

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HR: WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE GROUND?



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AHRI would also like to thank its Advisory Research Panel members for their input into this survey.

FOREWORD



This study was conducted against a backdrop of estimated incidents of violent abuse by a current partner of 160,000 women and 68,100 men in Australia, according to a [2010 National Personal Safety Survey](#).

AHRI is very pleased to be part of this study by Professor Karin Sanders and her team of

researchers from the University of New South Wales Sydney and the Australian National University. The 1,125 AHRI members who participated in the research during April-May 2017 are an indication that HR practitioners take the issue of partner abuse seriously.

There is a good deal of general data available on the prevalence of domestic violence in the Australian community. By contrast, this study constitutes a preliminary look at the issue from the perspective of its incidence and impact in Australian workplaces as observed by HR practitioners. It also looks at what if anything, organisations are doing by way of workplace policies and practices in response to the issue.

I note that only five individual respondents to the survey are of the view that domestic violence is not a matter of relevance to employers. In December 2011, the then Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick and I co-authored an [opinion piece](#) that appeared in the now discontinued ABC blogsite, *The Drum*. We took the view

that employers need to think about what they are doing about domestic violence. Many hundreds of readers commented on the article, with around half asserting, some rancorously, that employers have no role in what is essentially a private matter between couples.

Just six years later, it pleases me to see that view is no longer so widely shared. A substantial number of HR practitioners see the negative impact that domestic violence has on affected employees' productivity and absenteeism, as well as their career prospects.

While the survey made no findings on matters such as the gender of offenders or victims, it did make findings on the incidence of organisational training in areas designed to assist managers to recognise domestic violence and ways in which they might be able to support victims. On both matters, practice appears well short of rhetoric.

I applaud Professor Sanders and her research team and look forward to future studies in this area of national significance as it presents itself in Australian workplaces.



Peter Wilson AM FCPHR
Chairman and National President
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intimate partner violence, commonly referred to as domestic violence, is generally understood as behaviour that inflicts either one or a combination of physical and psychological harm to a former or current intimate partner. It is recognised as a pervasive social malaise affecting various life domains, the family and the workplace prominent among them.

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of HR-related policies and practices that support victims of domestic violence in Australian workplaces. In addition, it attempts to identify specific organisational characteristics that predict the extent to which different types of HR policies and practices are adopted to support victims of domestic violence.

While most respondent organisations claim a range of policies that touch on employee domestic violence matters, this study reveals the conversion into practice falls short.

The survey, which sampled the views of 1,125 HR professionals from private and public-sector organisations around Australia, was conducted in April and May 2017, in partnership with Professor Karin Sanders head of the School of Management at UNSW Business School and the lead researcher. Her fellow researchers are Professor Simon Restubog, Associate Professor Nick (Lu) Wang and Ms Claire Petelczyc from the Australian National University.

With respect to workplace attitudes, the results reveal that a substantial minority of 34 per cent of respondents agree (28 per cent) or strongly agree (6 per cent) that domestic violence victims are less productive, and 38 per cent agree (33 per cent) or strongly agree (5 per cent) that they call in ill more often.

Regardless of any research controls for the type and size of an organisation, gender at the top – having a female CEO and female members in the senior management team – is related to the presence of domestic violence policies and practices in the organisation.

A small minority of only 5 per cent of respondents agree (4 per cent) or strongly agree (1 per cent) that it is not possible to assist victims of domestic violence until they leave their abusive spouse.

In general areas of policy and practice, 92 per cent report the availability of parental leave, 89 per cent report flexible work practices in place, and 89 per cent report anti-bullying policies and practices within their organisations.

A miniscule number of five respondents do not believe the issue of domestic violence is a responsibility of employers.

Practical recognition of domestic violence victims by way of case management within workplaces shows itself where some form of practice is evident, according to 23 per cent of respondents. Practices to empower victims to do something about their situation are reported by 17 per cent of respondents.

The survey findings reveal that only 14 per cent of respondents report any form of specific training for supervisors and managers to help victims disclose domestic violence as an issue for them, and only 18 per cent have any form of manager training to recognise victims of domestic violence

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

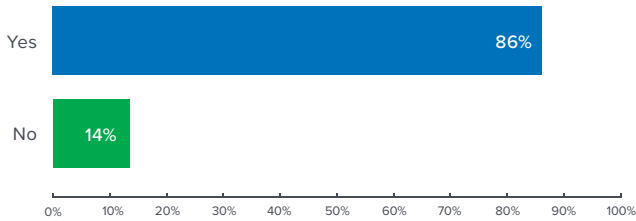
- Around two thirds of the respondents indicate that their organisations have some form of policy in place relating to domestic violence.
- A third of respondents indicate their organisation has a dedicated family or domestic violence leave policy in place.
- Respondents report the main related policies in place centre on inclusion and diversity, flexible working arrangements, parental leave and bullying.
- The most specific practices in place to support victims of domestic violence centre around counselling for victims and a supporting organisational culture.
- Respondents report low incidence of training to equip managers and supervisors to support recognition and disclosure of domestic violence.
- The data reveals a relationship between the proportion of female senior management and domestic violence practices.
- A third of respondents believe that victims of domestic violence are less productive and report being ill more often.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey was distributed to the member database of the Australian HR Institute during April and May 2017. It attracted a total of 1125 respondents. Responses were treated anonymously.

As shown in Figure 1, a majority of respondents are currently working as HR practitioners (86 per cent).

FIGURE 1: WORKING AS AN HR PROFESSIONAL (1103 RESPONSES)



Figures 2 and 3 identify the majority of respondents as female (79 per cent) and aged between 41 and 55 (48 per cent).

FIGURE 2: GENDER (1103 RESPONSES)

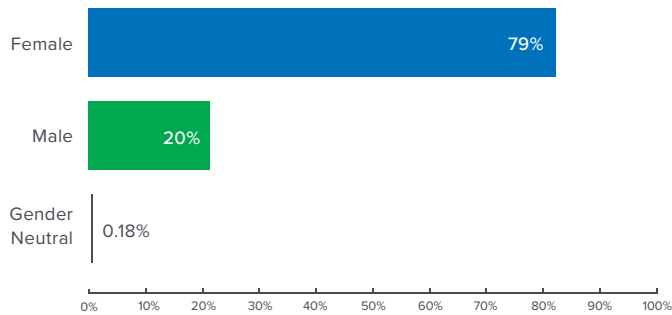
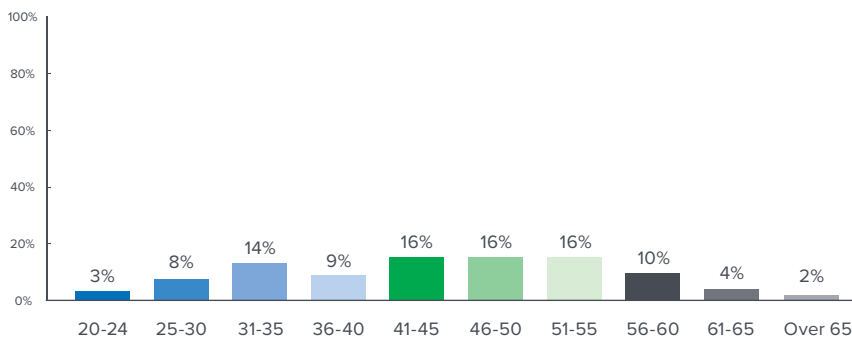


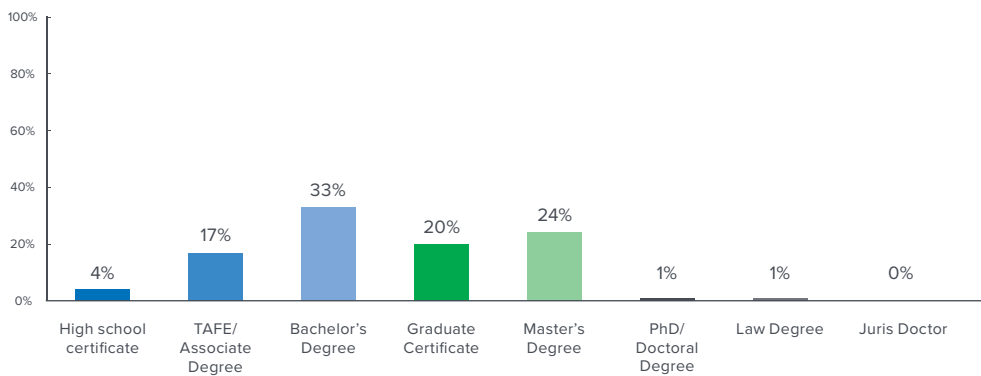
FIGURE 3: AGE (1100 RESPONSES)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 4 shows that 33 per cent of respondents have achieved as their highest qualification a bachelor's degree, 24 per cent a master's degree, 20 per cent a graduate certificate and 17 per cent a TAFE/associate degree. An insignificant proportion report having a law degree or a doctorate, and fewer than 5 per cent of respondents report the Higher School Certificate as their highest qualification.

FIGURE 4: HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION (1102 RESPONSES)



ORGANISATION CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 5 indicates the majority of respondents are from organisations that are not listed on the Australian Security Exchange (ASX) (89 per cent), whilst Figure 6 designates respondents as either from a private sector for-profit organisation (46 per cent), a non-for-profit (25 per cent) or a public sector organisation (29 per cent).

FIGURE 5: ASX LISTED ORGANISATION (1119 RESPONSES)

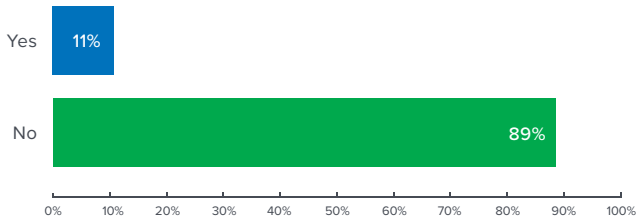
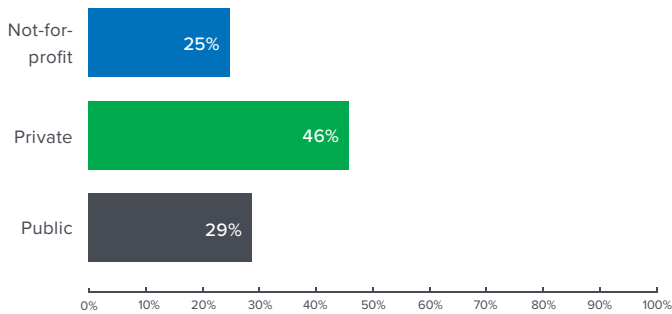


FIGURE 6: SECTOR OF ORGANISATION (1108 RESPONSES)

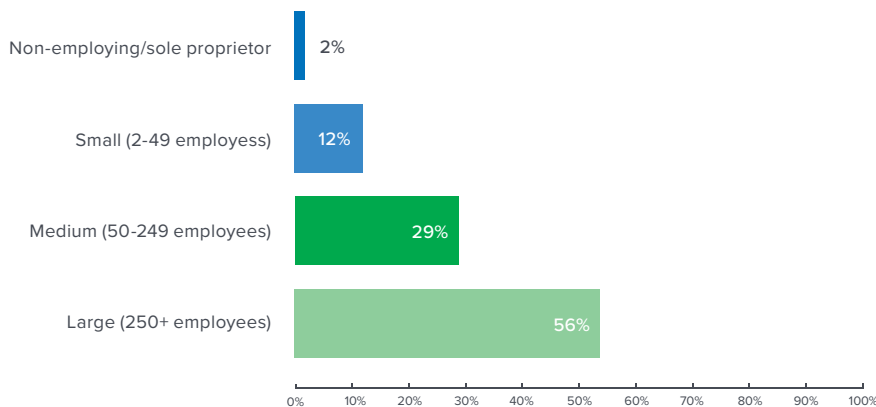


Respondents from ASX listed organisations were significantly more likely to work in larger organisations, were less likely to have a female CEO (6 per cent) and were significantly less likely to have female members in their senior management team (27 per cent), in comparison to non-listed private sector organisations.

ASX listed and non-listed private sector organisations do not differ significantly in the gender of the head of HR, the age of the CEO or the age of the head of HR.

Around half the sample (56 per cent) report that they are from organisations with more than 250 employees, as indicated in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7: SIZE OF ORGANISATION (1123 RESPONSES)



ORGANISATION CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 8 shows that most respondents were from organisations headed by a male CEO (77 per cent). Figure 9 shows that a little more than half are led by a CEO in the 51–60 age range (51 per cent).

FIGURE 8: GENDER OF CEO (1108 RESPONSES)

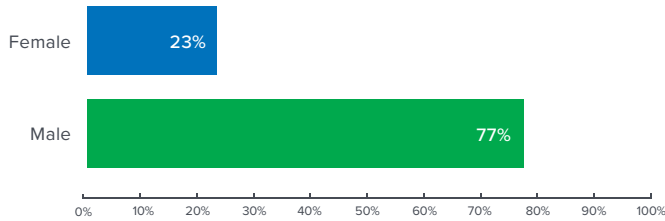
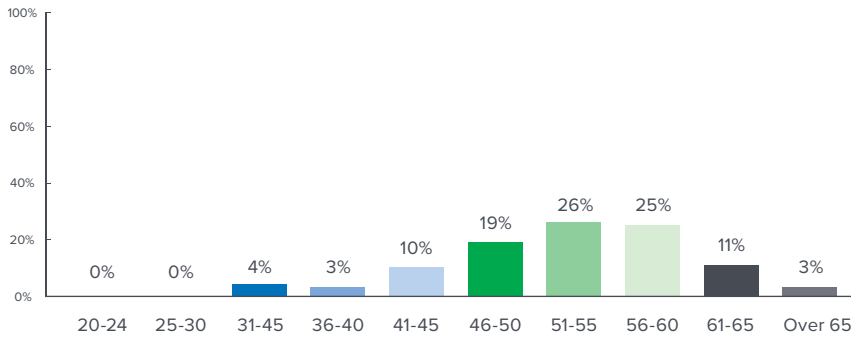
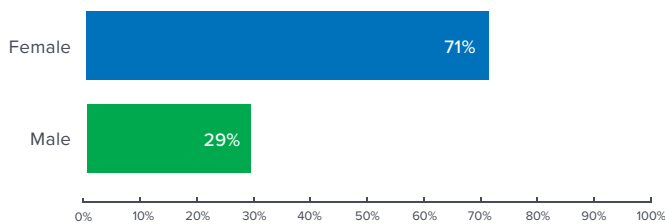


FIGURE 9: AGE OF CEO (1106 RESPONSES)



Figures 10 and 11 indicate that most respondents were from organisations with a female head of HR (71 per cent) and with a HR head in the 41–55 age range (64 per cent). Cross-tabulated data indicates respondents from public sector organisations were more likely to work in large organisations than those from not-for-profit and for-profit organisations. In addition respondents from not-for-profit organisations were more likely to have a female CEO and a female head of HR (39 per cent female CEO and 75 per cent female head of HR) than respondents from public (23 per cent female CEO and 66 per cent female head of HR) and for-profit organisations (23 per cent female CEO, and 72 per cent female head of HR). The age of the CEO and the age of the head of HR were not significantly different across different types of organisations.

FIGURE 10: GENDER OF HEAD OF HR (1112 RESPONSES)



ORGANISATION CHARACTERISTICS

FIGURE 11: AGE OF HEAD OF HR (1100 RESPONSES)

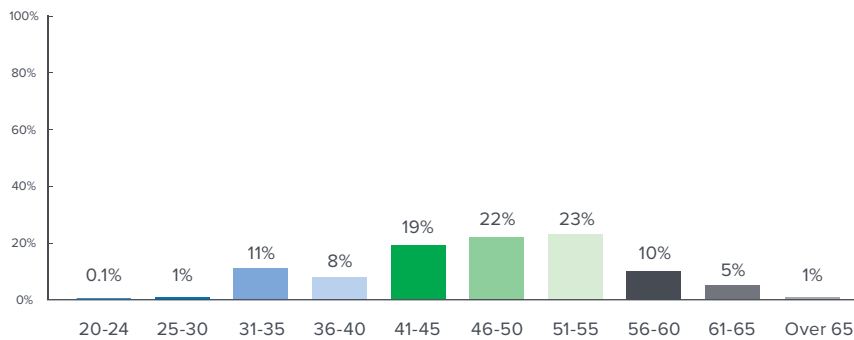


Table 1 shows respondents work in a wide range of industries, though nearly one in three work in health care (12 per cent), education (10 per cent) or finance (9 per cent).

TABLE 1: INDUSTRY OF ORGANISATION (1108 RESPONSES)

Aerospace industry	0.09%
Agriculture, Fishing industry, Timber industry, Tobacco industry	2.53%
Chemical industry, Pharmaceutical industry	0.18%
Computer industry, Software industry	1.35%
Construction industry	3.61%
Defence industry, Arms industry	2.53%
Education industry	10.20%
Energy industry, Electrical power industry, Petroleum industry	2.62%
Entertainment industry	0.99%
Financial services industry, Insurance industry	9.48%
Food industry, Fruit production	1.17%
Health care industry	12.09%
Hospitality industry	1.81%
Information industry	1.62%
Manufacturing, Automotive industry, Pulp and paper industry, Steel industry, Shipbuilding industry	5.23%
Mass media, Broadcasting, Film industry, Internet, Music industry, News media, Publication	0.72%
Telecommunications industry	0.81%
Transport industry	2.98%
Water industry	0.99%
Other industry	38.99%

ORGANISATION CHARACTERISTICS

As indicated in Figure 12, respondents report moderately low levels of voluntary staff turnover with 43 per cent reporting turnover of less than 10 per cent. As shown in Figure 13, 60 per cent report absenteeism of less than 10 per cent.

FIGURE 12: VOLUNTARY TURNOVER IN 2016 (1080 RESPONSES)

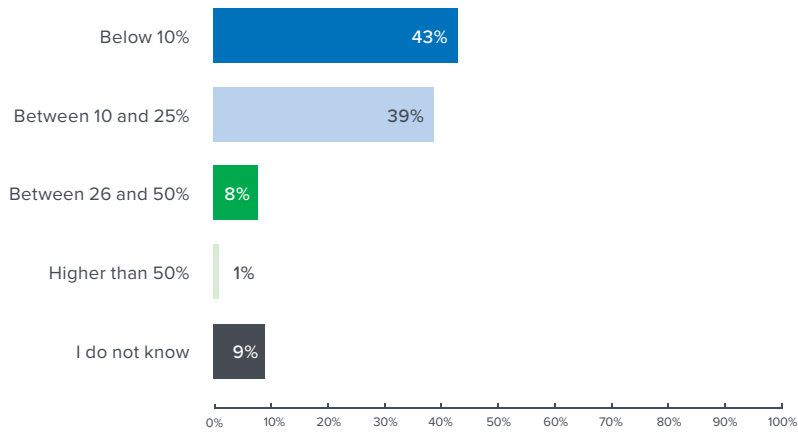
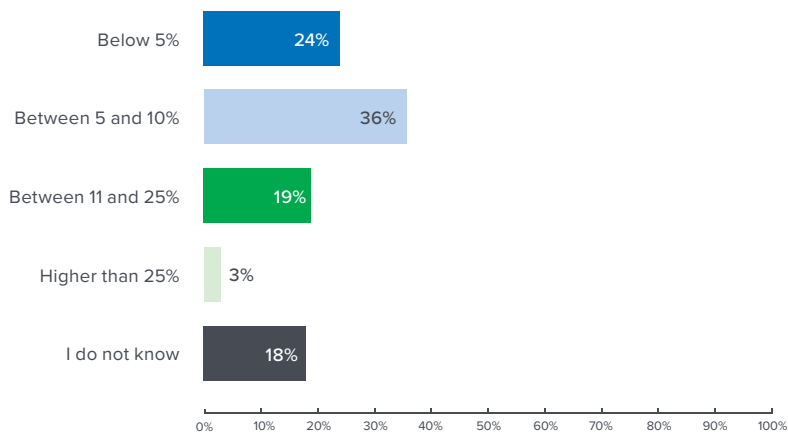


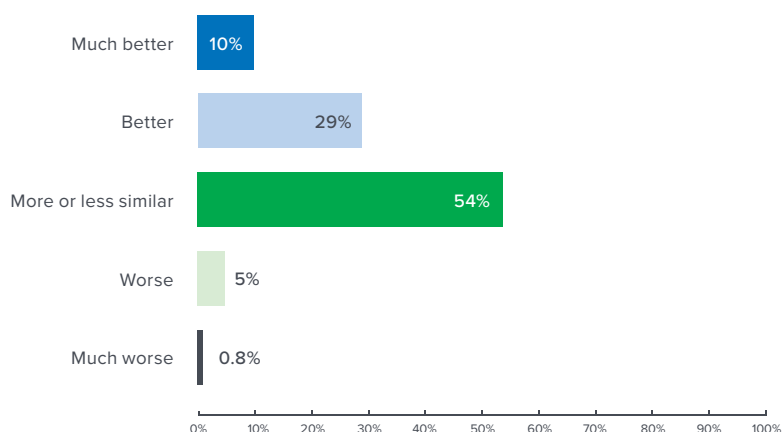
FIGURE 13: ABSENTEEISM IN 2016 (1085 RESPONSES)



ORGANISATION CHARACTERISTICS

Although public sector organisations do not have ‘competitors’ in the usual sense of the word, they do measure their financial performance and so would be able to make comparisons with other public-sector agencies. Accordingly, almost all respondents (96 per cent) answered the question “How would you assess your financial performance in comparison to your competitors?” As shown in Figure 14, a narrow majority of respondents (54 per cent) believe their organisation has a similar financial performance in comparison to their competitors. Nearly half of the respondents (40 per cent) believe they are performing better than their competitors (29 per cent) or much better (10 per cent),

FIGURE 14: FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE COMPARED TO COMPETITORS (1079 RESPONSES)



Respondents indicate they are ‘confident’ that their organisation has the resources and training capability required to support employees who disclose they are experiencing a number of adversities, as listed in Table 2. In particular, a total of 57 per cent are ‘confident’, ‘very confident’ or ‘extremely confident’ that their organisation has the resources to support victims of domestic violence.

TABLE 2: RESOURCES AND TRAINING REQUIRED TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES (950 RESPONSES)

	Not at all confident	Not confident	Confident	Very confident	Extremely confident	I do not know	Total
Suffering from mental health issue	8.11% 77	20.02% 190	41.31% 392	18.34% 174	10.96% 104	1.26% 12	949
A victim of domestic violence	12.47% 121	28.21% 268	34.42% 327	16.32% 155	6.63% 63	1.68% 16	950
A victim of sexual harassment at work	6.11% 58	13.79% 131	36.21% 344	27.79% 264	14.95% 142	1.16% 11	950
Suffering from a chronic or debilitating medical condition	5.22% 49	13.75% 129	40.41% 379	24.63% 231	14.29% 134	1.71% 16	938

POLICIES AND PRACTICES

POLICIES

Tables 3 and 4 point out the majority of the sample (64 per cent) report that their organisations have some general policy in place that may have a connection to domestic violence such as an anti-bullying policy (92 per cent), parental leave (83 per cent), flexible working arrangements (79 per cent), and inclusion and diversity policy (67 per cent).

A dedicated family and domestic violence leave policy is in place in around a third of organisations (37 per cent) with around one in five (18 per cent) indicating they will embed a policy in the near future.

TABLE 3: POLICY AND PRACTICE TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (911 RESPONSES)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
We have no policy, practices or programs to support victims of domestic violence in our organisation	36.03%	343
Yes, we have some policy and/or practice in place in our organisation	63.97%	609
TOTAL		952

TABLE 4: TYPES OF POLICIES IN PLACE (913 RESPONSES)

	Practice does not currently exist in our organisation.	Practice does not currently exist but we have plans to embed in near future	Yes, such practice is evident in our organisation.	I do not know.	Total
Family and Domestic Violence Leave Policy	41.69% 394	18.31% 173	37.25% 352	2.75% 26	945
Inclusion and Diversity Policy	16.60% 157	14.06% 133	67.12% 635	2.22% 21	946
Flexible Working Arrangement Policy	12.03% 114	8.02% 76	79.32% 752	79.32% 752	948
Parental Policy	9.17% 87	5.58% 53	83.46% 792	1.79% 17	949
Anti-bullying Policy	3.68% 35	2.94% 28	92.02% 876	1.37% 13	952

PRACTICES

A number of organisations have general practices in place which have the potential to provide support for victims of domestic violence. Table 5 indicates that 78 per cent of respondents report inclusion and diversity practices, 89 per cent flexible work arrangements, 92 per cent parental leave, and 89 per cent anti-bullying practices.

TABLE 5: GENERAL TYPES OF PRACTICE IN PLACE (945 RESPONSES)

	Practice does not currently exist in our organisation.	Practice does not currently exist but we have plans to embed in near future	Yes, such practice is evident in our organisation.	I do not know.	Total
Inclusion and Diversity Practices	11.16% 105	8.50% 80	78.43% 738	1.91% 18	941
Flexible work arrangements in practice	6.48% 61	3.72% 35	89.38% 842	0.42% 4	942
Mentoring/ networking programs	21.04% 198	13.28% 125	64.08% 603	1.59% 15	941
Inclusive leadership	17.11% 160	12.83% 120	65.45% 612	4.60% 43	935
Employee networks	22.13% 208	10.00% 94	64.47% 606	3.40% 32	940
Parental leave practices	4.90% 46	2.34% 22	91.80% 862	0.96% 9	939
Workplace accreditation program of White Ribbon	61.78% 577	12.10% 113	14.13% 132	11.99% 112	934
Anti-bullying policy practices	5.11% 48	3.62% 34	89.36% 840	1.91% 18	940

As shown in Table 6, the most common specific practices reported by respondents are counselling (66 per cent), flexible work arrangements (60 per cent), supportive organisational culture (54 per cent) and family and domestic violence leave (48 per cent).

A relatively small proportion of respondents report the existence of practices to train supervisors and line managers in how to recognise victims of domestic violence (18 per cent), or how to help them disclose domestic violence (14 per cent).

When correlated with gender response data, respondents reported being more likely to report training to recognise victims of domestic violence if they were from an organisation with a female CEO (25 per cent) compared with a male CEO (16 per cent).

Similarly, respondents reported a higher likelihood of training to help victims to disclose domestic violence if they were from an organisation with a female CEO (19 per cent) compared

with a male CEO (13 per cent).

In addition, training for recognition of domestic violence victims and training to assist in disclosure of domestic violence are two practices more likely to be reported by respondents from not-for-profit organisations (14 per cent and 21 per cent respectively) and public-sector organisations (19 per cent and 25 per cent) in comparison to respondents from private sector for-profit organisations (9 per cent and 12 per cent respectively).

The demographics (age, level of education and gender) of the respondents are not related to the incidence of organisations that provide training for supervisors to recognise victims of domestic violence or to know how to disclose domestic violence.

TABLE 6: SPECIFIC TYPES OF PRACTICE IN PLACE (956 RESPONSES)

	Practice does not currently exist in our organisation.	Practice does not currently exist but we have plans to embed in near future	Yes, such practice is evident in our organisation.	I do not know.	Total
Family and domestic violence leave (sometimes known as discretionary leave)	34.70% 331	11.22% 107	47.80% 456	6.29% 60	954
Training for supervisors/line managers to recognise victims of domestic violence	54.52% 519	23.74% 226	17.54% 167	4.20% 40	942
Training for supervisors/line managers to help victims to disclose domestic violence	56.55% 535	24.52% 232	13.95% 132	4.97% 47	946
Supportive organisational culture for victims of domestic violence	28.21% 268	12.53% 119	54.11% 514	5.16% 49	950
Case management for victims of domestic violence	57.66% 542	12.02% 113	22.55% 212	7.77% 73	940
Counselling for victims of domestic violence	23.31% 221	7.07% 67	65.72% 623	3.90% 37	948
Flexible work arrangements for victims of domestic violence	25.79% 244	9.41% 89	59.73% 565	5.07% 48	946
Practices to empower victims of domestic violence	53.80% 510	16.56% 157	20.57% 195	9.07% 86	948
Practices to provide advocacy for victims of domestic violence	58.16% 549	14.83% 140	18.22% 172	8.79% 83	944

Table 7 displays the relationship between size of organisation and adoption of dedicated HR practices in relation to domestic violence. Significant differences were found for family and domestic violence leave, counselling for victims of domestic violence and flexible work arrangements for the victims. These practices are much more likely to be adopted in medium and large organisations.

There were also significant differences between the size of the organisation and training for supervisors and line managers to recognise victims of domestic violence, and practices to empower victims. These practices are more often adopted in small and large organisations, but less so in medium-sized organisations.

Practices providing advocacy for victims of domestic violence are significantly more likely to be adopted in small organisations in comparison to medium and large organisations.

TABLE 7: SPECIFIC PRACTICES IN PLACE BY ORGANISATION AND SIZE (945 RESPONSES)

Practice	Total	Small (2-19 employees) (%)	Medium (50-249 employees) (%)	Large (250+ employees) (%)
Family and domestic violence leave	48	35	35	57
Training for supervisors/line managers (recognise)	18	20	10	20
Training for supervisors/line managers (disclose)	14	15	10	16
Supportive culture	54	53	50	57
Case management	23	18	20	25
Counselling	66	47	61	73
Flexible work arrangements	60	54	54	65
Practices to empower victims	21	25	19	21
Practices to provide advocacy	18	25	18	17

ATTITUDES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Table 8 shows findings with regards to attitudes towards victims of domestic violence. For example, it was found that a total 34% of the respondents agreed (28%) or strongly agreed (6%) that victims of domestic violence are less productive.

A total of 38% agreed (33%) or strongly agreed (5%) that domestic violence victims call in ill more often.

A total of 46% agreed (37%) or strongly agreed (9%) that domestic violence has a negative impact on career options for victims, and a total of 28% agreed (24%) or strongly agreed (4%) that domestic violence victims are less proactive in finding a new job or career.

Only 5% of respondents agreed with the proposition that it is not possible to help victims of domestic violence if they are not leaving their abusive spouse.

TABLE 8: ATTITUDES TOWARDS VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (988 RESPONSES)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree, nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Victims of domestic violence are less productive	7.08% 67	18.82% 178	40.17% 380	27.80% 263	6.13% 58	946
Victims of domestic violence call themselves ill more often	4.98% 47	14.00% 132	43.48% 410	32.66% 308	4.88% 46	943
It is not possible to help victims of domestic violence if they are not leaving their abusive spouse	37.06% 351	44.35% 420	13.62% 129	4.12% 39	0.84% 8	947
Domestic violence has a negative impact on the career options for the victims	8.99% 85	17.76% 168	26.96% 255	37.42% 354	8.88% 84	946
Victims of domestic violence are less pro-active in finding a new job or a new career option	5.96% 56	19.17% 180	47.28% 444	24.07% 226	3.51% 33	939

When invited to offer written views on the best way organisations could assist employees who are victims of domestic violence, 294 responses were received. Most suggestions referred to issues such as a supportive and flexible working environment, training for managers, empathy and non-judgement from others, and formal policies and practices.

There were a small minority of respondents who do not believe the issue of domestic violence is a responsibility of the organisation; of the 294 written responses, five expressed that view.

A sample of verbatim responses are provided below:

“Provide training to managers to recognise and assist staff who are victims of DV and provide counselling options to these staff”

“Provide non-judgmental internal support, linking them to any external providers, such as EAPs, specialist practitioners”

“Clear statement of support and access to paid leave as well as visible policies and training”

“Provide a supportive, safe environment which enables an employee to still participate in the workforce while managing their home situation”

“Research best practice; create and maintain strong policies and practices in place; regularly communicate to staff what is in place; create and maintain a culture of safety and confidentiality for the person to feel able to disclose to the degree they wish; evaluate what is in place to make sure it meets needs”

“It is not and should not be an issue for the organisation”

ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Respondents were invited to list the areas of primary accountability and responsibility for the practices and programs that support victims of domestic violence in their organisation.

Table 9 shows that 45 per cent of respondents believe the CEO is primarily accountable, with 41 per cent nominating HR. Respondents were invited to rank the top three. A small minority (15 per cent) think line managers are primarily accountable.

In terms of primary responsibility for developing practices and programs related to domestic violence, using a Likert scale, more than a third of respondents (35 per cent) believe HR is responsible to a great extent, with line managers bearing a significant level of responsibility, as shown in Table 10.

TABLE 9: PRIMARY ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS (885 RESPONSES)

	1	2	3	4	TOTAL
CEO	45.20% 367	21.43% 174	28.94% 235	4.43% 36	812
Human Resources	41.02% 363	43.16% 382	12.66% 112	3.16% 28	885
Line Management	15.30% 127	32.29% 268	48.67% 404	3.73% 31	830
Other (please specify)	14.52% 27	14.52% 27	39.78% 78	31.18% 58	186

TABLE 10: PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPING PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS (883 RESPONSES)

	1 = Not responsible at all	2	3	4	5 = Responsible to a great extent	TOTAL
CEO	17.99% 147	18.85% 154	21.54% 176	21.30% 174	20.32% 166	817
Human Resources	22.31% 197	13.48% 119	9.51% 84	19.71% 174	34.99% 309	883
Line Management	4.15% 34	17.68% 145	54.63% 448	18.17% 149	5.37% 44	820
Other (please specify)	12.15% 22	22.65% 41	27.07% 49	25.97% 47	12.15% 22	181



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This publication represents a sample of the views and perspectives of the member respondents who contributed to the survey on which it was based. Although AHRI has exercised due care and skill in its preparation, it does not warrant its accuracy, completeness, currency or suitability for any purpose.