Family and domestic violence clause a step forward

SSTUWA
State School Teachers' Union of WA

FAMILY VIOLENCE

STATISTICS



Globally, 1 in 3 women experience violence by a partner



Family violence is increasing

WHO'S MORE AT RISK?

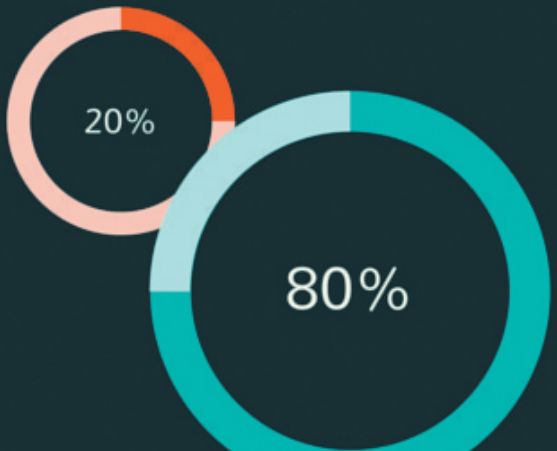
- Indigenous women
- Women with disabilities
- Younger women
- Pregnant women

A child is present



at 1 in 3

incidents of family violence



WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

- MALE
- FEMALE

By Samantha Schofield
Vice President

As part of the 2014 General Agreement for schools, the inclusion of a Family and Domestic Violence Leave clause is significant as it recognises the severity of the problem in Australia.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there were 14,603 people in Western Australia in 2014 who experienced family and domestic violence (10,648 women and 3,860 men), the second highest number in the country. In WA, 6,761 people were aged between 20-34 years of age, and 471 women reported family domestic violence sexual assault.

And these are just the situations that were reported to the police.

While domestic violence is not confined to one sexual identity or cultural background, women of all ages are more vulnerable as they are generally the primary caregivers and often more economically disadvantaged.

The prevalence and cultural normalisation of male entitlement to sexual gratification and male privilege still dominates the Australian landscape.

Assumptions of masculinity, sexuality, violence and sexual assault can often be barriers for people to seek assistance – both legal and personal – in disclosing information and gaining understanding.

We still see social and very public commentary in the media by misinformed, misguided and naïve individuals who fuel victim-blaming and shaming, perpetrating the myth that it was the individual who should be blamed for allowing or attracting violence to them – all aimed to disempower, and generally to inflict dominance over another.

Family domestic violence does not fit neatly into one definition and this can make it difficult for school leaders to recognise it is happening and understand what assistance can be offered.

Family and domestic violence is any controlling, abusive, violent, threatening or intimidating behaviour that is intended to cause a family or household member to be fearful.

This may include physical, sexual, financial, verbal or emotional abuse. Most forms of family and domestic violence are criminal offences. All forms are harmful to the victim and children who witness the abuse.

The workplace can be a vulnerable place due to the predictability of the location and work hours.

While schools generally have measures in place to stop members of the public entering school grounds, take a moment to consider the open spaces when you’re out on yard duty, bus duty or moving across the grounds from your classroom to the car.

An employee who is experiencing family and domestic violence might be reluctant to disclose this because of shame and fear of losing their job.

Other staff may be reluctant to pry as family and domestic violence can be seen as a personal matter that has no relevance to work.

There is the assumption that you need special skills to respond to family and domestic violence.

The role of school leaders is crucial for a safe school environment and inclusion of this clause enshrines entitlements for staff facing family and domestic violence.

Access to leave may be immediate, planned or unplanned. It is important to have an understanding of the complexities and changing needs of staff in family and domestic violence situations.

Access to leave is only one part of the process. Often employees who are experiencing family and domestic violence are in significant stress which can continue for years after the event, much like post-traumatic stress.

Establishing a work safety plan for an employee experiencing family and domestic violence might include:

- Having a confidential discussion with the employee about arrangements to make them feel safe at work. There may be specific requirements in the violence restraining order (VRO).
- Carrying a mobile during the working day around the school worksite.
- Re-arranging duty to an enclosed area rather than a school oval.
- Screening outside calls/emails to staff (through administration).

- Arranging for parking close to the main building/ entrance of the school.
- The principal knowing the details of the VRO to assist the employee.
- Assisting the employee to return to/maintain work. Advising the employee to not come to work can put more stress and pressure on the employee.

More information on the SSTUWA's Family and Domestic Violence Leave Guidelines can be foundhere.

For further queries or support, speak with your union representative or women's contact officer or contact Member Assist on 1800 106 683 or (08) 9210 6000

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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