

Workplace Responses to Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

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WOMEN'S REFUGE

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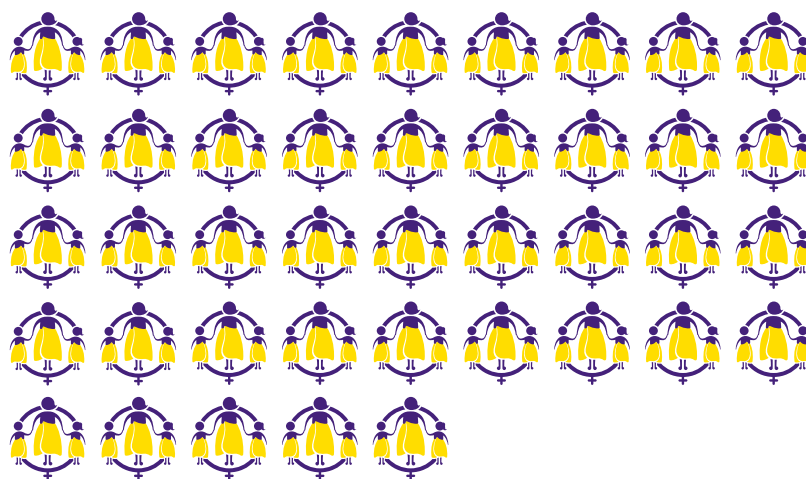
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Women's Refuge

The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges | Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa (NCIWR), has been providing support to women, children, and whānau impacted by family violence for over 50 years.

Our vision is for all women and children in Aotearoa to live free from family violence.



NCIWR comprises **41** affiliated Women's Refuges and is the largest nationwide organisation providing immediate crisis and long-term family violence specialist advocacy to women in Aotearoa.



Thank You

A huge thank you to everyone who took part in this research. Your kōrero makes this mahi possible. A big thank you to our partners Contact Energy for supporting this research.

**Nāu te rourou, nāku te
rourou, ka ora ai te iwi.**

With your food basket and
my food basket the people
will thrive.



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Overview



Overview

For many victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), the workplace can be a crucial lifeline. Providing more than income alone, the workplace can offer a sense of identity, connectedness, community, stability, and, for some, respite from relentless abuse.

Economic (or financial) abuse is a common and debilitating part of intimate partner violence. International data suggests that between 85 and 95 percent of partner violence involves some form of economic abuse.¹ Almost 50 percent of Women's Refuge clients reported that their perpetrator denied them access to their own money.²

Perpetrators frequently target their victims' employment and financial independence, meaning victims remain trapped in relationships with violent and controlling partners. Even when relationships end, the violence often continues, with intimate partner stalking occurring in 62.9 percent of post separation IPV.³ Victims' employment and finances – present and future – often become casualties of their perpetrators' abuse.⁴

The Domestic Violence – Victims' Protection Act 2018 (DVVPA) is landmark legislation in Aotearoa that strengthens employers' obligations and opportunities to support victims. It introduced entitlements to paid family violence leave, flexible working arrangements, and protection from discrimination in employment for employees affected by family violence.

This report presents findings from Women's Refuge's broader research project *Safer When, Safer How?* generously funded by our partners Contact Energy, that specifically explores IPV victims' experiences of workplace responses as well as public understanding of workplace

initiatives. The data draws, firstly, from a nationally representative sample of people across Aotearoa, 56.7 percent of whom reported some experience of family violence.⁵ Secondly, it centres the workplace experiences of 216 women and non-binary victims of IPV who had separated from their partners in the five years since the DVVPA's implementation.

Our findings affirm the power that workplaces have to influence the safety and wellbeing of their employees who experience IPV, and underline how this power may be used to benefit victims in employment by ensuring consistent, cohesive, and compassionate workplace responses to IPV.

Intimate partner violence as an employment issue

Intimate partner violence (IPV) does not only happen in the privacy of the home; perpetrators extend their power and control into every part of a victim's life – including their work life – in ways that can be subtle or hidden. Perpetrators typically draw upon a range of tactics to coercively control their partner or ex-partner, with each tactic reinforcing and giving greater effect to the others.⁶ In combination, these abuse tactics have devastating consequences and costs for victims' lives.⁷

When every aspect of a woman's life is controlled by her abusive (ex)partner, sustaining her employment can be a lifeline, offering many protective benefits. Work can be a source of self-efficacy, purpose, pride, and a site at which independence of thought can be maintained.⁸ In addition, the economic autonomy that employment offers may disrupt or alleviate the ongoing and long-term impacts of family violence for victims and their children.⁹

¹ Royal K. (2022) Economic Abuse: a global perspective. *Findings on the prevalence and nature of economic abuse, and responses to it*. https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SEA_Economic-Abuse-A-GlobalPerspective.pdf

² NCIWR's risk information from 5000 clients who entered Refuge in 2024/2025

³ NCIWR's risk information from 5000 clients who entered Refuge in 2024/2025

⁴ Jury, A., Thorburn, N., & Weatherall, R. (2016). *Women's Experiences of Economic Abuse in Aotearoa New Zealand*. <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/economic-abuse-report-.pdf>

⁵ Supporting someone being abused by a partner, being a victim themselves, or both.

⁶ Stark, E. (2023). *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life* (2ed).

⁷ Thorburn, N., Arathoon, C., Beaumont, S., & Jury, A. (2025). *Safer When, Safer How? Reframing 'risk' and 'safety' in the lives of IPV victims on Aotearoa*. <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/SWSH-reframing-risk-and-safety-research-WEB.pdf>

⁸ Rothman, E. F., Hathaway, J., Stidsen, A., & de Vries, H. F. (2007). How employment helps female victims of intimate partner violence: a qualitative study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*.

⁹ Arathoon, C., Thorburn, N., Burgess, M., & Jury, A. (2023). *Evaluation of Kōihi Ngā Rito*. <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Womens-Refuge-Evaluation-of-Kohihi-nga-Rito-digital.pdf>

Conversely, research also shows that IPV has a negative effect on a victim's ability to sustain employment. Women's Refuge's (NCIWR) research on economic abuse found that of 445 victims, sixty percent were in fulltime employment before the abusive relationship, and just 27.5 percent remained in work during the relationship. Those who stayed in employment were subjected to numerous hardships affecting their experience at work and their future employment prospects, and those who left found it difficult to re-enter the workforce.¹⁰

Victims are often abused at work or during work time, and the ripple effect of a perpetrator's actions can impact on their sense of safety, wellbeing, and productivity.¹¹ Data collected from the New Zealand Public Service Association showed that, of those who experienced IPV while employed, over 50 percent had experienced some form of violence while they were at work (for example, harassment or stalking). Around 40 percent were prevented from getting to work because of the impacts of the violence, and over half had to take time off to deal with the impacts of the violence (mainly physical or mental health issues).¹²

There are also significant work equity implications to consider. Intimate partner violence is perpetrated the most against those with the least social power: women (particularly Māori women), disabled people, and gender minorities.¹³ The follow-on impacts of IPV, including to employment and financial wellbeing, therefore also fall disproportionately upon these groups.

The cost to women is a cost to workplaces. UN Women estimated that in 2016, violence against women cost the global economy \$1.5 trillion US dollars. Researchers in Aotearoa estimated that IPV costs NZ employers at least \$368 million each year.¹⁴ The costs of termination, recruitment,

hiring, and training a replacement employee were significant.¹⁵ However, for every victim who was positively impacted by workplace protections, employers could avoid \$3,371 of production-related costs.¹⁶ Accordingly, the intrusion of IPV into the workplace is increasingly being recognised as a human rights issue as well as a gender equity issue.¹⁷

The Domestic Violence – Victims' Protection Act 2018

The Domestic Violence – Victims' Protection Act 2018 (DVVPA) sets out specific obligations for employers to support victims of IPV employed in their workplaces.¹⁸ The DVVPA, which came into effect in April 2019, not only legislated new entitlements for employees affected by family violence, but also increased public awareness that family violence is a workplace issue.

Under the DVVPA, employees affected by family violence¹⁹ are entitled to:

- Request up to 10 days of paid family violence leave annually;
- Request short-term flexible working arrangements (for up to two months) to deal with the effects of family violence, with limited reasons that employers can deny these requests; and
- Protection from discrimination on the basis of being a victim of family violence.

There is not yet a robust body of research on employee perspectives on workplace responses to family violence following the introduction of the DVVPA. In addition, the types of support victims would like their employers to offer, and what difference that support makes to their safety, is also relatively unexplored in the literature.

¹⁰ Jury et al. (2016)

¹¹ Carrington, H., & Williamson, R. (2022). Responding to domestic violence within the workplace: Reflections and recommendations from the DVFREE workplace initiative in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Labour and Industry*.

¹² Rayner-Thomas, M., Dixon, R., Fanslow, J., & Tse, C. (2016). The impact of domestic violence on the workplace. *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations*; Fanslow J. L. & McIntosh T. (2023). *Key findings and policy implications from He Koiora Matatāpopore | The 2019 Family Violence Study*. <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/4ba25ce0-2338-414b-a490-80f15512a369/content>

¹³ Pihama, L., Smith, L.T., Simmonds, S., Raumati, N., Smith, C.W., Cassidy, B., Te Nana, R., & Sio, B. (2023). *He Waka Eke Noa: Māori Cultural Frameworks for Violence Prevention and Intervention*. https://assets.nationbuilder.com/taranaki/pages/1292/attachments/original/1708900177/477994_He_Waka_Eke_Noa_LR.pdf?1708900177; Wilson, D. (2023). Violence within whānau and mahi tūkino – A litany of sound revisited. <https://preventfsv.govt.nz/assets/Te-Pukotahitanga/2023-10-A-Litany-of-Sound-Revisited.pdf>

¹⁴ Kahui, S., Ku, B., & Snively, S. (2014). *Productivity Gains from Workplace Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence*. https://ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/productivity_gains_from_workplace_protection_of_victims_of_domestic_violence.pdf

¹⁵ As above.

¹⁶ As above.

¹⁷ OECD (2025). *Supports (th)at work: Policy tools to support workplace action on intimate partner violence*. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/06/supports-th-at-work_e10b0927/343cff04-en.pdf

Who we heard from

In this report, we provide data on victims' experiences of their workplace's response to family violence, alongside community perspectives of workplace responses (and perceptions of their preparedness to respond).

This report draws on two sets of data, both collected by Women's Refuge's (NCIWR) research team in 2024 as part of Women's Refuge's broader research project, titled '*Safer When, Safer How?*'

The first dataset 'Community' is a representative sample of 2,010 members of the Aotearoa public. Respondents were asked about their comfort, confidence, and experience supporting women victims of IPV. Data presented in this report has been filtered to only include those who indicated they were employed (excluding self-employment) at the time they completed the survey or questionnaire. As with any community, some of the respondents in this sample are, of course, victims themselves.

Employed community members: N= 1,416

The second dataset 'Victims' is taken from a questionnaire about victims' experiences of seeking support from workplaces. This data has been filtered further to include only those who had told someone at their workplace about their (ex)partner's violence.

Employed victims who had disclosed to someone at work: N= 408

Of the 408 victims who told someone at their workplace and were separated from their abuser, we differentiated between:

Those who had separated less than five years ago²⁰
(**'post DVVPA victims', N=216**)

Those who had separated more than five years ago
(**'pre DVVPA victims', N=166**)

We acknowledge that separation alone does not precisely indicate when help was sought, however, women are most likely to seek workplace support during and after the point of separation.²¹ As such, we are confident that this method of grouping the data provides a sufficiently clear temporal distinction.

Findings

Part one sets out insights gathered from the **community**.

Part two then looks at **victims'** experiences of their workplaces' involvement.

²⁰ From 2019 until 2024 (when the survey was undertaken)

²¹ Rayner-Thomas et al. (2016)

PART ONE

Community perceptions





The way that workplaces respond to victims of intimate partner violence inevitably shapes victims' access to support and safety. Accordingly, we start with the perspectives of employed community members.

Supporting women experiencing IPV

Of 1,416 employed community members, almost half **(49.6%)** had already supported a woman who had or was being abused by an intimate partner.

The majority of people see it as their role to help a woman who is being abused by their partner, with respondents showing both a willingness and preparedness to help.

Community members feel more comfortable with someone disclosing violence to them as opposed to having to ask someone outright – **64 percent** felt comfortable hearing from a victim that their partner was abusing them.

Respondents reported high levels of comfort around helping a victim to access agencies or services **(84.1%)** and asking her how she feels and what she needs **(77.7%)**. They were less comfortable being the only one who knew about the abuse. The main worry that people had was feeling they did not know enough about family violence to respond appropriately and that they would inadvertently make things worse for victims.

These findings provide valuable insight into the comfort levels of those who may be responding to victims in the workplace, while also highlighting their main concerns about how to respond. Together, they underscore the importance of ensuring that managers, HR, and other key staff are adequately prepared to support employees experiencing family violence, and point to areas workplaces may wish to prioritise when considering how to support victims under the DVVPA.

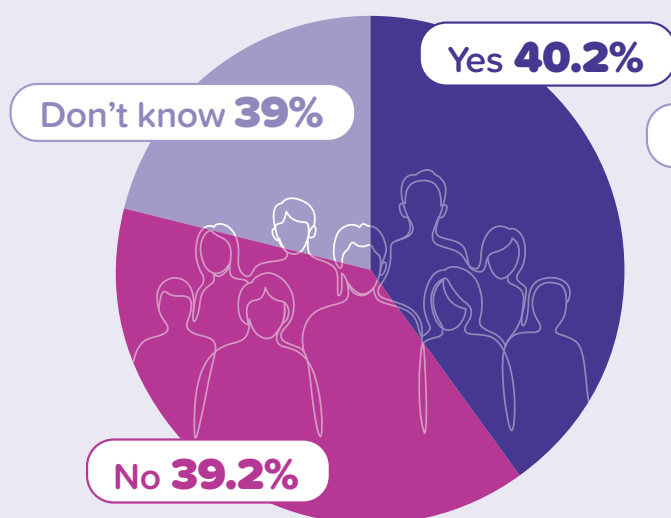
How common are workplace policies and training on family violence?

Of the employed community members surveyed, **40.2 percent** stated that their workplace has a policy on support for employees experiencing family violence. Another **39.2 percent**, did not know whether any specific policy existed at their place of work.

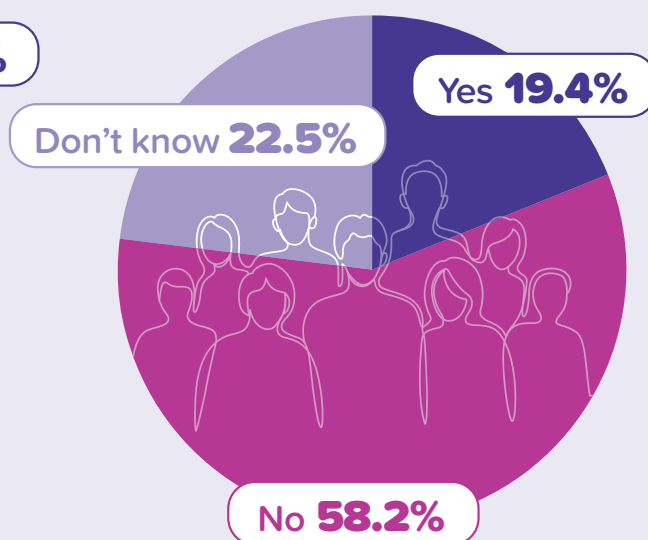
It is encouraging to see that over **40 percent** of people are aware of their workplace policies. At the same time, there is considerable room for improvement both in raising employee awareness of existing policies and in developing family violence workplace policies where they do not yet exist.

Only **19.4 percent** of community members reported that their workplace has provided training on how to respond to staff experiencing family violence, **22.5 percent** did not know whether this had been provided, and **58.2 percent** said that no training had been provided.

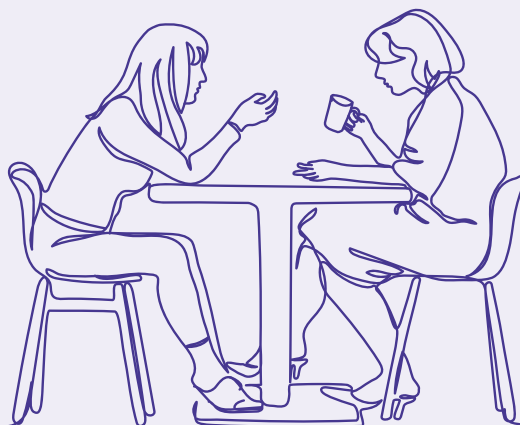
Does your workplace have a policy on support for employees experiencing family violence?



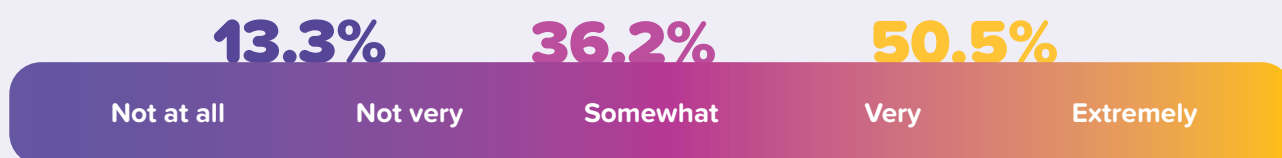
Has your workplace had training on how to respond to staff experiencing family violence?



These findings show that for **80.7 percent** of employees, family violence training was either unavailable or inaccessible. It is important to note that these findings only indicate the knowledge that policies and training initiatives exist, not their visibility, consistency, or quality. However, it does suggest that family violence training is not yet a widespread feature of workplace preparedness efforts.

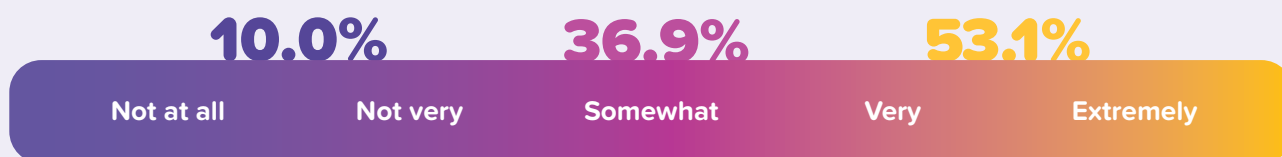


Do communities believe their workplaces would respond safely and supportively?



Confidence in the workplace responding safely and supportively

Just over half (**50.5%**) of employed community members were very confident or extremely confident that their workplace would **respond safely and supportively** if a colleague spoke about being harmed by a partner, while another **36.2 percent** were somewhat confident. Only **13.3 percent** were not very confident or not at all confident.



Confidence the boss would give someone experiencing IPV the same job security and opportunities

Just over half (**53.1%**) were very confident or extremely confident that their boss would still give someone experiencing IPV the same **job security and opportunities**, and another **36.9 percent** were somewhat confident. Only **10.0 percent** were not very or not at all confident.

Within the cohort of employed community members **56.7 percent** had lived experience of IPV (either as a victim, a support person, or both) – this group is referred to as ‘employees with lived experience’. **Analysis between the responses of employees with lived experience (805) compared to employees with no reported experience of partner violence (611) revealed important distinctions.** On the surface, there is little difference in the confidence rates for these groups regarding their workplaces responding safely and supportively. However, drilling deeper into the data, employees with lived experience of violence showed more scepticism about workplace responses than those without. When asked about a **victims’ ongoing job prospects** if they disclosed IPV to their workplace, more people with lived experience of violence were ‘not confident’ that a victim’s employment prospects would remain stable (**11.9% vs. 5.9%**). Similarly, more said they were ‘not confident’ that **colleagues would talk about it with respect and empathy (16.0% vs. 11.3%)**.

These findings suggest that those with lived experience have less confidence in workplace responses than those with no lived experience of violence. Given the differences in perceptions of community members with and without lived experience of violence, it is important to hear directly from victims about their experiences of seeking support from their workplaces.

PART TWO

Victims' experiences



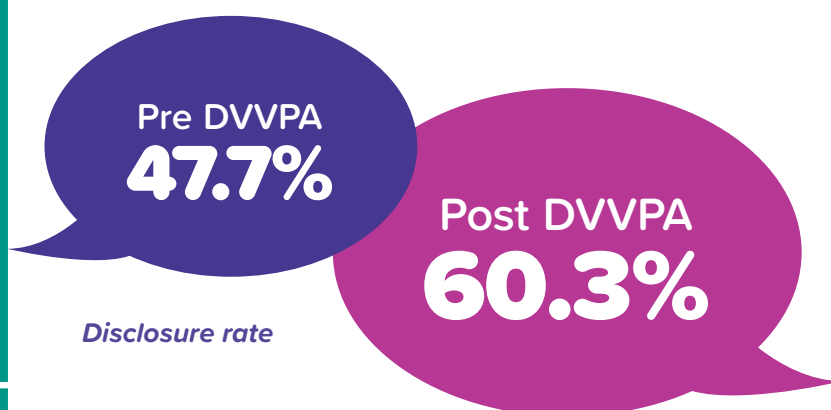
This analysis focuses on the experiences of employed victims who had disclosed to someone at work and who were separated from their partners within the past five years (from 2019) in order to provide a current view of help-seeking outcomes in the post DVVPA context.

Disclosures in the Workplace

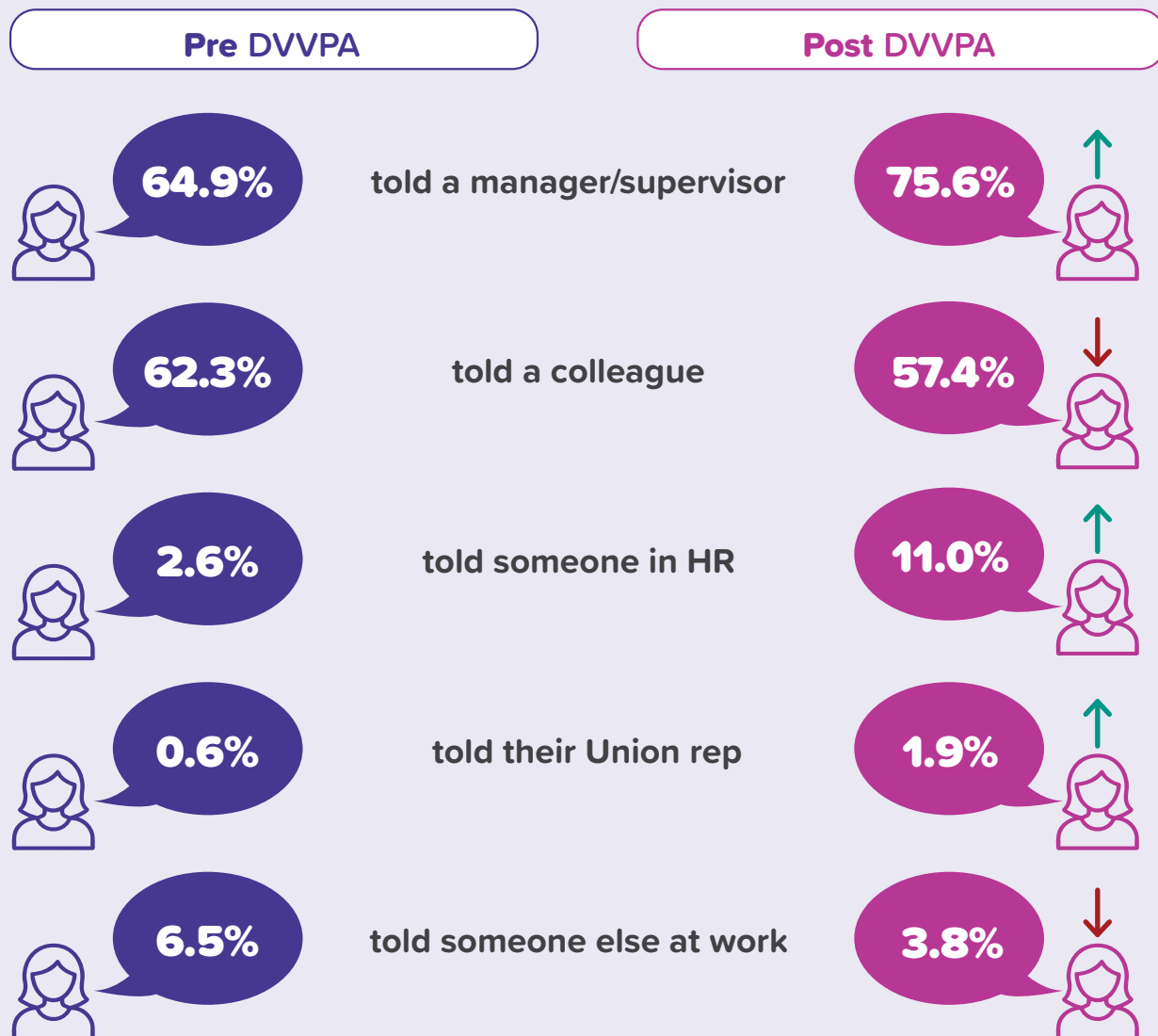
216 respondents had separated less than five years ago (**post DVVPA victims**)

116 respondents had separated more than five years ago (**pre DVVPA victims**)

Findings indicate that the DVVPA was likely to have had a positive impact on disclosure rates; post DVVPA victims were significantly more likely to tell someone at work compared to victims prior to the DVVPA.



Looking at the post DVVPA group vs pre DVVPA group who disclosed to their workplaces:



Differences in who victims disclosed to in the workplace suggest that post DVVPA, there is a growing awareness of the workplace as an option to access formal support, since more people are disclosing to managers/supervisors and HR, and less people are disclosing to colleagues and other people at work.

This may be a result of employees' knowledge of the new DVVPA entitlements giving them confidence to use formal pathways to access these – victims are more likely post DVVPA to disclose to those who generally have the power to enact formal processes. That said, while the rates of disclosure to HR have increased, they are still relatively low. This is not surprising as staff are more likely to have a relationship of trust with a manager who they engage with on a daily basis, and trust is often a prerequisite for victims to disclose.²² At the same time, this points to a potential barrier to effective support within workplaces in which support can only be accessed through HR.

²² Fanslow, J. L., & Robinson, E. M. (2010). Help-seeking behaviors and reasons for help seeking reported by a representative sample of women victims of intimate partner violence in New Zealand. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

The most common reasons given for not seeking support included shame, embarrassment, and humiliation. Other frequent, but less common, reasons included:

- fear of negative outcomes from the abuser and/or the workplace,
- wanting work to remain a place totally separate from the abuse,
- believing it is unprofessional to disclose abuse,
- blaming oneself for the abuse or minimising the abuse.²³

Reasons for non-disclosure were consistent across pre DVVPA and post DVVPA groups:



While the likelihood of victims disclosing to someone at work has increased significantly post DVVPA, from 47.7% to 60.3%, findings show that significant barriers persist.

The frequency with which shame and embarrassment were identified as barriers give weight to the need to make family violence policies and procedures victim-focused and victim-friendly, and to promote awareness of them amongst employees. This may help to eliminate the many victim-blaming myths and misconceptions about family violence within workplaces and reduce the stigma victims face. They also demonstrate the importance of training managers and key staff to respond safely, supportively, and confidentially, so that disclosures are handled with consent and do not harm future career opportunities.

²⁸ Quotes from post DVVPA respondents only.



What victims hoped for and what workplaces offered

Many women described doing everything in their power to maintain their employment and their professionalism, even when their partners would “give me black eyes before work”, “make it almost impossible for me to keep my job”, “threaten to get me fired”, and “turn up intoxicated at my job”. They did everything within their control to protect their privacy, dignity, safety, and financial security.

When asked what they hoped would happen after telling someone at work, victims most often described wanting understanding.

For some, this meant empathy, compassion, encouragement, and non-judgemental support. For others, it meant recognition of how the violence was affecting their work, safety, and wellbeing, including reassurance that their job would not be at risk and guidance about accessing support services.

While many hoped for understanding and empathy, not all received it:



“I hoped they would then understand why I was lacking in work at times due to being tired and stressed from what was happening, I was hopeful in some sense that they might find a way to help me. Instead, I was later let go from my job.”

Some victims wanted access to paid leave or flexible work arrangements, the entitlements available to them as outlined in the DVVPA. Others emphasised the importance of their employer keeping their disclosure confidential.²⁴ Some also hoped their workplace would offer protection from the perpetrator in the workplace during work, including instances where the perpetrator was employed by the same organisation.

Overall, victims wanted their workplaces to understand the impact of their partners’ violence on their safety and wellbeing, and to respond with both compassion and practical support that demonstrated a genuine understanding of their circumstances.

²⁴ This is required by the Privacy Act, unless there is a serious threat to life or health

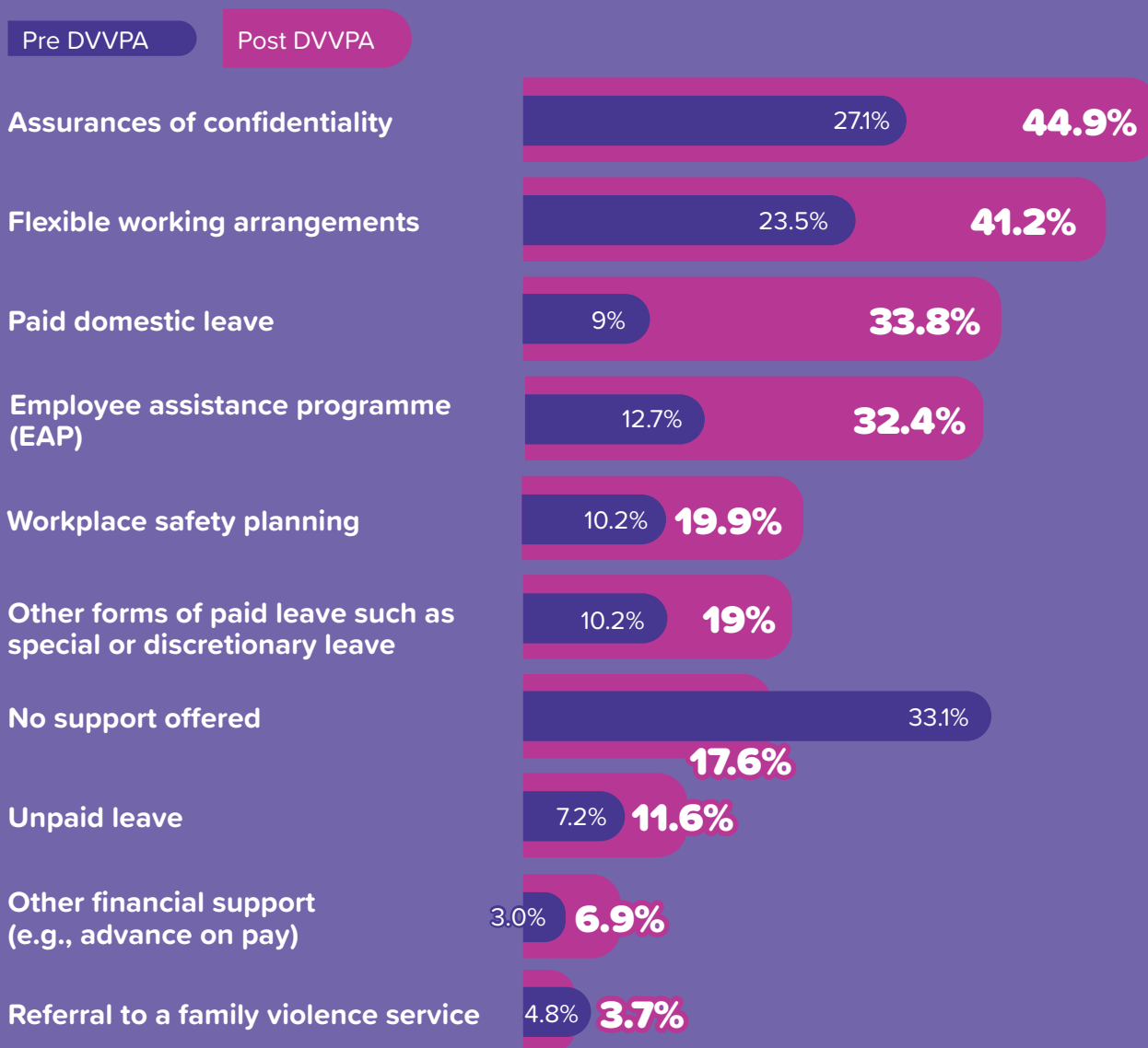
What victims hoped would happen when they told their workplace:



Improvements under the Act

When asked what support, if any, their workplace offered in relation to their experience of IPV, those separated post DVVPA indicated that they were offered more support, and a greater range of support options than those separated pre DVVPA.

Post DVVPA victims were offered the following workplace support (compared to pre DVVPA victims):



It is heartening to see improvements across most categories of support. The largest percentage gains were in paid domestic violence leave, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), other financial support, other forms of paid leave such as special or discretionary leave, and flexible working arrangements. Assurances of confidentiality remained the most frequently offered form of support. These findings may reflect the greater availability of information and guidance for workplaces following the implementation of the DVVPA.

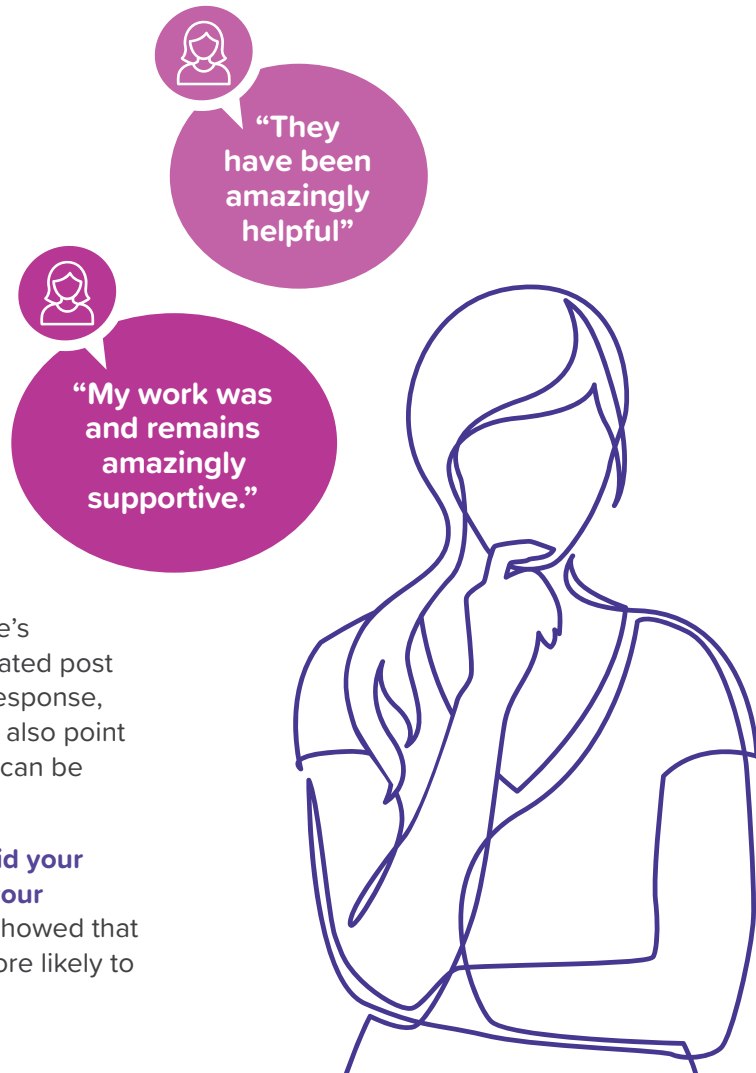
At the same time, the number of victims that had no support offered dropped significantly from **33.1 percent** pre DVVPA to **17.6 percent** post DVVPA victims. It is also important to note that not everyone who discloses at work will need these forms of support, as victims in the previous section identified understanding was their primary need. Even so, this remains an area for improvement, as offering these supports regardless of initial uptake, may provide victims with options for safety and wellbeing in the future.

The impact of workplace responses on victims

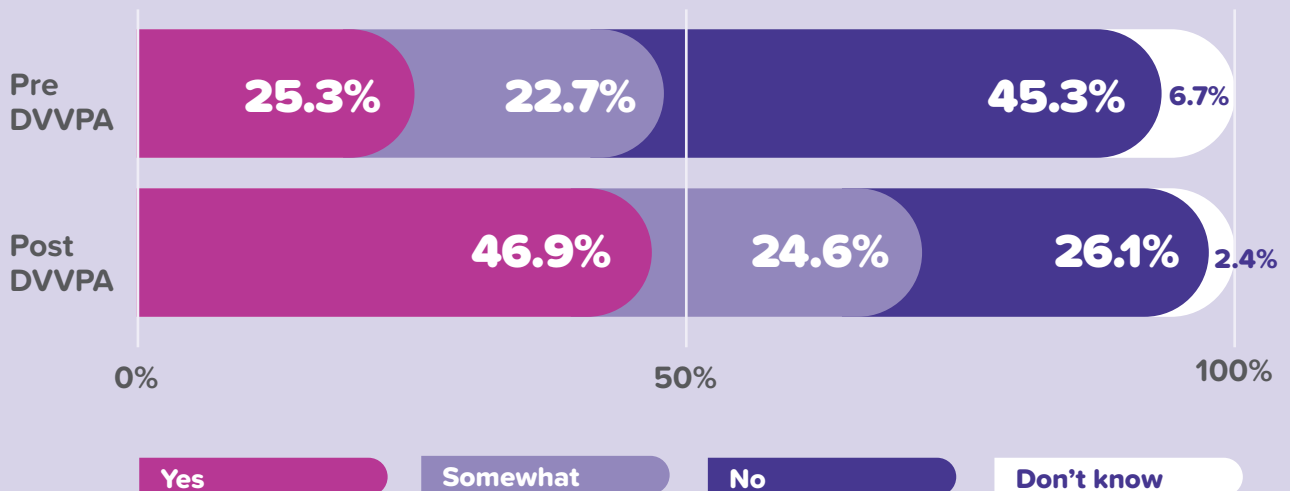
Victims were asked several questions to gauge the impact of their workplace's response. The trend, that those separated post DVVPA had an improved workplace response, continues across these findings. They also point to areas where overall improvements can be made.



Firstly, victims were asked 'did your workplace's response meet your needs?'. The findings clearly showed that those separated post DVVPA were more likely to have their needs met.



Did the workplace response meet your needs?

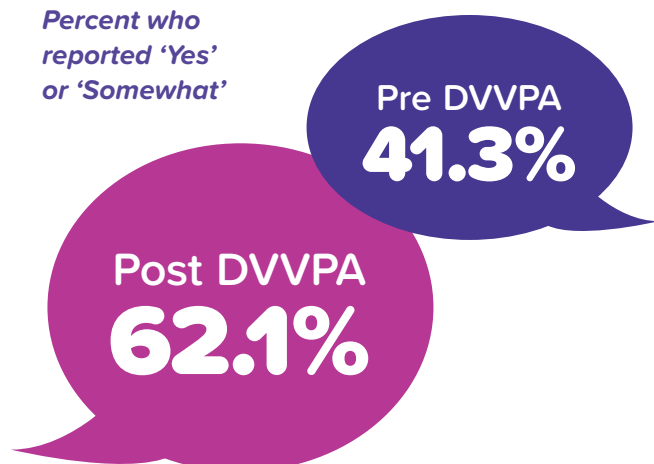


These findings further indicate that the DVVPA may have improved victims' workplace experiences. The need for further progress is also signalled; just over a quarter of victims in the post DVVPA group said that their workplace's responses did not meet their needs.

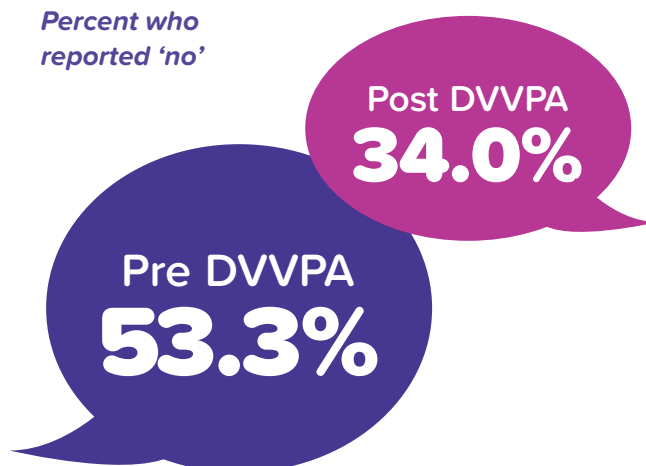


 Victims were then asked if their workplaces' response made them 'safer'. Again, those who separated post DVVPA were more likely to say that their workplace had made them safer. This is a promising finding and is consistent with the broader pattern of improvement since the Act was implemented.

Percent who reported 'Yes' or 'Somewhat'



Percent who reported 'no'



Several victims explained that insufficient workplace responses added to their difficulty, leaving them more unsafe.

 "[I wish my workplace] would have not added to the abuse and stress and sought advice on the subject if they did not know how to help me. Instead, they made it hell for me."

 Victims were then asked whether they were more or less likely to stay in their role or move forward/progress in their employment because of their workplace's response.

As a result of your workplace's response, were you	Pre DVVPA	Post DVVPA
More likely to stay in your role	31.3%	53.7%
More likely to move forward/progress in your employment	7.8%	8.3%
Less likely to stay in your role	25.9%	18.1%
Less likely to move forward/progress in your employment	30.1%	22.2%



Over **50 percent** of post DVVPA victims who sought help from their workplaces reported that they were more likely to stay in their role – suggesting that positive workplace responses are indeed engendering sustained employment for many victims. However, this was not the case for all victims; over **22 percent** of victims felt they were less likely to move forward or progress in their employment as a result of their workplace’s response. While this is a decrease from **30.1 percent** pre DVVPA it shows that improvement is still needed to extend workplace protections to all victims.



“I wished for my manager to better understand the long-term impacts of abuse.”



Finally, victims were asked ‘If you could change anything about how [your workplace] responded, what would it be?’

The responses given by victims offer a blueprint about what workplaces could strengthen and prioritise moving forward.

Insights from victims:

Hear, believe, and not judge victims:



“I felt judged and felt it was used against me.”



“I wish that they’d believed me and would have supported me.”

Understand employee entitlements under the DVVPA, and give effect to these entitlements in a way that supports victims’ safety and wellbeing:



“I hoped that I wouldn’t have had to fight to get the paid domestic leave I was entitled to after I was injured from a strangulation attempt.”



“If they had advised me of my leave entitlements that would have made a difference big time.”



“They could have given me time off work.”



“They gave me a list of requirements I needed to meet to get DV leave, this was given to me while I had a broken nose.”

Ask victims what they need and offer other support for their safety and wellbeing in the workplace:



“I wanted them to ask what I might find useful.”



“I wish they had taken me aside and asked if I was ok, and if there was anything they could do.”



“A simple ‘Are you safe?’, ‘How can we support you?’, ‘Have you heard about...?’.”



“They could’ve made a plan or asked what would make things easier for me.”

Have understanding and flexibility:



"They could take into account the effects this abuse has on someone's mental wellbeing making it difficult to work at their normal capacity and offer some assistance with getting help."



"I just needed understanding."

Foster a supportive culture for employee wellbeing:



"I knew there was support available but did not feel comfortable sharing my private problems with management. I did not trust that it would be a positive process and thought it best to just share with a few team members I trusted. The organisation does not foster a culture that makes workers feel ok about disclosing a family violence problem. I felt I would be watched for signs of weakness and not get my needs met."



"I understood what I was entitled to, but working for a Global IT Company, I was referred to a male HR person based in another country, who wasn't very sympathetic, and this was too much for me, so I didn't divulge any details. I requested work from home privileges and just carried on."



"My manager called me a liar and asked me to provide evidence of abuse from Women's Refuge (which they did provide). It was horrific and traumatising."

It is also important to highlight workplace responses that went beyond the minimum entitlements outlined in the DVVPA. Some workplaces clearly took a proactive role in supporting ongoing safety and wellbeing of victims.



"Honestly they were the kindest of anyone I talked with about the abuse."



"My manager reached out to a security guard contracted to our job site and they both came with me to new living arrangements."



"[They] helped me find a safe place to stay."



"They stored my possessions until I had fully transferred within the company and [had new] accommodation."



"One of my bosses made me pack a bag to keep at their house just in case."



"I was able to leave my job straight away and given a good reference."



"They let me change the area I worked within my workplace."



"I phoned in sick and they were patient and understanding."

Conclusion



The women who contributed to these findings shared first-hand experiences of seeking support from their workplaces. Their accounts ranged from unsafe and harmful workplace responses to examples of employers who went well beyond the minimum obligations to support employees' safety, wellbeing, and job security, removing additional burdens for the women they employed.

Areas of positive change and forward momentum

Overall, the findings show that workplace responses improved for victims who separated after the DVVPA compared with those who separated earlier. This suggests the Act has contributed to meaningful progress and that workplace responses have the power to improve both safety and employment security for victims of violence.

The findings also indicate that the DVVPA likely contributed to increased disclosure rates, with more victims telling people in positions of authority who could support their safety and wellbeing at work. Post DVVPA, more victims reported workplace responses that made them safer; these respondents were also more likely to be offered paid family violence leave, flexible working arrangements, workplace safety planning, and assurances of confidentiality.

Areas where improvement is still needed

The findings also point to clear areas for improvement. Community responses highlight the need for greater awareness, uptake, and integration of family violence policies and training across workplaces. This aligns with international research, which shows that such initiatives are beneficial but that their success is contingent on strengthened awareness of family violence and on consistent implementation.²⁵

Victims clearly state that workplace responses need to:

understand victims' circumstances and respond with empathy;

- believe victims and avoid judgment;
- ask what support is needed rather than making assumptions;
- offer flexibility where possible;
- understand and give effect to the DVVPA entitlements; and
- promote a workplace culture where family violence policies and supports are visible, accessible, and normalised.

Workplaces are one part of the solution

Workplaces are only one part of the wider response to family violence. They cannot, and should not, be expected to provide complete safety from a perpetrator. However, they can reduce some of the impacts of violence when they follow the lead of victims, respond with compassion and care, make the full range of available supports under the DVVPA accessible in practice, and support workplace safety when needed. Alongside formal entitlements, workplace culture also plays a pivotal role. Non-discriminatory, respectful, and supportive environments are crucial, even though they are harder to measure than policy compliance.

Overall, the findings strongly suggest that the DVVPA has played an important role in improving workplace responses in the years since its implementation, while also signalling what progress is still needed to build on this positive momentum.

²⁵ OECD (2025); Gavin, M. & Ellicott, S. (2025). Domestic violence leave laws: assessing their effectiveness for addressing domestic violence and gender inequality. In *Research Handbook on Gender, Work and Employment Relations*.

Recommendations

As an overall recommendation, we strongly encourage all employers to put into action the voices of victims heard throughout the findings.



Start where you can. If major changes are not immediately viable, begin with smaller, practical steps. Incremental action is always preferable to inaction, and even small changes can help make workplace support more visible, accessible, and responsive to victims' needs. You may want to:

Check if you have an existing family violence policy. If you do not yet have a family violence policy that incorporates the entitlements under the DVVPA, or if your policy needs updating, you can find information about how to do this on the DVFREE website.²⁶



If you have a family violence policy that incorporates the entitlements of the DVVPA, make sure you offer employees these entitlements. Don't forget to ask them what they need most at the moment. Be prepared to action these for them and understand that flexibility is important. Employment is only one area of a victim's life that family violence disrupts, ask them what else you can do for them.

Promote your policy, inclusive of the DVVPA entitlements, openly and transparently in your workplace. Invite all employees to access the information and regularly remind them about where to find this information.



Ensure family violence policies and family violence trainings are accessible, transparent, explicit, and normalised within the workplace.

Aim to do more than the minimum cited requirements. There is no harm in offering more; great workplaces offer and normalise a higher minimum standard.

Ensure information about family violence support is easy to find, including access to services and helplines.



Connect with your local Refuge to understand their services and processes should you need to support an employee to access them or give an employee information about them. See 'Find your local Refuge' on our website.²⁷



Keep information about specialist family violence support alongside EAP information, so employees can easily find both. Specialist services can provide safety advice and advocacy tailored to people experiencing family violence and its impacts.

Provide specialist family violence training on supporting staff affected by family violence, for managers, HR, and first responders.²⁸ Provide opportunities for all employees to learn about family violence and debunk some of the common myths that harm victims.²⁹

Address perpetration of work-related family violence. There were a small but compelling number of participant comments about family violence perpetrated by their partner within the same workplace. Employers may have the opportunity to help victims of violence by intervening appropriately with employees who are perpetrators.³⁰ For example, by the use of disciplinary procedures and by connecting them with appropriate stopping violence programmes.³¹

²⁶ **See:** <https://2shine.org.nz/shine-education-training/dvfree> DVFREE can offer in depth policy guidance including how to: centre a definition of family violence, clarify that staff will not be treated adversely based on their experiences of violence, address confidentiality, incorporate and explain DVVPA entitlements, navigate the threshold for proof of family violence.

²⁷ <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/contact-us/find-your-local-refuge/>

²⁸ **See:** <https://2shine.org.nz/shine-education-training/dvfree> DVFREE can offer specialist family violence training tailored for key people in workplaces who support employees affected by family violence.

²⁹ **See:** https://2shine.org.nz/_modules/workplace-learning-module/ for a free DVFREE workplace awareness module.

³⁰ OECD (2025) **For full report see:** https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/06/supports-th-at-work_e10b0927/343cff04-en.pdf

³¹ **See:** <https://2shine.org.nz/shine-education-training/dvfree>



WOMEN'S REFUGE