

Conversations with the Experts

Domestic Violence and the Workplace



Jane Randel

Bio: Jane Randel is Vice President of Corporate Communications at Liz Claiborne Inc. and is responsible for managing the Company's corporate reputation through both external and internal communications. She leads corporate, business and crisis media relations, manages the annual report and oversees internal communications, including the corporate intranet. In addition, Ms. Randel has been spearheading the Company's award-winning, cause marketing program aimed to generate awareness, educate the public and ultimately prevent violence against women. The Company's philanthropic programs, including the Liz Claiborne Foundation, also report to her.



Jennifer Swanberg

Bio: Jennifer E. Swanberg, Ph.D., is the executive director and founder of the Institute for Workplace Innovation (iWin) at the University of Kentucky, an associate professor in the UK College of Social Work with joint appointments in the Colleges of Medicine and Public Health, and a faculty affiliate with the UK Center on Poverty Research and the Center for the Advancement of Women's Health. Dr. Swanberg is also a Research Fellow of the Boston College Work & Family Roundtable. Her principal research interests include the development of quality workplaces as a business and work-life integration strategy, access to workplace flexibility among under-represented working populations, and the use of human capital and quality workplaces as an economic development strategy.

An Interview with Jane Randel and Jennifer Swanberg

By Judi Casey and Karen Corday

Casey: How would you define domestic violence? Should we use the term "intimate partner violence"?

Swanberg: I personally use the term "intimate partner violence" because I think "domestic violence" suggests that other types of violence could be occurring within the home. Domestic violence is generally thought of as physical, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship. It often forms a pattern of coercive or controlling behavior. "Intimate partner violence" clearly connotes that the violence is occurring between two intimate partners. "Domestic violence," on the other hand, can represent other types of violence occurring within the home, such as child or elder abuse.

Randel: We also work with the teen population, and with them, we refer to "teen dating abuse," because domestic violence implies that the couple is married or cohabitating. I personally use the two terms interchangeably, but when Jennifer uses the term "intimate partner violence," it's very clear what she's talking about.

Casey: So although it's not the common vernacular, "intimate partner violence" may be a more accurate term for what we're discussing.

Randel: Yes. Many times, people use the term intimate partner violence because "domestic" implies "married," while intimate partners could be living together or they could be homosexual partners; it's a broader definition.

Casey: Why is domestic violence a workplace issue?

Randel: Domestic violence is a workplace issue because what happens in the home or in one's personal life follows a worker to the office. It's a health issue in the same way that workplaces offer Weight Watchers programs for their employees as well as counseling for alcohol or drug addictions. Furthermore, the workplace often represents either a safe place for the victim, or it's a place where the abuser knows he or she can locate their victim. An abuser might inflict abuse on their victim by calling them at work one hundred times a day, faxing them, texting them, or stalking them. Someone suffering from physical abuse is likely to call in sick, come in late, or be distracted from their work, increasing the workplace's health care costs and absenteeism as well as decreasing overall productivity. This is the impact that this supposed "private matter" has on the workplace. There is also the issue of safety; at Liz Claiborne, we feel that we're obligated to provide a safe environment for our employees to the best of our ability. That can be difficult to do if there's an angry individual trying to harm their intimate partner.

Casey: What does the research tell us?

Swanberg: In a review of the literature on the impact of intimate partner violence on employment and the workplace, Dr. TK Logan and I set out to better understand this social issue. First we identified the types of job interference tactics used by abusers to disrupt an employee's job, then we examined the consequences of job interference tactics on victimized employees and the places where they work. Lastly, we examined employer responses to intimate partner violence.

We found that job interference tactics generally fall into two primary categories: work disruption and on-the-job stalking and harassment. Work disruption consists primarily of actions that prevent the victim from reaching the workplace either on time or at all. These actions mainly take place in the home. On-the-job stalking and harassment entails unwelcome harassing or threatening behaviors toward a person while he or she is at work. Examples of on-the-job harassment may include the perpetrator looking into the window of the workplace, or waiting for the victim at the end of the work day. We categorized on-the-job harassment as those behaviors exhibited by a perpetrator that interfere with an employee's work. For instance, the perpetrator may engage the employee in some type of activity at work that interferes with their completing their work, or the perpetrator may make frequent telephone calls to victims, coworkers, or supervisors.

In terms of consequences, we found both individual and organizational consequences. Some of our research shows that between sixty-six and ninety-six percent of employees that experience partner violence report that their job was disrupted in some way. Employer consequences include jeopardizing the safety of the victim, other employees, and customers. Depending on the stigma that's attached to intimate partner violence, organizations can either be very supportive, allowing the victim to take time off to get relocated, for example, or they can be very unsupportive, fear for the safety of other employees, and fire the victim because the perpetrator keeps appearing at the workplace.

Randel: The issue of co-workers of victims is very important. Employees may need to cover for the victim, and may do so with concern or with resentment. Employee morale can also suffer as a result of intimate partner violence.

Casey: Why might employers be reluctant to address domestic violence issues, and why is it in their best interest to do so?

Randel: As we've tried to get critical mass in terms of big-name companies addressing this issue, we've asked ourselves that very question. I think a lot of it has to do with what Jennifer mentioned before—the stigma surrounding the issue. Many people feel that it's a private family matter not to be discussed outside of the home. One could argue that as late as the 1990's, until the O.J. Simpson trial took place, it wasn't discussed as broadly as it is now. There's also the "blame and shame" stigma—as a society, we ask the victim "Why didn't you leave?" instead of asking the perpetrator "Why are you abusing this person?" It's a messy, emotional topic that makes people feel uncomfortable and helpless—there's not an immediate solution, such as taking someone's keys when they've had too much to drink. People also don't understand the issues of power and control, and that someone doesn't have a "healthy" relationship, come home one day, and suddenly find themselves in an abusive situation. It is usually a dynamic that exists from the start and develops or worsens over time. Finally, people falsely believe that domestic violence is a problem found only in lower socio-economic households, when in reality, it's a problem that affects all income levels, races, genders, sexual orientations, and religions.

At Liz Claiborne, the big "a-ha!" moment was when we identified that not knowing what to do was the major barrier to helping someone dealing with domestic violence. However, it's not a co-worker or manager's responsibility to be a domestic violence counselor; that's not their job. The workplace has the responsibility to provide a safe environment for employees and to be a conduit to the organizations and experts that can help.

For the most part, companies seem to be comfortable with this role. Just as they wouldn't be expected to counsel someone with a drug problem, they aren't qualified to intervene with a victim of domestic violence; they just need to facilitate their referral to resources and professional counselors.

Casey: So it's about identification and referral.

Randel: Correct. The organization is invested in facilitating a referral since there's a bottom line issue in terms of health care costs, lost productivity, absenteeism, and presenteeism, and there's also the need to provide a safe work environment for all employees.

Casey: What is Liz Claiborne doing? What types of policies and services are available?

Randel: We've been doing this work since 1991. As we started an external push to increase awareness of domestic violence, we realized that we had an audience within the company that may be dealing with the issue personally. We developed a policy and protocol and provided some training on communications around the issue. We put up posters in every men and women's bathroom with the number of the National Domestic Violence Hotline number and our EAP number. For the longest time, no cases came forward. It was frustrating. Around 2002, I went to an FBI conference on workplace violence; I presented on domestic violence, but I also simply attended. There, I learned about implementing a multi-disciplinary task force to address various issues. When I got back, we created a Domestic Violence Response Team, which includes people from Human Resources, Legal, Security, and Communications. We looked at our policy and protocol (LINK) and rewrote them to be much more in-depth. We conducted trainings for human resources, security, and legal, and then we did more training with upper management so they'd be informed and support our efforts. Finally, we launched a broader communications plan called Recognize, Respond, Refer. The idea is to recognize how domestic violence manifests itself in the workplace, know how to respond when someone comes to you or if you need to approach someone, and refer them to resources that can help. Since we've rolled this approach out in 2003, we've had more than 100 people come forward or be identified. It has been a true team effort—I have great partners in HR, Security, and Legal.

Another technique we've implemented is connected to the company's common review date of all employees. Prior to the review date, we send out a memo to HR to remind them to consider how personal problems, including domestic violence, may affect work.

We've had a lot of support from the top; we hired a new CEO last year and he has been on board from the beginning, and we're still plugging away. We also have no idea how many employees we've helped who haven't officially come forward—people who have called a hotline because of a bathroom poster, for example.

Casey: How have other organizations responded in the United States and abroad?

Swanberg: According to the literature we reviewed, employers seem to respond in one of three ways. One, and Liz Claiborne is an excellent example of this, is prevention—educating employees on how to recognize warning signs and enhancing familiarity with community partners and experts. Two, there's a range of workplace initiatives that focus on employee protection, such as giving leave time without penalty so an employee can keep court appointments, instituting flexible work hours to throw off a stalker, moving a worker to a different work site, providing an escort to and from the employee's car, screening phone calls, offering legal assistance, and installing security cameras or better lighting in a parking lot. These types of initiatives usually occur in response to an incident, but some companies are proactive with these supports. Finally, there's a focus on intervention such as an EAP program, counseling services, assistance with safety planning, and funds for employees in emergency situations.

Casey: Is domestic violence in the workplace a global issue?

Randel: It's definitely being addressed around the globe. Dennis Butler, our VP of Associate Relations, has traveled to Turkey, Israel, and England to discuss the issue. Internationally, you find different legal and cultural issues, which affects how to best intervene.

Casey: How would you recommend that interested organizations get started in addressing this issue?

Randel: There's an organization called the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (<http://www.caepv.org/>); I would recommend talking to Kim Wells there, or to anyone else at a company who's implemented a program. There's also lots of information available online. You do need to make sure that you'll be able to get the necessary buy-in. We've done some research on companies and their attitudes on the topic. Most people

we've interviewed understand the importance of the issue and its impact on their employees, but only twelve percent think it's their responsibility to implement interventions in their companies. This viewpoint hasn't changed much since 1994. The interesting piece of information is that the CEOs said that if employees asked for it, they would implement the programs. So, I think it's important to understand your company's culture, do your research, and identify people within the organization who will be your champions.

Casey: What further research is needed? Have you identified a focus for your next research project in this area?

Swanberg: From the individual perspective, research is needed to better understand the complex nuances associated with partner violence and employment. A longitudinal study of employed victims of partner violence would provide insight into what it is that prevents a victim from being able to do his or her job. Is it an explosive relationship, or a coercive situation that wears one down on a day to day basis? I'm also looking into the strategies and coping skills used by short- and long-term victims of violence to help them remain successful. For example, some people are going to stay in these relationships—we can't assume that they will leave their abusers. Are there strategies that victims use to endure and continue working? There's also the task of bringing recognition to the issue and letting people know that it's not only an issue for people in lower socio-economic households. Researchers often perform their research in shelters, and people in shelters are disproportionately from lower socio-economic environments. Consequently, people assume that domestic violence only affects those individuals. It is important that research studies on intimate partner violence include women employed in jobs at all levels of the organization. Maybe if people recognize that intimate partner violence cuts across all socioeconomic levels, the stigma associated with domestic violence will lessen.

From an employer perspective, we need to know more about the prevalence of partner violence in the United States workforce, and the associated economic, social, and psychological costs. Additionally, although OSHA has guiding regulations pertaining to workplace violence and how to manage partner violence when it spills over into the workplace, we know very little about employers' knowledge of the consequences that intimate partner violence, their perceptions about partner violence, and actions taken once partner violence spillover situations become apparent within the workplace. As Jane pointed out, employers have begun to recognize that substance abuse is not purely the fault of the individual; in terms of partner violence, there's still the perception that it's the victim's fault. Finally, we also need research on strategies that employers have used to address the problem—what's working and what has not? Are there certain strategies that have helped certain employers to encourage victims to come forward?

Randel: Over the years, we've tried to work with celebrities on this issue, and it's next to impossible to get anyone on board. The only A-list celebrity that I know of that's ever come out against this issue is Salma Hayak. Unfortunately, we are a celebrity-oriented culture, and celebrity involvement does make people stop and take notice of issues.

Another ongoing issue is that people can't understand how someone in an abusive relationship can love their partner. Oftentimes, they do want to be with their partner, they just don't want to be abused. It can take up to seven attempts before a victim leaves an abusive partner for good, and as we all know, it can be more dangerous after they leave.

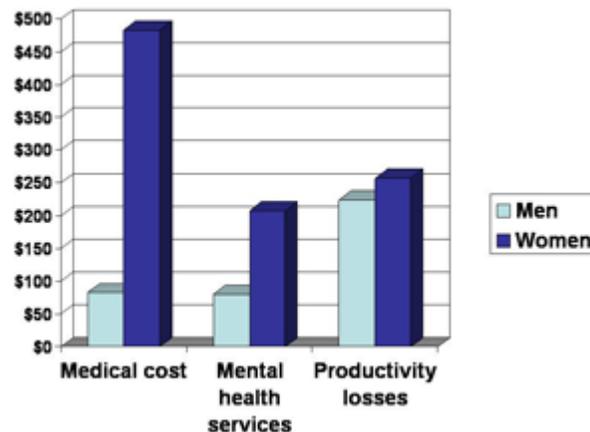
From a practical standpoint, if a victim is financially independent, it's much easier to leave an abusive relationship. Financial dependence on an abusive partner, particularly if there are children involved, is often what keeps someone in an abusive relationship.

Casey: How could state public policy makers be more supportive of the issue of domestic violence in the workplace?

Swanberg: I'm currently in the process of conducting a systematic content analysis of state employment protection policies for victims of intimate partner violence. The study is identifying which states have statutes to protect employment of intimate partner violence victims, and to determine the parameters of the employment protection laws among states that have passed such legislation. Preliminary findings suggest that states have passed legislation that require employers to offer employed victims leave from work, offer some type of financial protection such as unemployment insurance if job loss is associated with partner violence, or require employers to educate supervisors and managers about intimate partner violence and its effects of the workplace. We're looking at laws that have been enacted that protect victims in some capacity. For example, some states have a specific law that prohibits an employer from firing an employee who wants to take a leave of absence due to domestic violence. Some states have policies for training employers on the subject of domestic violence as a workplace issue provided by the Department of Labor. Others allow employees to file a

domestic violence order that prevents the perpetrator from entering the workplace. Finally, some states have proposed legislation that allows women who have experienced domestic violence to go on short-term disability, providing some sort of financial security during a period in which they might be leaving the relationship.

Average Costs Associated With Each Incident of Domestic Violence: Men and Women



Source: Arias, I., & Corso, P. (2005). Average cost per person victimized by an intimate partner of the opposite gender: A comparison of men and women. *Violence and Victims*, 20(4), 379-391.

Additional Resources Related to Domestic Violence and the Workplace

Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence (U.K.): “The Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence is a group of progressive companies and organizations working individually and collectively to address the impact of domestic violence in the workplace.”

- <http://www.corporateallianceuk.com/home.asp>

Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Topic Page: This Sloan Work and Family Research Network Topic Page, compiled by Chelsea Lettieri and Caitlin Sullivan and advised by Jennifer Swanberg, includes statistics, definitions, overviews and briefs, bills and statutes, suggested readings, audio/video clips, and links.

- <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/topic.php?id=31>

Domestic Violence: Effective Workplace Series #11: This issue of our Effective Workplace Series distills the information from the topic page into a one-page summary. Compiled by Judi Casey.

- http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/pdfs/EWS_DV.pdf

Safe at Work Coalition: “Safe@work was created in 2000 by a coalition of private employers, trade unions, domestic violence advocacy groups, and government organizations. Its mission is to demystify domestic violence for employers and unions and to provide guidance on creating an environment where this historically “private” problem can be openly and effectively addressed.”

- <http://www.safeatworkcoalition.org/dv/whatisdv.htm>

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E-mail: wfnetwork@bc.edu - Phone: 617-552-1708 - Fax: 617-552-9202

www.bc.edu

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