

Employment sabotage and disruption as a form of economic abuse

The intersections between employment and intimate partner violence.



Introduction to intimate partner violence

Gender-based violence is rooted in gender inequality, as both a cause and consequence. Intimate partner violence - in which one person uses emotional, financial, sexual, psychological and/or physical violence to wield power and control over a current or former spouse or dating partner - is consistently recognized as the most common form of gender-based violence (WHO, 2013). While both women and men experience violence, women are significantly more likely to experience gender-based violence and are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence and employment

Intimate partner violence can have an impact on a survivor's job stability and employment. Women with a history of intimate partner violence change jobs more often and are more likely to be in casual and part-time roles compared to women without experiences of violence (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2005; Riger and Staggs, 2004). Job instability can be the result of poor mental health outcomes and disruptions to housing or relocation as a result of the abuse. It can also be caused by increased

violence or stalking. Additionally, intimate partner violence can lead to unemployment, with studies showing that around 50% of survivors have lost at least one job due to the abuse (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018; Pillinger et al., 2019). The impacts of trauma from abuse can also have long term impacts on women's employment stability and career progression (Showalter, 2016).

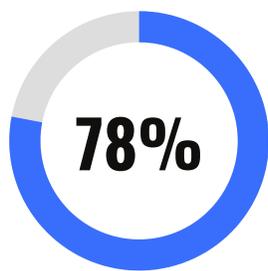
The relationship between intimate partner violence and employment can be complicated. In some cases, employment can be a place of safety or escape for survivors (Adams et al., 2013). However, in most cases, intimate partner violence spills over into the workplace. Regardless, employment plays a critical role in women's economic security and therefore, their safety. Employment supports women to establish financial independence and can help them flee violence and create safety by allowing them to access housing and other basic needs.

Employment sabotage and disruption

Employment sabotage is a form of economic abuse that involves tactics used by an abuser to prevent their partner or ex-partner from working, or progressing in their career.

It is used to exercise control, create isolation

and foster women's economic dependence on the abusive partner. It is a common form of intimate partner violence. In one study, 83% of survivors of intimate partner violence reported that their partner had disrupted their employment (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018). In another study, 78% of survivors reported that their employment had been sabotaged by their partner (Postmus et. al., 2012).



Studies show that up to 78% of survivors have had their partners or ex-partners sabotage or disrupt their employment.

There are many reasons why abusers target women's employment. Employment is often a place of control or independence for women outside of the abusive relationship. It is also a source of financial independence for women (Showalter, 2016) and can be a place for social connections (Moe and Bell, 2004).

Employment sabotage and disruption can include tactics to prevent a woman from working as well as making it difficult for a woman to maintain work. These tactics can be used both outside of the workplace and in the workplace. They can also be used to sabotage or disrupt a woman's education and professional development.

Outside of the workplace

Employment sabotage and disruption outside of the workplace can be used to prevent a woman from looking for or acquiring work. This can include prohibiting a partner from working or not allowing them to look for jobs or attend job interviews. Other tactics can be used to make it difficult for a woman to access their employment, such as restricting their access to transportation by stealing their car keys, not allowing money for public transportation or refusing to give them a ride to their place of work (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2005). One common form of sabotage outside of the workplace includes disrupting childcare arrangements. This can include a partner refusing to care for their children, restricting access to alternative childcare or making women fearful of leaving their children alone with their partner (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018).

Employment sabotage is often in the form of emotional and psychological abuse. Women have reported that partners use emotional abuse and sleep deprivation to impact productivity at work. An attack on their confidence was also reported to be used to undermine their confidence in their work (Moe and Bell, 2004). Women may also be encouraged to leave their employment and work for their abuser or family business. In some cases, women have been encouraged to leave their place of employment for a family business or another form of employment in which they were not compensated (Docherty, Zawitkowski and Currie, 2019).

In the workplace

Employment sabotage and disruption in the workplace can be used to monitor a woman's whereabouts, and to harass a woman and damage her employment and career opportunities. Intimate partner violence in the workplace is the fastest growing form of workplace violence in Canada (PHSA, 2010) with over 50% of survivors reporting experiencing intimate partner violence in and around their workplace (Wathen et al., 2014).

Abusers can interfere with survivors work in the workplace through regular phone calls, text messages and emails (Adams et al., 2008). Studies show that unwanted phone calls may be the most common form of workplace sabotage and harassment in the workplace (Showalter, 2016). Even if the phone calls are for the purpose of checking up on the survivors, rather than sabotaging their employment intentionally, it can prevent the survivor from working and therefore, impact the survivors work performance.

Studies also show that partners or ex-partners often show up at work and harass survivors, in addition to harassing co-workers (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018). In some examples, abusers have told lies to employers to harm women's employment, such as claiming that the woman stole from the employer or that the woman is experiencing mental health issues (Moe and Bell, 2004). Another form of harassment in the workplace includes stalking. Stalking behaviours in the workplace can include sitting outside of their work, showing up at their work, showing up along their route to work as well as leaving written messages in and around the workplace (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2005).

Because many partners are familiar with the workplace or because many workplaces are public, harassment in the workplace is accessible for abusers (Showalter, 2016). In fact, studies show that workplace abuse from an ex-partner often continues even after separation as the workplace location will likely remain the same even if a survivor has relocated (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2005).

Education sabotage

Another form of economic sabotage includes a partner's interference with a woman's effort to access or attend education. This can include preventing their efforts to progress in their career such as accessing further training or professional development (Adams et al., 2008). Partners may interfere with women's efforts to take part in self improvement or educational opportunities because it may improve their chances of acquiring a meaningful and well paid job. One study showed that 66% of survivors had their education disrupted by a partner (Hess and Del Rosario, 2018). Educational disruptions include being restricted from enrolling in school and accessing income for education.



Another example of educational sabotage is survivors having their school equipment, such as a laptop, damaged. Studies have shown that education sabotage can look like the stealing of education loans or calling while in education with urgent requests that require the survivor to leave class (Docherty, Zawitkowski and Currie, 2019).

Impacts of employment sabotage and disruption

There are short-term and long-term impacts of employment sabotage and disruption. Employment sabotage can cause decreased productivity and increased absenteeism (Adams et al., 2008). The abuse spilling into the workplace can also have an impact on survivors' mental health (Showalter, 2016). Women have reported being unable to concentrate and going home sick because of the abuse they are receiving from their partner or ex-partner at work or outside of work. Women have also reported being reprimanded for their poor performance which is a result of the abuse (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2005).

The consequences of employment sabotage can put women at risk of poor work evaluations and can decrease their likelihood for career progression. They can also result in job loss. Some women may leave their employment because they feel shame or embarrassment in the workplace about the abuse. One study found that 53% of survivors had lost at least one job as a result of the abuse and 30% feared that they would lose a job due to the abuse (Pillinger et al., 2019).

Employment sabotage can also have long term impacts on women's employment stability and economic security. Employment

sabotage can result in women changing jobs frequently or having long career gaps which can impact their access to employment and overall economic security (Adams et al., 2013). This can also have a knock on effect on their pension and economic security when they are older. Without access to economic resources and financial independence, women are unable to meet their basic needs or flee violence. For example, a lack of economic resources can limit their access to safe housing. Moreover, women's economic insecurity puts them at greater risk of victimization. In addition to these barriers, women face structural barriers to economic security, including a lack of decent jobs and equal pay (Ferrao, 2010). These structural barriers are greater for particular populations of women, including racialized women and immigrant women (Ng and Gagnon, 2020).

Addressing employment sabotage and disruption

Studies shows that policies and supports both outside and inside of the workplace are effective in preventing and responding to employment sabotage and disruption. Workplace policies and supports can help survivors work without disruption as well as increase survivors' safety (Showalter, 2016). Employers can provide protections for survivors in the workplace such as safety plans, silent alarms, security cameras, enhanced lighting and providing an escort for survivors to their transportation. In addition to offering workplace supports, it is important that workplaces provide education to employees on intimate partner violence, reduce the stigma around intimate partner violence and train co-workers on how to respond to disclosures (Swanberg, Logan and Macke, 2007). Workplaces can consider

accommodations including flexible working, workplace relocation and paid time off. These accommodations can support survivors and reduce the fears related to absenteeism that may result in a survivor resigning. Survivors that have received support from their workplaces, including from their co-workers are more likely to maintain their employment (Showalter, 2016).

Outside of the workplace, survivors require a holistic range of services and supports to address intimate partner violence and secure their economic safety, including counselling, housing support and legal help. Income security policies and programs that provide emergency funds to help women flee violence and establish their safety can prevent women from choosing between safety and access to income.

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