Domestic Violence and Employment: A Qualitative Study

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This exploratory study sought to gather detailed information about how domestic violence affects women's employment, specifically to identify the types of job interference tactics used by abusers and their consequences on women's job performance; identify and understand the context associated with disclosure about victimization to employers and coworkers; and identify the supports offered to employees after disclosure. Qualitative analyses, guided by grounded theory, revealed that perpetrators exhibited job interference behaviors before, during, and after work. Abuser tactics reduced women's job performance as measured by absenteeism, tardiness, job leavings, and terminations. Among women who disclosed victimization to employers, informal and formal job supports were offered. Workplace supports led to short-term job retention, but fear and safety issues mitigated employers' attempts to retain workers.

The effects of intimate partner violence on women's physical and mental health and on the public health infrastructure within the United States have received a fair amount of attention in recent history (Dutton, Haywood, & El-Bayoumi, 1997; Eby, Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995; Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Acierno, 1997; Logan, Walker, Cole, Ratliff, & Leukefeld, 2003; Resnick, Acierno, & Kilpatrick, 1997). Despite this research, minimal attention has focused on the effects of intimate partner violence on women's labor force (Lloyd, 1997; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999; Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Riger, Ahrens, & Blickenstaff, 2000; Tolman & Raphael, 2000). In general, research suggests that although economic resources are critical in the transition out of abusive relationships (Lloyd, 1997; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999), women are at a heightened risk of victimization when, and potentially because, they seek work outside the home or job training (Raphael, 1995; 1996; see also Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Riger et al., 2000; Tolman & Raphael, 2000).

Estimates from the National Crime and Victimization Survey indicate that nearly 1 million women were assaulted in 1998 by an intimate partner in the United States (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). The U.S. Department of Justice reports that intimate partners commit 13,000 acts of violence against women in the workplace every year (Lynn, 1998). Moreover, data suggest that 70% of employed victims of domestic violence say their abusers have harassed them at work (Lynn, 1998). The effects of victimization by male partners on women's employment are complicated, often varying by family, job, and personal circumstances (Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Nonetheless, data suggest women experiencing intimate partner violence sometimes miss work, are terminated from employment, and have difficulty sustaining jobs over the long term (Friedman & Crouper, 1987; Raphael & Tolman, 1997). For instance, one of the first studies to systematically collect data to examine the relationship between intimate partner violence and employment within an urban population found that of the 50 women interviewed, 54% reported missing 3 days of work per month because of the abuse, and 56% reported having lost at least one job because of the abuse (Friedman & Crouper, 1987). Further, studies of women with histories of victimization show that although women do work they are unable to maintain a job over a long time (for a review, see Raphael & Tolman, 1997). For example, Riger et al. (2000) found that of the 57 female domestic violence victims residing in a Chicago shelter who did work, 85% missed work because of the abuse, and 53% were fired or had to resign from their job because of the abuse.

To date, the majority of research conducted on the effects of intimate partner violence on women's employment focuses primarily on women receiving pub-

lic assistance (Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1999; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999; Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Riger et al., 2000; Tolman & Raphael, 2000). While these studies were among the first to highlight the negative impact that domestic violence has on women's employment, they have provided limited information about specific job interference tactics used by perpetrators to sabotage women's employment. Further, these studies do not discuss other job-related factors that might assist women in meeting their job responsibilities during periods of extreme personal hardship. For instance, the domestic violence and employment studies to date have not examined whether women disclose their victimization to someone at work and the results associated with disclosure. This latter omission is rather significant because research examining the nexus between work and family life indicates a positive relationship between workplace supports (i.e., supervisor supports or job flexibility) and employee outcomes (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998; Saltzstein, Ting, & Saltzstein, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). The few work–family investigations that have examined the associations of extreme stressful family or personal circumstances suggest that workplace supports often help to reduce the employees' strain when confronting difficult personal circumstances (Bhagat, 1983; Breslau, Salkever, & Staruch, 1982; Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, Emlen, & Boise, 1990).

In summary, although research on domestic violence suggests that victimization increases tardiness and absenteeism rates (Lloyd, 1997; Riger et al., 2000) and limits job tenures (for a review, see Raphael & Tolman, 1997), these studies do not take into account the context and consequences associated with victimization disclosure to people at work, whether coworkers or supervisors offer support to women, and whether workplace supports, such as supervisor support, have any positive influence on domestic violence victims' job performance. To this end, this study seeks to fill in some of these identified gaps in the literature by gathering more detailed information about the consequences of domestic violence on women's employment. Specifically, this exploratory study seeks to (a) identify the types of job interference tactics used by abusers and their consequences on women's job performance, (b) identify and understand the context associated with the disclosure about victimization to employers and coworkers, and (c) identify the supports offered to employees once they have disclosed.

Method

Participants

The study sample includes 32 women residing in rural ($n = 15$) and urban ($n = 17$) communities who were employed during the past 2 years while simultaneously experiencing intimate partner violence. The rural sample was selected from three counties that had a population of over 80% rural as classified by the 1990 census. Specifically, the counties selected have populations less than 50,000. The urban sample was drawn from one county. As such, it had only 3% of the population defined as rural by the 1990 census and has a city with over 100,000 inhabitants.

Although data were collected from a rural and an urban sample, women's experiences of intimate partner violence and its effects on work were essentially the same, regardless of their residence location. Thus findings are reported for the entire sample. Participants' mean age was 38 years, with a range between 22 and 54 years. Twenty-two percent of women had some high school education, 37.5% had completed high school or earned a General Equivalency Degree (GED), 6% had an associate's degree, and 34% had some college, including completing a bachelor's degree or higher. Sixty-nine percent of participants identified as White, 22% identified as Black, 3% identified as Native American, and 6% identified as other. Seventy-one percent of respondents had children under age 18, ranging in ages from 1 year to 18 years.

All of the participants had been employed within the past 2 years; 87.5% were either currently employed or employed within the last year, and 12.5% had been employed sometime within the past 24 months. Respondents were employed in jobs within the service-producing sector (93.5%) and trades industry (12.5%).[1] Specifically, women were employed in positions including grocery cashier, waitress, motel clerk, nurse's aide, factory worker, machine operator, tobacco stripper, video store manager, restaurant manager, receptionist, house painter, health club manager, and taxi driver. The average wage in U.S. dollars for women ranged between $5.15 hourly (minimum wage in the United States) and $10 hourly.

All of the women reported experiencing psychological abuse in their life, and 78% reported experiencing psychological abuse by an intimate partner in the past year. Psychological or emotional violence frequently co-occurs with both physical and sexual violence and includes verbal attacks such as ridicule, verbal harassment, and name-calling; isolation; and verbal threats of harm (Dutton et al., 1997; Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990). All of the women reported being stalked in their lifetime, with 67.7% reporting being stalked by an intimate partner in the past year. All of the women experienced physical aggression (being pushed, shoved, kicked, or bit) in their lifetime, with 75% reporting physical aggression in the past year. About 88% of the women reported severe violence by an intimate partner (being beaten up, threatened with a weapon, or actually had a weapon used on them), and 59.4%

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[1] Percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents had more than one job during the 2-year period.

reported severe violence by an intimate partner in the past year. Three quarters of the sample reported sexual assault by an intimate partner in their lifetime, and one third reported sexual assault in the past year.

Measures

Victimization histories were measured using a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1990). Because of the time it takes to complete the entire CTS scale, we modified it by using selected items to measure verbal threats, stalking, harassment, physical beating, threatening or attacking with a weapon, sexual assault, and rape that took place in the past year and in their lifetime. These results are reported in the previous section.

Procedure

Recruitment for research volunteers and subsequent data collection took place over a 6-month period between May and October 2001. Research participants were recruited by posting flyers at community-based treatment facilities serving intimate partner violence victims, in courts, and around the community. Thirty-two percent of participants were recruited by community-based flyers, and the remaining 68% were recruited from substance abuse programs. None of the participants were recruited from the courts. Women at substance abuse treatment facilities responded to the flyer independently or staff members informed prospective respondents about the study. Women interested in the study were briefed on the purpose of the research and the procedures involved in the study, including payment of $35 if they agreed to participate. A short screening instrument was used to assess whether volunteers met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Eligibility criteria required women to have been employed and have experienced intimate partner violence simultaneously at some point during the last 2 years. Once eligibility was established, a meeting time was set for the data collection. The study's purpose and procedures were explained to research volunteers, including the intended use of an audiotape machine to record the interviews. All but 3 women in one small focus group agreed to be audiotaped. Participants who declined permission alternatively approved of having a research assistant present to record verbatim notes of the interview or focus groups. Once consented, a brief questionnaire comprising seven questions covering demographic information and employment and the CTS were administered before the interview.

A mixed-method data collection strategy was used to maximize research participation. Initially volunteers were recruited to participate in a 90-min focus group of no more than 8 participants. However, the data collection method was modified to include individual interviews in addition to the focus groups. The methodological change occurred for two main reasons. First, potential research participants expressed a preference for one-on-one interviews rather than a small focus group. Specifically, they preferred to tell their stories in confidence rather than share their circumstances with people unknown to them. Second, the logistics associated with scheduling focus groups conducive to volunteers' schedules, especially volunteers not affiliated with a treatment center, proved to be more complicated than an-

ticipated. As a result, focus groups were conducted during the first half of the study, and once University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, the data collection methods changed to include individual interviews. Thirteen individual interview and seven focus groups ($n = 19$) were conducted. Focus group sizes ranged from 3 to 6 participants. The procedures for both collection methods were essentially the same. Interviews and focus groups took place in private rooms in public facilities with only the research staff present. For all but two interviews, only the lead investigator (Jennifer Swanberg) was present, whereas two people (Swanberg and a research assistant) were present during the focus groups and the two remaining interviews. Swanberg asked questions, while the research assistant managed the audio equipment or took notes during one small focus group with 3 women.

The focus group and individual interview format began by asking women to describe their most recent job, what they liked most about their job, and what they liked most about working. These questions served as warm-up questions. They were specifically designed to put focus group and interview participants at ease with the interview process. Following the warm-up question, three open-ended questions were asked in this exact order to both focus group and interview participants:

1. How has domestic violence affected your job or your ability of find a job?
2. Have you informed your employer about your situation? Why or Why not?
   a. Have your informed coworkers about your situation? Why or Why not?
3. What supports, if any, has someone at your workplace offered to you?
   a. How have the supports affected you and your life on the job?

Data Analysis

As previously noted, this study was an exploratory examination of the impact of domestic violence on women's employment. Thus, the primary goal of this study was to describe a phenomenon that has to date been underresearched rather than to test any hypotheses. To this end, four primary steps were used to analyze the qualitative information gleaned from focus groups and interviews. First, the 19 audiotaped conversations from focus groups and interviews and one set of verbatim focus groups were transcribed.

The second step in the qualitative analysis was to conduct an in-depth content analysis of the transcribed interviews. We used ATLAS qualitative software program to assist with the content analysis (Scientific Software Development, 1997). The ATLAS software is a qualitative software program that allows for consistent coding and model construction when appropriate. In this study, it was used as a tool to control the quality of the coding. As contextual themes pertaining to each of the various research questions emerged, the software makes it easy to assign codes to text and to assign strict defining parameters to the codes. Because this particular software allows for text to be easily coded and for codes to be easily defined, it maximizes the consistency in the coding process.

To conduct the content analysis, we imported the tran-

scribed interviews into the ATLAS qualitative software program, then we used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as a guiding analytic framework to determine the meaning of the interviews. Specifically, text was coded according to themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews. As texts were assigned codes, codes were defined using strict parameters; subsequent text vignettes were coded accordingly. Once all of the interviews were coded, we again classified the codes into larger themes that directly corresponded to the three primary research questions. The three broad themes were effects of victimization on employment, context for disclosure of domestic violence, and workplace supports to assist with effects of domestic violence. Then within each of these three broad themes, data were sorted into more narrow constructs, concepts, and categories that allowed for data interpretation.

Results

Job Interference Tactics and Their Consequences on Victims' Employment Interference Behaviors

Attempts by male abusers to interfere with women's employment fell into three categories: actions taken before work, actions taken during work, and actions taken after work. Each respondent had a detailed story about how abusers' interference tactics negatively affected her ability to get to work or to focus on job-related functions (see Table 1).

Actions taken before work.   Prework tactics prevented 56% of respondents from going to work. Abusers' prework tactics were categorized into three primary types of behaviors: physically restraining respondents from going to work (75%); beating respondents severely enough that they could not or did not want to go to work (78%); and perpetrating a range of other actions, including disallowing participant to sleep, neglecting to bring the car home, and cutting up work clothes (88%). For example, 1 participant who was employed as a nurse's aide at the time described her experience with being physically restrained from leaving for work in the following way: "three or four times a week, he would hold me in the house and stuff like that." Another women described being "locked in the house" and then enduring "accusations of me having a man in there with me." As a result of the abuser's actions the participant reported that she had to "call in sick to work."

Among respondents who suffered beatings prior to work, the majority of them attempted to go to work. One participant reported:

Table 1
Domestic Violence and Employment: Emerging Themes

Job interference behaviors	Consequences of job interference tactics	Reasons for disclosure	Reasons for nondisclosure

Before-work actions
  a. physically restrain employee
  b. beat employee, unable to attend work
  c. miscellaneous other prework behaviors
	Work absences
	  a. directly related to victimization
	  b. indirectly related to victimization
		Safety
		Suspected supervisor/ coworkers knew
		Forced to tell because abuser showed up at work.
			Fear of job loss
			Shamed about situation
			Ability to handle situation independently

Actions taken at work
  a. showing up at work
  b. making harassing phone calls to employee, supervisor, or coworker
  c. stalking respondent at work
  d. variety of other at-work behaviors
	Job resignation
	  a. shamed by victimization experience
	  b. safety issues for self and child
	  c. embarrassed by abuser showing up at work
	  d. forced to quit job by abuser		

Actions take after work
  a. beaten after work for actions employee took at work.
	Job termination
	  a. poor attendance
	  b. excessive personal phone calls
	  c. poor job performance
	  d. abuser showing up at work too many times		

[H]alf the time I wouldn't even want to go [to work] . . . I feared what he'd do [to me] before I went to work. One time he had beat me so bad I had to walk to work and I don't even know how I made it. Since then I'm cautious before leaving for work.

Another woman noted a particularly difficult situation:

I was about 7 months pregnant . . . he started kicking me in the sides; I had a boot print on my side for months . . . I went to work, I did not know what else to do.

One woman captured the experience of many of the participants who reported a range of other prework tactics:

[H]e would keep me up at night . . . he would come in the bedroom and flip on the light and call me names and try to jerk me out of the bed and call me horrible names. . . . [I]n the morning I would be too tired to go to work.

Another woman who shared a car with her then-boyfriend described missing work or reported to her job as a waitress late because she "wait[ed] for him to return from work with the car from his shift. He was always late, or he would not show up at all sometimes." Damaging participants' work clothing was another prework tactic experienced by one participant:

[H]e had cut up all my clothes, so I couldn't go to work because I did not have clothes . . . not nothing to wear to work. He cut up the things that I liked, because he knew that clothes were something that I loved.

Overall most participants suggested that it was usual to experience some form of prework interference tactic weekly. Further, respondents discussed becoming "numb" to abusers' actions, dealing with each incident "as part of the daily routine," reported 1 participant.

Actions taken at work. Abuse during work time was the second type of job interference behavior that emerged from the data. Perpetrators interfered with victims' work duties in four ways: showing up at work (72%), making harassing phone calls to victims (20%) and to victims' supervisors (10%), stalking respondents while at work (56%), and engaging in a variety of other tactics, described below.[2] One participant, a nurse's aide, described the effect of her abuser showing up at work in the following way: "For one thing, it was very embarrassing. It made me nervous to go to work because I didn't know at what point he was going to walk in and it just it was so unexpected, you never knew." Another woman provided graphic detail about one particular incident,

although she noted that similar incidents had occurred before:

I was working at a restaurant and he showed up outside and just started beating on the back door. We had closed up and we were cleaning up for inspection and stuff and the manager come and told me that he was out there. I of course went outside I could see that he was drunk and he was very angry . . . he saw me talking with someone . . . [he] started throwing me around the parking lot and they called the law and I got fired.

Participants also reported receiving harassing phone calls from abusers and reported that the phone calls were a nuisance and often quite distracting. The following two quotes illustrate that, for some participants, harassing phone calls were part of an array of work interference tactics used regularly by their abuser, whereas for others it was the sole tactic used. One woman described:

It started with phone calls . . . the kids are sick you need to come home. . . . [then] he'd come sit and watch and he'd order something and he'd sit there for hours. My boss said he really has a problem. I'd go out there and say you need to leave, I'm working . . . sometimes he'd leave sometimes he would not.

Another woman noted that even though she had her coworkers screening her incoming phone calls, she finally had to tell her supervisor about her abusive relationship because she feared that her abuser would contact her supervisor:

[Y]eah, I told my supervisor, he [abuser] calls here, he called him [supervisor] but luckily I told my supervisor first . . . he [abuser] tried to pull my boss into it . . . it is tricky . . . my coworkers know because they answered the phone for me.

Stalking at work was the third on-the-job interference tactic experienced by 56% of the participants. Participants indicated that being stalked at work was more distracting than receiving phone calls and equally as distracting as when the abuser appeared at work. Women described the stalking behavior as "unpredictable" and therefore "more frightening, because you never know when he's there and what he might do." The unpredictability is illustrated in the two following quotes:

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[2] Stalking at work and showing up at work were differentiated by respondents according to the perpetrators' location: If the abuser watched from afar, slightly off work premises, this was considered stalking. However, according to respondents, once the abuser set foot on the premises of the workplace it constituted "on-the-job harassment."

I was a cashier [at a restaurant]. I closed the store at nighttime. . . . It was raining outside and he was sitting across the street in the parking lot watching every move I made, I had not seen him first. After one of the regular customers talked to me about the rain, he never came back to get me that night. I had to walk home and I got there and he beat the living daylights out of me, he called me a slut, he kicked me in the stomach, broke my ribs, took a machete and threw it at me.

The unpredictable nature of her abuser's actions frightened one woman the most because she feared he would get her fired from her job.

I was the food stamp caseworker; it was the best money I ever made. He would pop up from nowhere, if I was gone too long [from my chair] he'd know it and then the phone calls would start from the outside phone booth. I had no idea how he knew my every move. If I stayed too late at work, the phone calls would start from home. The unpredictability was most stressful . . . I was afraid I'd lose my job.

Other on-the-job interference tactics included asking victims to leave their job immediately, verbally threatening to hurt respondents, verbally harassing respondents' coworkers or supervisor, physically harassing and verbally threatening supervisors, and in one case severely beating the respondent while on workplace premises. For example, 1 study participant described a scenario in which her then-boyfriend showed up at work and made her leave:

[He] would come in during work. He'd make me leave. He'd say don't make me show my butt. Don't make me make a scene. Just get in the car and let's go, don't tell them why you're leaving, just come on.

Another woman described a similar experience:

[He] came into work and they [coworkers] knew I was upset. He said, he evidently was sleeping and didn't know I had left [the house]. So he came to work . . . and said how dare you leave without telling me you are gone. I need you to call my job and tell them I won't be in today that I'm not feeling well. So get up and leave work right now and go home and call them and tell them I won't be there . . . he told me to leave my job and or else he [would] threatened me.

Another respondent described a situation in which her then-partner showed up at work threatening to hurt her if she did not cooperate with his demands:

I got . . . a job [at] . . . a sewing factory because he wouldn't let me go back to school. He would show up at work . . . he would scream at me and chase me inside the sewing factory. . . . [I]t was embarrassing and frightening.

Another on-the-job harassment situation experienced by 3 participants entailed the abuser verbally

harassing coworkers and supervisors. The following two examples illustrate examples of abusers threatening coworkers and supervisors:

He'd call a lot especially when we were in an argument. Towards the end when he felt like I really was gonna be gone or leave him, he would show up [at work]. He would kind of threaten him [male coworker] . . . threaten him with physical violence.

[H]e called me, he call all the time. . . . while I've been at the hospital, he called [my supervisors and coworkers] and said he was my dope man and I owed him some money. But I had an understanding supervisor.

In addition, 1 participant reported being beaten up while at work:

I did not know but he was watching me from outside. When I talked to a guy at work while doing displays at [the grocery store] he came into [the store] and just beat me up there. A customer wanted to call the cops and I told him please to not do that because it would only make it worse so he didn't call. I knew he'd kill me if someone intervened for me.

Actions taken after work.   After-work actions was the third and least frequent type of job interference behavior. According to respondents, after-work beatings often occurred because the abuser disapproved of something they did at work. Ten percent of women described being beaten directly after work for reasons including abusers' disapproval of respondent speaking to customers or coworkers or not earning enough money. The following quotes illustrate two women's experiences of being hit or harassed after work for something they did while at work:

[W]hen I came in from work, then I catch hell. You know like, that constant barrage of, you're lazy, you're stupid, you're dumb, . . . who would want to employ you . . . then if he caught me talking to a man it would be worse.

One time he left a gift box on the hood of the truck. I opened it and it was my cat, dead. The note said I would be next if I talked to anyone else at work.

Consequences of Victimization on Job Performance

Regardless of the type of job interference tactics displayed by abusers, one of the main themes that emerged from the data was the effect that victimization had on women's job performance. The majority of respondents reported that they missed work, were terminated from a job, or resigned as a direct result of the victimization. Three behaviors (missing work, job resignation, and job termination) were used as proxy

measures of job performance, as it was impossible to objectively evaluate respondents' job performance (see Table 1).

Work absences. Missing work with some regularity was a common theme among over 50% of the respondents. Specifically, women reported missing work as frequently as three to four times a month or as little as once every 2 weeks. Either way, data imply that some women would make up excuses about why they were unable to come into work, or some women would call in sick. In a few cases, when it became too difficult to continue calling in sick or making excuses, women would leave their jobs. Themes also suggest that women who regularly missed work without providing supervisors with legitimate excuses were eventually terminated from the job.

The reasons participants missed work fell into two distinct categories: Respondents missed work as a direct or indirect consequence of the victimization. Actions that *directly* affected women's job attendance included sleep deprivation from fighting the night before, suffering physical evidence of the abuse, feeling too ashamed to show up at work, in hiding and unable to call, hospitalized for an injury, physically restrained from going to work, or damaged car or hidden keys. The following examples illustrate how victimization *directly* affected participants' jobs.

As reported by many participants, sleep deprivation prevented them from going to work. For example, one woman reported:

> [W]e would be arguing I wouldn't get any sleep. Or a lot of times I would think, we would get in fights all night then I'd be too tired to work. . . . I'd call in with an excuse or not show up.

Another woman described how her bruises kept her from going to work, "Yeah, a couple of times I had to just call in because, I mean I was too bruised. I had never, never missed work." Data further implied that among women who had been hospitalized or who had to retreat into hiding, calling their employer was not a top priority:

> [A]s many times as I was in the hospital I expect I probably should have [told my employer] . . . maybe I would have saved my job. . . . I never called in . . . I just did not show up.
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> I missed a few days of work. I was not in a place where I could call in. I was at a point where he was stalking me and I actually hid out for a couple of days. I lost the job.

Other factors that directly affected participants' job attendance included being physically restrained from going to work or having their car sabotaged in some way. The following two quotes demonstrate the extent to which some abusers will go to sabotage their girlfriend's or partner's job:

> It happened in November . . . I quit the next Thursday. . . before it was time for me to go to work he fixed the house even if he was not there it was locked from the outside . . . I couldn't get out. . . . I couldn't even open anything to let anybody in or to get out.
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> [H]e shows up right before I go to work. . . . He'd keep me from getting into the car . . . I would have to push past him. Sometimes he'd take my keys, put some fake keys in their place so you can't get in or out of the house or drive the car. I have four different sets of keys. I've never had to do this before.

Reasons for missing work as a result of *indirect* consequences associated with the victimization included feeling "too psychologically distressed," "too depressed," and "too anxious" to function at work. As a result, women either called in sick or did not show up for work. If available, respondents used leave time to compensate for work absences. However, women with limited job tenures had not yet built up a pool of sick or vacation time, and therefore it was easier "to just not show up." The following quotes illuminate how victimization indirectly wreaked havoc at work. One woman said, "I was too upset to do much of anything, trying to go to work was impossible." One woman mentioned that she would "burst out into tears" and then take "time to just get away by myself. My boss would see . . . I'd just go home without reason and just fall asleep because when I sleep I don't have to think about it." Fatigue was a significant factor that led women to miss work. Women described feeling emotionally or physically drained from having to deal with abusers tactics.[3] "Yeah, a couple of times I had to just call in because, I mean I was too upset and tired to get there. I had never missed work . . . before meeting him."

Job resignations and terminations. Over the course of the previous 24 months, 91% of respondents had resigned or had been terminated as a result of experiencing some form of domestic violence. Slightly over 50% of the women had resigned from at

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[3] Fatigue as an indirect consequence of victimization is distinct from sleep deprivation as a direct consequences of victimization in that the former results as a culmination of experiencing a variety of factors. For instance, the woman may experience fatigue from trying to meet all her commitments without allowing anyone to know what is happening at home. In contrast, the latter results from a specific event, such as the abuser keeping the victim up all night by badgering her or not allowing her to fall asleep.

least one job during the 2-year period, and an equal percentage had resigned from more than one job during the past 2 years. Among the respondents who had resigned over the 2-year period, all but 1 (96%) resigned from jobs by giving supervisors and managers little or no notice. Most of the respondents indicated they would have preferred to keep working or preferred to give the appropriate resignation notice, but the circumstances surrounding the job leaving frequently prohibited the traditional job resignation procedure.

Data suggested four primary reasons for why women left their jobs with little or no notice. First, it was common for women to feel "shamed by the situation" as illustrated in this participant's quote:

> [H]e just started, I don't even know what the fight started over. He slapped me and pushed me down . . . I couldn't go to work after that. . . . I was too shamed by it [what she looked like] . . . I just quit.

Fear for their children's and their own safety was the second reason women left without any notice:

> And then I'd have to miss work because [my son would] get sick. And they'd [supervisor] say we love your work but you've got to be here. And I'd say, well my baby comes first, you know. I could not leave my child home alone with him [abuser]. . . . I finally quit.

A third reason some women never returned to work was because they were embarrassed by their abusers' continued on-the-job harassment,[4] as depicted by this woman's story:

> He'd walk into [my] office and you know it's just a little tiny room. It sat between the two bathrooms. It was like a broom closet. . . . He would show up at my work and just the sight of him would tear me all to pieces. My manager did ask me one time, what's going on you know with you and man friend? I said, you know, we're having difficulties. She said we just don't want to have him coming in here interfering with your job. I eventually quit, because he would not stop coming to my job, I felt too ashamed.

Forced resignation was the fourth reason women left their job without giving notice:

> [T]hat night he took my stereo and stomped on the speakers [at the store where I worked] . . . he come in there . . . and told me I had to leave there and I had to quit my job and walk out. I knew if I didn't I was going to be in trouble when I got home, so I quit that job.

While some respondents resigned or were forced to leave their jobs by abusers, other respondents were terminated from employment. Forty-one percent of respondents were terminated from at least one job within the previous 2-year period. Women were asked to leave jobs because of poor attendance at work, excessive personal phone calls, poor job performance, and abuser showing up at work too many times. One participant described missing work because she was hiding out from her abuser, yet she did not feel comfortable telling her boss:

> [I] hid out. I did not feel comfortable explaining this to my boss and I regret having to lose the job over it, but . . . I had no choice . . . I didn't show up for three days . . . I called in finally and they said do not bother [coming back].

Women who had access to a telephone at work reported that it was common for their abuser to phone them frequently, and in some instances with great costs:

> I'd stay on the phone . . . because I'd fear he would show up . . . he would call on the phone for hours at the hotel while I was there. After his calls, [I'd be] forgetful . . . have slow performance . . . couldn't think, couldn't concentrate . . . eventually I lost the job.

In two instances, employers terminated study participants because they could no longer tolerate abusers' disruptive tactics, as illustrated in this quote:

> He would call and I wasn't allowed to have personal phone calls so he'd get angry with that . . . he'd eventually come out to work, the last time he showed up at work he dragged me out of work. My employer got tired of it and fired me.

Respondents' reactions to being terminated from their job fell into three general categories. One group of participants was deeply discouraged by the job termination. The job and the people with whom they worked had great meaning. As well, they perceived themselves as women with strong work ethics. Among these women, many relied on their earnings to support themselves and their families, thus a sense of panic quickly ensued. The following quote illustrates the sentiment shared by participants who were discouraged by their job termination:

> I work at a nursing home and I loved my job. I worked as dietary in the kitchen and I'm trying to keep away from drugs . . . I knew at my job I had to stay away from drugs . . . they thought I was a real good worker,

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[4] Women appeared to conceptualize "embarrassed by abuser" slightly differently from "feeling ashamed" by victimization situation. Women who were embarrassed by abuser described situations in which the abuser would appear at work and display angry, belligerent behavior. It was his behavior they were affected by. On the other hand, women who described feeling ashamed by the victimization associated a sense of low-self esteem, disgrace, and stigma with the situation.

. . . until I did not show up for work three days in row . . . it was because of the fighting . . . I eventually I lost my job. I loved meeting the people. I knew a lot of the people I worked with and they were real real sweet. I love working with elderly people. . . . I called you know to get my job back but she told me she said she could not give my job back where I hadn't showed up for three days . . . I felt bad and I still feel bad.

Another group of respondents stated they were not as concerned about losing their jobs because they knew they were not working up to capacity. The following participant's experience is similar to other participants whose responses fell into this category:

Between the fighting all night and it's kind of hard to function properly. I'd go to work, but my job performance was not up to par and I was a cashier so that's pretty . . . they did [notice] . . . they come right out and say it . . . I eventually had to leave.

The third theme among respondents who were terminated from their job was the spirit of "no problem, other jobs exist." Among the women categorized within this theme, looking for another job was part of the usual yearly routine. For instance, 1 participant who lost her job as a direct result of issues associated with her victimization worried more about paying the bills than finding another job:

[I'm] not as much worried about my safety than I am about having electric cutoff. . . .You could go work at McDonalds if you had to. None of that is a real big issue. Well, I mean it's an issue especially if you have a good job, but it's not nearly as complicated and frightening . . . as not having money. When you have children, like right now I'm trying to get my house payment on a moratorium, I haven't paid it in two months. That means they'll stop the payment for a while. I have no money . . . but I know I'll find another job.

Context Associated With Disclosing Victimization

The findings and the quotes reported in the previous section illustrate the variety of job interference tactics used by batterer and the job-related consequences associated with these behaviors. This section explores whether participants told someone at work about their victimization experience and the consequences associated with disclosing or not disclosing this information. Among the entire sample, 46% of respondents informed supervisors or managers about their victimization situation, suggesting that 54% opted *not* to tell their supervisor. Similarly, among the total sample, 43% of respondents informed a coworker about domestic violence, whereas 57% of

respondents opted *not* to tell a coworker. In almost all situations, when women disclosed to someone at work, supervisors and coworkers were generally supportive. Respondents' reasons for disclosing victimization pertained to either safety reasons or because women assumed people "figured out what was going on." For instance, in two cases, respondents disclosed to both their coworkers and supervisor because they needed someone to screen their phone calls:

I told my supervisor and my coworkers just for phone calls screening purposes. It makes it hard too because I answer phones. And I do, since I work in security, I did get in touch with my old supervisor and made him aware of it, just in case I did need to call security.

In another set of instances, women disclosed directly to their supervisors or coworkers because they needed physical protection:

I was really afraid after what I had gone through that if they downsized anybody I was going to be out of there because of the problems I had had and missing work and coming in late that this was going to really impact me. He told me, I really feel like, I know you've had problems, family, personal problems, but we feel you could step it up and really get in there and get the job done if you focus on the work. I told them there about the EPO[5] . . . my boss was great . . . they transferred me to another location . . . and I felt much safer.

In the other case, the employee told her supervisor because she did not feel safe at work:

[W]hen I got an EPO . . . I told my boss and told coworkers about EPO. They'd check in on me and watch to see if he was around and . . . make sure I could go home safely, but he always got around it.

In contrast to participants informing people directly about their victimization, the other primary way people at work found out was due to the abuser "making a scene at work" or harassing coworkers and supervisors by phone. After describing the scene her boyfriend created on the premises of the convenience store where she was employed, 1 participant noted:

I mean you're ashamed. You don't know what people are gonna say. I mean, you want them to think the best of you and quite naturally when you tell them that you're having these type of problems, they're gonna think less of you. I even ultimately went and got an EPO against this person, . . . so I told them [store owner].

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[5]EPO stands for "Emergency Protective Order." An EPO is a type of domestic violence protective order issued by the Commonwealth of Kentucky to protect victims of domestic violence inflicted by abusers.

Another woman described how hard she worked to keep it from people at work, and then when her boyfriend appeared at work, she could no longer hide it:

> I did have to wear long sleeves . . . you feel like, well, I felt like that everybody knew anyway. The whole time I'm trying to hide it it's like everyone can see right through me. I never told them, but then when he showed up at work, I had to tell them.

Three main reasons emerged for why women opted *not* to tell someone at work: fear of job loss, sense of shame about their situation, and ability to handle situation independently. Fear of job loss within the context of perceived limited economic opportunities within their immediate communities prevented some women from informing anyone at work. As illustrated by the following two quotes, women feared that they would be terminated if they informed someone at work: "Gracious no! I kept everything hid. I live in a pretty small town. I worked at a good job and I didn't want to lose my job so I didn't bother with telling nobody." A second woman felt similarly: "I was brought up that what goes on in the family you keep inside. I feared I'd lose my jobs . . . there are not many good jobs in this small town."

Shame about their "home situation" was the second reason that respondents opted not to disclose victimization histories. In particular, women living in tight-knit communities believed "everyone knows everyone . . . to tell your boss about what's happening at home is to tell the community." Data suggested that hiding the abuse stemmed from an extreme sense of privacy and pride, as illustrated by the following quotes, "No, you don't . . . [tell anyone at work]. They will just know. . . . the less they know the better, then I could not be fired. And I was more ashamed than anything." This sentiment was echoed by another woman who took great pride in being employed for several years: "A lot of people like you feel that a lot of shame is associated with it [violence]

. . . so if you tell your employer . . . you're doomed . . . and if you do, you don't want to go back."

The capacity to handle the situation independently was the third reason women opted not to disclose the victimization to someone at work. Data imply that these women mentioned that they could balance the demands of work with the victimization and therefore deemed it "unnecessary to tell anyone at work, as [they] could handle the abuse on [their] own." One woman feared that telling someone at work would lead to her abuser being arrested: "No [did not tell anyone] because they [people at work] would have reported it to the police."

Employers' Responses: Workplace Support

The reactions and subsequent actions taken by employer representatives when employees disclosed victimization histories emerged as a significant concern for the majority of participants (see Table 2). Among all of the women who confided in supervisors or managers ($n = 15$), a strong majority (86%) received formal or informal support from the workplace. Formal support could be defined as a supervisor or manager using a documented workplace policy or program to assist the respondents or referring participants to a community-based agency for help. Examples of formal workplace supports would include Employee Assistance Programs and various types of human resources (HR) policies (e.g., vacation time, sick time, or flexible work schedules). Data imply that women who received formal support from their employer were generally quite grateful. One woman said:

> Yeah, I told my boss. She uhm, that was really like the first incident and she let me take a couple days off from work. She was supportive . . . I could not have done it [moved to a shelter] without her.

As noted earlier, one participant reported that her employer took a huge risk by relocating her:

Table 2
Domestic Violence and Employment: Employers' Responses Workplace Supports

Formal supports	Informal supports	Workplace support benefits
Employee Assistance Program	Supervisor offering sense of understanding	Short-term job retention
Allow use of vacation or sick leave	Screening phone calls	Long-term job retention
Institute flexible work arrangements (job relocation)	Escorting abuser off property	
	Partnering employed domestic violence victim with another employee	

[T]here was another lady in HR, and I've talked to her and told her. The woman that I report to . . . talked with the county attorneys and explained to her what was going on. They have me working at another location now and I don't mind going to that location. I told her that I really needed to work . . . she mentioned to me that they would set up a laptop here [at the shelter] for me and a phone . . . I said that I would be willing to work in the warehouse or work anywhere just so I can work. And they had me, I have to go to [another city] everyday and they pay me for the driving time.

Providing informal supports emerged as the other set of strategies used by managers or supervisors to assist respondents. Informal supports are defined by supportive actions taken by a supervisor or manager to assist women with their situations; these actions do not directly adhere to administrative workplace policy. Examples of informal supports included displaying a sense of understanding of the situation, screening phone calls, escorting abuser off workplace property, and arranging for an employee escort. One participant who was employed as an administrative assistant reported her "[supervisor] paid to get his number blocked from this phone." Another participant working for a food service company reported:

[T]he reason I really liked the job was because I worked for a woman that I could talk to her and she was sensitive about whatever I was going through. . . . She would say well, you know we really want to keep you and I understand that you've been going through. . . . That's why I worked with her so long.

Another participant working in a small convenience store described a potential violent situation:

[T]hat's how my boss found out . . . he showed up at work . . . and well the boss sort of said [to him] . . . like you need to leave or I'm going to . . . I'm going to call the cops or whatever.

Another women employed at a small restaurant reported:

[T]hey [supervisors] knew, they said whatever you need . . . they'd say, if you need a place to stay or anything like that. They were really helpful. I guess that's the reason I liked my job so well cause of the people were understanding and they're to help you.

Participants indicated that receiving both informal and formal workplace supports was highly valued and consequently promoted loyalty, as illustrated by the following two quotes. The first woman explained:

I have a manager whose daughter's going through it [intimate partner violence]. She gives me paperwork [work that I can focus on] and she's taking me to a seminar on domestic violence. . . . She helps me . . . because her daughter's going through it, she can relate.

I think that on the job, you have to find the person that you can relate to, especially the supervisor or somebody there . . . I'm more focused on the job because of it.

The second women's remarks echo the previous employee's as well as other study participants' experiences:

[A]t work she [supervisor] would, she'd say no she's not at this store today if I'd like see him and then I'd go in the back. I felt safe when she [supervisor] was there . . . so I stayed . . . for a while at least.

Although employees valued informal and formal supports, the relationship between employees' perceptions of workplace supports and respondents' job retention was inconclusive. Data suggest that supervisory and coworker support had positive effects on respondents. In particular, such support helped respondents stay focused on work and stay employed. However, about half of the women who had received workplace supports eventually had to resign from their jobs because of safety reasons, being too "upset and stressed" to hold a job or because they were forced to stop working.

Discussion

This research had three main goals: (a) to identify the types of job interference tactics used by abusers and their consequences on women's job performance, (b) to identify and understand the context and consequences of disclosing victimization to coworkers and supervisors, and (c) to identify the supports offered to employees once they had disclosed their victimization histories. Findings associated with specific effects of victimization on women's employment were similar to earlier studies which found that women experienced abuse before, during, and after work that did interfere with work performance and job stability (Barusch, Taylor, Abu-Bader, & Derr, 1999; Friedman & Crouper, 1987; Lloyd, 1997; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999; Pearson, Theonnes, & Griswold, 1999; Raphael, 1995, 1996, 2000; Riger et al., 2000; see Tolman & Raphael, 2000). In particular, this study found that while all types of job interference tactics used by their abusers negatively affected respondents' job performance in some way, the on-the-job type of interference tactics appeared to be the most detrimental to women's ability to consistently function at work. Furthermore, similar to other research investigations (Browne et al., 1999), data imply that abusers' job interference behaviors have neg-

ative consequences on short- and long-term job stability.

Compared with previous research, two unexpected findings emerged pertaining to victimization and job interference. The majority of women from this study reported that their abusers had shown up at work at some point during the last 2 years. These data are higher than a sample of domestic violence victims residing in a Chicago shelter (72% vs. 40%; Riger et al., 2000). Despite differences in the methodology and the purposes of the two studies, the qualitative differences between the two investigations could be partially explained by proximity of job to respondents' home. That is, respondents residing in smaller communities reported living in close proximity to their job site or working with abusers' friends or relatives. Such circumstances could possibly increase the occurrence of abusers showing up at the job site, because in some smaller communities work is an extension of employees' social networks (Websdale, 1995), whereas in dense urban areas like Chicago (Riger et al., 2000), employees may be more likely to work outside their immediate neighborhood or community, thus decreasing the likelihood of on-the-job occurrences.

The other unexpected finding, stalking at work and its negative effect on work performance, had not been discussed in previous research (see Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Riger et al., 2000; Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Women's responses implied that stalking at work caused significant levels of stress and psychological discomfort that in turn significantly affected job performance. In fact, the content of respondents' discussions that focused on the ramifications associated with being stalked while at work led us to surmise that the abusers' stalking behavior produced more anxiety and stress for women than actual physical actions taken by abuser prior to work. Women suggested that these symptoms of anxiety and stress were predominantly caused by the unpredictability of their abusers' behavior and the fear that they might act on their threats.

The study's second and third goal focused on identifying whether respondents disclosed to someone at work, the context for telling someone, and consequences of disclosing victimization. Results suggest that respondents' disclosed to supervisors or coworkers because (a) they were seeking physical protection from their abuser, (b) they needed someone to intervene with abuser because he was calling workplace incessantly throughout the day, or (c) they were forced to tell someone at work because the abuser showed up at the workplace. In contrast, rea-

sons employees opted not to disclose to someone at work included a fear of job loss, a sense of shame, or a belief they could handle the interface between work and their abusive home life without help from somewhat at work.

Overall, respondents who did tell someone at work about their victimization experiences were satisfied with the reactions and subsequent support offered by a coworker or supervisor. Women were relieved when they were not fired immediately after informing someone at work about their home situation. As well, they were appreciative of supervisors offering informal or formal workplace supports such as schedule flexibility, screening of phone calls, job relocation, or shift changes. Likewise, respondents positively perceived the support received by their coworkers. However, contrary to organizational support literature that indicates supervisor and workplace support can lead to increased job retention (Bond et al., 1998; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Saltzstein et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Voydanoff, 1988), this study's results suggest that employer-based supports primarily led to short-term job retention. Long-term job retention was evident in only two cases. Safety issues often thwarted the long-term benefits typically associated with employer or coworker support. Specifically, despite receiving assistance from a supervisor or a coworker, some women had to resign from their position or leave their job without notice because the abusers' actions put respondents' lives at risk. The two women who retained their jobs over the long term were able to do so because their employers provided them with significant accommodations. One respondent was relocated to another work setting in a nearby community, whereas the other respondent was given extended time off by her supervisor, allowing her to temporarily move into a shelter and then relocate into safe housing.

Although this study is too small to suggest broadranging workplace implications, the data provide evidence that certain workplace strategies could be useful in helping employers address domestic violence when it spills over into the workplace and possibly prevent it. For instance, some women opted not to tell someone at work about the abuse because they were shamed by their situation. This suggests that providing education to supervisors and managers about domestic violence and its workplace consequences might encourage more victims to seek support from someone at work. Further, the majority of respondents reported that their abuser showed up at their workplace. Such a finding implies that workplaces might benefit from having a "domestic violence spill-

over safety plan" in place in the event that an abuser comes onto the workplace premises or harasses employees over the phone.

This preliminary study has several implications for further research on the effects of victimization on women's employment and the role of workplace supports in job retention among domestic violence victims. First, more research is needed to examine, in greater depth, the short- and long-term effects of victimization on women's employment. Specifically, a comprehensive and systematic inquiry into the immediate and short-term effects of how domestic violence affects victims' ability to obtain and maintain work for at least 1 year would deepen researchers' and practitioners' knowledge of this social issue. The additional knowledge could help employers and community-based agencies design policies and programs to help domestic violence victims become or stay employed while experiencing the immediate effects of domestic violence.

Second, a longitudinal investigation of the effects of domestic violence on women's labor force participation is warranted to determine the longer term effects of domestic violence on women's economic security. Following a cohort of employed or recently employed domestic violence victims over a period of at least 5 years would provide insight into how past and current victimization affect labor force attachment patterns, occupational choice, career development, hourly earnings, and economic security. Moreover, a longitudinal study could examine the relationship between employment outcomes and access to workplace supports, community resources, and perceived employment opportunities within the community.

Research that examines the relationships between domestic violence victims' lives on and off the job would further the understanding of earlier research, which has focused on the effects of adverse family situations on employees' work life (Bhagat, 1983; Breslau et al., 1982; Frone & Barnes, 1994). Such investigations would contribute significantly to the work–family research and inform work–family and human resource managers about issues salient to the personnel management and organizational culture. Third, additional research into organizational responses to domestic violence's spillover into the workplace and manager and supervisor attitudes about domestic violence is long overdue. As evident in this study and other research findings, domestic violence spills over into the workplace and has serious ramifications for victims, employees, and customer safety. Thus, a comprehensive investigation

that evaluates workplace policies and practices and employee attitudes pertaining to domestic violence is needed to further improve safety in the workplace. Further, such information is necessary to design employer and employee education materials about domestic violence, its effects on workplace safety, and policies and procedures that could further improve the safety of the workplace.

Finally, the findings, though preliminary, suggest that social service agencies that treat victims of domestic violence might want to consider offering treatment services aimed at helping women manage their employment situation as an intervention to minimize job interference and job loss. Services might consider workplace-specific issues such as when and how to inform your employer about domestic violence and how to create a safety plan at work. Moreover, preliminary data suggest that treatment services may need to be community specific, in that issues relevant in a small rural community may be completely irrelevant in a larger urban environment and vice versa.

There are several limitations to this study. The sample was small and biased given the recruitment methods, and so its findings are not generalizable to all employed women experiencing domestic violence. Given the small number of participants in the study ($N = 32$), it should be reiterated that this investigation is exploratory and results are preliminary. The study used a self-report approach in collecting data and used a mixed-methodology data collection procedure. Thus, this may contribute to biased reporting of certain behaviors. However, a self-report approach has been used before with exploratory research (Edin & Lein, 1997; Schein, 1995; Williams, 1996). Finally, one person coded the data. Although measures were taken to maximize the objectivity of a subjective process, biases or misinterpretations of quotes could be possible. Building on previous research, the results from this study provide useful information about consequences of victimization on women's work. Moreover, this study expands previous investigations by examining employers' responses to employee disclosure about domestic violence, the presence and effects of workplace supports, and factors that influence job retention and coping strategies used by women to deal with victimization while working.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the consequences that domestic violence may have on women's employment. As such, the study provides a framework from which practitioners and researchers can begin designing further inquiry into understanding the issues faced by employed domestic violence

victims. Particularly, this study raises questions about whether workplace supports, in combination with social services aimed to address job retention among domestic violence victims, could help reduce the economic insecurity experienced by many victims of domestic violence. Examining these issues in greater depth could improve the safety of victims and their coworkers, increase victims' economic security, and thereby create an opportunity for them to leave a violent relationship.

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