

Brian Howe  
Chair  
Insecure Work Inquiry Panel  
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23 January 2012

Dear Mr Howe

The Safe at Home, Safe at Work Project is anxious to support the submission by the national Network of Working Women's Centres (NWWC) on the impact of insecure work on women.

Our project has drawn heavily on the experience and knowledge of the NWWC when developing domestic violence entitlements and supports in the workplace for workers experiencing domestic violence.

The Safe at Home, Safe at Work Project is funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and is based at the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of NSW.

Of interest to your inquiry might be the first national survey of the impact of domestic violence in the workplace, conducted by this project in 2011. *Safe at Home, Safe at Work? National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey* (attached) found that thirty percent of 3,611 respondent workers had experienced some form of domestic violence over the course of their lifetime, with 25 percent having experienced it more than 12 months ago and five percent within the past 12 months.

Of the respondents who had experienced domestic violence, nearly half reported that it had affected their capacity to get to work, through either physical restraint, hiding/stealing keys or transportation money or refusal/failure to show up to care for children. Nineteen percent of respondents who had experienced domestic violence reported that the violence had impacted on them in the workplace; abusive calls and emails and the abusive person attending the workplace were the most common form of abuse experienced. The impacts on workers included feeling distracted, tired or unwell, having to take time off and being late to work.

In many instances, the abusive person targets the victim at work or their capacity to get to work in order to force them to resign or abandon their job, or get them fired or disciplined. Once the victim loses their job, it can be difficult - if not impossible, to leave the violent relationship: without an independent income source, the victim is unlikely to have the means to pay rent or mortgage repayments and other necessary expenses.

This is supported by range of research findings: a United States Government review found that 24 – 52 percent of victims reported losing a job, at least in part, due to domestic

violence.<sup>[1]</sup> Women who are victims of domestic violence have more disrupted work histories, on average have lower personal incomes, have had to change jobs frequently and are more likely to be employed in casual and part time work than women with no experience of violence.<sup>[2]</sup> Income security and employment are identified as a key structural supports to women leaving violence relationships.<sup>[3]</sup>

In partnership with the trade union movement, the NWWC and progressive employers, we have promoted the introduction of domestic violence clauses in enterprise agreement and awards. Over 300,000 Australian workers now have access to domestic violence leave and other protections.

However, our concern for women working in insecure employment motivated a submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) inquiry into family violence (2010), and contributed to the 2011 ALRC inquiry into family violence and Commonwealth employment law. We strongly recommended that domestic violence is recognised in Commonwealth employment and anti- discrimination legislation. The ALRC report will be publically available in the near future.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>[1]</sup> United States General Accounting Office, *Domestic Violence: Prevalence and Implications for Employment Among Welfare Recipients* (Washington DC, GAO Publication No B-280099, 24 November 1998) at 8 (citing the results of three earlier studies). Available at: [www.gao.gov/products/HEHS-99-12](http://www.gao.gov/products/HEHS-99-12).

<sup>[2]</sup> Suzanne Franzway, Carole Zufferey and Donna Chung, *Domestic Violence and Women's Employment*, (Paper presented at Our Work, Our Lives 2007: National Conference on Women and Industrial Relations, 20 – 21 September, 2007) citing Jody Raphael, 'Domestic Violence as a Welfare-to-Work Barrier: Research and Theoretical Issues' in Renzetti et al, *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women* (California, Sage Publications, 2001) at 443-457.

<sup>[3]</sup> Shirley Patton, *Pathways: How Women Leave Violent Men* (Government of Tasmania, 2003) at xviii. Available at: [www.dpac.tas.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/47012/pathways\\_how\\_women\\_leave\\_violent\\_men.pdf](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/47012/pathways_how_women_leave_violent_men.pdf).