

# Intimate Partner Violence & the Workplace: Results of a Saskatchewan Study

## Executive Summary





## About PATHS

The Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS) is the member association for 21 agencies that provide intimate partner violence (IPV) services across Saskatchewan. Our members are women's shelters (also known as domestic violence shelters, safe shelters, transition houses, or interval houses), second stage shelters, and counselling centres that offer counselling and support to survivors of IPV. **Our member agencies work on a daily basis with individuals who have experienced violence, those who perpetrate it, and children who have been exposed to it.** PATHS has worked on issues related to violence against women and supported our member agencies for over 30 years. **PATHS' vision is a society free from violence. PATHS' mission is to collaborate with PATHS members and to provide research, program development, awareness, and education on interpersonal violence to all.**

## About the Project

*Intimate Partner Violence and the Workplace* is a 3-year project (2015-2018), funded by Status of Women Canada. A Steering Committee comprised of representatives from project partners, including the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) and Saskatchewan Government and General Employee's Union (SGEU), members from unions, crown corporations, non-profit organizations, government, policing, and survivors of violence helped guide the process.

**"Saskatchewan has the highest rates of police-reported interpersonal and domestic violence of all provinces across all relationships. This affects the wellbeing of Saskatchewan citizens, businesses and communities and generates high costs to human service systems, workplaces, individuals and families."**

(Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice, 2018).

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## Previous Research

Zhang, Hoddenbagh, McDonald, & Scrim (2012) estimated the **total economic cost of spousal violence in Canada to be \$7.4 billion in 2009, equivalent to \$8.7 billion in 2018**. The total losses to employers totaled \$77.9 million (equivalent to \$91.2 million in 2018). Losses to employers included lost outputs, lost productivity due to tardiness and distraction, and administrative costs. Further costs not included in the \$77.9 million estimate include recruitment and retraining costs when employees quit or are fired for reasons relating to intimate partner violence (IPV).

Knowledge on the impact of IPV in workplaces has vastly increased in recent years, largely due to the work of the labour movement. **The present study builds on *Can Work Be Safe When Home Isn't?*, a pan-Canadian survey** conducted by the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC) at Western University and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), **which demonstrated that IPV not only impacts victims in their workplaces, but affects their coworkers**, as well (Wathen et al., 2014). This research is the second survey regarding the impact of IPV in workplaces to be completed in Canada and the first to focus on the specific impact—and possible solutions—in the province of Saskatchewan. This research also included focus groups and interviews with survivors, workers, managers, union employees, and human resources professionals and is one of few qualitative studies to gather information on the impact of IPV in the workplace—and strategies for mitigating this impact.

## Legislation

In recent years, changes to protect and support survivors of IPV have been enacted in policy and legislation in Canada and abroad. Currently, legislation allowing workplace leaves for employees experiencing IPV are in place in Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. Manitoba allows for up to ten days leave (5 paid or sick days used and another 5 unpaid) as well as a 17-week continuous unpaid leave. Ontario's legislation is similar, providing ten days of leave (5 of them paid) plus an unpaid leave of 15 weeks. Legislation in both Alberta and Saskatchewan allows workers to take up to 10 unpaid days off, used either continuously or intermittently. Prince Edward Island's legislation offers up to ten days off, with three of the days being paid. Employees in Quebec are entitled take an unpaid leave of up to 26 weeks, with up to two of the days paid.

Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* states that "if an employer becomes aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that domestic violence that would likely expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker." This legislation regards domestic violence in the workplace as a kind of workplace violence and requires employers to have policies on workplace violence, develop a program to implement the policy, and to provide workers with information regarding the policy.

## Key Study Findings

Data contained in this report was obtained through an online survey, focus groups, and interviews conducted in Saskatchewan between April 2016 and January 2017. **50% of Saskatchewan survey respondents reported experiencing abuse compared to 33% in pan-Canadian study. 83% of people experiencing IPV said that the abuse impacted them at work.** A theme repeated throughout this research was the lack of awareness in workplaces. **Workers cited a lack of awareness about the dynamics and signs of IPV, how to respond, and the policies at their workplaces.** Troublingly, while 49% of survey respondents said that they had known or suspected a coworker was experiencing IPV, only 13% had reported it. **12% of survey respondents who reported that they had been impacted at work stated that they had lost a job as a result of the abuse.**

*I took a lot of leave. I was taking a lot of leave. Not once was I ever asked, "Hey are you okay?" I never had any kind of support for that. Nobody asked me directly, "Is there something else going on? Can we help you with it?" None of that. I was burning through sick leave and taking leave without pay. Nobody even addressed it.*

**Focus group and interview data resulted in four themes, with sub-themes under each:**

### **Impact of Intimate Partner Violence in the Workplace on Survivors**

- **Experiences of IPV in the Workplace** (including experiences of stalking and harassment at the workplace, threats of injury or harm at the workplace, physical injury, and financial challenges).
- **Work Challenges & Experiences** (additional challenges in the workplace, impacts to coworker relationships, work performance, continuing to work despite experiencing IPV, and work as helpful).

### **Interventions in the Workplace**

- **Workplace Response** included examples of when coworkers and managers noticed or did not notice that a worker was experiencing IPV, helpful and unhelpful responses.
- **Workplace Policies and Awareness** included the accessibility of resources, helpful workplace policies and accommodations, and participants' awareness of IPV policies in their own workplaces.

### **Importance of Training on Intimate Partner Violence and the Workplace**

- **Changing Workplace Culture** to reduce stigma about speaking out.
- **Increasing Awareness about IPV** and ideas for training and responses in the workplace.

### **Suggestions for Intimate Partner Violence Policies for Workplaces**

- **Legislation** to protect jobs of workers experiencing IPV; supports for all Saskatchewan workers; workplace leaves.
- **Safety precautions in the workplace;** training on IPV is necessary for all managers and employees.
- **Importance of Interventions and Safety Plans** on an individualized, case-by-case basis; and the importance of listening to survivors.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Government of Canada include:

- Develop and implement a national action plan on violence against women which would include preventative education and increased funding for services, especially in rural and remote communities.
- Implement paid IPV leave for all Canadian workers.

### Recommendations for the Government of Saskatchewan include:

- Develop and implement a provincial strategy on intimate partner violence, focused on coordination of services and preventative education.
- Incorporate elements of Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act*, which states that: "if an employer is aware or ought to be aware that domestic violence that is likely to expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer must take every reasonable precaution to protect the worker" (2009, p. i).
- Follow the lead of Manitoba and other provinces by allowing paid days off for survivors of IPV.
- Provide all workers in Saskatchewan with paid sick time.
- Amend the definition of interpersonal violence in *The Victims of Interpersonal Violence Act* to include psychological or emotional abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from IPV.
- Amend *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* to state that no employer shall take discriminatory action against an employee because of absence related to IPV.
- Add experience of IPV to *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code's* list of grounds on which discrimination is prohibited.
- Make changes to the Victims Compensation Program to allow survivors of IPV to access counselling in a timely fashion, at no cost.
- Provide adequate and consistent funding for services for survivors and perpetrators of IPV across Saskatchewan.

### Recommendations for Workplaces include:

- Foster a supportive workplace culture.
- Provide mandatory training to all employees on the impact of IPV and how to respond.
- Develop a policy explaining what accommodations and supports are available to staff members who are experiencing IPV.
- Employees must be assured that coming forward about their experience of IPV will not result in negative repercussions at work, including job loss.
- Accommodations must be made for survivors who need to access services related to IPV during their scheduled work time.
- Work with survivors to develop and implement a workplace safety plan. The survivor must be consulted on all decisions concerning their safety plan.
- Review workplace security measures.
- Require perpetrators of IPV to participate in a treatment program as a condition of continued employment.
- Accommodations should be made when possible to allow perpetrators to arrange their work schedule to allow for participation in violence treatment programs.
- Implement a policy stating that disciplinary action can be taken against employees who use workplace resources and work time to stalk, harass, or abuse their current or former partners.
- Ensure that a sufficient amount of counselling is covered by employee health benefit programs.



