

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the  
**LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY**  
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library  
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from electronic originals  
(may include minor formatting differences from printed original)

# **Domestic Violence Survivors At Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment**

**October 2005**

**A Joint Research Project**

*Conducted by*

**Maine Department of Labor & Family Crisis Services**

**Ellen Ridley, John Rioux, Kim C. Lim, Ph.D., DesiRae Mason  
Kate Faragher Houghton, Faye Luppi, J.D., Tracey Melody**



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
20 UNION STREET, P.O. BOX 259  
AUGUSTA, MAINE  
04332-0259

JOHN ELIAS BALDACCI

GOVERNOR

LAURA A. FORTMAN

COMMISSIONER

October 20, 2005

In the last decade, policymakers and employers have stepped up efforts to address the problem of domestic violence in Maine. Although studies show that the majority of victims/survivors are female, domestic violence affects the lives of both men and women, children and adults, at home and in the workplace.

This joint research conducted by Family Crisis Services and the Maine Department of Labor looks at the issue from the perspective of the victim/survivor's workplace and examines how perpetrators of domestic abuse impact victims at work.

The cost in terms of absenteeism, increased healthcare costs, reduced productivity, and potential safety risks make domestic violence a significant workplace concern. I encourage all employers to develop a comprehensive workplace response on the issue. The Maine Department of Labor has resources that can help.

The SafetyWorks! program sponsors free workshops on how employers can reduce risks of violence in the workplace through effective human resource policy, security protocols and supporting the abused employee. For more information or a schedule of classes, please call (207) 624-6400 or visit the SafetyWorks! website at [www.safetyworksmaine.org](http://www.safetyworksmaine.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Laura A. Fortman".

Laura A. Fortman  
Commissioner

PHONE: (207) 624-6400

TTY: 1-800-794-1110  
E-Mail: [Laura.Fortman@maine.gov](mailto:Laura.Fortman@maine.gov)

FAX: (207) 287-5292

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	4
<b>Abstract and Introduction</b>	6
<b>Method</b>	7
<b>Results</b>	
Demographics	9
<b>Abuser Effects on Victim/Survivor Employment</b>	
Effects on performance and productivity	10
Abuser phone harassment	10
Abuser coming to worksite	11
Abuser using co-workers, threatening, stalking, email harassment	12
Workplace effects of leaving or attempting to leave relationship	13
Tardiness and attendance problems	14
Effects on flexibility of schedule	15
Effects of abuser-inflicted injuries	15
Paid and unpaid leave due to domestic violence	16
Workplace safety — Assaults and accidents	16
Termination of employment	17
Survivor awareness of employment protections	18
<b>Employer’s Awareness and Response to Domestic Violence</b>	
Supervisor awareness of domestic violence situation	19
Survivor concerns about disclosure	19
Supervisor responses (supportive, neutral, unsupportive, hostile)	19
Existence of workplace violence / domestic violence policies	21
Supervisor referrals	21
Employer-implemented safety steps	21
Effectiveness of safety steps and abuser’s access at work	23
<b>Legal and Civil Remedies</b>	
No contact actions against abusers	23
<b>Survivors’ Recommendations Regarding Domestic Violence and Work</b>	24
<b>Discussion</b>	25
<b>Summary</b>	29
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	30
<b>References</b>	31
<b>In Their Own Words — Survivor Stories</b>	33

## Executive Summary

During the summer and early fall of 2004, The Maine Department of Labor and Family Crisis Services conducted a joint research study on domestic violence and the occupational impact to victims/survivors. Subjects of the study were 120 women who met the following criteria: experienced domestic abuse within the last three years, were employed in Maine (not self-employed), and were affected at work by the abuse.

The purpose of the study was to • identify ways in which perpetrators of domestic abuse impact victims /survivors at their employment, • determine the frequency and methods abusers used to contact the victim/survivor at the workplace, • identify and quantify performance and productivity issues, lost work time, absenteeism, workplace delays, and workplace accidents as a result of these events, • measure employer responses, including frequency of policies as a prevention tool, and • examine survivors' views on how employers can create safer workplaces.

Survivors were invited to participate through a press release, website postings, and participation in local domestic violence projects. Information was collected in a survey format during one-on-one, thirty-minute interviews in person or over the telephone. The following findings represent the data from interviews with 120 domestic violence survivors:

- ❑ 98% reported that domestic abuse caused them to have difficulty concentrating on work tasks
- ❑ 96% reported that domestic abuse affected their ability to perform their job duties
- ❑ 94% were unaware of statutes that provide unemployment compensation to victims of domestic abuse, and 93% were unaware of Maine law that requires employers to provide time off to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking
- ❑ 87% reported the abuser made harassing phone calls at work, with some survivors receiving between 50 – 100 phone calls per week
- ❑ 83% reported the employer became aware of domestic abuse in employee's life
- ❑ 78% reported the abuser showed up at the workplace; 13% reported being assaulted at work
- ❑ 78% reported being late to work as a result of domestic abuse
- ❑ 77% reported they were prevented from getting to work on time because the abuser kept them up late or all night; 47% reported being assaulted before work
- ❑ 60% reported losing their job due to domestic abuse (fired or quit)

- ❑ 56% reported the workplace contact changed (increased in frequency or became more threatening) when the victim/survivor attempted to leave
- ❑ 45% reported they were concerned they would get fired if they discussed domestic abuse situation with employer
- ❑ 23% reported the abuser violated a protection from abuse order or other condition by contacting the victim/survivor at work
- ❑ 5% reported their employer had a domestic violence policy in place

# Domestic Violence Survivors at Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment

## Abstract

This research project sought to gather information about the broad effects domestic violence perpetrators have on the employment of domestic violence survivors. Quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that perpetrators of domestic abuse use multiple strategies to interrupt their intimate partner's ability to work, resulting in substantial absenteeism, tardiness, and difficulty performing job duties while at work. Data revealed that employer actions had a limited effect on the abuser's actual contact with the survivor at work. While over one half of the total group reported that the employer offered support after becoming aware of the domestic violence, 60% of survivors in this study reported losing their job, and the vast majority were unaware of employment protections offered to domestic violence victims under state law. Survivors widely recommended employers implement a workplace response that includes implementing a domestic violence policy and training supervisors in useful and appropriate responses to instances of domestic violence in the workplace.

In the past decade, domestic violence has increasingly been identified as a workplace concern. Given that violence in U.S. families is well-documented, the likelihood of spillover into the workplace – particularly for women - has resulted in increased efforts to examine this issue from both a public policy and business perspective. The prevalence of violence against women has been widely established, with nearly one-third of American women reporting physical or sexual abuse by an intimate male partner during their lifetime (Collins, Schoen, Joseph, Duchon, Simantov, and Yellowitz, 1999.) When comparing rates of family violence by gender, females are disproportionately represented in crime statistics by a wide margin. A compendium of family violence statistics compiled from three national databases shows that between 1998 and 2002, females represented 84% of spouse abuse victims and 86% of victims of abuse from a dating partner (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). The same report states that approximately three-quarters of the perpetrators in family violence crimes were male (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

With women now comprising nearly the same percentage of workers as men, (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, and Prottas, 2002), and with 93% of corporate security directors reporting that domestic violence is an issue of concern for corporations (Kaufer and Mattman, 2001), interest in gathering specific data about workplace effects has grown. Since 1987, when research revealed that 56% of battered women in a New York City study lost at least one job due to domestic violence (Friedman and Couper, 1987), a number of studies have verified the link between domestic abuse and employment of women receiving public assistance (for a review, see Lyon, 2002; and Tolman and Raphael, 2000). However, gaps exist in available information on *how* abusers disrupt their intimate partner's employment, and whether the survivor's employer

became aware and took steps as a result. Because a key response to domestic violence involves systems improvement and advocacy (Davies, 1998), analysis of abuser tactics is crucial as battered women and employers partner to increase safety at work. Both abusers and survivors report work interference tactics that include showing up at work, calling frequently, and preventing the survivor from getting to her job (Maine Department of Labor/Family Crisis Services, 2004; Swanberg and Logan, 2005). Additionally, an analysis of 32 employed domestic violence survivors revealed that 43% informed a supervisor or manager about their victimization; 86% of these employees reported their employer provided them with formal or informal support as a result (Swanberg and Logan, 2005). Further understanding the complex nature of an abuser's effects on the survivor's employment, including whether disclosure affects her ability to enhance work supports, safety, and maintain employment, is critical to determining next steps for both advocates and employers.

In order to gain a more complete picture of domestic violence survivors' employment, the Maine Department of Labor and Family Crisis Services jointly conducted a study with a research team consisting of labor statisticians, advocates, a domestic violence task force director, and business representative. The study objectives were refined after soliciting feedback from Maine employers about the issue of domestic violence and the workplace. What did Maine employers want to know about victims in their employ? Employers indicated several items of interest, including how the victim was affected, what her abuser was capable of doing to interrupt work, how businesses could create an environment that would encourage a survivor to come forward for assistance, and actions the employee took to get help at work. Based on these discussions, the working group developed the study objectives which included ■ determining the frequency and methods with which abusers contacted the survivor at work; ■ identifying and quantifying performance, productivity, lost work time, absenteeism, occupational safety issues, and job retention difficulties that resulted from abuse; ■ examining employer responses to domestic abuse; ■ determining the existence of and survivor awareness of their employer's workplace violence policies; and ■ examining survivors' views on how employers can implement specific actions to enhance safety at work.

This study complements and completes an earlier MDOL/Family Crisis Services research project, titled *Impact of Domestic Violence Offenders on Occupational Safety and Health: A Pilot Study*. Completed in 2004, the initial study examined the effects that offenders had on their own employers (<http://mainegov-images.informe.org/labor/bls/publications/domesticoffendersreport.pdf>).

## **Method**

*Participants.* The self-selected group of participants included 120 women who had been employed within the past three years, had experienced domestic abuse while employed, and had been affected at work by the perpetrator's abuse. All but one of the participants in the sample group was employed in Maine. (One man called to participate but did not screen in because he was self-employed.) Domestic abuse was defined as a pattern of intimidating and threatening behavior that could include physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and financial abuse, with the intention of controlling another person's freedom, actions or behaviors. A variety of methods were used to solicit participants for the study, including a Department of Labor press release, posters in employer restrooms and at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, interaction with support groups being conducted by the domestic violence projects of the Maine



Coalition to End Domestic Violence, and visits to two local jails and one state prison. Participants who completed an interview received a \$25.00 gift certificate to a local grocery store, purchased by the Maine Department of Labor.

*Informed Consent.* While a formal institutional review board process was not necessary for this study, the working group drafted the participant informed consent form in keeping with the necessary protections for human subjects research. Protections included voluntary participation, no penalty or negative consequences for refusal to answer any of the questions, and an option to end the interview at any time. Participants were informed they might experience discomfort during the 30-minute interview and reminded that their answers would be confidential. Finally, subjects were notified that the written report would not contain any material that could identify them or their employer.

Confidentiality was waived if the participant revealed information requiring mandated reporting of child or incapacitated elder abuse under Maine law.

*Data Collection and Survey Instrument.* Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through one-on-one, private interviews conducted either in person or over the phone. Eighty-four (70%) of the interviews were conducted by one of the principal researchers, with the remaining 36 interviews carried out by trained volunteers. During each interview, the researcher read the survey questions to the participant and then recorded their answer. The survey was divided into sections that gathered occupational demographic information, effects of the perpetrator's abuse on the victim's job, the employer's knowledge of and response to the violence, the survivor's use of civil and legal remedies available to victims, and study participants' recommendations for employers. Questions were presented using a variety of formats including multiple choice, checklists, and short answer descriptions of events recorded by the interviewer. Several questions required the participant to provide number estimates, such as the number of times a certain abuser tactic may have occurred, or over what period of time the survivor was impacted on the job.

*Data Analysis.* Means, frequencies, and percentages were calculated at the Maine Department of Labor utilizing SPSS. The results are based on the answers of all 120 participants, except in cases where answers were dependent on a response to a previous question, in which case percentages reflect only those in the subgroup who responded "yes" to the related question. Wherever applicable, statistics based on subgroups are noted in the text. Missing values such as unanswered questions were treated as missing in the statistical analysis; percentages are based on only those participants who registered a response.

During the survey design, the research team discussed whether or not to regard all reports of workplace contact as harassing in nature. We determined that in the context of a relationship in which one party is being coerced, any contact by the abuser would have the potential to create fear and distress in the survivor. Therefore, all contact is referred to as abusive. This was validated by the number of women who provided anecdotes about workplace contact, as noted in the study text.

In three cases participants' narrative comments were examined to determine themes that were present across a number of surveys. Themes were explored regarding the abuser's effects on

attendance, the survivor's reports of why she was fired, and the survivor's reports of why she quit her job. In determining the presence and prevalence of themes, surveys were individually examined to gain a sense of commonalities, and then re-examined to identify and quantify references to specific events or actions. Each specific event or action mentioned was given a hatch mark, and the resulting marks were quantified and listed according to the prevalence with which they occurred in the narrative. Themes are noted in the sections pertinent to their content.

*Results.* Results are presented in the order they appear in the survey format beginning with occupational demographic information, followed by effects of the perpetrator's abuse on the victim's employment, the employer's awareness and response, use of legal options, and survivor recommendations.

## **Demographics**

Participants were asked demographic information related to their employment at the time they were experiencing domestic violence, including questions regarding occupational information, type of industry, employment status, and the employment status of their abuser.

Occupational status of the participants is based on standardized industry coding and is listed in the following table:

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Administrative Support Occupations	22
Service Occupations	22
Sales Occupations	15
Executive, Administrative, and Management	12
Professional Specialty Occupations	12
Technicians and Related Support	6
Machine Operators	3
Fabrication Machine Operators	3
Transportation Occupations	2
Construction	2
Unclassifiable/missing	1

Thirty-one percent (31%) worked in wholesale or retail trade including grocery stores and eating establishments, with 29% employed in services, including schools, personal care facilities, and social service agencies. Eleven percent (11%) worked in government, and a roughly equal number (10%) were employed in the finance, insurance, and real estate industries. Three survivors worked in manufacturing and two in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. In eighteen cases there was not enough detail to assign the participant to an industry code.

The majority of survivors in this study, 79%, were employed full-time at the time the abuse occurred. Fifteen percent (15%) worked part-time, and the remaining 6% had their status fluctuate between full and part-time during the employment period. Close to half of the group

(49%) reported their abuser was also employed during the same time frame, with 28% saying he was employed a portion of the time, and 23% reporting the abuser was unemployed.

The vast majority of survivors were not employed in the same workplace with their abuser (88%).

At the time of the interview, 55% of the survivors were employed and 45% were not.

### **Abuser Effects on Victim/Survivor's Employment**

Victims and survivors of domestic violence reported that their abusers' tactics had substantial and far-reaching effects on their employment. This section will report on performance and productivity, attendance, workplace safety issues, and retention or termination of employment.

#### Performance and Productivity

Ninety-six percent (96%) of survivors reported that their domestic abuse situation affected their ability to perform their job duties, often for months, and sometimes years.

The mean number of weeks survivors reported job performance difficulties was 73.62 weeks, with a high value of 624 weeks. The median was 35.5 weeks (eight and a half months), with half the group affected less than 35.5 weeks, and half affected for more than 35.5 weeks.

One survivor summed up the reason it was difficult to give herself 100% to her employment by noting, *"He was my work, if you get right down to it."*

In a related question, 98% reported that domestic abuse caused difficulty concentrating at work. Of those in the subgroup who reported difficulty concentrating, 92% said their productivity was affected.

Questions regarding the abuser's access to the victim/survivor at work created a context to interpret questions about productivity and concentration. Ninety-three (93%) percent of respondents reported that the abuser contacted them at work. In addition to checking up using telephones and email, victims reported that their intimate partners used co-workers for information, threatened to show up at work, stalked the victim by stationing himself nearby, or directly showed up at the workplace.

*Abuser Phone Harassment* Of the group of 120 respondents, 87% reported that the abuser harassed them using phones. Of those in this subgroup, the mean number of phone contacts was 15.51 per week (high value of 100). The median number of calls per week was ten, with half receiving less than ten and half receiving more than ten calls per week. Seven percent of the total group reported fielding between 31 to 100 calls per week from their abuser.

Although occurring from a remote site, phone access by the abuser had a marked impact on productivity as noted in survivor narratives.

*“You try to go to work, thinking it’s a refuge, but then he calls you and the sound of his voice makes your heart pound. You start making mistakes and worry about what’s going to happen when you get home.”*

*“When you’re being threatened on the phone, wondering where your child is, you can’t think, you’re wondering what you’re going to do next.”*

*“He’d call and I’d have to leave what I was doing. If I was giving medications or changing a person’s dressing I couldn’t leave but he would keep calling back until I came to the phone.”*

*“Every time I would be in a conversation with a client my [other] line would blink and I could see it was him. I’d be trying to have the conversation with the customer while watching that line blinking...”*

*“I wanted to ask my supervisor to change my telephone extension, but I didn’t dare to.”*

*“The phone calls would start before I even got to work in the morning. The answering service had to take them. Then he would start in on the office phone and the cell phone. The urgency increased on his part – I felt unsafe.”*

*“He would call sometimes 30 times a day. He would keep me on the phone but I’d have to hang up because I didn’t want to get loud, then I’d have to check my voicemail to see if any customers had called and left messages. He left dozens of messages, even from jail.”*

*“My employer was willing to change my extension, but it was an automated system so the only thing the abuser had to do to access me at the new number was say my name into the automated system. It was frustrating because I had to answer the phone for my job so couldn’t screen out his calls.”*

Abuser Coming to Worksite Seventy-eight percent of survivors reported that the abuser physically came to the worksite. Of those in this subgroup, the mean number of times the abuser came to the worksite was 3.05 times per week (high value of 40). The median number of times per week the abuser came to the worksite was one. Four percent of survivors reported their abuser came to their work site between 11 and 40 times per week.

Interviewer narrative notes reflect a range of workplace scenarios when abusers came to work.

- Abuser arrived at victim’s workplace one day and entered through an unlocked door in the back, where he made his way to her office where she was working with a client. Abuser refused to leave, and only left after victim threatened to call police.
- Victim’s abuser came to worksite, came onto property, and was yelling at her in front of co-workers. The employee had left the relationship, but her boss said, “I wish you two would keep this at home.”
- Victim reports abuser prevented her from having any other job than one where he could also be employed. Abuser was jealous and would come to her department, would be mad if she didn’t immediately drop her business conversation. A lot of her distraction was wondering where he was in the building.

- She would know he was coming to her workplace and would concentrate on his arrival/potential scene instead of focusing on her work. Would try to leave quickly so dispute did not happen at work.
- Abuser came to the workplace the day after he was released from jail, but he was stopped at the door and was not able to get in.
- Although he did not assault her at work, he came into the workplace and threatened her saying, "I'm going to slap the glasses off your head."
- There were no controls on her building so he could just walk in. At times he would come in and look over her desk, look at her calendar, try to get information, then question her about who was at the meetings, etc.

### Checking up Using Co-Workers ; Threatening; Stalking, and E-Mail Harassment

Sixty percent of respondents indicated their abuser used co-workers to gain information about them at work or sabotage their employment. Of those in this subgroup, the mean number of times the abuser used co-workers to gain information was 2.89 times per week (high value of 15). The median number of times abusers contacted co-workers per week was two.

Fifty-nine percent of survivors indicated their abuser threatened to come to the workplace as a tactic of control. Of those in this subgroup, the mean number of times the abuser threatened to show up at work was 2.15 times per week (high value of 21). The median number of times abusers threatened to come to work was one. Thirty-six percent (36%) of survivors reported the abuser threatened to come to work between one and seven times per week.

Fifty-seven percent of survivors reported their abuser stalked them at work in a variety of ways, many of which involved parking in a nearby lot and observing the survivor at work. Of those in this subgroup, the mean number of stalking incidents per week was 2.14 (high value of eight). The median number of incidents for survivors reporting stalking was one. Thirty-five percent of survivors reported being stalked between one and eight times per week.

Survivors reported lower rates of email harassment compared to phone use, with 23% of respondents indicating the abuser sent emails as a way to check up on them. Of those in this subgroup, the mean number of email contacts was 4.65 per week (high value of 15). The median number of email contacts per week was 2.25. Thirteen percent (13%) said email contact ranged from 1 to 5 times per week. Seven percent (7%) of respondents reported a range of 6 to 15 emails per week.

*"He would threaten all kinds of things if I wouldn't take the day off with him. One day when I had called out sick he called my boss and lied, saying I just wanted the day off. He harassed my co-workers, calling them and pretending he was someone else so he could check up on me."*

*"I would take unscheduled cigarette breaks, walk around the building to clear my head. When he couldn't find me he'd go to my supervisor to find out where I was."*

*"It would make me nervous to see him out in the parking lot. He would arrange himself so he could see the cash register and observe me, especially if there were any male customers."*

*“Once he threatened one of my male co-workers who he perceived was threatening our relationship. My co-worker was pretty scared by this and never talked or looked at me again.”*

*“He used email as a way to get to me at work. He stalked me for a number of months by sending emails from himself and also from a fake address and identity he’d created to try and convince me to forgive him.”*

*“After I took out a PFA [protection from abuse order] he came and left notes on my car while I was working. The notes were begging me to come home. It was scary that he was so focused on me.”*

*“He would call my boss, my managers, team leader, anyone he could get to page me.”*

*“He would park every day across the street and watch me with binoculars. He was unemployed.”*

*“He told my boss and co-workers details about our relationship, but they didn’t see that what he was doing was abuse. The boss said, ‘He seems like a really great guy. You should make this work.’”*

### Workplace effects of leaving or attempting to leave the relationship

Over three-quarters of survey respondents (78%) indicated they left or attempted to leave the relationship during the time that they were employed, but these strategies were often not successful in ending the contact at work. Of 93 survivors who left or attempted to leave, 72% reported that the abuser’s workplace contact increased in frequency and/or severity. Seventy-six percent (76%) answered yes when asked, “Was there additional impact to your work performance at this time?” In addition to impact from increased contact by the abuser, survivors also reported loss of work time due to childcare issues and court dates. In some cases, leaving the relationship caused the survivor to quit in an effort plan for her safety (such as flee or go into a confidential shelter), or began disciplinary action by the employer.

- Once abuser was gone she had less options. Abuser had helped provide child care; periodically she had to take personal time to accommodate child care issues.
- She had to quit work to get away from him; he knew everywhere she could be located. She got a PFA [protection from abuse order] because he was stalking her at work. Managers were telling her he was calling again looking for her.
- Lost work time, had to go to a shelter for safety. Co-workers were afraid.
- Spent more time dodging him than working.
- He was calling her more at work, tying up her time. Sometimes he would beg and sometimes he was threatening. He also hung around the parking lot more.
- Scared to death, worked right near front door. He could just walk right in. Anxiety attacks.
- She took a leave of absence and left the state to get away.

### Tardiness & Attendance Problems

Survivors reported a range of attendance issues due to domestic violence. Tardiness, inability to be flexible with job schedules, and work loss due to injury were common themes expressed during interviews.

Seventy-nine percent (79%) reported they were late to work as a result of domestic abuse, with 37% late more than once per week, 25% late less than once per week, and 18% late once a week.

Survivors were asked a series of questions about common tactics abusers used to interfere with employment and attendance; their answers are reflected in the table below.

<b>Abuser Tactics</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Applicable</b>
Start a fight before work?	84%	13%	4%
Keep you up late or all night?	77%	17%	6%
Assault you before work?	47%	4%	49%
Refuse to care for children or bring to child care/school?	39%	13%	42%
Hide or take the car keys?	34%	53%	13%

When given the opportunity to provide greater detail on tactics that interfered with attendance, a number of themes emerged. Survivors were most likely to comment on the abuser's tactic of disabling or interfering with the family vehicle as a way to prevent work attendance, with 29 survivors reporting a range of tactics related to the car. These abuser strategies included cutting the brake lines, removing the distributor cap, spark plugs, fuses, or other parts, flattening tires, selling or otherwise removing the vehicle from use, rigging lights so that the victim would be likely to be pulled over, and leaving the gas tank low.

Abusers also used transportation to gain the upper hand by keeping the most reliable vehicle for their own use, blocking her car when she tried to leave, following her and trying to run her off the road, refusing to provide money to insure her car, taking the phone so she couldn't call a cab, or not coming home on time when she needed the vehicle. In cases where the abuser lacked a valid driver's license, a common tactic was to make appointments that interfered with the survivor's work schedule so she had to choose between going to work or accommodating his needs.

Themes that received roughly equal attention in the narrative comments included the abuser starting arguments before work (9), creating a crisis (8), and making the survivor fearful for the children's safety (7). Six survivors reported in their narrative that the abuser physically prevented them from leaving the house, and five noted that the abuser created fear for significant

consequences if she left for work. (Three women specifically noted the abuser tactic of threatening to or actually calling Department of Health and Human Services.) Other narrative comments included disruptions due to the abuser's use of alcohol (2), pressure for sex in the morning (2), and causing physical injury that prevented work (2). More detail on abuser-inflicted injuries is available below.

### Effects on flexibility of schedule

Abusers also affected women's ability to be flexible with their employment, such as stay beyond their regularly scheduled shift or put in work time on a weekend day. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of survivors reported the abuser prevented them from working late, with 54% saying they also could not work overtime or weekends, and 53% reporting that they were also not allowed to go in early. Eighteen percent (18%) of survivors could not go on business trips, although for most survivors in our group (73%), business trips did not apply to their job function.

In general, abusers exercised control over the victim's schedule by creating unpleasant and unsafe consequences if she tried to increase or extend her regular workday. One woman talked about wanting to stay late to complete her bookkeeping tasks, but instead left tasks undone because she was afraid of staying too late; another said her abuser "screamed and hollered that I was sleeping with everyone at work." For survivors, it was easier to conform to the abuser's arbitrary rules rather than risk consequences by satisfying their employer's needs.

### Effects of abuser-inflicted injuries; resulting company and project work delays

Forty-four percent (44%) of survivors sustained physical injuries at home that prevented them from being able to report to work or interfered with their job duties once they were at work. Injuries included stab wounds, broken bones, bruises and welts, black eyes, muscle strains, and pregnancy complications due to abuse. Other survivors reported indirect medical problems such as migraines and PTSD symptoms that caused attendance difficulties. Survivors also noted lost work time due to the serious toll domestic abuse took on their emotional well-being. It was not uncommon for women to discuss how long bouts of crying made it impossible to report to work, or created work delays when they needed to take time to regain their composure.

The effects of injuries took many forms, from embarrassment to concentration difficulties to the inability to stand for extended periods of time. One woman who went to work with multiple bruises said co-workers whispered about her. Another said she reported to work with a black eye; her employer's response was to change her job function until it healed so customers wouldn't see her. Occasionally survivors would go to work regardless of the injuries, only to leave the job later in the day to seek treatment at an emergency room. One victim reported suffering a broken bone but did not go to the hospital until after arriving at work. Another said she'd been "punched in the head so hard that every time I turned my head the room would spin." She remained at work throughout the day despite what was later diagnosed as a concussion.

Abuser-inflicted injuries also caused project and other work delays when survivors could not complete their job duties. Delays caused a range of consequences. In some cases temporary help needed to be hired to cover lost work time, or co-workers had to complete the survivor's tasks. In other cases, survivors noted they were difficult to replace because of their skill level. One



woman who suffered a broken bone was unable to do her task as a skilled production worker and said, “It was a hard job that required training and you couldn’t just hire someone off the street. The production level was affected.” Several survivors reported their injuries further complicated existing staffing problems, such as in nursing home facilities and other healthcare-related workplaces.

### *Paid and unpaid leave from work due to domestic violence*

Survivors reported significant amounts of lost work time as a result of domestic violence. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents took paid or unpaid time off from work, with the mean and median values reflected in the chart below.

<b>Domestic abuse-related time off from work (n=82)</b>	<b>Paid Time off</b>	<b>Unpaid time off</b>	<b>Total leave time</b>
<b>Mean # hours</b>	149.59	141.08	167.30
<b>Median # hours</b>	46.50	64.00	56.00
<b>Maximum value hours</b>	960	1280	1440
<b>Total hours for the subgroup</b>	<b>5086</b>	<b>8465</b>	<b>13551</b>

Many survivors noted that they exhausted all of their vacation time, sick leave, or other flexible paid time off options in an effort to respond to their abuser’s violence. Lost work time was generated when survivors were hospitalized or injured, went to court for protective orders or criminal matters, received assistance from domestic abuse projects, responded to their children’s needs, or took time off for stress-related symptoms. Very few respondents made reference to the use of Family Medical Leave to cover their work absences, although one survivor noted in hindsight that FMLA may have saved her job if it been offered by her employer. Ultimately she was terminated for excessive absences from work.

### Workplace Safety — Assaults and Accidents

*Assaults.* Domestic abuse impacted workplace safety through both external threats (abuser assaults at the worksite) as well as internal safety issues (accidents and near miss accidents involving survivors). Thirteen percent (13%) of survivors reported they were assaulted at work by their abuser. Three percent (3%) reported the abuser assaulted one of the survivor’s co-workers. In addition, one respondent described her abuser attempting to assault her with workplace tools yet she answered “no” to the question, “Did your partner ever physically assault you at work?”

Of the subgroup of survivors who were assaulted at work, six (40%) worked in the restaurant industry. Three (20%) worked in the medical field. Four (26%) reported that their abuser was employed in the same workplace. Survivors reported the assaults occurred inside the work building both in public and private areas, in the parking lot, and away from the worksite but following a work-related function, such as a meeting held in a different location.

In some cases, workplace assault precipitated the survivor’s termination of employment. One woman described her abuser coming to the worksite and causing a scene, after which she was “ushered out of the workplace.” She said, “My employer didn’t seem to understand that it wasn’t within my power to control him.”

Accidents. As noted above, 98% of survivors reported that domestic abuse caused difficulty concentrating at work. Of the subgroup who noted difficulty concentrating, 17% said this resulted in a work accident or near miss accident involving themselves or others. Injuries to the survivor or others in the workplace resulted among 65% of those in the subgroup who reported a workplace accident or near miss.

Survivors reported being “so wrapped up in thoughts” that they walked into walls, sometimes sustaining minor injuries or in other cases causing a workplace hazard, such as spilling bodily fluids. Others reported being burned, in one case when the survivor’s job required working near heating elements and her hands shook uncontrollably after a harassing phone call. One medical professional reported sticking herself with a used needle following a patient procedure.

### Termination of employment

Sixty percent (60%) of survivors reported that they lost the job they held while they were experiencing domestic abuse. Of the subgroup of those who lost their job, 92% reported they believed the loss was due to domestic violence.

Of the 71 women whose employment was ended, 58% quit and 42% were fired.

Survivors who quit. A number of themes emerged for survivors who chose to quit work rather than maintain their employment. Themes included lost confidence/stress/emotional difficulties due to the abuse (10), needing to flee for safety (8), concern for the children (4) and for the co-workers (3), quitting as a preemptive measure to avoid being fired (3), and abuser manipulation (2). One survivor reported quitting due to transportation issues.

Stress associated from domestic abuse caused severe, life-changing circumstances when employees became disabled as a result of the violence they were experiencing. One survivor commented on what her job had meant to her. “This was the best job I ever had. The people, the workplace, everything about it made it the best job. They had promoted me but I stepped down because I was making a lot of errors and it was important paperwork.” Although her employer was willing to take her back, she was unable to work due to her stress-related disability and continued concerns about the abuser and safety for her child.

Another survivor noted that she felt safer in quitting and remaining home. “It was safer to be around him than away from him at work. At least if I was home I could manage his trigger points.”

Survivors who were fired. Survivors who were fired reported that employers gave a number of reasons for the termination, among them attendance problems and lost work time (10), mistakes and performance problems (5), and the employee’s “personal issues” (3). Employers also terminated survivors because the abuser caused a scene at work (2), the employer considered the employee to be a high risk (2), and in two other cases, the survivor was terminated when she was incarcerated. Survivors also reported that the employer said the termination was due to business cutbacks (2), and two survivors were fired when they violated company policies to protect their own safety. One survivor was not retained when her probationary period ended. During

interviews, survivors expressed a range of reactions to being terminated. One woman noted that she was treated respectfully through the whole process and didn't bear any ill will to her supervisor, who fired her when concentration issues caused multiple paperwork errors. Another survivor said she was fired after the employer gained information about her domestic violence victimization; she was devastated that the business chose to base its retention decision on this information, rather than her work history.

A third survivor was stunned when she was fired after her abuser, also a co-worker, disabled her by breaking one of her bones. After assaulting her, the abuser showed up at the workplace early in the day to provide the business owner with his side of the story. When the survivor arrived to say she couldn't work because she needed to get medical treatment for her injuries, the owner fired her without discussion saying, "Last night was the last straw! You need to leave!" The survivor was in disbelief that she could be fired for being a victim of domestic violence. Others described the unfairness of a system in which the victim of the crime was made accountable for the actions of the abuser.

**Employer said she had too many personal issues to take care of. Employee cried and felt it was unjust. Even though these things were going on she felt she always got her work done. She really needed the job.**

*Survivor awareness of employment protections.* Three state laws provide specific employment protections for victims of domestic violence in Maine. The Employment Leave for Victims of Violence Act (Title 26, Subchapter VI-B, § 850) states that employers must provide reasonable and necessary leave from work if an employee or employee's daughter, son, parent or spouse is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Leave can be used for the purpose of preparing for and appearing in court, receiving treatment, or obtaining services related to the crime.

Two unemployment laws, the disqualification clause (Title 26, Chapter 13, § 1193, #4) and the misconduct clause (Title 26, Chapter 13, § 1043, #3) provide protection for employees should they quit work or be fired due to domestic violence. In both cases the claimant must have been taking actions to protect their safety and must have made all reasonable efforts to maintain their employment.

Although these laws have existed for several years in Maine, survivors in this study were overwhelmingly unaware that any specific statutes protected their employment status. Ninety-three percent (93%) of survivors reported that they were not aware of the Victim's Leave Act. Similarly, 94% were not aware of the unemployment statutes available to them.

## Employer's Awareness and Response to Domestic Violence

*Supervisor awareness of employee's domestic violence situation.* Eighty-three percent of survivors reported that their employer became aware of their domestic violence situation.

The vast majority of survivors (92%) reported having at least one concern about disclosing their domestic violence situation to the employer (whether or not they ultimately chose to tell anyone.) Survivors were provided with a checklist of possible concerns, and could choose as many as applied to their situation. The following table represents their specific concerns:

Employee concern	Percentage of survivors reporting n=110
Embarrassed	93%
Loss of confidentiality	71%
Loss of credibility as a worker	70%
Abuser retaliation	70%
Thought employer would not help	52%
Being fired	49%
Losing promotions	46%
Loss of overtime opportunity	33%

Despite these concerns, 57% of survivors said they initiated contact with a supervisor or human resources representative to discuss their domestic violence situation. Supervisors were also made aware through other means, such as the supervisor approaching the employee (20%), someone else at the workplace telling the employee's supervisor (6%), or non-employees contacting the supervisor (18%). Non-employee callers included the abuser, law enforcement, and customers.

*Supervisor responses.* In the subgroup of those whose employers became aware of the domestic violence, 59% reported that their supervisor was supportive and helpful upon learning of the employee's situation. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of survivors said their supervisor was neutral and expected the employee to solve the problem herself. In eight percent (8%) of the cases, survivors described their supervisors as unsupportive, and 6% were hostile and blaming.

Help and assistance was demonstrated in a number of ways, ranging from emotional support to time off to referrals. Interviewer notes reflect the following ways in which survivors characterized their workplace response:

**Employer has offered to listen, has invited her into her office. Another supervisor told her about the Victim's Leave Act and that her job would be protected if she took time off. Supervisor supported her to go to a domestic violence support group.**

**They gave her the EAP number; her boss gave her the time off she needed for both her child's and her own mental health needs. Sometimes employer paid her for the whole day when she had to have appointments.**

**Employer checked in with her every day to see what she needed or if they could help in any way. Both supervisor and co-workers were supportive. She was very comfortable discussing the situation with her employer because it was like a family there.**

**The night she left abuser she went to work and her supervisor was unbelievably wonderful, called someone he knew who understood domestic violence, helped get the employee into shelter. Co-workers picked her up at the safe house so she could get to work.**

**Employer said, “No one deserves to live like that. I am so sorry. Your family comes first, do what you need to do.” They tried to schedule her work time around the court and medical appointments.**

Slightly over one quarter of the group reported that their supervisors were neutral, essentially expecting the employee to report to work and take care of the problem on their own. Some survivors in this category said that the employer’s primary concern was the effect on the business; these supervisors did not appear to believe they could play a role in assisting the employee with safety planning, flexibility, or other options. One survivor who suffered an assault that required hospitalization said her employer was silent about the domestic violence, and communication was limited to discussions about when she would return to work.

**Employer didn’t really care but wanted employee to continue to report to work because it was hard to find dependable workers.**

**Her supervisor said, “You need to put your job first. You need to put your family issues on the back burner. Do you understand me?” It was very intimidating.**

**Supervisor would say, “You should just leave him.” She made it sound like it was so easy.**

**Supportive but neutral. Supervisor didn’t want to get involved. Urged employee to get rid of the abuser.**

**They encouraged her to keep the arguing at home. Abuser worked there as well but both HR and the direct supervisor made it her responsibility to fix the problem.**

Survivors who characterized their supervisor’s response as unsupportive referenced difficulty getting time off, indifference to protection orders requiring the abuser to stay away from work, and a general lack of concern about the effect domestic violence was having on the survivor’s ability to fulfill her job requirements.

**Employer did not have a clue the number of times she had to go to court to take care of his harassment, that there were multiple times she had to go to complete the process. Employee had to tell the supervisor details just to get her to understand.**

**Employer was not willing to be flexible with her schedule. Her manager, knowing the employee had a protection order and was now trying to function as a single parent, said, “My wife and I managed it,” referring to making child care arrangements.**

**They suggested she should quit. Didn’t take into consideration in her performance review the domestic violence situation even though they were aware. She was making active efforts to leave the relationship and was working with a local DV project and local crisis line.**

Finally, a small number of survivors noted that their supervisor's response was outwardly blaming and hostile.

**From the point at which they became aware, employer was more demanding, less tolerant of mistakes. Boss would scream at her in a public place. HR said they could not intervene.**

**"They tried to get rid of me." No lay-offs until the abuser was in her life, then she got laid off every year.**

**Employer was aware that she was being abused. "No more personal phone calls, got it?" Employer made sexual interpretation for the bruises on her back.**

**"The manager talked about a co-worker who was being beaten up by her boyfriend. He described the woman as pathetic. He was very victim-blaming, saying things like, 'Why would you feel sorry for someone who's bringing it all on herself?'"**

Employer responses were not always consistent, even within the same business. A number of women reported that the response varied from supervisor to supervisor, indicating there was no policy-driven manner directing how the situation should be handled. Survivors also noted that a supervisor's actions changed depending on the situation. Support sometimes turned to hostility when the employee did not take actions that the employer recommended, when the effects continued at work, or when the abuser showed up at the business. Conversely, some supervisors who were initially neutral became more actively concerned and responsive after they recognized the abuse as a workplace safety threat.

#### *Existence of workplace violence and/or domestic violence policies*

Sixteen percent of survivors reported the employer had a workplace violence policy in place, with 5 % saying the employer had a specific workplace policy referencing domestic violence. Over four in ten survivors reported there was neither a workplace violence nor domestic violence policy (43%), and slightly less reported that they didn't know whether policies were in place or not.

#### *Referrals to employer and community help sources*

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of employers who became aware of their employee's domestic abuse situation made a referral to a help source of some sort. Of the subgroup of employer's who became aware, slightly less than one quarter (23%) referred the survivor to law enforcement, 18% referred to Employee Assistance Program services, 15% referred her to a domestic abuse project, and 6% referred to an attorney.

#### *Employer-Implemented Safety Steps*

Survivors reported that of those employers who were aware of domestic violence, 72% took steps to assist the employee with specific safety planning measures. The breakdown of these measures is reflected in the following table:

<b>Employer Safety Step</b>	<b>Percentage of survivors reporting their employer was aware of domestic violence and took safety steps to assist (n=71)</b>
Limited abuser's physical access to worksite	39%
Provided employee with time off	36%
Limited phone/email access from abuser	33%
Provided escort to vehicle	16%
Offered assistance in applying for/enforcing a protection order	16%
Altered survivor's work schedule	14%
Altered survivor's parking arrangements	12%
Changed survivor's worksite	5%
Installed additional security measures	4%

Personnel at many levels of the organization were engaged in implementing safety measures and did so in both formal and informal ways. The following is a limited list of strategies employed by administrative, human resources, and security staff, often with the assistance of watchful co-workers:

- With survivor's permission, staff was briefed on abuser's physical and vehicle description; employee provided a photo of abuser to reception staff
- Co-workers screened calls
- Employer put a block on incoming calls from abuser's home and work phone
- HR canceled direct deposit for employee's check and rushed paper copy to workplace next day
- Supervisor accompanied survivor to court, allowed co-workers time off to attend court as well
- Supervisor took photos documenting bruises after employee was assaulted
- Employer separated abuser and victim (co-worker) during dangerous time; gave victim choice about giving her time off or giving abuser suspension, dependent on which felt like the safest option for her
- Stopped abuser from physically entering workplace
- Posted police at workplace entrance during dangerous time
- Co-workers and supervisor answered her extension, said she was not available
- Security circled parking lot
- Offered to lay off employee instead of having her quit so that she could access unemployment benefits
- Locked building down
- Altered phone system so that all incoming calls had caller ID
- Changed survivor's email address, routed all abuser's email messages to junk mail folder
- Receptionist told abuser that survivor no longer worked there

Survivors also reported that intervention strategies were sometimes implemented without taking their wishes into consideration, causing additional safety concerns.

**Employer did not give her a choice about the response. Supervisor insisted that she get a PFA, which she felt compromised her safety. They put up his picture all over the place. Discussed situation in public area rather than taking her to a confidential place. Employee says this was dreadfully embarrassing.**

### Effectiveness of Safety Steps; Effects on Abuser's Access to Survivor at Work

Of the subgroup of survivors whose employer implemented safety steps, (72%) reported that the employer's safety steps were effective, and 73% said that the employer remained committed to protecting the survivor's safety for the entire time she felt she needed assistance.

To gain a more complete picture of how workplace safety planning affected the abuser's access at work, survivors were asked to compare the number of abuser contacts after safety steps were implemented against the number of contacts experienced on average. The responses are provided in the table below. Although nearly three-quarters of survivors felt the safety steps were effective, there was no significant difference between the number of survivors who reported decreased abuser contact after safety steps were implemented and those who collectively reported no change or an increase.

<b>Method of abuser contact</b>	<b>Survivors reporting decreased abuser contact</b>	<b>Survivors reporting increase in abuser contact</b>	<b>Survivors reporting no change in abuser contact</b>
Phone harassment	46%	19%	35%
Email harassment	33%	17%	50%
Using co-workers	28%	12%	60%
Threatening to show up	30%	16%	54%
Stalking at work	30%	16%	54%
Came to workplace	51%	11%	38%

### **Legal and Civil Remedies**

No contact actions against abusers. Nearly half (48%) of survivors reported that they had a protection from abuse order or other criminal condition prohibiting the abuser from contacting her at work. Of those in this subgroup, 88% reported that the employer was aware of the no contact order. The majority of these orders (90%) were civil protection orders, but protection from harassment (18%), bail conditions (32%), and probation conditions (14%) also existed. Some abusers had both criminal and civil no contact conditions placed against them.

Of the subgroup of survivors whose abusers had a no contact order in place, 59% said the no contact order was effective in decreasing or stopping the contact at work. However, 49% of these women also reported that the abuser violated the no contact order through direct or indirect workplace contact while it was in effect. The majority of survivors (76%) reported that even when the employer was aware of the order *and* the abuser violated it, the employer did not assist the victim in enforcing the conditions of the order.



One theme that emerged regarding protection orders and other criminal conditions was the lack of training offered to supervisors responding to this issue. Survivors reported cases where supervisors didn't vigorously enforce the requirements of the order, were nonchalant, or didn't understand what "no contact, direct or indirect" meant.

**Employer did not strictly enforce the PFA in case where victim/abuser were employed together. Abuser had knowledge of where survivor would be in the building and would show up there, claiming he needed to be in that part of the work area to do his job. Victim made multiple complaints before situation was corrected and abuser was permanently moved to different area of building.**

**Employer did not know how to handle it. Even after she got the protection order the employer would ask her if she wanted to answer the phone when he called. Employee had to teach employer what a protection order meant.**

**When she told manager about protection order and abuser not coming to workplace, he just shrugged his shoulders.**

## **Survivors' Recommendations Regarding Domestic Violence and Work**

Survivors were asked, "What steps would you recommend employers take to help employees who are experiencing domestic abuse at home?" and were given a checklist of steps to respond to. Nearly all of those interviewed (98%) recommended that employers have a domestic violence policy that offers job protection and on-the-job safety, and 96% said policy information should be presented during the new-hire orientation session. Ninety-four percent (94%) of survivors recommended that employers offer domestic abuse resources (brochures and local hotline numbers) in private locations. In addition, survivors noted the importance of being able to talk about the problem at work; 92% of those interviewed recommended the employer have well-trained supervisors and managers so that the employee would feel more comfortable discussing it when necessary. Posters about domestic abuse were also recognized as a resource, with 87% of survivors noting those as helpful.

In many cases, women also commented briefly on recommendations; their comments add depth and substance to the survey results.

*It must be an open and trustworthy environment at work so you feel you can actually talk to the employer. The environment must be truly open to realizing it can happen to anyone, middle class professionals and well-educated as well. In a professional career you can't talk about these things at work. There is a lot of shame.*

*It's essential to have well-trained supervisors and managers. It is humiliating to talk about this. It takes incredible courage to come to the employer and tell them, it's much easier to keep your mouth shut.*

*They don't train the supervisors and managers. They are ignorant to many of the laws and rules and even some of their own personnel policies. They don't have a clue what the man or woman is going through when they're living with domestic abuse.*

*[Employers have] mandatory posters about taking your breaks and stretching, but there's nothing about domestic violence. I knew at least five other women who were also having a hard time with their husbands but there was nothing in place.*

*Be supportive. Employers should educate themselves. They know how to cut people open, fix them, and sew them up, but they don't know about domestic violence.*

*Basic respect. My son and I were the victims here, we didn't ask for this. I shouldn't be penalized for trying to take care of myself and my son.*

*Let the employee know it's not her fault. Employers need to know that the abuser won't listen if the victim tells the abuser not to show up at work.*

*{There should be} state-required, mandatory signs about domestic abuse at work so that employers don't have a choice about whether they should be posted or not.*

*If you're going to be a boss and be in charge of people, learn about domestic abuse and develop some sensitivity. There are a lot of women being abused.*

*Employers shouldn't just be able to fire someone because of domestic violence. It absolutely should be against the law.*

*It would have been great from a technology perspective to be able to insulate me from the phone system. They were not able to block his number and track how many times he called. I could not forward voicemail messages without listening to them first, and also could not retrieve deleted voicemails he had left that were threatening.*

*Make sure the policy is reviewed every year.*

*[The] majority of older workers are getting to be older people, and older people don't discuss their personal problems at work. There has to be a way to encourage people not to be ashamed. HR managers and others who are in charge of people need to learn how to deal with this in a sensitive way.*

*Be direct with the employee if you suspect domestic abuse. Try to be sensitive and not so harsh.*

*Employers should watch for certain behaviors in their employees and be able to approach them with general questions that might help the employee to open up a little bit more.*

## **Discussion**

This research project sought to gain a greater understanding of how domestic violence survivors are impacted at their place of employment by the actions of their abuser. In particular, we wanted to identify • the frequency and methods with which abusers contacted the survivor at work, • performance, productivity, lost time, job retention, and workplace safety issues that resulted from the abuser's actions, • employer responses to domestic violence, including the existence of policies addressing the issue, and • survivors' views on how employers can implement specific actions to enhance safety and support at work.

*Abuser behavior affects survivors at work.* Findings from this study add to the growing body of research on domestic violence perpetration and women who work. Abusers have significant and often long-term effects on the ability of their female intimate partner to be present at work, to be able to concentrate fully on her job duties and consequently, to be a productive employee who can retain her employment. Demographic information from this self-selected group indicates that domestic violence affects survivors in a variety of workplace settings and occupations, from fast food cashier to registered nurse to industrial stitcher. While the majority of research to date focuses on domestic violence survivors receiving welfare (Lyon, 2002; Tolman & Raphael;

2000, Riger, Ahrens, Blickenstaff, & Camacho, 1999)) we found that twenty four percent (24%) of survivors in this group worked in executive, administrative, management, or professional specialty occupations, indicating that professional status does not shield a domestic violence victim from harassment by her abuser on the job. Regardless of occupation or industry, nearly all of the 120 survivors stated that domestic violence affected their ability to perform their job duties. The effects were long-lasting, with performance difficulties averaging eighteen months, and survivors utilizing approximately 3.6 weeks of paid and unpaid time. Abuser tactics were consistent and broad, often beginning before the survivor/ employee reported to work. Assaults, keeping the victim up late or all night, refusing to provide child care (Raphael, 1995) and interfering with or disabling the vehicle (Riger et al, 1999; Swanberg et al, 2005) are all tactics that have been duplicated in previous research and were found in this group as well. In addition, this study replicates other findings noting that abusers affect a victim's attendance in a number of ways, ranging from tardiness (Friedman et al, 1987), absenteeism due to injuries (Moore & Selkove, 1999, Swanberg et al, 2005)) to job termination (Riger et al, 1999; Swanberg et al, 2005). Regarding workplace contacts, we specifically quantified the method and number of times per week an abuser was able to contact the survivor on the job, with the entire group reporting an average of 15.5 phone calls, three on-site "visits", nearly three incidents involving the use of co-workers to check up, over two cases of stalking, and over four contacts via email on a weekly basis. Telephone harassment was the leading tactic abusers employed in this regard, with nearly 9 in 10 women reporting upsetting phone calls. A key workplace strategy might be to provide caller ID as a routine telephone function that would enable any employee to determine whether or not they wanted to engage in a conversation with the caller. If made available to all workplace phones, domestic violence survivors would not be placed in the position of requesting such an accommodation to prevent actual contact by the abuser.

Workplace safety. Of additional significance, workplace safety concerns were revealed when over three-quarters of survivors said their abuser came to the worksite slightly more than three times per week on average, in some cases assaulting the survivor (13%), and in others causing a scene significant enough to cause the survivor's termination. Survivors in this study appeared to be partnered with abusers who had easy access to their workplaces, a fact also supported by abusers themselves (Lim et al, 2004). Although these findings are limited in that they were drawn from a self-selected group who relied on memories of the abuser's contact within the past three years, they provide useful information for employers and advocates when considering safety strategies for the workplace. Such strategies must focus not only on abuser contact but the effects of concentration issues that result in workplace accidents or near miss accidents. Interestingly, the number of survivors reporting workplace accidents or near misses almost duplicated previous research on abusers and the workplace, with 17% of survivors in this study and 19% of abusers in 2004 reporting accidents due to concentration issues (Lim, et al, 2004). Given that fatigue and distraction have been shown to contribute to vehicular accidents among U.S. workers (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2003), it is possible that worker inattentiveness due to domestic violence also contributes to unsafe working conditions for employees.

Job retention. One interesting finding was the percentage of the group (60%) who reported resigning from the job or being fired, despite the fact that survivors were most likely to report their supervisors were supportive when learning of the abuse. Cross-tabulations were run to determine counts versus expected counts on a number of questions regarding the relationship, if

any, between employer awareness, supervisory response, and job retention. While there appeared to be no relationship overall between a supervisor knowing about the abuse and the survivor losing her job, survivors whose supervisors were supportive were less likely than expected to be fired, but more likely than expected to quit. Given the complicated safety issues associated with domestic abuse, this could mean that existing employer supports were inadequate to remedy the crisis for those who ultimately resigned. A similar conclusion was reached in a qualitative study of 32 women living in rural and urban communities whose workplace support was helpful in the short term, but did not result in long-term job retention (Swanberg and Logan, 2005). Since participants in the Maine Department of Labor/Family Crisis Services study were not randomly selected no statistical significance can be attached to these numbers, but they provide information for further research topics. One hopeful conclusion is that employer education, training, and culture change will influence greater numbers of supervisors to support employees living with domestic violence, thus potentially reducing the number of victims whose jobs are terminated. Employers may also have the ability to reduce voluntary resignation by providing survivors with increased work supports during difficult times, such as when they are concerned about their personal safety or are experiencing a loss of confidence due to the abuse.

*Support through safety planning and referrals.* Two methods to increase the potential for safety include referring to domestic violence resources in the community (reported by 15%), and implementing workplace safety planning measures (reported by 73% of survivors whose employers knew about the abuse). Regarding the first, employers should implement as standard practice referral of the affected employee to a domestic violence project. Given that less than one in six survivors in this study received specific information about domestic violence services, employers and advocates have an opportunity to increase information about and access to these critical resources. When making such a referral, employers should consider the likelihood that the survivor may not be able to make phone calls or access services away from work, and should offer options such as using work time or workplace resources to place calls, make appointments, and/or meet with an advocate at the worksite. Through woman-defined advocacy available from the local domestic violence project, a survivor can review her existing life and batterer generated risks, identify and analyze resources and options, and implement a safety strategy based on the context of her individual circumstances (Davies, 1998).

Employer-sponsored safety measures are also a key resource, although one that needs further research and understanding. This study found that although employer safety steps did not appear to markedly affect the ability of the abuser to contact the survivor at work, the majority of survivors (72%) reported that workplace safety steps were effective. These apparent discrepancies could be due to a number of factors. First, the results are reliant on survivor's memories of abuser contact within the past three years; as such, they may be inaccurate. In addition, questions about employer safety steps and abuser contact came toward the end of a survey that took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. Participants may have had more difficulty concentrating at this point in the interview process. It's also possible that survivors' perceptions of their safety were enhanced by the support they were receiving at the workplace. Finally, survivors may have associated the employer's safety steps with an overall positive outcome in their life, such as being able to escape from the abuser. Taken as a whole, it's clear that workplace safety planning is complex. In this study, some survivors reported increased abuser contact after safety steps were implemented, although it's unknown whether this was directly in response to the employer's assistance or due to the survivor's preparations to escape

the relationship. Given this, it's vitally important that safety considerations be employee-driven, taking into account that the survivor knows the abuser's behavior best and will be the best predictor of his level of dangerousness. In cases where employers are concerned for the safety of their entire workforce and implement safety measures that step beyond the survivor's wishes, they must keep the survivor employee fully apprised of their actions. This is critical, given that a survivor's personal safety plans may be altered dramatically based on changes in information — for example, who has information regarding the abuse, whether the abuser might learn that others have knowledge, and how that will impact the abuser's behavior. (Davies, 1998.) Additionally, safety planning must extend to employer support for the enforcement of civil and criminal conditions imposed on the abuser. Evidence suggests that protection from abuse orders are effective in reducing physical violence when they are utilized in the context of a coordinated community response; that is, in conjunction with other systems such as 1) criminal justice agencies 2) social supports (family, public, or private help, including domestic violence resources) and 3) survivor safety planning (Police Magazine, 2004). The extension of “coordinated community response” to include employers is a logical step, given the significant impacts to the business community. However, we found that three-quarters of the employers who knew of the existence of the civil or criminal condition did not assist the victim by documenting the contact, calling the police, or saving email messages when the abuser violated the condition by contacting the survivor at work. This could be due to lack of knowledge about options on both the survivor's and supervisor's part (for example, one survivor said it never occurred to her the employer could help), or it could be that the employer considers this to step beyond the boundaries of their involvement. Some model employer policies now state the business intention to assist with the enforcement of court orders, including providing evidence (as an example, see the State of New York Domestic Violence Policy). Both management and advocate training is crucial to enhance understanding of what employers can do when civil or criminal conditions are violated, therefore providing an additional element of potential safety for the working survivor.

*Awareness of employment protections.* In a related and significant finding to that of job loss, this study documented the overwhelming likelihood that domestic violence survivors are not aware of the few employment protections specifically available to them, with nearly 95% reporting no knowledge of the Maine Victim's Leave Act and unemployment compensation statutes. This is especially important, given that legislatures around the country are enacting useful protections regarding domestic violence and the workplace (Business Insurance, 2004). In order for laws to be effective survivors must be aware; however, evidence indicates information is not being widely disseminated to employees. For example, in 2003 Illinois passed the most comprehensive legislation of its kind in the country, prohibiting employers from discriminating against victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Yet as of March 2005 only 22 complaints against employers had been filed (Chicago Sun Times, 2005), despite the fact there are three million women in the Illinois labor force (Illinois Department of Labor, 2004). In Maine, there is no specific procedure for tracking employees who utilize the Victim's Leave Act, and only a handful of Maine workers have utilized the domestic violence provision in the unemployment statutes, although these laws have been in place for several years. (A. Fisher, personal communication, October 11, 2005). Public officials, advocates, and employers should assume responsibility for the systems changes necessary to increase awareness and utilization of these laws.

*Survivor Views on Employer Responses to Domestic Abuse.* Not unexpectedly, survivors broadly supported a number of steps employers could take to enhance their response to domestic violence. This information is limited to the degree that survivors were given a checklist of options developed by the research team and asked to check all that they thought applied, rather than soliciting their direct feedback. Nearly all (98%) recommended that employers adopt a domestic violence policy to protect the employment and on-the-job safety of domestic violence survivors, and the vast majority agreed that policies should be complemented by systemic changes such as training, information for new hires, and availability of domestic violence resources. While the number of corporations, unions, and foundations developing workplace responses is growing (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2005), most employers in a focus group exploring the issue did not have a specific domestic violence policy (Partnership for Prevention, 2002). In cases where a policy *is* implemented, its effectiveness can be severely limited if it does not meet several criteria, including definitions for the actions it seeks to influence, procedures for reporting, defined responsibilities for those affected by the policy, and a method through which employees can learn about the policy itself — training (Braverman, 1999). In fact, workplace training specific to domestic violence has been shown to be effective. In an evaluation study of Harmon International’s Domestic Violence Prevention Project, managers who had received domestic violence training reported significant changes in knowledge about how to respond to victims (in particular, knowing what to do if an employee disclosed to them, as well as being less likely to tell the employee that she/he should leave the intimate partner.) Managers also reported they were less likely to manage the potential threat alone, indicating they were more likely to involve others in a coordinated workplace response. Employees also benefited by training, with over nine out of ten workers agreeing it was somewhat to very true (post-training) that 1) people in the workplace should be supportive of someone who is abused, 2) employees know where to refer someone for help, and 3) employees know the signs that someone may be living with abuse (Urban, 2004).

A number of questions remain for domestic violence survivors in the workplace, however. Will the impact of domestic violence policies always be positive? Are there unintended consequences for survivors when policies are hastily adopted by using a one-size-fits-all approach and implemented without deliberation, foresight, and training? Are employers using domestic violence policies as “window dressing” with limited attention to the actual needs of survivors who come forward for help? Finally, does the adoption of a formal workplace response remove or discourage informal assistance that may have previously supported survivors? These are questions for further research.

## **Summary**

This study has a number of strengths and limitations that should be weighed when examining its findings. First, only a small amount of demographic information regarding the participants’ occupation was obtained. A more complete data set would have allowed us to compare these results with the results of studies on domestic violence and women receiving welfare benefits. The study is a self-selected group and as such, its findings can’t be generalized to all employed domestic violence survivors. Self-selection may also influence findings by drawing people whose workplace experience was significant enough to want to be interviewed given the nature of their experiences. On the other hand, the study was limited in that it couldn’t capture those survivors whose violence was severe enough so that they had to flee the state. It’s possible we

have not interviewed women with the most dangerous abusers; in that respect, workplace impact and job retention issues may have been underreported. Regarding strengths, nearly three-quarters of the interviews were completed by one of the principal researchers, lending to consistency. Interviews were conducted one on one in privacy, providing the greatest opportunity for women to be open about their experiences. The research team was a cross-section with representation from the Department of Labor, domestic violence advocacy services, a county community response project director, and a business representative; in addition, specific input was sought from the business community prior to the development of the survey.

The findings from this study clearly support and build upon previous research identifying domestic abuse as a significant workplace issue. Those who perpetrate intimate partner abuse must be held accountable for the extraordinary human and social costs this crime generates. Further research is needed to determine impacts on particular industries such as health care, food service, education, and others that are likely to employ greater percentages of female workers. Additional studies are also needed to determine the impact of domestic violence on small business owners and their employees, those who often have less conventional resources such as EAP and a dedicated human resources department. Finally, more research is needed to determine how to support underserved populations in the workplace such as gay and lesbian workers, elders, refugees, workers with limited English proficiency, and disabled employees. As these groups may experience additional barriers in getting help for domestic abuse, dedicated outreach is critical.

## **Acknowledgements**

This study could not have been completed without the generous support of Maine State Government, the Maine Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Family Crisis Services, Family Violence Project, Violence Intervention Partnership, and Wright Express. In addition, a number of volunteer interviewers came forward to help conduct surveys with survivors. Special thanks to Diane Belanger, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, for her assistance conducting interviews at the Maine Correctional Center.

Volunteers:	Alan Robitaille	Jessica Maurer, J.D.
	Donna Mann	Donna Linley
	Diane Belanger	Bonnie Gagnon
	Jane Farmer	Monique Libby
	Eleanor Warren	Katie Kondrat
	Mary Campbell	

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to the 120 survivors who were willing to speak about some of the most personal events of their lives. Each woman's story, woven together into collective experience, helps employers to fashion a new understanding of support, assistance, and greater safety.

## References

- U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2005). *Family violence statistics including statistics on strangers and acquaintances* (NJC 207846). Washington, D.C.: Retrieved October 1, 2005, from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/fvs.pdf>.
- Bond, J., Thompson, C., Galinsky, E., & Prottas, D. (2002). *Highlights of the national study of the changing workforce: Executive summary*. Families and Work Institute. Retrieved October 1, 2005 from <http://familiesandwork.org/index.asp?PageAction> .
- Bondi, M. (2002). *Domestic Violence and the workplace*. Partnership for Prevention. Retrieved October 1, 2005 from [http://www.prevent.org/publications/Domestic\\_Violence\\_and\\_the\\_Workplace.pdf](http://www.prevent.org/publications/Domestic_Violence_and_the_Workplace.pdf).
- Braverman, M. (1999). *Preventing workplace violence: A guide to employers and practioners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Collins, K., Schoen, C., Joseph, S., Duchon, L. Simantov, E. & Yellowitz, M. (1999). *Health concerns across a woman's lifespan: The Commonwealth Fund 1998 Survey of Women's Health*.
- Davies, J. (1998). *Safety planning with battered women: Complex lives/difficult choices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Family Violence Prevention Fund, (2005). *Strategic Employer Responses to Domestic Violence: What Innovative Employers Are Doing*. Retrieved October 2, 2005 from <http://endabuse.org/workplace/display.php?DocID=33004>.
- Friedman, L., & Couper, S. (1987). *The cost of domestic violence: A preliminary investigation of the financial cost of domestic violence*. New York: Victim Services Agency.
- Kaufer, S. & Mattman, J. (2001). *Workplace violence: An employer's guide*. Workplace Violence Research Institute. Retrieved October 5, 2005 from [http://www.workviolence.com/articles/employers\\_guide.htm](http://www.workviolence.com/articles/employers_guide.htm)
- Lim, K., Rioux, J., & Ridley, E. (2004). *Impact of Domestic Violence Offenders on Occupational Safety and Health: A Pilot Study*. Maine Department of Labor/Family Crisis Services. Retrieved October 5 from <http://mainegov-images.informe.org/labor/bls/publications/domesticoffendersreport.pdf>
- Lyon, E. (2002). *Welfare and domestic violence against women: Lessons from Research*. National Electronic Network on Violence Against Women. Retrieved October 3, 2005 from [http://www.vawnet.org/DomesticViolence/Research/VAWnetDocs/AR\\_Welfare2.pdf](http://www.vawnet.org/DomesticViolence/Research/VAWnetDocs/AR_Welfare2.pdf)



- National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (2003). *Work-Related Roadway Crashes: Challenges and Opportunities for Prevention*. Retrieved October 7, 2005 at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2003-119/2003-119d.html#four>
- Raphael, J. (1995). Domestic violence: Telling the untold welfare-to-work story. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from [http://www.ssw.umich.edu/trapped/pubs\\_untold.pdf](http://www.ssw.umich.edu/trapped/pubs_untold.pdf)
- Richards, C. Abuse victims, know your rights. (2005, March 9). *Chicago Sun –Times*. Retrieved October 8, 2005 from <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/AbuseVictimsKnowYourRights.pdf>
- Riger, S., Ahrens, A., Blickenstaff, A., & Camacho, J. (1999). *Obstacles to employment of women with abusive partners: A summary of select interview data*. Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago. Retrieved October 4, 2005 from <http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/gci/publications/working%20papers/pdf/Obstacles%20to%20employment%20of%20women.pdf>
- Shreve, M. (2004). Employer response important in dealing with domestic abuse: States enact rules to aid victims. *Business Insurance*. Retrieved October 9, 2005 from <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/EmployerResponseImportantDealing.pdf>
- Swanberg, J. & Logan, T.K. (2005). Domestic violence and employment: A qualitative study. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 10, 3-17.
- Tolman, R. & Raphael, J. (2000). A review of research on welfare and domestic violence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56, 655.
- Urban, B. (2004). *Evaluation report: Harman International domestic violence prevention project*. Family Violence Prevention Fund, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from <http://endabuse.org/field/HarmanReport/pdf>
- Will a Restraining Order Protect a Person from Abuse? (2004, January 21). Police Magazine, Torrance, CA.

## **In Their Own Words: Survivor Stories**

*Survivors were asked at the conclusion of each interview if they wanted to share a written story to be included in the report. The following are three stories submitted by women willing to share their experiences. Specific information that could identify these survivors has been removed or altered to protect them.*

### **“Holly’s Story”**

He was so cute, and seemed so generous and nice. That’s what they want you to think. I remember the first time it started I was in such shock that leaving him was so far in the back of my mind that it took two years for it to resurface and for me to take action. I had passed a slow driver and I got hit, not slapped, not punched, just hit in the face. He hit me while I was driving; now if that wasn’t bad enough he continued to yell at me for passing someone. We all know that passing a slow driver is something people like him do all the time; I didn’t understand what was so wrong with what I did. Unfortunately, that’s the biggest question when you are in a relationship like this: “What did I do?”

He would start to manipulate my mind from that point on, telling me that nobody else would ever want to be with me, and that no one loved me the way that he did (boy, was he ever right, no one has ever treated me like that since). I felt like I couldn’t leave him, if I did, I would be hunted and killed, and if he didn’t get that drastic, I certainly would not find another man to love me.

I wasn’t allowed to talk to my family much, and whether he was around or not, I feared the things that I would say, I had to watch every word that came out, because if it was something that he did not like, he remembered that and would use it against me at his earliest convenience.

I was scared at work, at home, there was nowhere I felt safe. I had no friends, and my family was all but scared for me, and pretty much stayed away from me, even though I lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment (with him) above my own parents, they even stayed out of my life. Anytime that I got a phone call he would stand right there, and if I tried to keep it private I would be followed, or dragged back into the room he was in. He had his friends monitor me while in High School, and when I graduated and started working immediately, he kept as good a tab on me as he could.

I would get screamed at, hit, or somehow punished for almost anything, even if it was as simple as not saying something the way he wanted. I was not allowed on the Internet without his permission, and if the phone was busy when he tried to call it was instant anger and he took it out on me when he could. There was a time when dinner wasn’t tasty enough for him, so after he dropped me to the floor he flipped the kitchen table over and dropped it directly on top of me.

In public he had to be more subtle about his control, but he had it, fully. If someone I knew said Hi, I wasn’t allowed to talk back, and if I did I would get the worst looks, and as if it was the only thing he was thinking, I got punished when we got home. I always feared coming home from work. I always wanted to work late, but at the same time, knew I would get punished for that. There were times that he felt like taking the aggression out on our two cats. I loved those

cats, and there were other times that I would throw myself in the way, so that he would take it out on me instead of my cats.

For most of our relationship he worked the 3<sup>rd</sup> shift, and when I got home from work, I would have to make dinner, then wake him up, then make sure he left on time, and of course, if he was late, it was my fault, especially if he was late because he was abusing me. There were times when he would have a night off, and instead of letting me sleep so I could go to work, he would pull the mattress out from underneath and drag it across the room so that I had to stay up long enough to put it all back (queen sized bed, big mattress) and by then it was not worth it because we were fighting and I was so far from tired I wouldn't go to bed, and that had a horrible impact on my work performance.

There were some peaceful days, the only problem is, I say peaceful meaning that there was not physical abuse going on. There was still always a fear that he could explode and hit me at any time, for anything. Maybe even for no reason at all. We did a lot of spur of the moment camping and such. I think that being out of the house was a little better for him, still was not a remedy though.

He cheated on me twice, one excuse was drugs (which I pleaded for him not to do), and the other one was a friend pretty much forced him, and then his friend tried to lie for him, but I already know everything. At this point I had already tried to leave him twice, and every time it was just begging and begging for me to stay because he needed me, not because he loved me, or because he was sorry, but because he needed me, and unfortunately, someone who is being abused, simply wants to be needed. I finally decided I deserved better and that I needed to get away.

I told him I was leaving, he didn't believe me, and he pleaded, but this time I was adamant, I was out of there. I asked my parents if I could move back in (downstairs), and of course they helped me to move my stuff back down and that's where I stayed for a little while. While I stayed there he would often bring notes down and push them under my door. There was one time that I snuck back up to see him because he said he had birthday presents for me, and he would not bring them down to me, but would only give them to me if I came up, so out of curiosity I went up. They were the most thoughtful and beautiful gifts I'd ever seen. Unfortunately I could not appreciate them because he had never bought me anything before, and only after all this did he ever think of me in a decent manner.

When I went back to work the next week things were hectic. He called several times a day, he had his friends, and even his stepfather calling me to try and convince me to go back. He would e-mail me messages to come back to him. When we would talk it would be mostly arguments and sometimes I would have to raise my voice for him to understand. My boss came to me and asked what was going on and I told him that I was in the middle of a break-up with an abusive boyfriend and that I was sorry. The only thing that he advised was that I could no longer answer that phone, and then he forced me to go to the court to file a "Protection from Abuse". I did, I felt really uncomfortable, especially since I didn't do it on my own. I am embarrassed to this day that I did not file charges on him, and get him put in jail. His latest girlfriend has since, but then she wrote a letter to the court saying that she wants contact with him, which is what a manipulated girl will do. Glad that wasn't me.

It was really embarrassing at work the way that my boss handled it; he didn't have a grasp on what kind of situation this was, nor how to handle it in the workplace.

What was even more embarrassing was that before I started working for this office, I was working in a small office, with only a few people located there during the day. He was calling all the time to check up on me. Make sure that's where I was. There were times when we'd fight so bad and the things he said were horrible. The phrase "You're going to get it when you get home" was heard many times. I would go into such hysterics some days that my boss and co-boss had to shut me in a private room so that any public coming in would not see one of their employees like that. If my co-boss had not fought so hard to keep me, I would have lost my job, my benefits, everything. I even attended college through all of this, and although it was extremely difficult for me to work in groups, or participate in a class, for fear that he would find out I spoke with someone, I made it through, with relatively few encounters dealing with college.

I also feel that everyone should know that I now have medical problems that doctors can't even figure out. I blame it on this relationship. There was so much physical and mental stress that I developed a hiatal hernia, and some other stomach, stress related injuries. I can't take medication, because it doesn't help anything, I had some surgery to try and reduce the amount of stomach acid that would come up my esophagus and enter the hiatal hernia, instead of that, now the acid just boils in my stomach, and I get really sick at least once a week. I cannot relieve any sickness because the surgery has made it impossible for me to throw up. I can't even burp. It is really painful, and I know that I feel this way because of the abuse I endured. I just hope that more women can be like me, and get away from the situation before it ends up like all those cases you read about in the paper where the wife gets killed.

## **“Lynn’s Story”**

I was asked to share my story of domestic abuse and how it has affected me at work.

Where do you begin. No one grows up thinking ‘I want to be in an abusive relationship’ and it is so difficult to define abuse, especially in my situation. It creeps into a relationship; oftentimes it does not show its ugly mask for years and it comes in disguises such as blaming the other person or telling them that they are doing it because they love them or they deserve it. That is why it is so difficult to study or define abuse. It often is not until after being out of the relationship for years that the person actually even begins to see the abuse.

I married later in life. I married someone of the same religion, similar backgrounds. I dated for almost two years before I married. As far as I was concerned I did all the right things. I married for love and saw no signs of abuse for a while; when they crept into our relationship like a pervasive virus I had difficulty identifying it. I convinced myself I had the perfect marriage and to many it appeared that way. I could not understand why I felt so unhappy, sad, and empty. I worked real hard at our relationship but I felt no intimacy and at times I felt crazy. When I addressed this I was told I expected too much and I believed it and pushed my disappointment and resentment in deeper. I perfected denial and bought into the story of this perfect love and marriage, because in abusive relationships there is control with a story; for me it was the romantic, how we were meant to be together, how special this all was, the ‘death until you die’. It became the abusive death that was making me die.

I was never punched, physically, or physically assaulted in my marriage although at times I wish I was. Those assaults you can see and they heal. The abuse I tolerated was emotional, psychological, and spiritual. There are defining moments in abusive relationships, those times when you know right where you were, just like when President Kennedy died. The moments of trauma that get glossed over by the cycle of abuse with the promises and the buying into the love story. One defining moment...I was at my kitchen table crying, sobbing, saying I have a beautiful house and great kids but I was so sad and lonely. I felt like I was his mother. I did not feel intimate no matter how hard I tried. He coldly told me I needed help. It was not in a supportive way but as though I was nuts. It was the second time in our marriage that I believed it was my fault, it was me.

I felt this even though my husband had had multiple sexual encounters with other women during our marriage, even though I answered the phone one day when a young woman called looking for him, even when he finally admitted that he had been having sex with people he met on line. I thought I would sweep my heart off the floor, but still thought perhaps I could save my marriage. I went to an awful marriage therapist who, after this crisis, actually advised me to go home and find out what my husband liked sexually. I thought he knew best so that’s what I did. Nothing I have ever seen has chilled me to the depth of my bones like what I experienced that weekend. That Monday we went to the therapist and I said I was leaving.

I was very afraid what effect divorce would have on my children and it has been huge. I chose to get out of a long-term pathological and abusive relationship and teach my children a healthier way of living. My ex has been allowed to hurt me financially through the divorce and after five years separated and three years divorced the abuse continues. Since my ex could no longer

control me he has manipulated a series of challenging legal consequences. My income decreased 85% in the divorce. There is constant friction and crisis which makes employment difficult. One day my daughter came to my office, trying to be somewhere where her father couldn't find her. She had been trying to avoid going with him since he had tried to "smack her in the face" as she put it, and then told her he would "smack her from one room to another" if she didn't do what he said. I know that hitting a child in the face takes a high degree of anger and a determination to hurt that child. Telling a child that you will hit them harder or smack them into the next room is not discipline; it teaches children to fear their parent and that violence is all right.

Shortly after, my ex walked into my office after coming into the building through a back door and demanded my daughter go with him. I was working with a client at the time. I told him he could not be there and asked him to leave. He refused. He turned to my daughter and told her to "wipe that smirk off her face" and said, "You will go with me next time." I told him if he didn't leave I would call someone. He slowly turned toward me, posturing his body. He removed his sunglasses and said, "Call someone." Then he walked out. I met with my boss, who advised me to talk to the police and said we needed to coordinate a plan to prevent this from happening in the future. My ex-husband had not only put me and my daughter at risk but all of my co-workers and clients as well. As a result, we locked the back door and only used the main entrance of the building. On the advice of the police I went to court to get a restraining order and I absolutely could not believe it when the judge would not grant me one. I expressed fear about the situation; he stated that my ex-husband's behavior was inappropriate but that he did not threaten me or hit me. The judge lectured me in front of my daughter and said that discipline means to teach. I absolutely shut down and thought 'he has to hit me, it would not take much.' I had spent sooooo much energy setting boundaries and trying to avoid being hit. But because he did not punch me in the face, break my bones, crack my ribs then it is not abuse. The fear is no less when someone puffs up their body, refuses to leave and intimidates you.

As far as work, I was not silent. I talked with my boss, his boss, someone from the Board of Directors, and the police. I was not silent. Although people addressed the issue there was no support and my future opportunities were robbed. My focus at work was affected. Every time anyone entered a side door a bubble of fear erupted in me. I never felt safe there again. I missed two job interviews due to court dates and I cannot even begin to calculate the hours of work lost to responding to a crisis and legal maneuvers.

I see bumper stickers every day that say, "There is no excuse for domestic abuse." And there is...it is everywhere, in the police department, the workplace, the courts, the community, and in you and me. I know people in the community who are aware that my ex-husband is a walking time bomb. My boss has witnessed my ex-husband posturing himself at community meetings and has been silent...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. There is an attorney who will represent him and foster and fight for every crisis my ex creates...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. A judge who tells you that hitting and threats are discipline...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. A judge who states that coming into your workplace through a back door putting everyone at risk is inappropriate but not abuse...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. A child who hides and cries out of fear without an adult to protect her...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. A therapist who tells you to find out what a sex addict likes sexually and creates a situation where you are further abused...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. Lawyers who tell you you don't

make enough money to pay for them...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. Volunteer lawyers who tell you make too much money to get representation...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse. Lawyers and police who tell you that it is a custody or domestic issue, not abuse...there *is* an excuse for domestic abuse.

There are lots of excuses for domestic abuse. People cover their ears, close their eyes, shut their mouths, turn their backs, hearts, souls and arms to families suffering and trying to get help from domestic abuse. People will label it as anything but...domestic abuse.

## **“Mary’s Story”**

I was a victim of domestic violence. My partner was verbally and emotionally abusive. It caused me to get depressed and after a while it became physically violent. My partner would call my work and say they were my family. The cops were called. My partner violated the bail conditions. I had to have cops come by my work because my partner would come to my work or say he would and they parked across the street of my work and had people check up on me. I spent one year of my life like this because I didn’t dare to leave. Finally I did. I had to get a PFA [protection from abuse order] and PFH [protection from harassment order].

My son’s father was abusive to us both. I had to leave work, go in late, and take days off. I was afraid of him. He told me he would put a hammer in my skull if I tried to keep his son away. DHS [Department of Human Services] had to get involved. I would get calls at work that upset me. I would break down. My life was changed due to this and my son and I are still affected by this four and a half years later.