Easing the Return to Normalcy: Reintegrating Victims of Domestic Violence Into the Workplace

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Example

Jane Doe was on vacation in Colorado when she was victimized by her boyfriend of 6 months. Her abuse lasted hours and was extremely brutal. Jane is physically doing much better, but she still suffers from blindness in her left eye as a result of a detached retina. There is no telling if/when she will ever be emotionally okay again. Due to her injuries, ongoing doctor appointments and legal hearings, Jane cannot return to work in her home state of Texas, which is causing a financial burden, especially considering the piling medical bills. Her company, a local bar, has created fundraisers to help offset the costs, but there is only so much that t-shirt sales can cover. As a blue-collar industry, bars and restaurants, especially family owned, are at a disadvantage as to the amount of support they can provide to victims of DV.

Abstract

There is a plethora of research regarding domestic violence, but there is a considerable lack of research on when victims of domestic violence return to the workplace. When victims of domestic violence return to work, they may experience symptoms of withdrawal, disengagement, and lower productivity. Therefore, it is important for organizations to understand how to reintegrate victims of domestic violence into the workplace without taking on the role of a psychologist. We propose in order to successfully reintegrate victims of domestic violence into the workforce, it is imperative that organizations provide emotional, psychological, and physical resources to best support the victim. When organizations fail to recognize they have victims of domestic violence in their workforce, the victims are not the only ones adversely affected. This presentation will address the current gap in research regarding when victims of domestic violence return to work, how organizations can best reintegrate victims of domestic violence, and recommendations on how organizations can offer support in the future.

Background & Purpose

Organizations play a critical role in allowing victims of domestic violence to return to the lives they had before the violence occurred. How a company reintegrates victims into the workplace is pivotal in whether the employee continues to succeed in recovery or struggles to maintain a positive work-life balance. While it is important to have support from coworkers after returning to work, having the support of the organization is the most influential predictor of employee well-being (Reeves & O'Leary-Kelly, 2009). In order to provide this support, organizations also need to recognize the differences in domestic violence prevalence rates and differences among types of domestic violence treatments for white-collar versus blue-collar industries. Certain blue-collar industries are considered a high risk population for domestic violence, and in some cases, class differences can facilitate approval of violence (Cunradi, Todd, Duke & Ames, 2009; Kantor & Straus, 1987). Domestic violence does not have to be physically happening on workplace premises for the effects to hurt the organization. When victims are not reintegrated properly, the loss in productivity, increase in absences, increased thoughts of leaving, and overall lack of well-being on the victim's behalf can be costly for organizations. However, there may be issues identifying victims that are struggling to reintegrate. Reeves and O'Leary-Kelly (2009) demonstrate that when victims do disclose their abuse, it is typically to supervisors and coworkers compared to HR representatives or security. Similarly, men are less likely to disclose victimization due to the perceptions of the public, and therefore are less likely to seek professional help (Bohall, Bautista, & Musson, 2016). The purpose of this research is to help organizations identify victims of domestic violence, to bridge the gap in knowledge of domestic violence prevalence rates between white- and blue-collar industries, and to provide recommendations for all organizations on how to best help reintegrate victims into the workplace.

Proposed Methods & Future Directions

We are currently identifying recommendations of best domestic violence work reintegration practices from the clinical and counseling literature. Then, to supplement the best practices literature, we plan to use snowball sampling methods to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from people who have re-joined the workforce after experiencing domestic violence. Our main questions will focus on 1) what organizations did that was helpful for reintegration, 2) what the victim wishes their organization would have done differently during reintegration, and 3) which recommendations would be most useful for different industries.

Recommendations

- Safe leave – offering time off for victims to attend court proceedings, doctors appointments, and counseling can decrease chances of the victim leaving the company
- Dialogue circles – important for facilitating an open and welcoming atmosphere regarding support for victims of domestic violence
  - Put out a welcome mat
  - Lend a listening ear
  - Offer a helping hand
- Provide local resources – organizations can do this by creating a list of community programs and forming relationships with those programs/organizations
  - Domestic violence shelters
  - Psychologists/Psychiatrists
  - Group therapy
  - Defense attorneys
  - Places of worship
- Additional benefits
  - Child care
  - Paid time off
- Trainings – knowing signs of DV can help both leaders and coworkers assist victims with beginning the reintegration process

References

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