

## Intimate Partner Abuse Perpetrated by Employees

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This exploratory study examined partner abuse perpetration in the context of employment. Qualitative and quantitative data from 29 men convicted of partner abuse were gathered through focus groups and a brief survey. Men attributed absences, reduced productivity, and errors to their perpetration of abuse and described harassing their victims using employers' phones, vehicles, e-mails and by enlisting coworkers. Findings also suggest that zero-tolerance policies may be ineffective and that employers may benefit from partner abuse training. For example, participants reported that their employers offered them alcohol-abuse services instead of batterer intervention, despite the fact that substance abuse was not a factor in all of the cases. These findings need to be tested through a larger scale, empirical investigation.

Between 1992 and 1998, a total of 210 workers in the United States were killed on the job by an intimate partner, and it is estimated that roughly 18,700 nonfatal assaults by intimate partners are perpetrated in the workplace every year (Duhart, 2001; Sygnatur & Toscano, 2000). Given that roughly 25% of women and 8% of men in the United States experience intimate partner violence during their lifetimes, the frequency of these assaults in the workplace is not unexpected (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Since the mid-1990s, the U.S. business community has concerned itself with the social, criminal, and public health problems presented by partner violence. Largely, the corporate response to intimate partner violence has focused on victims. Policies designed to protect victims' confidentiality, assist them, or ensure their safety in the workplace have been developed and in two cases evaluated with positive results (Isaac, 1997; Urban & Bennett, 1999).

There are several reasons why companies are motivated to address the issue of partner violence experienced by their employees. Intimate partner violence

victimization of women costs U.S. businesses an estimated \$727.8 million each year in lost productivity, and, increasingly, senior management is becoming aware of the loss (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). During a recent survey of Fortune 1,000 senior executives, 41% indicated that they believe domestic violence substantially affects profits (RoperASW, 2002). The proportion of these executives who say that they are personally aware of employees in their organizations who have been victims of domestic violence has increased by 16 percentage points during the past 8 years, from 40% in 1994 to 56% in 2002 (RoperASW, 2002). It is not surprising, then, that the number of corporate members of national groups such as the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence has increased dramatically in recent years (K. Wells, personal communication, April 21, 2003).

The proportion of U.S. workers who abuse intimates and the proportion of U.S. businesses that employ abusive workers are unknown. The cost of employing batterers remains similarly uninvestigated. However, both the humanistic and profit concerns of employing *victims* of violence have generated significant involvement in violence prevention among corporate leaders such as American Express, CIGNA, Verizon Communications, Kraft Foods, Mary Kay Inc., State Farm Insurance Companies, and others (Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, 2002). Investigating and subsequently informing the business community about *perpetrators* of intimate partner violence would enhance existing efforts. Because many organizations have already begun the process of drafting domestic violence policies and victimization prevention programs, the added cost of extending existing policies, protocols, or assistance programming to those who abuse will be minimal.

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Additionally, the potential benefit of providing abusers with rehabilitative resources may have other indirect effects. It has been suggested that family violence perpetrators and perpetrators of workplace aggression may share some risk factors for abuse (Barling, 1996). Although the overlap between the two types of aggressors is unknown, it is possible that a reduction in workplace aggression may be observed in companies in which domestic safety becomes a focus.

From a liability perspective, experts disagree about employers' responsibility to intervene with employees who perpetrate violence that generally occurs off-site. Some question whether employers have a right to take action against employees for criminal behavior during nonworking hours and point out the legal constraints on conducting criminal background checks on job candidates (Bush & O'Shea, 1996). Counterbalancing these concerns is the fact that employers have been held liable in cases in which they retain batterers who reoffend (Johnson & Gardner, 1999), and that employers conceivably could be found liable if they fail to warn authorities when they have prior knowledge about the commission of a crime.

In the absence of existing literature on this topic, we conducted a small-scale, exploratory study to generate hypotheses about batterers and the workplace for future investigation. Specifically, the four

primary research questions of this study were as follows: (a) Does perpetrating partner abuse affect employee productivity? (b) In what ways might employees who batter use workplace resources to perpetuate abuse? (c) How might employers respond to employees who are convicted of intimate partner abuse? (d) Which workplace policies and interventions might be effective at inhibiting abuse perpetration?

## Method

### Participants

The sample of participants included 29 employed men attending Massachusetts certified batterer intervention programs as the result of a criminal offense involving the abuse of an intimate partner. At the time of recruitment, the participants had been attending weekly batterer intervention counseling groups on a nonvoluntary basis for 8 to 38 weeks. Demographically, the participants were typical of clients in Massachusetts certified batterer intervention programs (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2002). The demographic characteristics of batterers in intervention programs in Massachusetts and of this sample are presented in Table 1.

### Data Collection and Response Rate

The qualitative data that were the primary focus of this analysis were collected through four focus groups that

Table 1  
*Selected Participant Demographics (N = 29)*

Demographic characteristic	Massachusetts batterer clients: Proportion (count) (N = 8,834)	Sample: Proportion (count) (N = 29)
Mean age in years (SD)	33 (1)	33 (7.7)
Race		
White	51% (4,505)	59% (17)
Black	24% (2,120)	17% (5)
Hispanic	19% (1,678)	17% (5)
Cambodian	2% (178)	4% (1)
Missing	4% (353)	0% (0)
Occupation		
Auto body repair	—	3% (1)
Clothing sales	—	3% (1)
Construction foreman	—	7% (2)
Driver (truck or limo)	—	17% (5)
Food preparation	—	10% (3)
Mail carrier	—	3% (1)
Manager/corporate	—	17% (5)
Shipping/machine operations	—	28% (8)
Teacher	—	3% (1)
Unknown	—	7% (2)

*Note.* Dashes indicate data not collected on occupation.

shared an identical semistructured format based on a discussion guide. Supplementary quantitative data were collected through a short survey that was distributed at the beginning of each focus group. Focus group methods offered several advantages for the purpose of this investigation, including the promotion of self-disclosure around sensitive topics (Deane & Degner, 1997), enhancing the validity of data collected (Cirgin Ellett & Beausang, 2001), the opportunity to repeat and refine questions aloud for respondents who may have low literacy levels, and cost-effectiveness.

Four Massachusetts certified batterer intervention programs were selected as recruitment sites out of 22 possible programs, on the basis of their geographic diversity and the ethnic diversity of their clients. Participants in the four focus groups were recruited through flyers distributed during batterer intervention group sessions by program counselors. One week of free counseling at the respective batterer intervention programs (a value of \$10–\$25) was advertised as compensation in exchange for participation in the focus groups. Of the 85 batterer intervention clients who were given the recruiting materials by program counselors, 29 chose to participate (34%).

Each focus group administered informed consent, was conducted in English, lasted approximately 2 hr, and was audiotaped. The audiotapes were later transcribed.

### Instruments

The 21-item quantitative survey collected demographic information, the number of jobs held in the past 5 years, current occupation, termination history, and the perceived impact of intimate partner abuse perpetration on employment history (see Table 2). These questions were presented in multiple-choice format, with the exception of 8, which required a write-in response. Two additional sets of questions on the quantitative survey asked whether participants had used workplace resources to abuse victims (7 questions)

or had missed work time as a result of intimate partner abuse perpetration (5 questions). These questions were presented in the form of checklists. Participants were instructed to endorse the behaviors in which they had ever engaged. Face and construct validity of the question sets were judged to be high by a panel of seven experts that included partner violence specialists and human resource professionals. The qualitative data were collected through a discussion guide comprised of open-ended questions also designed by the expert panel as a standard set of procedures. Sample questions for the qualitative data collection include: "How has your abusive behavior affected your time at work?" and "What, if anything, could an employer do to prevent batterers from abusing their partners?"

### Analytic Strategy

Means and frequencies were calculated from the quantitative survey data using STATA. The qualitative data were analyzed in four phases by two independent raters, which is a standard approach to organizing and interpreting focus group data (Morgan, 1997). These four phases were operationalized as follows: (a) Each of the four focus group transcripts was read to get a "sense of the whole" (Feldman, 1994), (b) 336 chunks of text were identified and coded into four primary categories that reflected the research questions of interest, (c) coded chunks of text were further subcoded for finer detail, and (d) the interrater agreement was calculated and coding discrepancies were resolved through consensus. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a "chunk of text" may be a word, clause, sentence, or paragraph. For the purposes of this analysis, chunks were words, sentences, or interchanges between focus group members that provided information about one of the four research questions of interest pertaining to (a) worker productivity, (b) using workplace resources to harm victims, (c) employers' response to employees who batter, and (d) workplace interventions with employees who batter. While each chunk was eligible for multiple codes, as some comments from focus group participants were relevant to more than one research question, only 7 chunks required double coding.

Of the 336 chunks of text, roughly 30% pertained to worker productivity, 25% pertained to using workplace resources to harm victims, 30% pertained to employers' response to batterers, and 15% pertained to workplace interventions. Within each of these four primary code categories, chunks of text were further subcoded to organize the information contained within each. For example, data about worker productivity received one subcode if it pertained to lost work time, another subcode if it pertained to being distracted while at work, and another subcode if it pertained to mistakes made on the job because of abuse perpetration. Other subcodes applied in other categories included (e) use of tangible resources such as phones, computers, or vehicles; (f) use of coworkers (human resources) to monitor victims; (g) employer response was supportive of battering; (h) employer response did not support battering; (i) reactions to posters designed to prevent abuse; and (j) reactions to other workplace interventions, policies, or sanctions.

The intercoder reliability relative to the four primary codes was calculated according to the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994): number of agreements /  $\Sigma$  number of agreements + number of disagreements. The intercoder reliability for the four focus group texts was 96%,

Table 2  
*Employment History and Behaviors of Abusers*  
(*N* = 29)

Variable	Proportion (count)
Ever been fired from a job	48% (14)
Ever denied a job because of history of intimate abuse perpetration	14% (4)
Ever asked to quit a job because of intimate abuse perpetration	3% (1)
Ever brought a weapon to work	7% (2)
Ever been in an intimate relationship with a coworker	38% (11)
Ever faced charges of sexual harassment in the workplace	0% (0)
Ever faced any other type of complaint regarding behavior in the workplace	12% (3)
Employer knew that abuser was subject to a restraining order	74% (20)
Told someone at work about the abuse perpetrated against partner	44% (12)

85%, 90%, and 91%, respectively, and the overall reliability of the coding was 91%.

## Results

Results are organized into four categories corresponding to the four primary research questions that drove both the qualitative and quantitative data collection.

### *Workplace Productivity*

One theme that clearly emerged from the data was that a portion of these workers' absenteeism and reduced productivity is attributable to abuse perpetration. From the quantitative survey, it was determined that 75% of participants had taken at least 1 day off of work because of their intimate partner violence perpetration in the past year (see Table 3). During the focus groups, participants indicated that while they had never missed an entire workday because of their abuse, they generally missed between 20 and 25 hr per month for a period of several months as a direct result of their violence perpetration. For example, these participants lost work time to meet with their probation officer or attend batterer intervention counseling sessions. During the focus groups, almost all of the participants revealed that they had each missed approximately 7 business days total for court activities as a result of their abuse. Further, during the focus groups several participants said that they had been incarcerated for periods that ranged from 1 night to 6 months and had their job position "held" for them while they were in jail or prison.

Table 3  
*Productivity Among Employees Convicted of Abusing an Intimate (N = 29)*

Variable	Proportion (count)
Been late to work because of your perpetration of intimate partner abuse	46% (13)
Left work early because of your perpetration of intimate partner abuse	39% (11)
Taken an entire day off of work to go to court or for other reasons related to your intimate partner abuse	75% (21)
Falsified an attendance record because of your intimate partner abuse	7% (2)
Took a break in the middle of the day (or a few hours off) because of your intimate partner abuse	18% (5)

During the focus groups, participants acknowledged that they had made mistakes at work, incurring cost to employers, as a result of preoccupation with their intimate partners or the consequences of their abusive behavior. Fear of going to prison, shame about their behavior, and depression at being separated from children were listed as reasons why participants found it difficult to concentrate on work. Six focus group participants provided specific examples of mistakes that they made at work due to their preoccupation with their own perpetration of abuse (see Table 4). Some of these mistakes are directly attributable to abuse perpetration, that is, resulted because of absences of the participant while he was in prison. Other mistakes were indirectly caused by the abuse perpetration, such as careless errors made because of a participant's distracted thinking. One participant reported that despite the fact he had not made any specific errors at work due to his abusive behavior, he felt that his abusive behavior impaired his ability to work effectively for several years: "Maybe like four years, I was like . . . operating on three cylinders every day. You know if I had been in a healthy relationship or in a healthy place I would have been working twice as fast."

### *Using Workplace Resources to Harm Victims*

In the focus groups, participants said that the time they spend at work is often consumed by long-distance "monitoring" of their victims. During the discussions, it became clear that almost every participant who had access to a company phone (approximately one third of the participants) used that phone to "check up on" their victims during the workday. Those who did not have access to a company phone said that they used cell or pay phones for this purpose. Two of the participants admitted that they used e-mail for the purpose of monitoring their victims (see Table 5). In response to probes from the facilitator, participants distinguished between phoning victims for nonabusive purposes and phoning to monitor victims' whereabouts:

I would call her to see if she's at home. How many times she would be on the phone calling whoever and how long she was on the phone with each person and how long it took her to answer the phone. I said "How come you were on the phone with your friends? Are they more important than me? Huh? [Expletive] your damn friends, huh?" I would use my [work] phone to do that probably about four times a day.

Several participants whose work involves driving admitted to using the company vehicle to stop at their victims' homes and check on them during the day,

Table 4  
*Job-Related Mistakes Attributed to Intimate Partner Abuse Perpetration*

Occupation	Description of mistake made as a result of preoccupation with abuse perpetration
Construction foreman	Construction on a house was delayed for 2 weeks while participant attended court dates for abuse perpetration.
Delivery person for a computer company	Participant was distracted while making deliveries and gave \$40,000 worth of supplies to the wrong customer. The employer was forced to schedule an additional day's worth of driving, pickup, and delivery in order to correct the mistake.
Auto mechanic	Put windshield-washer fluid in the radiator of a car.
Bagel shop clerk	Made multiple food order and cash register errors that caused customers to become angry and discontinue patronizing the business.
Truck driver	A coworker was forced to drive participant's truck 8 days in a row, without any days off, because the participant was in jail and unable to make deliveries. For 1 day, nobody did the participant's usual route and no deliveries were made to customers.
Tree removal specialist	While removing the top of a tree, the participant began "thinking about the whole [domestic violence] situation" and failed to follow safety procedures. The top of the tree almost landed on a coworker, which likely would have resulted in critical injury.

although only 2 participants responded to that question affirmatively on the quantitative survey (see Table 5). One participant stated that he had enlisted a coworker to check on a victim:

Because I was busy doing something, I said, "Why don't you go see if her car is still over there?" I did that on occasion, maybe three or four times a week. I don't know why [my coworker] did it. I just asked him to do it and he did it.

Table 5  
*Frequency of Controlling Behaviors Perpetrated Using Workplace Resources (N = 29)*

Variable	Proportion (count)
Use the phone at work in order to call victim and check up on her	25% (7)
Use the computer at work in order to send your victim e-mails	7% (2)
Used the company vehicle in order to stop off and visit victim (of those who had access to vehicle; <i>n</i> = 9)	22% (2)
Use equipment related to work in order to affect your victim (alter phone lines, bills, etc.)	11% (3)
Spread rumors about your victim at work	3% (1)
Expose your victim's wrongdoing to others with whom you both work	7% (2)
Had union or work-related friends check up on victim	3% (1)
Used company property (e.g., gun, knife, vehicle, staple gun, hammer) as a weapon	3% (1)
Used work connections to gain information about a person	7% (2)

*Employer Response to Employees Who Batter*

One aim of this study was to explore ways in which employers help prevent abuse perpetrated by their employees and ways in which they may collude with abusers or encourage their abuse. Almost all of the participants indicated that they either chose to admit their arrest for intimate partner abuse to their supervisors or were forced to do so due to incarceration. On the quantitative survey, 74% of the participants indicated that their employer was told or found out about their most recent offense (see Table 2). The few who were able to conceal their status as violent offenders worked in finance or computers and had more autonomy than their counterparts. These workers reported that they were able to "phone in a personal day" when they were arrested without having to provide further details.

Employees who told their supervisors about their violence perpetration reported that their supervisors were sympathetic to them and were concerned about their welfare. In the overwhelming majority of cases, participants' supervisors offered them paid or unpaid leave for court dates that did not affect allotted per-

sonal or vacation time. Most participants were assured of job stability by their supervisors, even if they were sentenced to serve up to 6 months in prison. Three of the participants indicated that their supervisors had personally posted bail when they were arrested: "Yeah, my supervisor knows [about my violence]. I told him. Because we're pretty close. When I went to jail, I got out—he was always there. Even bailing me out a couple of times, you know." Three other participants, however, disclosed that their supervisors refused to post bail or grant time off when asked. Two of the participants were fired as a direct result of their intimate partner violence offense.

Several of the participants revealed that their supervisors did confront them when they were arrested and reproached them for their behavior; however, the reproaches did not touch on the violence perpetrated. Rather, supervisors sternly counseled participants to refrain from substance abuse and in two cases threatened them with a loss of employment if they began drinking again.

Only 1 participant was able to recall any comments made by supervisors that expressed support for his abuse victim: "He told me that my partner was a nice girl and asked me why I would do that to her." Some employers blamed or expressed antipathy toward victims:

My boss knew what was going on [that I was being violent] and you know he'd be like, "alright, well you know, if I was you I would be aggravated with her too."

Everyone knew in my life [that I was being violent]. The whole restaurant wanted to support me. They pretty much got me out of it [criminal charges]. They said she probably got what she deserved. That was the consensus from everybody, and I pretty much believed that in the beginning.

I told [my supervisors] what happened and they were more concerned about me losing my driving license and not having a driver for their company. They didn't care much about, you know, the abuse.

### *Preventing the Perpetration of Abuse Through Worksite Intervention*

During the focus groups, participants were asked to provide comments on workplace policies and interventions designed to reduce the perpetration of intimate partner violence that either penalize or provide services to the abuser. The participants in these focus groups were not in agreement with regard to whether zero-tolerance policies, similar to those that have been implemented in some companies to prevent sexual harassment, would be effective at preventing intimate partner violence perpetration. A typ-

ical zero-tolerance for battering policy entails terminating employees who are convicted of assaulting an intimate partner, whether the offense takes place on-site or elsewhere. On the one hand, the majority of participants agreed that they might "think twice" about perpetrating violence if they knew that they could lose their job as a result. On the other hand, several pointed to the fact that the threat of going to jail (and subsequently losing one's job) is not enough to deter many abusers, so a workplace policy would be unlikely to provide any additional protection for victims. Moreover, they argued that firing employees because of their violence perpetration meant only that they would find employment elsewhere and remain fundamentally unchanged as individuals. Some participants expressed a concern that zero-tolerance policies would endanger victims:

Zero tolerance could make it worse for the people at home. It might actually push you further . . . I mean, yeah, I think it would make you think about it [whether or not one should be violent], but it might not always be in the positive way.

He's gonna be really mad that he got fired from his job. He's gonna look at it like it was because of her. He's gonna be out of his mind and he's going to take it out on her.

A few participants suggested a possible "middle-ground" policy such as suspension for the first offense and termination if the employee in question does not participate in counseling/intervention.

Participants were more enthusiastic about policies that would (a) protect their confidentiality and (b) provide them with information and referrals for counseling intervention. Most opined that providing batterers with education about what counts as abuse, information about alternatives to violence, and the opportunity to participate in counseling that emphasizes victim safety while encouraging self-reflection, would be of benefit. They referred to workplace policies that provide substance abusers with the opportunity to participate in counseling—before facing the threat of termination—as a precedent for a "treatment-oriented" policy:

I would have gone to counseling [if it had been offered through my workplace]. I mean, if you go and tell your buddy, then they don't care. You need to open up to someone who is willing to give you the help. If you know that person is there, of course you would go, you know.

Many participants had suggestions about prevention-oriented policies. On the quantitative survey, only 14% ( $n = 4$ ) of the participants indicated that they were informed that their workplaces had domes-

tic violence policies when they were hired at their most recent place of employment.

Notably, participants in each of the four groups independently suggested and then selected as their "favorite strategy" an approach that would provide all employees in an organization with monthly or annual education sessions. As envisioned by the participants, these information sessions would include both men and women and provide general information about intimate partner violence. It was suggested that the presenter be an expert from the community who can distribute information on where both perpetrators and victims can get help. Of particular importance to the participants in the focus groups was that an educational video be used during the information sessions. They explained that watching scenarios of intimate partner violence role-played by others made it much easier for them to recognize the behaviors in themselves.

Many participants said they recognized they were "having trouble" in their intimate partnerships well before they were arrested and would have volunteered to be screened for a special counseling program had one been made available under a name they found agreeable. They claimed that if a "relationship skills" session had been offered at their workplaces (rather than "batterer intervention" or "domestic violence class"), they would have attended it. Participants also suggested that companies should consider making attendance at batterer intervention programs mandatory for convicted perpetrators of intimate partner violence, and that the companies should subsidize the cost of attending the sessions.

Participants reinforced that many employers may be unaware of what constitutes intimate partner violence. They pointed out that employers would not be effective at screening, referring, or penalizing employees unless they knew how to recognize intimate partner violence. For example, 1 participant said that his employer was not fazed by frequent loud arguments that he would have with this girlfriend in his place of employment during working hours. Two participants stated that they felt that no matter how much training employers received and no matter which policies were instituted, no intervention would make a difference for some abusers.

## Discussion

On the basis of the results from this formative investigation, it was possible to generate four specific hypotheses about employees who batter. Findings suggest that (a) abusers are less productive at work than nonabusing counterparts, including experienc-

ing higher rates of absenteeism, higher levels of distracted thinking while at work, slower work pace, and making more frequent errors on the job; (b) abusers use workplace resources such as phones, computers, vehicles, and coworkers to harass their victims from the worksite; (c) some employers may facilitate or exacerbate abuse perpetration and would benefit from education and training; and (d) zero-tolerance policies may have an unintended negative effect on victims, but on-site violence prevention may prevent partner abuse.

The burden of batterers' absenteeism, distracted thinking during work, reduced productivity, and misuse of company resources may create considerable costs for employers. Through the focus groups, it emerged that among this sample of convicted male batterers, almost all had missed days of work (some for an extended period of time, up to and including 6 months while incarcerated) that they attributed to intimate partner violence perpetration. Abusers in this sample also admitted that they frequently used workplace resources such as telephones, vehicles, and coworkers to monitor and harass victims. Misuse of company resources in this manner creates unnecessary cost for employers, presumably violates workplace policy, and exploits company resources to facilitate criminal threats, harassment, stalking, or the violation of restraining orders. If employers are aware of their resources being used to commit crimes and do nothing to prevent their continued misuse, their inaction could be perceived to be unlawful or morally reprehensible by clients and members of the community.

One unanticipated finding of this study was that abusers made mistakes and created safety hazards on the job because they were preoccupied with anxiety about their behavior and its consequences. Partner abuse perpetration may reduce employees' ability to concentrate, decrease accuracy in job tasks, and detract from their ability to follow safety and health-related protocols. These findings are consistent with previous research that has demonstrated that marital violence is associated with work stress, and that home stressors detract from job performance (Barling & Rosenbaum, 1986; Forthofer, Markma, Cox, Stanley, & Kessler, 1996).

Our findings indicate that employers could use more training about partner abuse. The focus group participants reported that their employers had varied and mostly inappropriate responses to their arrests. While one employer's response was to immediately fire his employee upon criminal conviction, most others took a much more neutral—if not supportive—stance. Several of the participants in this study

fondly recalled the generosity of their employers when they were charged with assault. Employers of men in this sample posted bail, testified as character witnesses, offered reassurance that they too would be aggravated at the victims in question, and guaranteed job security for their employees who battered. Some employers responded only to substance abuse perpetrated by their employees but wholly ignored their criminal violence. Employers may learn to respond more effectively to abusive employees by exchanging best practices information with other employers (Randel & Wells, 2003).

Employers who attempt to minimize the impact of criminal penalties for partner violence should be made aware that they are likely facilitating continued abuse. Failing to voice unequivocal intolerance for abuse may be perceived by batterers as tacit endorsement. Given that peer support for battering has been shown to be an important predictor of partner abuse perpetration (Silverman & Williamson, 1997; Williamson & Silverman, 2001), employers who do not send a clearly negative message to their abusive employees may—however unwittingly—contribute to a general impression that abuse is normal, understandable, and socially acceptable.

Participants in all four focus groups universally expressed support for graduated sanctions against abusers in their places of employment, including official warnings issued at the same time as referrals to established batterer programs in the community. The participants also suggested prevention-oriented strategies such as disseminating information about relationship violence to new hires as part of their orientation. Zero-tolerance policies, which entail termination of employees convicted of intimate abuse whether the incident takes place on- or off-site, were criticized; the majority of participants expressed concern for victims who would likely be faced with enraged, depressed, reduced-income batterers with free time at home. These concerns are reasonable given research suggesting that job loss and associated financial strain are predictive of depression and impaired functioning (Price, Choi, & Vinokur, 2002). Moreover, because it has been suggested that employee turnover incurs considerable replacement and training costs for organizations (Campbell, 2002; McNatt & Light, 1998) and may negatively affect the productivity of coworkers who remain employed (Sheehan, 1993), the benefits of zero-tolerance policies to employers is similarly questionable. Enacting such policies should be considered only when no other alternatives exist.

There are several limitations to this exploratory study. Perhaps most importantly, the comments made

by the 29 men who volunteered to participate in the focus groups cannot be generalized to all batterers. Whether men who are convicted of partner abuse, adjudicated to attend intervention programs, and volunteer to participate in focus group research are representative of batterers overall is unknown but unlikely. In addition, while the sample size is adequate for the purposes of formative, qualitative research, it is insufficient for hypothesis testing or making inferences about the effect of batterers on their workplace in quantifiable terms. Large-scale empirical studies that test hypotheses generated by these data—namely, that batterers reduce workplace productivity and that employers can have an effect on the perpetration behavior of the batterers they employ—will benefit the field.

Another potential threat to the validity of these data is the bias introduced through self-report, despite the fact it has been suggested that the homogeneity of focus groups encourage self-disclosure of sensitive topics (Deane & Degner, 1997). While it is possible that the participants in the study minimized their own abusive behaviors or recalled their employers' actions through a self-serving filter, neither of these biases detract from what the participants did choose to reveal. A follow-up study that pairs batterers with employers and that surveys both groups for validation purposes would be of benefit. Similarly, a follow-up study that uses a comparison group of non-batterers would provide additional insight as to whether batterers are any less productive than workers in general or workers with other criminal convictions.

Employers convinced that they need to take action to prevent abuse by employees will likely be stymied by the lack of evaluated interventions currently available. To date, we are not aware of published studies that have examined the impact of batterer-specific workplace policies or programs. However, findings from almost 40 evaluations of community-based batterer intervention programs suggest it is possible to reduce reoffense among at least a portion of abusers if they face criminal penalties and receive psychoeducation (Gondolf, 2002). Such promising findings indicate that abuse prevention policies, strategies, and interventions developed for the workplace may indeed achieve their goals if they are carefully crafted, evaluated, and adjusted.

In conclusion, employers face a dilemma when it comes to addressing partner abuse perpetrated by employees. If forthcoming studies establish that abusers do in fact reduce workplace productivity, increase costs to employers, create liability risks for employers, or are more likely than nonabusive coun-

terparts to become violent with coworkers or managers, employers will feel pressure to respond with effective policies and training. On the other hand, if zero-tolerance policies create dangers for victims, or if employers are legally bound to respond to abusive employees in a manner they find disagreeable, or if the cost-benefit of intervention is not immediately felt, employers may decide that they are better off not getting involved. It is our hope that this dilemma will not deter employers from taking an interest in the issue of employees who batter but will serve as a call for larger, empirical testing of the hypotheses presented here. Ultimately, we hope that employers will eventually have a range of options for responding to intimate partner violence in a manner that is feasible, cost-effective, and successful at preventing further incidents.

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