Conversely, a workplace may also be one of few sites where women can seek assistance and support, as it is a place where she is away from her abuser. Perpetrators of family violence may use workplace resources to facilitate their violent behaviour, such as using their workplace telephone, fax or email to harass their victim. Thus, work performance may be diminished due to the attention given to these abusive activities. Also perpetrators may take time off work to carry out these activities (Gurchiek 2006). They may also need to take time off work to attend court or seek legal advice to deal with matters arising from their violent behaviours.

Coworkers of the victims and perpetrators can also be affected by the violent behaviour and/or the impacts upon the workplace. If workers are distracted or distressed and unable to perform their work safely, it may increase the risk of potential work safety hazards and workers being unable to perform their duties safely (Johnson & Gardner 1999, Cossack, Maingault & Lau 2004, Bowman & Rich 2005). The reputation of the workplace may be jeopardised as a consequence of employees' work performance being affected by family violence or, particularly, if clients are exposed to the violence and its impacts.

As a result of a number of these impacts, the economic costs of family violence to businesses and corporations in Australia are over $1.5 billion annually and include lost productivity, misuse of resources, absenteeism and staff turnover, as well as indirect costs such as the tax share of public sector costs of family violence (Henderson 2000, Laing & Bobic 2002). More widely, domestic violence has been estimated to cost the Australian community in the order of $8.1 billion annually in both direct and indirect costs (Access Economics 2004).

The potential benefits to workplaces in implementing human resource policies and other strategies to prevent family violence include both direct and indirect economic benefits. These outcomes are revealed as increased productivity and decreased costs in relation to leave and staff replacement (Johnson & Indvik 1999), as well as indirect benefits such as being identified as an employer of choice who shows social responsibility and provides community leadership. By being aware of family violence issues and having prevention strategies in place, employers can also better ensure that they are meeting equal opportunity and anti discrimination requirements, as well as their duty of care in ensuring a safe work environment (Johnson & Gardner 1999, Cossack, et al. 2004). Thus, human resource managers have an important role in developing and implementing strategies that aim to prevent family violence through workplaces. The ways that these strategies can be put in place are outlined in the next sections.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODELS

To date, much of the research about and development of workplace interventions for family violence have occurred in the United States (U.S.) and the United Kingdom (U.K.), with some work in Canada and New Zealand. Indeed, the published research literature on this topic remains a relatively small though emerging area. Accordingly, many of the international sources in relation to prevention of family violence through workplaces cited in this paper have been drawn from workplace policies, employee and union magazines, as well as organisational websites and other organisational documents. For example, in the U.S., businesses such as Polaroid, clothing manufacturer Liz Claiborne, and telecommunications company, Verizon, have put in place programmes dealing with domestic violence in their workplaces (Solomon 1998, Johnson & Indvik 1999, Milligan 1999, Sherve 2004, Bowman & Rich 2005). Moreover, the Family Violence Prevention Fund in the U.S. and the Trade Union Congress in the U.K. have developed training manuals and other resources for workplaces to use in developing their family violence prevention strategies.

The published literature on family violence prevention through the workplace is even less developed in the Australian context, with comparatively little published material or documentation available. In Australia, the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Service has developed a training manual and the commonwealth government, through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence — A Business Approach initiative, have developed resources to assist workplaces to implement family violence prevention programmes. Various Australian state governments have also taken steps to promote family violence prevention through workplaces such as that in Western Australia (Office of Women's Policy (WA) 1999), the Northern Territory (Office of Women's Policy (NT) 1999) and Victoria (Victorian Community Council Against Violence 2004). However, the academic research, and in particular, the evaluative literature is virtually non existent.

The models presented in this paper are based on original research involving indepth interviews conducted with programme operators and with employers. These interviews formed the basis of case studies of the small number of identified Australian initiatives. In total, four Australian initiatives are included in this paper, representing both the scarcity of this promising work within the local context, and also the diversity of potential approaches. (For a more detailed account of these initiatives, see Victorian Community Council Against Violence 2004). While based on a relatively small case study research project, in presenting these findings it is hoped that future Australian workplace initiatives and research will continue to learn from and build upon the early achievements of these case studies. Indeed, though the case studies are drawn primarily from Australian initiatives, the learnings from them may also have implications for similar work undertaken internationally.

HOW CAN WORKPLACES HELP PREVENT FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Workplaces can implement human resource strategies in the prevention of family violence which vary according to factors such as the size, location or industry of the workplace, as well who is initiating the activities and at whom they are targeted. These activities could include the implementation of policies regarding workplace responses to incidents of family violence; statements from management to staff condemning family violence and supporting

family violence prevention in forums such as messages on payslips, workplace newsletters and intranet sites; the training of key personnel who are likely to come into contact with family violence issues in the workplace, including managers, employee assistance programme staff and human resources personnel; and the display of posters and information sheets that provide information about family violence and sources of assistance (Reynolds 1997, Johnson & Gardner 1999, Bowman & Rich 2005, Gurchiek 2006).

The research interviews conducted and a review of the international literature have revealed three main models of family violence prevention through workplaces: employer led, partnerships and union based models. However, these models do not address all workplace settings; small family run businesses, home based industries and work that is done in others' homes such as home help and community nursing are further examples where other models of family violence prevention could be developed. Furthermore, some industries, such as police, defence and security forces, present unique issues due to elevated risks as a result of access to firearms or, in the case of police, the need to attend incidents of family violence where it may be an issue in their own life or where a fellow officer is involved (Honig & Sultan 2000, Women's Emergency Services Network 2000).

Employer Led Model

Models of family violence prevention that are employer led typically involve incorporating an awareness of family violence into existing human resources structures. Family violence prevention is integrated into existing strategies or organisational processes such as those concerning occupational health and safety, anti discrimination, bullying and harassment and employee assistance programmes. The aims of family violence prevention are also consistent with organisational codes of ethics or other standards established by the workplace.

As part of the incorporation of family violence prevention into the workplace, human resources and employee assistance programme personnel and others including managers are trained to be both aware of and sensitive to issues of family violence which may impact individual staff (Karamally 2004, Ceausu 2005, Gurchiek 2006). The pre existence of human resources structures, in conjunction with a larger pool of resources, provides large organisations with the opportunity to develop their own family violence prevention strategies that compliment their workplace values and philosophies, such as a commitment to staff work/life balance, family friendly policies and being an 'employer of choice' in the community. Workplace policies which provide for flexible leave provisions, increased security measures, flexible shifts and making available referral information to local family services, are just some examples of what might be included in an overall prevention strategy (Karamally 2004, Ceausu 2005, Gurchiek 2006).

Another form of the employer led model is family violence prevention undertaken as part of philanthropic activities, such as in the form of financial contributions or workplace food and clothing drives for a local family violence service. Australia's CEO Challenge, based on the U.S. Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence model, is an initiative of the Brisbane Lord Mayor's Women's Advisory Committee, and was developed in response to a gap in family violence awareness throughout the corporate sector. CEO Challenge encourages business to support family violence services and promote awareness of this issue in their organisation and in the wider community. The programme aims to raise awareness in a way that also benefits the family violence and refuge sector through the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships. For example, business may support a women's refuge through goods drives or fundraising, in return for which businesses receive awareness training and support to develop policies around family violence in their workplace (Jeans 2003). The nature of this model of family violence prevention through the workplace is such that it depends largely on an individual within the business who is willing to promote the issue and to drive the initiatives. This can be a limitation because if a key individual driving the initiative moves on the fundraising drives or awareness programmes may not continue.

Partnership Model

The partnership model of family violence prevention through the workplace refers to a relationship between a business and a local family violence support service or health service where a service worker visits the workplace offering information and referral about family violence typically within a wider health promotion programme. The visiting outreach worker may also provide posters and brochures about family violence for display and distribution within the workplace so that information and sources of referral are available widely. This model of family violence prevention and intervention through the workplace may be more suited to smaller and medium size workplaces, which do not have the infrastructure to more systematically address the issue through existing management and human resources programmes (Swanberg, Macke & Logan 2007).

Child and Family Services Ballarat operates a roving counselling service in a number of major factories in the Ballarat area, a major rural centre in western Victoria. Being mostly male dominated industries, two service workers from the agency's Men and Family Relationships programme visit these workplaces at regular intervals bringing their expert knowledge of family violence and referral information for men concerned about their family life (Brandenburg 2003). One workplace, for example, has continued to be involved in the programme for over two

and a half years, with a service worker visiting the factory floor weekly to talk to men at their individual workstations. The programme also maintains a display board with information about the various services available for men and which the Men and Family Relationships programme workers update during their regular visits. Employers are also able to negotiate with the service workers to arrange a style and frequency of programme which best suits their individual workplace. Over ten workplaces have engaged the Men and Family Relationships programme workers along with a health professional to offer men a 'health and wellbeing check' which similarly provides support and information for men who may be concerned about family or other issues affecting their work and personal lives.

Other family violence prevention through the workplace partnerships have been developed by the family support service, Southern Family Life, and local industries, including Gregory's, a large transport business, in southern metropolitan Melbourne. Southern Family Life aims to engage workplaces across three layers of interface, at CEO, management and employee levels. In this way Southern Family Life has been able to provide different levels of service to their partners such as through education and awareness forums for managers and supervisors, direct support for employees at the workplace and referrals for individuals who may need additional counselling or support outside of the workplace (Cavanagh 2003). This programme, which is run as a partnership model, operates similarly to that run by Child and Family Services Ballarat with the additional targeting of the various layers of the organisation and specific services or training to meet their needs.

Working Women's Health, based in northern metropolitan Melbourne, similarly operates an industry visits programme with service workers providing health information and referrals in a variety of community languages to women of non English speaking backgrounds predominantly in factory based workplaces. The programme contains six modules, each covering between five to eight topics such as women's reproductive health, mental health, occupational health and safety and family violence. The sessions are run during lunchtimes to limit any disruption to the workplace and women are provided with an information kit written in their own language that they can take away with them and look over in their own time. The industry visits programme leaves the topic of family violence until the last module when rapport has been built between the women and the community educator before broaching the issue. The programme sessions are also backed up by additional one-to-one information which can be arranged outside of work hours if necessary so that women have an opportunity to discuss issues privately (Trifa 2003). The Working Women's Health industry visits programme developed out of recognition that many women, particularly in the factory based industries, did not get the chance to explore health issues and often did not seek assistance until a problem was severe. Thus, the programme operates in a preventive way, offering women information and referral to services in order to seek assistance for health and other issues such as family violence when they first emerge.

Union Based Model

The union movement has a long history of organising to instigate change for workers. Work/life balance, occupational health and safety, workplace bullying and harassment are some of the issues which unions have taken up, many of which recognise that home life can impact upon work life. Unions in the U.K. have taken up the issue of family violence and developed resources to assist in its prevention through workplace interventions (Trade Union Congress 2002). These strategies include encouraging employers to adopt workplace policies in relation to family violence which address the additional health, safety and security issues that employees experiencing family violence may face and also providing employees with the opportunity to negotiate flexible leave and shift arrangements. Family violence prevention can be incorporated into other union supported mechanisms that promote occupational health and safety, and anti discrimination and harassment programmes.

Unions may undertake specialised training of their representatives around family violence or be incorporated into other occupational health and safety or employee advocacy training sessions. This is to ensure that union representatives recognise the signs of family violence, are aware of any appropriate policies, are able to provide referral information, and assist employees in negotiating for flexible leave or shift arrangements when family violence interferes directly with their work to help minimise the risk of job loss.

A union led model of family violence prevention through the workplace differs from other models in several ways. Firstly, although not unlike the partnership model, it is external to employers. However, while health or local family violence services may have difficulty negotiating access to some workplaces, in some industries there is already a strong union presence. The strong advocacy and negotiation ability of unions also makes this model unique, as it may be able to initiate change in workplaces which would otherwise not be interested in family violence as an issue. One of the main concerns with this, however, is that it relies heavily on strong union backing of the issue and this may be one of the limitations of this model overall. In industries or workplaces where there is not a strong union involvement or where the union is struggling to have health, safety, bullying and harassment issues addressed in the workplace, family violence may not make it onto the immediate agenda.

PROMOTING SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Across the various models of family violence prevention in workplaces some recurring themes emerged in relation to their implementation. One of the most common responses in workplace settings to the suggestion that a family violence prevention programme be implemented is the question, 'what has family violence got to do with the workplace?' Typically, convincing others of the value and potential of preventing family violence through workplaces is a significant hurdle to progress. Staff from Working Women's Health reported that when seeking access to factories to present health information, they needed to be able to succinctly present their case in a non threatening manner making clear that their work would not disrupt production (Trifa 2003). As this article has attempted to demonstrate in the first section, workplaces (and their staff) have much to gain from such programmes. However, a business case will inevitably be required, regardless of the model of intervention to be used. Indeed, community agencies seeking partnerships with local business, unions and those within large employing organisations, should come prepared to present a convincing argument. Australia's CEO Challenge started by doing research into the costs of family violence to business to demonstrate that it is a workplace issue (Jeans 2003).

Once a level of interest has been established commitment from the highest (and widest) levels of management is essential for ongoing success. Support from other stakeholders, such as human resources personnel, employee assistance programmes and unions are also beneficial. Child and Family Services Ballarat found that negotiating the initial access to workplaces can be a 'delicate process' and that effective dialogue helped having some pre established links in the workplaces (Brandenburg 2003). Key staff can be engaged by presenting material about the experiences of and attitudes to family violence, explaining about changes that have occurred and making suggestions about what workplaces can offer in terms of intervention. Family violence prevention is about solving a problem for the workplace rather than giving business something extra with which to deal (Cavanagh 2003).

Positioning family violence prevention alongside or within existing workplace strategies such as the organisational code of ethics or harassment and equity policies may be an effective way to ensure a level of permanency to these initiatives. Ensuring that there is consistency and regularity of outreach visitors is most likely to promote partnership building and providing material that can be left for staff to pick up and having a display board of current material maintains a level of interest between visits. It also means that staff can take material away with them and read it in their own time. These approaches have been found to be useful ways to deliver a positive anti violence message to the workplace without workers feeling threatened.

The careful use of language is also an important element of the workplace programme. Rather than immediately confronting men with the term 'family violence', the workplace programme run by Child and Family Services Ballarat uses a number of relationship 'trigger' points to draw men into the service. For example, their brochure asks 'do you feel like you fight all the time with your partner?'. And while some may argue that this is potentially minimising the nature of family violence, this service uses it as a way of engaging men (Brandenburg 2003).

There are also safety concerns in relation to family violence prevention in workplaces and implementation must also take into account these issues. There are risks in being identified as a victim of family violence or being labelled as a perpetrator of violence. Some may take information away, take action and never disclose within the work environment. For others, disclosure may risk victimisation by unsupportive management and co-workers. Effective family violence prevention programmes rely on an organisational culture that is supportive and understanding of family violence. Furthermore, the implementation of these models is often heavily reliant on the dedication to the issue by 'project champions', such as committed employers, managers or programme operators. In the experience of those involved with the case study initiatives outlined here, if a project champion moves on to another role or organisation, the initiative is at great risk of failing. Thus, embedding family violence prevention into organisational policies and workplace culture may be crucial to ensuring the continuation of initiatives beyond the dedication of key individuals.

Evaluation of workplace family violence prevention programmes is needed to ensure that these strategies maintain safety and minimise risk. Indeed, lack of evaluation and monitoring of these strategies to ensure both safety and that they meet their objectives is a further limitation of this emerging area of work in Australia. To this time little evaluative research has been undertaken and this remains a crucial area for future work.

CONCLUSION

In Australia workplaces are an emerging site of intervention for family violence prevention. While initially resistance can be expected there are convincing arguments that highlight the benefits to employers, human resource managers and their staff for implementing these strategies. Several family violence prevention programmes have provided illustrations of three different models of implementation with the model determined by the workplace size, location or industry, as well who is initiating the activities and to whom they are targeted. The models discussed are those that are lead by employers, usually by incorporating programmes into existing human resources structures, others that are partnerships between community organisations and employers, and those that

are based in the work of unions. While the case studies are drawn primarily from Australian initiatives, the learnings have implications for work undertaken internationally.

Currently the initiatives in this emerging area of work tend to rely heavily on the interest and commitment of key individuals or project champions to ensure continuation of strategies and programmes. There is great scope, then, for human resource management to implement more lasting policies. While irregular and one off training for management or support forums for staff may indeed be beneficial, the impact of these strategies are likely to be improved with the additional support of ongoing human resource policies. Yet, to date, little evaluation of these or similar initiatives has occurred, and thus, further research and monitoring is needed to better assess the effectiveness of these measures.

Using workplaces as sites of intervention is an innovative way of preventing family violence and employers and human resource managers have an opportunity to take leadership in undertaking and furthering this ground breaking work. Potential benefits to business include increased productivity and reduced staff turnover, as well as improved employee and client safety. Yet, more importantly, and in addition to these economic benefits, the business sector has an opportunity to make a real difference to the safety of women and the well being of families in the community. Preventing the social, as well as the economic, costs of family violence really is 'everybody's business'.

AUTHOR

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