

When Violence at Home Comes to Work

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KAI RYSSDAL: There's some studies out from the Centers for Disease Control that show about 25 percent of women in the United States have suffered physical or sexual abuse by their partners. But that domestic violence doesn't always stay at home. It affects victims at their workplace, too. And it costs companies billions of dollars a year. So now, some businesses have started doing something about it. From the Marketplace Work and Family desk, Apryl Lundsten has more.

ANNOUNCER: Radiologist. Any Radiologist.

CHRISTINE MARIN: Radiology. . . . Christine.

APRYL LUNDSTEN: Christine Marin is a radiology supervisor at Torrance Memorial Medical Center in California. Three years ago, she was stalked at work by her abusive husband after she left him.

MARIN: He would leave things in my mailbox. He would leave things on my car, threatening my life, threatening my family members' lives.

Marin is one of the one in three American women who will experience domestic or sexual violence at some point in their lives.

ESTA SOLER: And since most American women work, violence in the home comes to the workplace.

That's Esta Soler, president of the Family Violence Prevention Fund. The organization helps companies create domestic violence policies. She says many women just don't speak up.

SOLER: We often want to hide problems. And there are costs because when you're hiding a problem that is complicated and is affecting you emotionally, it will in fact affect how you are performing.

Soler says there are other costs. Domestic violence costs society nearly \$2 billion a year in lost wages and productivity. Twice that much is spent on medical and mental health care. According to the Centers for Disease Control, victims miss some 8 million days of paid work per year. That's the equivalent of 32,000 full-time jobs.

But lots of employers just don't recognize the signs of domestic violence.

SCOTT MILLSTEIN: It doesn't appear in the form of someone always walking in with a black eye or someone coming forward and saying "I'm a victim of domestic violence — help me."

Scott Millstein is the chief operating officer for Safe Horizon. The nonprofit helps companies in New York City recognize abuse.

MILLSTEIN: Rather, domestic violence will manifest itself in a marked change in performance of an employee who was formerly a stellar employee who now is not, an unusual increase in use of sick leave or excessive doctor's appointments, excessive phone calls or repeated gifts or flowers being brought to the office.

He says some companies like Liz Claiborne, Marshall's and Verizon Wireless are putting on public awareness campaigns and implementing workplace domestic violence policies.

MARTHA DELAHANY: We have 57,000 employees, half of our workforce is women. This issue is certainly prevalent.

Martha Delahany is vice president of human resources for Verizon Wireless.

DELAHANY: Just last week we had a letter come in from a mom of an employee and she said, "Listen, my daughter who works for you is in a terrible situation and she's afraid and she's ashamed." So, we reached out to the daughter and within 24 hours she filed a police report, she was relocated to another state and started a new job and a new life." Delahany says that story is typical at Verizon. And it's worth the money to put an end to domestic violence.

DELAHANY: Last year alone we addressed no fewer than 100 specific scenarios within the workplace. From a turnover perspective, should we have lost those hundred people — turnover it costs about \$40,000 to retrain, re-energize somebody within the workplace. I mean, you do the math there.

For Christine Marin, it all added up during a work seminar about domestic violence.

MARIN: And it just dawned on me that "I'm in that situation."

Once her husband started threatening her, Marin let her supervisor and co-workers know. Security guards got a description of her husband and his car and kept an eye out. Marin parked in a well-lit spot close to the building's entrance and was walked to and from her car. Her company gave her information about shelters and counseling.

MARIN: I was pretty shocked. I really didn't have any idea how much support I would have.

Marin says her employer's help gave her strength. She pressed charges against her husband, who went to jail. And Marin was able to keep her job.

In Los Angeles, I'm Apryl Lundsten for Marketplace.