**WHEN HOME BECOMES THE WORKPLACE**

**Family  Violence as a Workplace Issue during the COVID19 Pandemic**

Although we are ‘all in this together’ not everyone’s situation is equal.

Rapid changes to working conditions for most workers over the past weeks has resulted in many challenges and stressors being faced as we adjust to new systems of work in our workplaces or having to learn how to work from home during the pandemic.  At the same time, schools have closed across the state of Victoria and in many households at least one worker has lost their employment as a result of the COVID19 pandemic shutdowns.

Working from home may present particular challenges for those whose home life also includes family violence, specifically if the perpetrator of family violence also resides with them or now knows they can access them in their home every day.  This context can allow for the behaviours of coercion, control and monitoring by perpetrators of family violence to increase. Whilst this can manifest as physical violence it may also appear as constant disruption of the worker’s work by interrupting them, using technology they need to access, preventing them from using spaces in the home they need to access to deliver their work. This may present as a worker not being able to get their work done, appearing tired, distracted and jumpy.

Employers have a duty to ensure that their workers are safe in whatever environment they are working in and to find a suitable alternative if remote working from home during the pandemic is not safe.

Employers can:

* When checking with staff about the suitability of them working from home during a pandemic, check that workers are actually safe to do so. This can be done with a question as part of a work from home assessment that directly asks if family violence is a concern as it will indicate to the worker that it is acceptable to raise this issue if needed. This should include a risk assessment which can be addressed with a number of questions relating to general OHS queries.
* Share the workplace Family Violence Policy and / or EBA clause so that all staff are reminded of it and are aware of their rights in relation to this issue.
* As with the way family violence may present within the workplace when people are in attendance, employers must be trained and understand that similar impacts could be occurring in the remote setting. This could include periods of the work day where it is difficult to make contact with the worker, a sense that they are unable to speak openly on the phone about their work or are distracted in Zoom meetings etc.  *It is, however, important to remember that we are all working within the context of a global pandemic which will also be impacting workers in a range of ways that may present similarly.*
* Ensure that regular wellbeing and safety check ins of staff occur during the work week, whether from team managers or specifically designated contact officers (for example, where Family Violence Contact Officers already exist).
* Send all staff referral information of appropriate services they can access should they need to do so.  It is important to recognise that whilst working from home during a pandemic a worker may have less opportunity to access support services whilst in that environment.
* In cases where a worker has disclosed family violence is occurring the usual advice in model EBA clauses and Worksafe Guidance should follow which will include asking the victim survivor what they want and need, developing a safety plan and appropriate record keeping.
* This is a time to review existing policies and procedures relating to family violence in the workplace and to update them to ensure they meet the needs of a changed workforce and environment.

**Resources:**

* VTHC Family Model Clause:

<https://www.unionwomen.org.au/fvworkplaceissue>

* Safe and Respectful Workplaces

<https://saferespectfulworkplaces.com/>

* Worksafe Family Violence Guidance:

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/addressing-family-violence-workplace>

* Orange Door (family violence services)

<https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au/>

* We Are Union Women

<https://www.unionwomen.org.au/>

* Safe Steps COVID19 advice

<https://www.safesteps.org.au/understanding-family-violence/seeking-safety-during-covid-19/>