

Businesses have a lot to lose if they don't address partner violence in the workplace

Leaders of STANDING FIRM, a new Pittsburgh initiative, explain why

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This article was submitted by Patricia Cluss, director of STANDING FIRM; Judy Hill-Finegan, director of the Personnel & Civil Service Commission for the city of Pittsburgh; and Greg Peaslee, senior vice president of human resources for UPMC.

In an economy where every business is trying to do more with less, our society is turning a blind eye to a broad-daylight thief that steals millions of dollars every year from our employers. That thief is partner violence.

Before you decide that partner violence is simply a women's issue or that it doesn't affect you as a working person or as an employer, let us tell you why you're wrong.

Twenty-one percent of full-time employed adults are victims of abuse from spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends or domestic partners. Think about that -- one in five of your co-workers or employees is being physically and/or emotionally abused.

Is it the woman serving lunch in the cafeteria? The guy in the cubicle next to you? The manager in the corner office? The receptionist who greets your visitors? Your senior vice president?

People you work with or employ are both victims and perpetrators of partner violence. In fact, one-fourth of all acts of workplace violence that take place each year in the United States are related to partner violence.

Where you work doesn't matter; it happens in Downtown Pittsburgh as well as Upper St. Clair, Murrysville, Cranberry Township, Oakdale and every small town in between. What your business or service is doesn't matter; it happens in all sectors, including retail, manufacturing, education, government and service.

Three of four employed victims of partner violence say they were harassed at work. That means they received harassing phone calls, text messages and e-mails at work and their abusers likely sent these messages from work -- tying up both employees at either the same or different companies.

Two-thirds of victims say their work performance is significantly affected by partner abuse. They spend time covering clues for fear of being discovered by a boss or co-worker; they worry that their abusers will make unannounced visits to their workplaces. These fears become reality all too often when someone shows up at a workplace to intimidate, threaten or harm a domestic partner.

Still not impressed?

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the annual cost of lost productivity due to partner violence is \$727.8 million, with more than 7.9 million paid workdays lost every year.

Employers of abusers also pay a price. Abusers report making costly and dangerous mistakes on the job. They use company phones, e-mail, vehicles and other resources, including time, to harass their partners. They use paid work time to attend court hearings.

Shockingly, when partner violence comes to light, not only do many employers not remind abusers that it is a crime, but 10 percent of employers, according to one study, posted bail for abusive employees or granted them paid leaves of absence for court dates.

Our region's employers have a crucial role to play in protecting our workplaces from partner violence and in improving productivity and worker health by addressing partner violence as a workplace issue. To that end, a number of Western Pennsylvania foundations -- including Eden Hall, FISA, McAuley Ministries and the Women & Girls Foundation -- have come together to launch [STANDING FIRM](#): the Business Case to End Partner Violence, an independent initiative housed at the University of Pittsburgh.

[STANDING FIRM](#) has begun engaging employers in our region to address partner violence and will help them do three things:

1. Recognize that partner violence impacts employees, entire workplaces and the bottom line;

2. Respond effectively by increasing awareness, developing company policies and training managers, human resources staff and security personnel;
3. Refer both victims and perpetrators of partner violence to internal resources, such as employee assistance programs, or community resources that specialize in counseling, shelter and legal aid for victims and counseling for abusers.

The benefits of implementing [STANDING FIRM](#) recommendations are significant. Employers can reduce workplace costs and safety risks. Valuable employees are retained, avoiding the time and costs associated with hiring and training replacements. Victim and perpetrators receive appropriate help.

By taking action, employers also can derive satisfaction from knowing that they've made their workers and workplaces stronger, healthier and more productive.

A number of our region's most-respected institutions already have signed on with [STANDING FIRM](#), including Chatham University, the city of Pittsburgh, Fifth Third Bancorp, The Pittsburgh Foundation and UPMC. We hope that in the weeks and months ahead, every one of our region's employers will stand firm against partner violence.

[STANDING FIRM](#) will be formally launched Tuesday at Heinz Field during a conference of the Pittsburgh Human Resources Association.

Cartoonist Rob Rogers does "Rob's Rough," an early look at his work and his creative process, exclusively at [PG+](#), a members-only web site of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Our [introduction to PG+](#) gives you all the details.



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