This report is designed to inform and support the reflections of workplaces and employee assistance program (EAP) providers

## **INSIGHTS PAPER**

Experiences and perceptions of workplace responses to domestic and family violence

Sightlines Professional Services - Domestic Violence Service Management

### **Acknowledgments**

Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, and our services operate, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

We would like to acknowledge the people with lived experience of violence who shared their thoughts and experiences with DVSM; we thank them for taking the time to engage with the employee survey.

Thank you to all the workplace and employee assistance program (EAP) organisations who have engaged with us, either via the employer or EAP surveys, attending events, or participating in discussion, in particular, the following members of the network of workplaces and EAPs committed to improving responses to domestic and family violence: Access EAP, AGL, Converge International, CSIRO, PwC, QBE, Tabcorp and the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of Australasia (EAPAA).

Our thanks also to the Finance Sector Union (FSU) and the SDA (the union for retail, fast food and warehousing workers) for sharing the employee survey with their members, and to Ethel Karskens from Civita for connecting us with Jennifer Sloane to provide some of the data analysis and visualisation used in this report.

The project lead on this report was Rebecca Glenn, an Associate in the Sightlines Professional Services team at Domestic Violence Service Management.

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### **About Domestic Violence Service Management and Sightlines**

Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) is a registered charity which aims to prevent and provide support for people experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) and homelessness. DVSM provides support services in an urban context (Inner Sydney), in a suburban context (Western Sydney) and in remote rural NSW (Wilcannia).

The Sightlines professional services team at DVSM works nationally to provide capacity building supports to corporates, institutes, organisations, services and communities. Sightlines works in a way that involves actively listening to people and communities with lived experience of domestic and family violence to improve social, service and system responses to violence.





By the time women (and their children) are calling our service, many are living in cars to stay safe, facing adverse circumstances of sexual violence, control and financial abuse, homelessness and the options available to them are limited and often inadequate. They, and their children, face unknown and uncertain futures. Violence has limited their world to such an extent that we are one of the few options still available to them. By the time they seek our assistance, they are facing employment issues and career losses that have compounding and enduring consequences on their safety, security and wellbeing.

Possibly, they were once your top performing employee, or emerging talent on track for leadership, a quiet achiever, the loyal worker; a team member, a team leader or an executive. Maybe you wonder what happened to that person who was a good employee or showed such promise before their performance began to slip and eventually, they left or were asked to leave?

What might have been prevented? What might have been possible if they had better support at the right time? The Sightlines professional services team at Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) is driven by the idea that responding to domestic and family violence is everyone's responsibility: That if people experiencing violence and abuse received

better responses and support, earlier, from a wider range of people and organisations, perhaps fewer people would be facing the compounding loss, poverty, threat and indignity of having nothing and having to ask for everything.

We know many people experiencing domestic abuse never call specialist services. We know many people experiencing DFV never call police. As our survey results reveal, most people choose not to disclose their situation to their workplace as their experience has taught them it is unlikely to be safe or helpful to do so.

If we are serious about addressing domestic and family violence in our communities and supporting the wellbeing of people experiencing DFV, more of us need to improve our understanding of violence and our readiness to respond.

Workplaces, supported by employee assistance programs, are well placed to provide timely and significant support to victims of DFV and we encourage organisations to develop their awareness and readiness to respond in ways that uphold dignity and build on safety.

Sal Dennis CEO, Domestic Violence Service Management

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The workplace plays an important role in the lives of many people. For employees experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) the workplace can represent different things: a place to escape to, a source of further stress, or somewhere to connect with others and receive support. Importantly, and without exception, it provides a source of income which is vital for enabling options for people experiencing DFV who may be considering their next steps.

It is estimated that between 55 and 70 per cent of people experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) are in the paid workforce<sup>1</sup>. Yet the violence and abuse people are experiencing from a current or former partner or family member, often directly and indirectly impacts on their work.

Many people experiencing domestic violence are experiencing economic abuse as part of the broader pattern of abusive behaviour. One form of economic abuse is sabotaging a person's employment opportunities making it difficult to keep a job. A study in New Zealand found less than half of women who had full-time employment prior to a relationship with an abusive partner, were able to sustain that employment during the relationship<sup>2</sup>.

An increasing number of employers are recognising the important role they play in the lives of their employees and working to improve their awareness and response, as well as the supports they offer to people experiencing DFV.

In 2018, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reported that the most commonly cited measure Australian employers say they offer employees experiencing domestic and family violence is access to their company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with 77 per cent of organisations reporting they offer this. Less than half of Australia's employers reported having a DFV policy (47%), approximately one-fifth offered paid domestic violence leave (21%) and even fewer provided relevant training to HR or other staff (17%)<sup>3</sup>.

Given our insights built as a specialist service provider, combined with these WGEA statistics, Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) was curious to know a) what the experience of the workplace was like for people experiencing DFV and b) what the experience of an EAP was like for employees experiencing DFV. Alongside

### **Executive Summary**

the employee experience, we were curious how workplaces and EAPs were approaching the issue.

In 2019, the Sightlines professional services team at DVSM conducted a survey of people with lived experience of DFV while employed to better understand how employees experience workplace responses to DFV. Sightlines also spoke with and surveyed employers/workplaces and employee assistance programs (EAPs) about how they were responding to DFV, and has been facilitating a national network of organisations who share a commitment to improving their responses to DFV. This report also summarises what we have learned through these surveys and this network.

However, the bulk of this report relates to what employees have told us, as the volume of responses to the employee survey far outweighed the volume of responses to the employer and EAP surveys.

What we have found affirms the importance of the workplace in people's lives and identifies an enormous opportunity for workplaces to do more and do it better in supporting employees experiencing domestic and family violence.

Key results from the employee survey:

- Approximately half of employees who responded to the survey did not know if their employer had a DFV policy.
- The majority of employees experiencing DFV did not choose to disclose this to their employer (66%).
- Of the 34 per cent that did disclose, most disclosed to their manager or a colleague.
- People who disclosed found it difficult to do so: Fifty-six per cent described the experience of disclosing with negative, mixed or neutral sentiments.

Asked what they'd most like us to influence about workplace responses to DFV, respondents' top three wishes were for:

- 1. People in the workplace to be compassionate and non-judgmental;
- 2. Workplaces to provide more, or better, tangible support; and
- 3. Improved understanding and awareness of domestic and family violence.

In the 12 months that DVSM Sightlines has been exploring this issue, further progress has been made by organisations across the country.

Towards the end of 2019, the WGEA reported a significant increase (13 percentage points) in the number of employers with a formal domestic and family violence policy in Australia. Sixty per cent of employers now say they have a formal domestic violence policy or strategy in place compared to 47 per cent a year earlier. There has also been a significant increase in employers offering paid domestic violence leave – up almost nine points to 30.3 per cent<sup>4</sup>.

Introducing a policy or providing special leave represents only a portion of the possible workplace responses to DFV. While there remains a significant and achievable body of work to do, we would like to acknowledge the increased attention DFV is now receiving from Australia's employers.

<sup>1.</sup> UN Women, 2017, 'Taking the first step: Workplace responses to domestic and family violence'

<sup>2.</sup> Women's Refuge, 2017, 'Women's Experiences of Economic Abuse in Aotearoa New Zealand'

WGEA, 2018, 'Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard: Key findings from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's 2017-18 reporting data'

WGEA, 2019, 'Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard: Key findings from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's 2018-19 reporting data'

# **EMPLOYEE INSIGHTS**

### **Employee insights**

The following insights are drawn from survey responses of more than 1,000 people in Australia with lived experience of domestic and family violence while in employment. The majority of respondents (72%) were employees in large organisations (organisations with more than 5,000 employees).\*

The survey asked employees about what supports were available in their workplace for people experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV), as well as their experience of these supports and other responses.

This section has a focus on what people have told us about disclosing, or not disclosing, DFV to their workplace, and workplace responses to these disclosures, including responses from employee assistance programs (EAPs).

The intent of the report is to better understand what is influencing whether people experiencing violence and abuse make a judgment to disclose, or not, and how they viewed the workplace response to their disclosure, if one was made.

DVSM understands it is not always safe to disclose experiences of DFV and that increasing disclosures in the workplace should not be a goal in and of itself. Being safe is no simple or single decision or task and a person experiencing violence and abuse will be better placed to decide, on balance, whether or not a disclosure to their workplace is necessary or likely to be helpful. However, in light of the important role workplaces can play in people's lives, DVSM seeks to support workplaces and EAPs to improve their responses to people experiencing DFV.

#### **Workplace supports**

Just on half of all respondents (49%) didn't know if their organisation had a formal policy to support employees experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV), 17 per cent were aware their organisation had a formal policy, and 34 per cent said their organisation did not have a policy (see chart 1).

<sup>\*</sup> See Notes (page 60) for more about the employee survey.

Chart 1. Was there a formal policy at your organisation to support employees experiencing domestic and family violence.

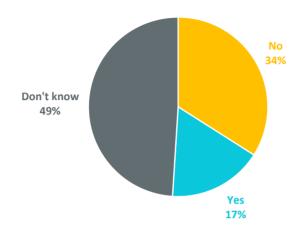
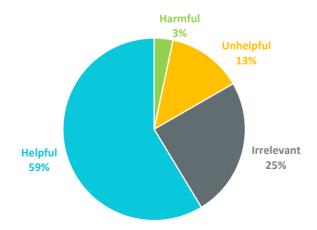


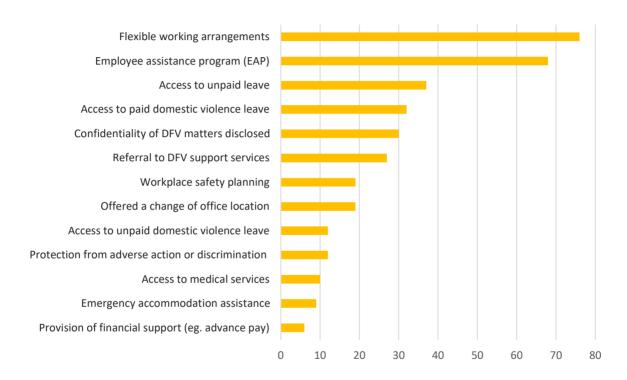
Chart 2. Did you find this policy to be helpful?

Of the 17 per cent of respondents who said their organisation had a policy to support employees experiencing DFV, the majority (59%) found the policy to be helpful.



## Chart 3. What support, if any, did the organisation offer you in relation to the domestic violence you were experiencing?

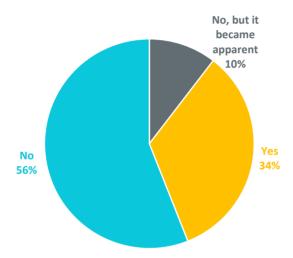
The supports most commonly offered by workplaces to respondents experiencing DFV were flexible working arrangements, EAP and access to unpaid leave.



### Disclosing domestic and family violence

The majority of respondents (56%) did not disclose that they were experiencing domestic violence. A small minority (a further 10%) did not choose to disclose their situation but it became apparent to people in the workplace because of the perpetrator's behaviour.

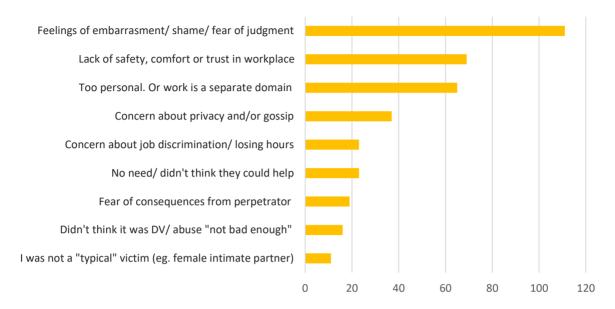
Chart 4. Did you disclose your domestic violence situation to anyone at work?



#### **Deciding not to disclose DFV**

Of the 542 respondents who did not disclose their domestic violence situation, 339 provided open-text descriptions about the decision not to disclose (for a full list of these, see Appendix A). A thematic analysis of responses to this question showed the most frequently-cited theme for not disclosing was feelings of **embarrassment**, **shame**, or fear of **judgment**.

Chart 5. Thematic analysis of open text responses to "Describe the decision not to disclose"



On the following pages are some examples of responses coded to the top seven themes identified.

Note: A further 35 responses were coded "other" because the response related to something else, or there was no clear theme, or it was unclear what was being said. All responses to the question "Describe the decision not to disclose", are included in Appendix A. Responses could be coded to multiple themes.

# Describe the decision not to disclose

Thematic analysis examples



## 1. Feelings of **embarrassment**, **shame**, or fear of **judgment**

"Felt ashamed and work was a lifeline. Wanted work to be my happy place."

"Because it was personal, and I thought people would judge and assume."

"I felt foolish and ashamed. I didn't want to be thought of as a victim."

"Embarrassed as I stayed with the person and wasn't sure how others would respond."

"Despite trusting and having a great relationship with my coworkers I never told them what was happening at the time because I knew it would take a lot of explaining and they would tell me to leave. It was hard because I wasn't sure if I wanted to leave. I didn't want them to be upset or judge me for staying."

"Fear of being judged as a failure."

"People will judge you and look at you differently."

"I was ashamed."

"Embarrassed and didn't want people to know."





## 2. A lack of safety, or workplaces that had not built enough trust

"People are generally uninformed about what DV is - and it's too painful on top of the experience of DV to be not believed or properly understood for what you're experiencing."

"Because work is not a safe place to tell personal information."

"I find that higher management were not concerned about the personal lives of employees."

"I didn't want everyone to know. Even telling the manager isn't safe as he would [have] told other managers."

"My managers and some team members knew the person and saw them in a positive light."

"Didn't feel comfortable."

"Just feel the situation will not be understood."

"Felt that they would hold the opinion that it was not their problem that telling them would be a burden."

"I didn't feel safe in doing so, people might judge."

# Describe the decision not to disclose

Thematic analysis examples



# 3. The idea of keeping personal life and work/professional life separate

"Have always been told to leave my family issues at home when I came to work."

"I preferred to keep my personal and work life separate it helped me feel normal at that time."

"What happens in the four walls of your home is to stay within the four walls."

"Not their business."

"Don't involve my personal life with work."

"I didn't want my personal life to interfere with my work life."

"Work is an escape from my reality – didn't want to bring my problems to work."



## 4. Concerns about office gossip, privacy and confidentiality

"Workplace gossip. Whenever I tell my manager anything about my personal life – a sick family member for e.g. – I find out other employees know everything we spoke about."

"Nothing is private. Confidentiality means absolutely nothing to management."

"My personal business. And I couldn't be absolutely sure of total confidentiality."

"Do not have enough trust in anyone. Have had personal information shared throughout store before."

"Didn't feel that the information would remain private. The people where I work love to pass on gossip."

"I didn't want everyone to know. Even telling the manager isn't safe as he would [have] told other managers."

# Describe the decision not to disclose

Thematic analysis examples



# 5. Concerns about discrimination, job/career implications or loss of hours

"Did not disclose in fear of me being forced the take time off and possibly affect my career."

"Didn't want to be sacked."

"I was concerned it may affect my position within the company."

"I was worried that managers would have put it in the too hard basket and wouldn't have given me extra hours etc, thinking I may not have been able to cope. At that time I needed extra money/hours to change my situation."

"Didn't want them to know in case it reflected on my work standards."

"Could affect my career or promotion prospects."

"I didn't want to lose hours and didn't feel comfortable with management at that time."





# 6. No need or didn't think they could help

"A few work friends knew but it seemed like the kind of thing an employer would judge you for so no point in telling them, esp. since they couldn't do anything about it so no point."

"No point - what can anyone do to help?"

"Because there isn't much they could do."

"Felt that they would hold the opinion that it was not their problem, that telling them would be a burden, also felt they did not really have the means to help in any real tangible way."

"I didn't think they would or could help me."

"Didn't feel it would help the situation so why bother."

# Describe the decision not to disclose

Thematic analysis examples



## 7. Fear of consequences from the perpetrator

"Out of fear, that my then husband would find out that I told someone."

"I was too scared that my abuser would find out and the abuse would become more severe."

"I didn't want to bring it into my workplace as he had threatened to harm any males I worked with."

"My partner at the time also worked at the same place as me, didn't want any repercussions against me for anyone knowing and saying something to him or treating him differently."

"It was unsafe and I would have been put in a high risk situation if the person found out that I said anything to my workplace."

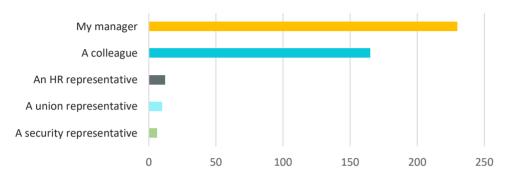
"Was too scared to say anything to anyone and was scared in case my then partner was to come into to work he would be judged or stared at then he would suspect I said something then I would cop abuse at home again."



#### **Experience of disclosing DFV**

If people did disclose they were experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV), it was most likely to be to their manager (54%), followed by a colleague (39%).

Chart 6. Who did you disclose to?



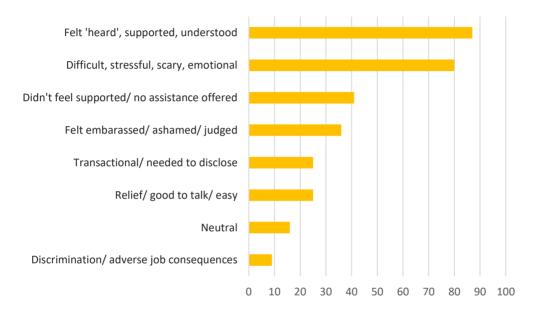
Of survey respondents that did disclose, 263 provided open-text descriptions about the experience of disclosing (for a full list of these, see Appendix B). We categorised these descriptions by sentiment (Table 1) and by theme (Chart 7). For many people experiencing domestic and family violence, the experience of disclosing was positive (44%) but for the majority of respondents (56%), the experience was either negative, mixed or neutral.

Table 1. Sentiment analysis of open text responses to "How would you describe the experience of disclosing?

Positive	44%
Negative	33%
Mixed	18%
Neutral	5%

## Chart 7. Thematic analysis of open text responses to "How would you describe the experience of disclosing?"

For those that did disclose they were experiencing domestic and family violence, the most common theme was that they felt 'heard', supported and understood. This was closely followed by the theme of how difficult, stressful and scary it was to disclose.



On the following pages are some examples of responses coded to the top five themes identified.

Note: A further 19 responses were coded "other" because the response related to something else, or there was no clear theme, or it was unclear what was being said. All responses to the question "How would you describe the experience of disclosing", are included in Appendix B. Responses could be coded to multiple themes.



### 1. Felt 'heard', supported and understood

"It gave me a sense of not feeling alone."

"My manager was great and offered me a safe place to retreat to if I needed. My area manager offered me the EAP sessions and told me he would try and be of assistance in any way possible."

"They were understanding and good to talk to."

"Nerve racking but relief at the same time; like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders."

"Very upsetting, but also very comforting knowing I had the support from my workplace."

"My manager was very caring about the situation and told me about the support number that we have. In the next few days she would also text me and check up on me."

"Overwhelming and confronting. But I trusted my store manager more than I have ever trusted any other manager I had previously worked for. He was sympathetic, understanding, caring and extremely helpful. I'll never forget the help he gave me."

"I felt relief to tell someone and she was the best help after."

"People were empathetic and emotionally supportive."

# Describe the experience of disclosing

Thematic analysis examples

"

# Describe the experience of disclosing

Thematic analysis examples



The second most common theme was how **difficult**, **scary**, and **emotional** it was to disclose. This response was regardless of whether or not people received positive, negative, mixed or neutral workplace responses.

### 2. Difficult, emotional, and scary

"Scary, in case no one believed me."

"It was terribly terrifying, embarrassing and the unknown - how management were going to react."

"Nerve racking, shameful."

"Stressful."

"Not something you want to admit to. Uncomfortable. Partial disclosure, to test the waters, downplaying of the situation, making out it isn't as bad as what other people go through."

"Very emotional. I had been hiding DV for years."

"Terrifying."

"I was anxious to tell people about the situation I was in thinking everyone would judge me."

"Difficult and unnerving."

"Scary, unsure how they would respond."





## 3. Did not feel supported

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"Anticlimactic. Didn't help. Made things worse."

"Horrible."

"Shit."

"It was brushed aside."

"Hard to discuss, no support from management."

"Unhelpful as I was only offered paid leave taken out of my annual leave and offered a phone number to call if I wanted counselling nothing in the ways of real help."

"They were not interested. Exact words, 'this is not our problem.'"

"Not much support."

"Disgusting, nobody wanted to know or help at the time."
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"They were not understanding or supportive at all and said I had to

"Fatal.. I lost my employment. . which was a high paying job."

go into work, or I would be taken off the roster."

# Describe the experience of disclosing

Thematic analysis examples



The theme relating to embarrassment, shame and judgment is also prevalent among people who did disclose they were experiencing domestic and family violence.

## 4. Feelings of **embarrassment**, **shame** or **fear of judgment**

"Embarrassing and extremely hard to discuss."

"Emotional, painful, humiliating."

"Demeaning and it always will have a stigma over it. Its classed as a poverty disease. You lose everything there is to lose."

"Embarrassing."

"Humiliating."

"No one really cared. In fact I felt I was seen as weak for admitting I was suffering."

"Heartbreaking traumatic and felt judged."

"Manager had no compassion and was upset that my AVO included my work place because she said it was a bad image. I had time off and was very anxious ... she told me to leave my problems at the front door."

"Disgusting cause I was male being violently assaulted by a female and it was humorous to them."



## 5. For many, disclosing was described in terms of being a **necessity**

"I had to disclose as I was having a lot of trouble keeping focused at work and being able to do certain shifts etc because of my son's day care hours because I didn't want my husband at home alone with my child."

"I had to explain my requirement for needing a day off to attend court."

"I felt it was none of their business, but they needed to know honestly why I was not at work."

"I had to disclose as this person used to enter my workplace frequently so [I] chose to let my manager know and some colleagues, as I was afraid."

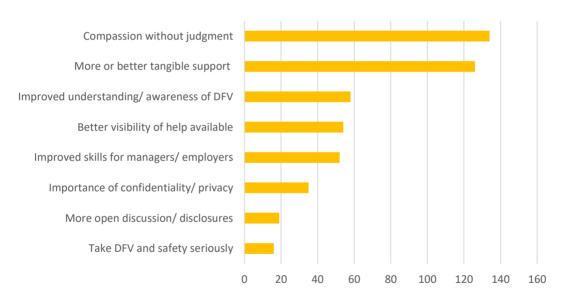
"I didn't want to go into too much detail but needed time off for court dates."

"I had to disclose because I needed to go home from work due to being extremely upset one day. I hated to do this. My manager seemed concerned and listened with a worried look on his face. He just handed me a business card for the employee assistance program. As I already have private counselling, I wouldn't bother with this."

#### Wish for influence

Three hundred and ninety-four respondents provided answers to the final open text question of the survey, "If you could wish for Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) to influence anything about workplace responses to DFV, what would that be?" For the full list, see Appendix C. The most common theme among responses was the wish for employers and people in workplaces to show more compassion and less judgment.

Chart 8. Thematic analysis of open text responses to "If you could wish for us to influence anything about workplace responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence, what would that be?"



Note: A further 30 responses were coded "other" because the response related to something else, or there was no clear theme, or it was unclear what was being said. All responses to the question "Describe the decision not to disclose", are included in Appendix C. Responses could be coded to multiple themes.



As with answers to previous questions about the experience of disclosing, respondents wished for workplaces to show compassion and not judgment.

## 1. Workplaces to show **compassion not judgment**

"Caring for staff should be universal. No matter the situation. If a workplace does not feel safe to begin with, why would we bring our personal troubles into an unsafe environment? I haven't enough fingers to count the times of injustice I have experienced. In small ways, in big ways. I am so happy that paid domestic violence exists now - for it can help others."

"Understanding not judgment - it's hard enough to tell others."

"... employees are people outside of work. We aren't just a number or a body to cover a shift. We all come with our own unique struggles and to be productive and happy in our job we need to be recognised as having lives outside of work."

"For people to understand it wasn't my fault."

"Understanding and tolerance is key. Issue is not black and white. Consequences are wide and varied options to combat problem should also reflect this."

"To make sure employees feel safe and cared for so they feel comfortable talking."

# Wish for Influence

Thematic analysis examples



# Wish for influence

Thematic analysis examples



## Workplaces to show compassion not judgment

"It needs to be safe for different cultures. You whitefellas judge Aboriginal people so we don't tell. If I could tell someone at work instead of just taking days off to hide the bruises it would be good."

"Don't be so judgmental, belittling, rolling of eyes; have a heart things aren't always simple to fix."

"More thoughtfulness and caring in the way management speak to employees would be nice, sometimes can be quite cold and come across as rude and abrupt."

"I feel they need to be aware of the implications of what their own behaviour can have on people who have gone through horrific experiences, leave their own judgements, criticisms outside the work place."

"Have an open mind and heart. It makes the world [of] difference when someone is listening and not brushing it aside."

"Understanding it's not an overnight fix. Flexibility in work hours. The amount of appointments to attend is difficult to work around if you're employed full time. Also understand that mental health issues arise from DV such as PTSD, anxiety, chronic fatigue etc."

"Time off when needed without guilt."

"Be more compassionate and understanding."





The most frequently mentioned tangible support wanted, was improved leave provisions (eg. Introduction of paid DFV leave, increased amount of leave, and confidentiality of leave.)

## 2. More, or better, tangible supports

"More needs to be done to accommodate people going though court cases/domestic violence in general. Five days of paid leave for domestic violence situations is not enough! Plus domestic violence leave should also include emotional recuperation from court cases and having to see abusers in these situations. There is a stigmatisation regarding using domestic violence leave and some employers/coworkers/managers use domestic violence as an excuse to refuse progression in the company."

"More time off."

"Paid leave and support."

"Make the leave an employer requirement - at the moment this leave for [company name] is at managers discretion."

"If the workplace could give the employee time off in the time of leaving their partner. As well as offer some form of monetary support to ensure they are able to stay out of domestic violence and not go back due to struggle."

"A person who doesn't work for the company should be available to approach."

"Please make help more accessible. Work was my only escape. I was not allowed to go anywhere else for almost 3 years. Put up posters. Send emails. Anything. Make it compulsory for people to take action if you disclose to a manager."

"

# Wish for influence

Thematic analysis examples



### More, or better, tangible supports

"Paid family violence leave is a MUST! And a process for worker relocation is made a whole lot easier (particularly the big retail chain stores) should a worker need to 'escape.' At least they keep their continual employment."

"A safe person to talk to who would not disclose the conversation to anyone else and the ability to take special leave without being penalised or judged."

"Financial issues were a huge reason I didn't get out sooner, if a workplace can help in any way with that that would be beneficial."

"I think that big businesses should provide a private space/room with a phone that is available for their staff to use for personal issues and support services."

"Counselling from DFV counsellor not a psychologist. I am glad that you can now get time off, you didn't 3 years ago ... It would have been nice to have someone help me to find a place and get the services established. ... it's good to get the immediate time off ... but I think it's later you can break down; workplaces need to understand this is ongoing trauma after the event."

"Access to DV leave as in the award. Access to specialist counselling and time off of work to attend counselling, solicitors etc. Managers to receive education in responding to disclosures and what constitutes domestic violence."





## 3. Improved understanding of DFV

"That it is serious and can be life threatening. Better understanding and compassion would help."

"Make people understand that it's not something you put yourself in on purpose. Domestic violence is scary and when you have children you need to be secure, especially in your job."

"It's not all about physical there is mental and financial abuse too. It's easier to help when you can see the bruises now that I'm out of the situation many people are upset and apologetic that they didn't know what was happening."

"The victim doesn't ask for any of it."

"To be more of an awareness that it happens more than they are wanting to believe and there should be more help."

"An understanding that domestic abuse is also financial and psychological - not just physical."

"That managers should understand what it is firstly and not just give a phone number and say it's going to be okay."

"Training Training Training, so people show more understanding and compassion and stop victim blaming. Again workshops and training."

# Wish for influence

Thematic analysis examples



### 4. Better visibility of help

"Making sure everyone is aware of services available and what the workplace can offer if someone finds themselves in that situation."

"That for one they actually have a support policy in place and secondly that it is well know that it's there should anyone need it."

"If you have employees that know that these types of services are available make them do their job and actually share that information with the people that really need it, because it may actually just save someone's life."

"Place hotline numbers in tea rooms. Get people discussing it at work."

"Employees need to know their rights more [and] that help is available."

"I guess promoting it in the store staff room when coming into work. There should be a greater influence about this."

"Pamphlets numbers to contact etc."

"To let people know about the counselling services offered."

"Maybe if we had more information in the workplace about what we can do when we have no one else, like poster signs, emails."





#### 5. Improved skills for managers

"Management training on how to response properly."

"Some scenario module training would be helpful I think. Even having one or two team leaders have a bit more of formal training in supporting a person who needs help. My issue was they didn't recognise the signs I needed help."

"Get management to take it seriously. When we call work we get challenged about being sick, go get a certificate, so I wouldn't mention this to my boss."

"To have all management trained in domestic violence and to be understanding."

"That management would keep conversations confidential."

"Better understanding from management about the effects that DV has in relation to a person's mental health."

"The possibility of better training for managers to help in these situations could be a good start."

"A lot of managers don't truly care to help, they would suggest the help line and be done. So probably make people more aware of the effects DV has on the person and those surrounding them."

## Wish for influence

Thematic analysis examples



#### 6. Importance of confidentiality

"We are already victims - confidentiality is imperative in all circumstances...the leave should therefore be recorded only as personal leave."

"More discretion. Rumours flow too easily in workplaces."

"Less people know the better."

"Privacy. I never spoke up because nothing stays with just your line manager or store manager."

"Making them accountable for keeping everything confidential."

"The ability for personal domestic violence situations to remain anonymous."

"Assured confidentiality."

"Privacy and understanding."

"No one will disclose if confidentiality is an issue and understanding that fear stops people from just leaving. The pattern is there. It's a hard thing."

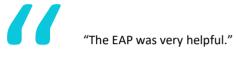
"Absolute confidentiality."

"To have a go to person who is not a member of the leadership team because they all do not understand the meaning of confidentiality."

#### **EAP Support**

While a referral to an employee assistance program (EAP) is one of the most commonly offered supports in the workplace, few respondents referred to utilising an EAP.

Comments about utilising EAP were generally negative. Only one respondent referred to a positive experience with an EAP.



"EAP told me if I didn't leave my ex I was wasting my time coming to counselling and letting my kids down. It was horrible. [Company name] said that EAP is all they offer. They and EAP made it worse."

"I was referred to EAP and the provider had absolutely no idea about DV. EAP is reflective counselling and unsuitable for DV. It would have been better had they referred me to [a specialist DV helpline]."

"EAP are hopeless."

Other respondents commented more generally about EAPs or their role.

"Referral to [specialist family violence service] changed my situation! They have been my life saver. Services like these need to be the first point of referral for EAP!"

"Store level all they could offer was EAP. Sometimes you have personal counselling that works better ... the selection of who you pick vs the company picks."

"I was left to contact EAP on my own and I was too scared to do so."

"Offer trauma counselling not EAP."



# EMPLOYER INSIGHTS

#### **Employers**

The Sightlines team has engaged with more than 20 employers through direct conversations or the network of workplaces and EAPs.

A further 33 employers responded to a survey about workplace responses to domestic and family violence (DFV).

#### **Employer survey**

The survey asked employers about:

- · Key elements of their organisation's DFV policy
- Whether or not they collect data on DFV disclosures
- Whether or not the organisation's EAP service was DFV-informed
- · What, if any, DFV training was provided to HR or other staff
- · What other, if any, referrals are provided to employees experiencing DFV

Of the employer survey respondents; 36 per cent were employers with more than 5,000 employees, 21 per cent of organisations had between 1,000 and 5,000 employees, 21 per cent had between 200 and 1,000 employees, and 21 per cent had fewer than 200 employees.

#### Key results - employer survey

Of the 33 employer respondents:

- The majority said the key elements of their DFV policy were: leave entitlements for people experiencing DFV and the referrals they provided (including to EAPs). One hundred per cent of respondents said they offered an EAP service to employees experiencing DFV.
- Seventy-nine per cent of responding employers provide referrals to specialist DFV services.
- Sixty-five per cent of responding employers provide DFV training to their HR and/or other staff.

- Asked how they knew their EAP was ready to respond to DFV, most said by virtue of the professional qualifications of their practitioners.
- There was no consistent approach among employers to data collection, or data protection, in relation to employee DFV disclosures.

#### Challenges and opportunities for workplaces

Employers engaged with the network of workplaces and EAPs (see page 46), identified a range of related issues in how they are responding to DFV. These include:

- Upskilling the workforce to respond appropriately and supportively to people experiencing DFV.
- Ensuring support offered to employees experiencing DFV matches public statements about the company's position on DFV.
- Using language about DFV, appropriately, in company communications.
- Balancing privacy and confidentiality concerns with reporting requirements and navigating complexity in system design.
- Knowing when and how to refer people experiencing DFV to other supports, including EAPs.
- How to measure the readiness and performance of the employer's EAP in responding to employees experiencing DFV.
- Responding to perpetrators and deciding on appropriate levels of support for employees who are perpetrators of violence.
- · Challenges for smaller employers who have less capacity for flexibility.

## EAP INSIGHTS

#### **EAPs**

The Sightlines team has engaged with eight employee assistance program providers (EAPs) through direct conversations or the network of workplaces and EAPs. We have also engaged with the peak professional body for the sector, the Employee Assistance Professionals Association Australasia (EAPAA). It is estimated there are around 300 EAPs in Australia.

EAP practitioners are usually psychologists, social workers or university-qualified counsellors. EAPs are often staffed by a combination of employee practitioners and associate or private practitioners for whom the EAP is only part of their practice.

#### **EAP** survey

Five EAPs responded to our survey about their responses to employees experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV). The smallest EAP had 12 practitioners and the largest had over 1,000 practitioners.

The survey asked EAPs:

- What percentage of their practitioners have specialist DFV training?
- Whether or not a specialised DFV service was part of the EAP offer available to employer clients?
- Whether or not their EAP provides its clients (employers) with supporting collateral about DFV?
- Whether or not they provide DFV training to employer clients?
- What, if any, referrals are provided to employees experiencing DFV?

#### **Key results - EAP survey**

Of the five respondents:

 Three EAPs said fewer than 25 per cent of their practitioners had specialist DFV training. One EAP said between 25 and 75 per cent of their practitioners had specialist DFV training and one EAP didn't know how many of its practitioners had DFV training.

- One EAP said it offers its employer clients a specialist DFV service.
- Two EAPs said they provided employer clients with supporting collateral about DFV.
- Two EAPs said they provided DFV training to staff of its employer clients
- Three EAPs said they provided employee clients experiencing domestic and family violence with referrals to specialist DFV services.

#### Challenges and opportunities for the EAP sector

EAPs engaged with the network of workplaces and EAPs (see page 46), identified a range of related issues in how they are responding to DFV. These include:

- There is no clear standard or guideline for EAPs to follow with regard to 'best practice' DFV responses. How does an EAP know its practitioners are aware and response-ready for people experiencing DFV?
- Responding appropriately within contracted number of sessions when employees
  may not reveal the real reason or full range of reasons for seeking support in the
  first couple of sessions. (Many employer-EAP contracts limit the number of
  sessions per employee client (eg. to four or six sessions).
- The EAP sector is highly competitive and operates with tight margins and a high degree of uncertainty. Utilisation rates vary and can be hard to predict. Are the right people at the table for procurement conversations?
- EAPs sometimes carry a larger weight of the response including provision of DFV training and supporting collateral for employers.
- EAPs often have limited visibility of what other supports an employer client may be offering employees experiencing DFV.

## NETWORK OF WORKPLACES AND EAPS

#### **Network of workplaces and EAPs**

The national network of workplaces and EAPs is an informal group of employers and employee assistance program (EAP) providers who are committed to improving responses to domestic and family violence (DFV).

The Sightlines team understands that there is no set time or number of times for a person experiencing DFV to seek support. Some people may never seek assistance. However, the workplace is one of the places a person may seek support. As such, it is important that an employer's readiness to respond, and the way it responds, is with the sensitivity that understands it might be the **first, only or last** time the person seeks support.

The quality of the support-seeking experience – what DVSM calls the 'social response' – cannot be underestimated, no matter what role we play.

With this in mind, Sightlines started talking with workplaces and EAPS to:

- encourage reflection and exploratory discussions that identify and begin to redress support and response gaps for women in the workplace who are experiencing DFV; and
- identify areas of responsibility and opportunity in order to create a more cohesive, informed and timely experience for each employee experiencing DFV.

The national network of workplaces and EAPs has formed as a result of these discussions and has been an opportunity for DVSM to share lived experience insights with a broad group of people and organisations, and for workplaces and EAPs to learn from each other's experiences.

To provide structure and direction to furthering these discussions, we facilitated a number of events throughout 2019 with the network. These were:

 Creating Conversations Masterclass by Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade from the Centre for Response-Based Practice: Building on best practice responses to Domestic and Family Violence within and from workplaces supporting employees and customers (March).

- Roundtable: Exploring and mapping DFV-informed responses in workplaces and EAPs (May).
- Language and Violence Roundtable: Communicating to employees about DFV (September).
- Seminar by Dr Allan Wade from the Centre for Response-Based Practice:
   Understanding and responding to disclosures of domestic and family violence with (October).

Through these events, five broad themes were identified by workplaces and EAPs as areas of interest for their work. They were:

- Understanding scope and duty of care: What role do workplaces and EAPs play in responding to an individual experiencing DFV? What role could/should each of these play?
- Improving how workplaces and EAPs support, not just what they offer in support
  of, people experiencing DFV.
- **'First-responder' care**: Ensuring adequate support for workplace managers and EAP practitioners responding to people experiencing DFV.
- Responding to people who use violence: How do workplaces and EAPs respond to and support people using violence?
- Managing complexity: Issues including: privacy and confidentiality; understanding where individual organisations fit in the broader ecosystem; and negotiating EAP contracts.

Participants in the network were keen to ensure lived experience and real-world application are always at the forefront of considering responses.

### **REFLECTIONS**

#### Reflections

We started this project with the intent of gaining a more accurate picture of people's experiences of the workplace while living with domestic and family violence and to better understand their experience of EAP support given it is the resource most commonly offered by employers in response to DFV. We have also spent time building our understanding of the approaches and challenges of workplaces and EAPs in responding to people experiencing domestic and family violence.

We have made uneven progress towards these goals. The employee survey provides a multitude of rich insights about workplaces and their responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence. However, we learnt very little about experiences of EAPs because EAPs did not strongly feature in the perceptions and experiences of people we surveyed.

In the employee survey, approximately 26 per cent of respondents who disclosed DFV to their workplace said they were offered EAP support, yet less than one per cent of respondents who provided descriptions of their experience of disclosing DFV, mentioned EAPs in their open text responses. When prompted to comment on the EAP response ("Do you have any other comments to make about the response/s you received from your employer or Employee Assistance Program?"), this increased to seven per cent of respondents. From the WGEA data, a casual observer might assume EAP support is a more significant part of the workplace response to employees experiencing violence than our survey data suggests is the case.

Similarly, a domestic and family violence policy may seem to be a core component of an organisation's response, yet around 50 per cent of employees who have experienced domestic and family violence didn't know if their employer had such a policy. Of the 17 per cent of respondents who said their organisation did have a formal DFV policy, the majority (59%) found it to be helpful.

Our survey results reveal most people choose not to disclose their situation to their workplace as experience has taught them it is unlikely to be safe or helpful to do so.

The challenge for an employee experiencing violence and abuse is that support that might be helpful, is usually only on offer if they disclose. The challenge for workplaces is how they signal safety, prove themselves trustworthy, and deliver on promises of confidentiality for their employees experiencing DFV who might be considering disclosing.

Reviewing people's descriptions of disclosing DFV to their employer, makes it clear what a big deal it is to disclose, and the gravity of the consequences in having done so. When a person experiencing violence received a poor response from an employer, it usually made a bad situation, worse. When people received positive responses to a disclosure, it usually made a positive difference to their situation. We can't know all that a positive response might have prevented, or made possible, but it would be fair to surmise that when a workplace response keeps more options on the table for someone experiencing violence, there is greater chance of that individual being better placed to build on safety, maintain dignity and increase wellbeing.

Of all the questions in the survey the one that attracted by far the most open text responses (almost 400 responses) was, "If you could wish for us to influence anything about workplaces responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence, what would that be?" These respondents wished for workplaces to be more compassionate, less judgmental, offer more or better support, develop better understanding of DFV, and increase visibility of the help available. While few people referenced talking to a workplace EAP specifically, there was a consistent theme about wanting a counsellor, or 'safe person' or other professional, to talk to.

The thing that stands out for us reading the hundreds of comments provided through the survey is that while tangible support from the workplace was important, the quality of the human interaction was critical. Overwhelmingly the themes that came through people's responses about what it was like to disclose, or what influenced their judgment not to disclose, were themes related to interpersonal dynamics: Embarrassment, shame, judgement and a sense of what is 'too personal'; and the flipside of feeling 'heard', understood, empathy and being supported.

These interpersonal experiences were often linked to the gravity of likely consequences. The stakes are always high for people seeking support.

In our experience, a deeper understanding of domestic and family violence, coupled with an appreciation of the unique complexity of each individual's context, paves the way for better responses.

Workplaces, and employee assistance programs (EAPs), are already knowingly or unknowingly responding to victims of DFV, and victims are assessing the quality of those responses. Organisations have a choice about whether or not they want to further develop their awareness and readiness to respond in ways that uphold dignity and build on safety.

On the following pages we have included some questions to support further reflection, and provided links to resources that may be helpful for organisations considering their approach to DFV.

Sightlines Professional Services

Domestic Violence Service Management

#### **Reflection questions**

There are numerous resources available for workplaces and EAPs wanting to take further steps towards improving their responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence (see Resources section).

A good starting place is to reflect on the insights shared throughout this paper and consider the questions below.

#### **Questions for EAPs**

- Do you know what other supports your employer clients offer their employees experiencing DFV? Have you spoken with them about this?
- Do you know the awareness and response readiness of the workplace to people experiencing DFV before they are even connected to your EAP?
- 3. How do you know your EAP practitioners are response-ready and referral-ready for people seeking support because of DFV?
- 4. What strategies would keep the conversations between the workplace lead, workplace procurement and EAP provider centered on, and informed by, the real-world support seeking experiences of people experiencing DFV?

#### **Questions for workplaces**

- How clear are you that what your workplace does and says about DFV, signals safety and builds trust?
- 2. How confident are you that what happens for employees seeking support for DFV in your workplace, matches the public messages about domestic and family violence?
- 3. How do you know your organisation is response-ready and referral-ready for people seeking support because of domestic and family violence?
- 4. Do you know if your EAP is responseready and referral-ready for people experiencing DFV? Has your organisation spoken with its EAP about its expectations in relation to DFV responses?
- 5. What strategies would keep the conversations between the workplace lead, workplace procurement and EAP provider centered on, and informed by, the real-world support seeking experiences of people experiencing domestic and family violence?

## **RESOURCES**

www.insightexchange.net

#### **Follow My Lead**

Follow My Lead is an awareness raising resource.

Follow My Lead speaks from the voice of people with lived experience of domestic and family violence (DFV) who need the professionals and their social networks to be more prepared to respond effectively; more prepared to respond in ways that uphold dignity and build on safety.

Read the first edition of <u>Follow My Lead</u> online at insightexchange.net.

#### Who is this resource for?

Follow My Lead is for any person who at some point may be listening to and responding to their friends, family members, colleagues, peers or to the people who use their service, who are experiencing DFV.

The resource may also have benefits for people who are:

- Thinking about their own relationships and experience of DFV
- Seeking support about their own lived (or live) experience of DFV
- Working as a service responder to people experiencing DFV.

We welcome continued **feedback** via the <u>insightexchange.net</u> website in order to improve future editions.



#### Become a distribution sponsor

You can apply <u>online</u> for a free, printready file of *Follow My Lead* with your logo added as distribution sponsor (*subject to terms and conditions of use* and distribution).

On Insight Exchange, you will also find examples of customised or distribution sponsor copies of *Follow My Lead* used by:

NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence | Converge | International | CSIRO | Penrith | Women's Health Centre | Lithgow Community Projects | QBE Insurance | Group Limited and Lower North Shore Domestic Violence Network and | Relationships Australia NSW.

#### My Safety Kit

My Safety Kit is a reflection resource.

My Safety Kit speaks in the voice of the reader who may be reflecting on their own relationships and (possible) experiences of domestic and family violence.

Read My Safety Kit online at insight exchange.net.

#### Who is this resource for?

My Safety Kit is for any person who at some point may be reflecting on their own relationships and experiences of domestic and family violence. The resource may also have benefits for people who are:

- Supporting friends and family who are (or might be) experiencing domestic and family violence
- Working as a service responder to people experiencing domestic and family violence

We welcome continued **feedback** via the <u>insightexchange.net</u> website in order to improve future editions.



#### Become a distribution sponsor:

You can apply <u>online</u> for a free, print-ready file of *My Safety Kit* with your logo added as distribution sponsor (*subject to terms and conditions of use and distribution*).

Visit the <u>Resources</u> section on insightexchange.net for examples of distribution sponsor copies of *My Safety Kit* including:

NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence | Lithgow Community Projects and QBE Insurance Group Limited.

#### Draw from the insights of lived experience

The **Insight** component of Insight Exchange invites people with lived experiences of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) and other adversities to share their experience through a safe and ethical process that affirms agency and upholds dignity.

Read these insights at insightexchange.net.

The insights are grouped into projects or initiatives:

Voices of Resistance – a project that documented four women's resistance and responses to the violence they experienced. The project participants supported the development and prototyping of the interview process for Insight Exchange through the sharing of their resistance and responses to violence. The result of the prototyping phase is an interview process with clear protocols and steps that provides a structure for an interview that affirms agency, is safe, ethical and upholds a person's dignity.

**Voices of Insight** – are de-identified narratives of people's lived experience of domestic and family violence and other adversities. The narratives have been developed through the Insight Exchange interview process designed to affirm agency, uphold dignity and support safety.



Voices of Reflection – are written insights and reflections from people with lived experience of domestic and family violence and other adversities. The participants are the authors of the written insight, and in some pieces, the Insight Exchange team have inserted content from the Follow My Lead resource as headings to help orientate the reader and to build understanding of the lived experience of violence.

#### **Language Lab**

"The problem of violence is inextricably linked to the problem of representation."

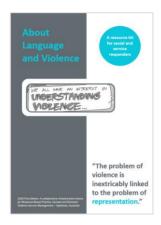
Dr Linda Coates & Dr Allan Wade

The Language Lab provides information on the role of language in representing violence and abuse, and tools to help us use language to more accurately represent violence and other adversities. It recognises that language can be used in restrictive or liberating ways to:

- conceal or reveal violence
- obscure or reveal offender responsibility
- conceal or reveal responses and resistance; and
- blame or contest the blaming of, victims<sup>1</sup>



1. Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade (2007), 'Language and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations', Journal of Family Violence. 22:511-522.



#### **Online resources**

There is a range of resources about language and violence on the Language Lab page of insightexchange.net including the video of the Masterclass on Language and Violence with Dr Linda Coates and the first edition of the Language and Violence Resource Kit.

## **NOTES**

#### Notes on the employee survey

The employee survey was distributed and publicised by the Sightlines team at Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) among its networks in the family violence sector, and via two unions; the Financial Sector Union (FSU) and the SDA (the union for retail, fast food and warehouse workers). The survey was anonymous and respondents were assured that no potentially identifying information would be shared or published.

While the survey invited employees with lived experience of domestic and family violence to respond, many people without lived experience also responded. A total of 1,931 responses were received between March and September 2019. As a result of the high numbers of people without lived experience responding initially, we introduced a filtering question: 'Have you experienced domestic and family violence in your personal life, while in employment?' There were 728 affirmative responses to this question. A further 323 respondents, prior to the introduction of this question, provided responses which indicated they had lived experience of DFV while in employment, bringing the total number of responses by people with lived experience of DFV to 1,051 people. Insights in this paper are drawn from this cohort only. Not all of these respondents answered all questions in the survey.

Responses from people in the retail, fast food and warehousing sector (SDA membership sector) represent close to 50 per cent of respondents, and respondents from Victoria and Queensland are overrepresented. The results cannot therefore be considered to be generalisable. The focus of this report is on the qualitative data contained in the survey and the insights from people with lived experience of domestic violence while employed.

The survey did not ask respondents how recent their DFV experiences were, so responses are not necessarily about current employer, nor did the survey capture personal demographic information like age, sex, country of birth, languages spoken or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

#### **Glossary and Terms**

**Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)** includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear and to be made to do things against their will. DFV can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It is often part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

Behaviours that may represent DFV include:

- Physical violence including physical assault or abuse
- Reproductive coercion
- Sexualised assault and other abusive or coercive behaviour of a sexualised nature
- Emotional or psychological abuse including verbal abuse, threats of violence, threats of self-harm or suicide, blackmail and bribery
- Economic abuse; for example denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or financial support or accruing debt in their name
- Stalking; for example harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person, or the person's family, in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment
- Technology facilitated abuse; for example harassment, impersonation, monitoring/stalking, threats and attacks through mobile phones and other devices, social media and online accounts (like email and banking).

Women and children are overwhelmingly the victims of DFV and those who use violence are overwhelmingly male. DFV can be perpetrated by a partner, family member, carer, house mate, boyfriend or girlfriend. Women also commit DFV against men, as do same-sex partners (*Domestic Violence NSW, 2018*). DFV is also committed by and committed against people who identify in non-gender binary terms.

**Intimate relationship** refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership whether or not the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship, i.e. married or engaged to be married, separated, divorced, de facto partners (whether of the same or different sex), couples promised to each other under cultural or religious tradition, or who are dating.

**Family relationship** has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, extended family relationships, and family of choice within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) communities.

**EAP** - an employee assistance program (EAP) is a "work-based intervention program designed to enhance the emotional, mental and general psychological wellbeing of all employees and includes services for immediate family members." (Employee Assistance Professionals Association Australasia)

**Economic abuse** is a form of family violence that, "involves behaviours that control a [person's] ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources, thus threatening her [or his] economic security and potential for self-sufficiency." (Adams et al, 2008)

**WGEA** – Workplace Gender Equality Agency is an Australian Government statutory agency created by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012. WGEA is charged with promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces.

**Workplace** refers to any organisation that employs people to work in any, or across multiple, locations.

#### **Appendices**

Appendix A Open text responses to: "Describe the decision not to disclose"

insightexchange.net/Workplace-Appendix-A

Appendix B Open text responses to: "How would you describe the experience of

disclosing?"

insightexchange.net/Workplace-Appendix-B

Appendix C Open text responses to: "If you could wish for us to influence one thing

workplace responses to people experiencing domestic and family

violence, what would that be?"

insightexchange.net/Workplace-Appendix-C

Free electronic copies of this Insights Paper and related resources are available online, and we welcome feedback in order to learn about the value of this resource and to improve future work.

Access the online version via

### www.insightexchange.net

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