



# SEXUAL VIOLENCE & THE WORKPLACE

## A GUIDE FOR ADVOCATES

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## A GUIDE FOR ADVOCATES

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Sexual violence permeates our society, including the workplace. The true magnitude of sexual violence as it relates to employment is unknown for a number of reasons, one of which is a lack of comprehensive research on the topic. However, as national awareness about harmful and far-reaching effects of sexual violence grows, more advocates and employers are taking steps to effectively address and prevent the devastating impacts of sexual violence in the workplace.

The purpose of this technical assistance guide is to provide advocates with information about the connections between sexual violence and employment and to offer possible prevention strategies. This guide applies Sexual Violence and the *Spectrum of Prevention (The Spectrum)* (Davis, Parks, & Cohen, 2006) to the workplace. *The Spectrum* is a model that has six levels of prevention activities; each

level is used in conjunction with the rest to reach the overarching goal of preventing sexual violence and fostering social change. This guide provides advocates with possible strategies on each of the six levels of that model. The hope is that this guide will equip advocates with tools to engage employers as partners in facilitating healthy and violence-free work environments.



## SECTION ONE

### ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence affects everyone; however, power imbalances and social inequities caused by oppressions such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, and heterosexism influence sexual violence. Oppressions can create risk factors for sexual violence and can compound barriers to seeking and accessing help for traditionally marginalized populations. In the workplace, it is helpful to understand and share with providers the complex ways that oppressions affect migrant farmworkers; immigrants; people of color; women; teens; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender; people with disabilities; people living in poverty; and others.

Sexual violence constitutes a continuum of harmful behaviors ranging from sexual harassment to rape.

Sexual violence research demonstrates its pervasiveness and the profound negative effects that sexual violence can have on individuals, relationships, communities, and the larger society. Survivors<sup>1</sup> often experience the effects of sexual violence across the lifespan in every aspect of life, such as their relationships, physical and mental health, productivity at work and school, and their general outlook on life and others.

Communities bear significant financial costs associated with sexual violence. Many

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this document, the terms “victim” and “survivor” are used interchangeably to be inclusive of the various ways people who have experienced sexual violence may identify. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) recognizes and supports the use of person-first terminology that honors and respects the whole person, which is also reflected in this document. Finally, NSVRC acknowledges that individuals should ultimately choose the language that is used to describe their experiences and therefore, supports advocacy approaches that are person-centered and that use the terminology preferred by individuals they serve.

social systems are involved in addressing sexual violence by responding to victims or incarcerating, treating, and managing sex offenders. Others incur costs due to reduced contributions or productivity of people affected by sexual violence. The following are some of the social systems affected by sexual violence: medical, mental health, criminal justice, corrections, workplaces, child care, schools and universities, law enforcement, military, social service organizations, and others.

Society as a whole suffers from sexual violence as it depletes the strength and potential of communities around the country, including the workplace. Sexual violence exists in a context of oppression that is detrimental to the well-being of the larger society, including the workplace. Sexual violence prevention organizations in the United States and territories work to create and sustain healthy norms in our communities to promote respectful, safe, and violence-free environments. Given the significant amount of time individuals spend at work – the average worker in the United States spends about 33% of their time working or participating in work-related activities (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2010) – the workplace is a critical environment in which to promote such norms.

## WORKPLACE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The relationship between sexual violence and the workplace is complex and multifaceted. The profound impacts of sexual violence on employment can be felt regardless of when or where the incident(s) occurred. Whether a person was assaulted as a child or struggles in the aftermath of a recent attack, the effects

are often devastating, resulting in depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Absenteeism, impaired job performance, and turnover are only some of the costs that employers bear as a direct result of sexual violence. A 2005 study on workplace violence found that more than 70% of workplaces in the United States did not have a formal workplace violence program or policy. Almost 40% of employers who experienced violence in the workplace within the last year reported that violence had an effect on the workplace (BLS, 2006). This illustrates how timely and effective prevention and intervention planning can be in averting workplace losses experienced due to violence.

Various studies have shown how sexual violence impacts all aspects of people's lives, including work and future earnings. For example, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health Population Information Program (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999) reported that PTSD is likely among 50% to 95% of rape survivors. In another study, 50% of rape victims lost or were forced to quit their jobs in the year following their rapes due to the severity of their reactions (Ellis, Atkeson, & Calhoun, 1981).

Many rape survivors lose time from work. The *National Violence Against Women Survey* found that of adult female rape survivors, 19.4% and 9.7% of adult male rape survivors reported their victimization caused them to lose time from work (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Of women raped by an intimate partner, more than 21% of stated they lost time from paid work, with an average of eight days lost (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2003). The *2008 National Crime Victimization Survey* found that 6.5% of rape



and sexual assault victims lost one to five days of work (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Sexual violence can cause a disruption in educational attainment and result in lost productivity. Lifetime income loss due to sexual violence in adolescence is estimated at \$241,600 (MacMillan, 2000). Between 8% and 13% of individuals who recently returned to public assistance experienced sexual harassment on the job (Siegel & Abbott, 2007). According to one study, rape victims incurred the following estimated costs as a result of their victimizations (numbers have been adjusted

for inflation): \$780 in medical costs; \$3,440 in mental health costs; \$3,440 in productivity; and \$127,390 in quality of life (Miller, Cohen, & Wiersema, 1996).

The economic impact of sexual violence makes work and earnings all the more critical for sexual violence survivors, yet research shows that often, sexual violence interferes with a person's ability to hold down a job and earn a living wage. This makes the workplace paramount to the systems advocacy work of sexual assault advocates and prevention educators working in communities throughout the U.S.

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IN ORDER FOR POLICIES AND ACTION TO OCCUR,  
THE EMPLOYER NEEDS TO BE COMMITTED TO THE ISSUE  
OF PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

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## SECTION TWO

### SPECTRUM OF PREVENTION

#### THE ROLE OF ADVOCATES IN WORKPLACE SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Sexual assault advocates and prevention educators play an important role in preventing sexual violence in the workplace and in educating communities about the many impacts that sexual violence and trauma can have on the workplace. It is important for advocates to reach out to employers in the community to provide resources and training on why employers should care about sexual violence, how sexual violence impacts the workplace, and ways employers can prevent and address sexual violence in their workplace.

Advocates are leaders in coordinated sexual violence prevention efforts. Advocates are well-prepared to educate and train employers on the dynamics of sexual violence and to create comprehensive approaches to healthy and safe work environments. Effective prevention strategies address sexual violence before it occurs by engaging in strategic, long-term, comprehensive strategies which engage multidisciplinary partners in creating positive, healthy social norms, reducing risk for sexual

violence, and increasing protective factors. These efforts reach audiences multiple times, in meaningful ways that expand skills and change behaviors and empower communities in the creation of healthy social norms. These strategies are most effective when developed with diverse, multidisciplinary community partners, and tailored to the strengths and needs of audiences. When employers are understanding of the issue of sexual violence in the workplace, its root causes, and the need for its prevention, and willing to implement policies, the positive effects are felt not only at the individual level, but throughout the workplace and society as a whole. In order for policies and action to occur, the employer needs to be committed to the issue of preventing sexual violence.

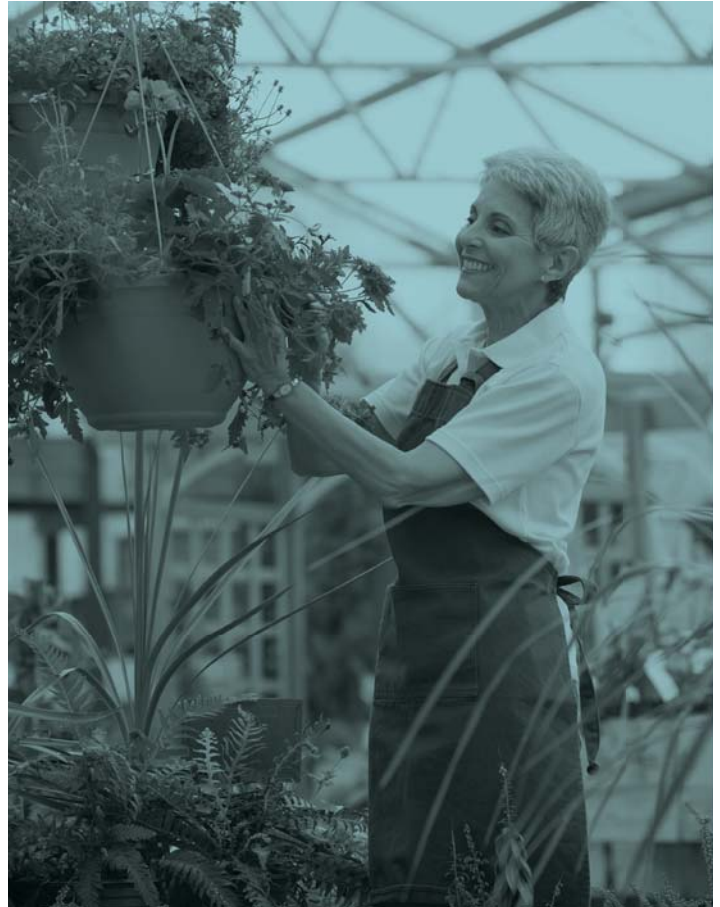
The *Spectrum of Prevention* is a tool for effectively developing a comprehensive prevention strategy which is designed for advocates, practitioners, and educators who are interested in advancing solutions for developing safer and healthier communities. *The Spectrum of Prevention* outlines six levels of intervention, which can help communities to design their own appropriate strategy to combat local issues: (1) strengthening individual knowledge and

skills; (2) promoting community education; (3) educating providers; (4) fostering coalitions and networks; (5) changing organizational practices; (6) and influencing policy and legislation. Activity at any of *The Spectrum's* six levels constitutes an intervention, but if used in combination, *The Spectrum* has a more effective transformative power. The inter-relatedness between levels of *The Spectrum* enables advocates to maximize the result of any one prevention activity (Cohen & Swift, 1999).

Using *The Spectrum of Prevention Model*, advocates and preventionists can work on all six levels of the Spectrum to prevent workplace sexual violence.

## LEVEL ONE: STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The first level of *The Spectrum* focuses on “Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills” (Davis et al., 2010, p. 8). Advocates can offer workplace presentations, educational groups, and individual employee and/or management knowledge and skill-building efforts to increase the capacity of employers and employees. Employers who understand the destructive consequences of sexual violence on workplace productivity are more open and willing to work with their employees and victim advocates on creating safe and supportive violence-free workplaces. Advocates and prevention educators can help workplaces address and prevent sexual violence by increasing individual prevention skills. For example, advocates can provide ongoing training and support to ensure that individuals at every level of the workplace understand sexual violence and its negative



impacts on work and know how to get involved as an active bystander – whether that is through their roles as managers, supervisors, or colleagues. (See Level Three for more information about the bystander program.) Additional ways that advocates can strengthen individual knowledge and skills is by raising awareness about community programs and resources to help survivors of sexual violence, as well as resources on wellness and violence prevention programs available in the community. Advocates can reinforce to employers the importance of actively promoting programs and services available to employees such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), health and wellness programs as well as workplace violence policies and reporting procedures.



## LEVEL TWO: PROMOTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The second level of *The Spectrum* focuses on “Promoting Community Education” (Davis et al., 2006, p. 9). The workplace is a community in and of itself. It is also a critical part of the larger community and has an important leadership role in sexual violence prevention. The workplace is where people spend a majority of their time during the day; therefore, it is important for the workplace to be involved in community activities and to be seen as an active and positive influence in the community. To this end, advocates can work with workplaces in the community to develop media campaigns and outreach materials as a way to involve the whole community in workplace sexual violence prevention. Materials on sexual violence prevention and intervention can be placed in a wide range of community settings including childcare, medical, legal, faith, education, employment, public assistance, and service sector settings.

Additionally, advocates can promote prevention throughout the community by participating in community-wide health and employment fairs and events and providing trainings at those venues. Advocates’ presence at these community events can raise awareness of sexual violence in the workplace and provide information and materials to employees for services available in the community. This also is a place advocates are likely to have contact with employers so they can provide employers with information on workplace violence prevention policies and offer training and assistance in improving workplace policies to include sexual violence victims.

Engaging in media advocacy is a critical component of prevention, ensuring that

journalists report on sexual violence in a way that promotes awareness, eliminates victim-blaming sentiment, and increases community members’ skills in preventing sexual violence. Advocates, workplaces, and community members can partner together in raising awareness about sexual violence. The month of April has been designated Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) in the United States. The goal of SAAM is to raise public awareness about sexual violence and to educate communities and individuals on how to prevent sexual violence. Through coordinated planning of special events, advocates can raise awareness, media attention, and national momentum for ending and preventing sexual violence in the workplace. For more information on SAAM and current campaign resources and materials, visit [www.nsvrc.org/saam](http://www.nsvrc.org/saam). For resources in Spanish, visit [www.nsvrc.org/es/saam](http://www.nsvrc.org/es/saam). There are resources on the SAAM website geared toward engaging employers and sexual violence in the workplace (<http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/workplace-resources>).

## LEVEL THREE: EDUCATING PROVIDERS

The third level of *The Spectrum* focuses on “Educating Providers” (Davis et al., 2006, p. 10). One critical role of advocates is to provide training on the prevention of sexual violence. Advocates can provide training to employers to ensure that sexual violence is prevented in the workplace at every level, from the ground up.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing sexual violence in the workplace. Therefore, training workplaces on sexual violence would be best conducted at different levels to ensure a comprehensive approach to sexual violence prevention and response. For example, training



for human resource professionals could include information about the workplace's legal and ethical responsibilities, the development of a workplace violence prevention and response plan, as well as information about EAPs and other services for employees. Training for managers might focus on the importance of serving as a positive role model and using supervision to create healthy workplace norms, offering flexibilities to survivors, and holding employees accountable when they violate the workplace violence prevention and response policy. Training for employees might also focus on modeling healthy and respectful workplace norms, how they can become active bystanders,

and reviews of the workplace violence prevention and response plan.

The bystander prevention program lends itself particularly well to the workplace and cross-training efforts. At work or in the community, everyone has the opportunity to be an engaged bystander. The general public witnesses a continuum of behaviors that range from being respectful and safe, to being sexually abusive and violent in a variety of community settings, including in the workplace. The bystander approach teaches potential witnesses safe and positive ways that they can act to prevent or intervene when there is risk for sexual violence. Bystander intervention training

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## BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING TEACHES SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS HOW TO RESPOND EARLY TO INTERRUPT POTENTIALLY PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIORS.

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### CROSS-TRAINING

Cross-training gives people a sense of ownership of the problem and an opportunity to make a difference in their neighborhood. When cross-training occurs among community partners, it provides each participant with tools to identify and respond to sexual violence and promotes violence-free norms in their respective workplaces. Advocates can work to cross-train multidisciplinary partners and stakeholders to prevent and respond to sexual violence in their respective workplaces. These partners could include social workers, nurses, doctors, attorneys, legislators, and others.

gives community members specific roles that they can use in preventing sexual violence, including naming and stopping situations that could lead to sexual violence before it happens, safely stepping in during an incident, and speaking out against ideas and behaviors that support sexual violence. The bystander approach also gives individuals the skills to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors after an assault has taken place.

There are many strategies to educate employees; one effective approach is bystander

intervention training. When determining how to educate and train workplaces, it is important to take into consideration workplaces' current policies and workplace culture so that the training is tailored to the organization. Training should also build on positive strengths of the organization or workplace such as an existing violence prevention program or a wellness program.

Effective bystander intervention training can help create healthy norms in the workplace. It provides models of helping interactions, offers assistance to potential victims and sends a strong message to potential offenders that inappropriate behaviors will not be tolerated. The goal is to create an environment where the cost of apathy (doing nothing) is high and is balanced by even higher benefits of engagement. The bystander approach discourages victim-blaming, offers the chance to change social norms, and shifts responsibility to men and women (Tabachnick, 2009). Bystander intervention training teaches supervisors and managers how to respond early to interrupt potentially problematic behaviors.

For more information on bystander intervention, see the resources and materials on the NSVRC website at <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/engaging-bystanders>. An online learning module is available. *Engaging Bystanders in Sexual Violence Prevention* can be accessed at <http://www.nsvrc.org/elearning/3546>.

## LEVEL FOUR: FOSTERING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

The fourth level of *The Spectrum* focuses on “Fostering Coalitions and Networks” (Davis et al., 2006, p. 11). Advocates can collaborate with multidisciplinary partners to establish a community-based task force to foster systemic changes and violence-free norms. Engaging community partners ensures that the issue of sexual violence and its root causes are addressed on multiple levels of the community. Each community partner has its own unique skills and resources to prevent sexual violence. Collaborations bring together key participants to ensure the success of prevention and intervention campaigns. They also bridge gaps in expertise, conserve resources, foster cooperation, and achieve goals that would be unattainable for a single advocate.

In collaborative efforts to prevent workplace violence, the sum is greater than its individual parts. It might be helpful to introduce sexual violence and the workplace as an agenda item for existing committees, task forces, and collaborations. Possible relevant groups to consider mobilizing around workplace issues could include those focused on health, mental health, sexual violence prevention/health promotion, economic justice, and others. Advocates also could collaborate with employers and provide trainings or facilitate discussions on how sexual violence is a workplace issue for boards and staff.

## LEVEL FIVE: CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

The fifth level of *The Spectrum* focuses on “Changing Organizational Practices” (Davis

et al., 2006, p. 12). Advocates can provide workplaces with resources and feedback on organizational policy changes that are comprehensive and culturally competent. Antiviolence policies and procedures must be written and widely distributed so that everyone can have immediate access to them when needed. Employee turnover should also be taken into consideration, and all new employees should be trained and made aware of violence prevention policies and procedures. Employers have a legal obligation and a social responsibility to prevent violence in the workplace and to respond to such violence and its effects. By developing a consistent and victim-centered prevention and response plan, organizations will enjoy the benefits of limited liability and increased productivity. Advocates can play a critical role in helping employers create and adapt a workplace violence prevention and response plan. The core components of a workplace violence prevention and response plan include policy development, education and training, implementation and response, and evaluation. For more information about workplace sexual violence prevention and response plan, see the *Sexual Violence & the Workplace: A Guide for Employers* (Benner, 2013) included in this information packet.

At level five of *The Spectrum*, employers can institute policies and practices that are responsive to the needs of sexual violence survivors. Such policies and practices can include such paid leave options as annual leave, sick leave, or medical leave, or such unpaid leave as leave covered under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 or leave without pay. Alternative worksite arrangements can assist a victim in coping and recovering from the trauma by offering telecommuting options or providing

the ability to utilize a flexible schedule so the victim can attend court hearings, counseling, and other medical appointments while maintaining employment. Survivor privacy and confidentiality are important to prioritize throughout a workplace violence prevention policy and plan.

An EAP is another workplace resource that employers could consider providing their employees. EAPs are designed to help employees connect with resources to address a range of personal and professional issues or challenges that could affect their work and productivity. EAPs can often assist employees in accessing supportive information and services in the following areas: health, mental health, housing, transportation, legal, education, management, employee and other relationships, and more. Proactive EAPs can serve as supportive resources to survivors of sexual violence and assist advocates in helping survivors navigate such services and resources. EAPs can help to create a work culture in which the well-being of employees is prioritized and nurtured. Together, managers and advocates can create an organization-specific plan about sexual violence prevention programs targeting safety and security of the workplace.

## LEVEL SIX: INFLUENCING POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

The sixth level of the Spectrum focuses on “Influencing Policies and Legislation” (Davis et al., 2006, pp. 13-14). Advocates are influential in building support around legislation that reduces risk factors and increases protective factors around workplace sexual violence, and workplace flexibilities that will support victims. Policy reform is often needed when attempting



to change public perceptions and social norms and eliminating the social conditions that perpetuate sexual violence in the workplace. Public policies could include those that address economic security and violence prevention such as legislation associated with violence against women and health promotion; the minimum wage; job creation; time off and work leave; public-assistance programs; health care and other work benefits; immigration employment rights; childcare; anti-poverty; and others. Advocates play a critical role in public policy advocacy because they are experts in sexual violence prevention and intervention and well-aware of the needs of their local communities and of survivors of sexual violence. For more information on engaging in public policy advocacy, see *Public Policy Advocacy: A Guide for Sexual Assault Counselors and Advocates: If We Don't Speak Up, Who Else Will?* (Greco, 2007).

## SECTION THREE

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### CONCLUSION

**W**orkplace sexual violence is part of a larger societal issue that requires systemic change. In partnership with advocates and prevention educators at the local level, employers have the opportunity to make significant changes in their communities. Through modeling responsible policies and practices they can impact employees, vendors, customers and clients. *The Spectrum* provides a blueprint for multilevel efforts that help create work environments that are free from violence and responsive to the needs of sexual violence survivors. Advocates and preventionists can bring their expertise and skills to help employers nurture these positive work cultures – cultures in which individuals are safe at work and are able to be fully present and productive community members. New policies and procedures with a proactive focus on prevention will lead the way to healthy, safe, and violence-free workplaces.

## SECTION FOUR

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### PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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**Jennifer Benner** is the Resource Development Specialist at the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) where she is responsible for developing resources and materials on a range of sexual violence topics. Prior to joining the NSVRC, she worked in the reproductive justice field while obtaining her master's degree in public policy. Jennifer's interests include public policy research, social science research, and advocating for social justice.

#### National Sexual Violence Resource Center

Founded by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape in 2000, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) identifies, develops and disseminates resources regarding all aspects of sexual violence prevention and intervention. NSVRC activities include training and technical assistance, referrals, consultation, systems advocacy, resource library, capacity-building, integrating research findings with community-based projects, coordinating Sexual Assault Awareness Month, cosponsoring national conferences and events, and creating Web-based and social networking resources.

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