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## The value and return of investing in a domestic violence plan

A domestic violence plan in the workplace is a small cost to employers, but priceless to the victims. However, when you put a lot of time, effort and resources into your employee's well-being, you are going to want to be sure that it's worth it.

It is tricky to equate the value of what your organisation will get out of the programme with the resources you put in. Until now, the business case for **return on investment** (ROI) of various employee well-being programmes, such as domestic violence plans, has been built on financial measures of ROI driven primarily by financial savings on healthcare costs. Not all employees spend money on employer healthcare and insurance plans, so measuring the benefit of having a domestic violence plan for employees against healthcare cost savings will fail to measure the real cost. In countries like South Africa, the need to control employee-related healthcare costs is non-existent. However, the cost to the business is a lot more than an increase in the number of sick days taken.

It is also a **security and liability** concern, as employers who fail to protect employees from violence may be liable. In the case of *La Rose v. State Mutual Life Assurance Co.*, the family of Francesia La Rose filed a wrongful-death action against her employer when she was murdered by a former boyfriend at work and the employer failed to protect her after she notified them of the threat. Research shows that 40 per cent of victims of domestic violence say that they fear that their partner will pay them and unexpected visit at work.

It is also a **performance and productivity** concern. In one study of domestic abuse victims, 41 per cent had job performance problems, and 98 per cent had difficulty concentrating on the job. Thirty-seven per cent of the women who experienced domestic violence reported that the abuse had an impact on their work in the form of lateness, missed work, making mistakes, keeping a job and career promotions. Research shows that 7.2 days are lost every year from an employee who is experiencing domestic violence in some form.

The cost of giving an employee time off, training workshops and counselling services is relatively easy to keep track of and measure but using a form of evaluation that is focused on a tangible return and something measurable that directly relates with the investment is tricky.

The term **value of investment** (VOI) is becoming increasingly popular in the employee well-being space. VOI refers to the overall value received on any given financial investment. It includes the financial return, but also considers more abstract value that was received from the investment. VOI is not as tangible or easy to measure as ROI. The forms of outcomes might differ from the investment, and in some cases the two can be difficult to compare. When using VOI, you want to determine whether the value or the investment is of greater value.

**“Creating standards others are drawn to”**

VOI considers invaluable benefits such as:

- Reduced employee health risk
- Improved employee job satisfaction
- Improved employee productivity
- Improved employee morale
- Attracting or retaining talented employees
- Improved employee energy levels at work
- Increased on-the-job safety
- Impacting business performance and profitability
- Improved comradery and team effectiveness
- Reduced presenteeism
- Having fun

VOI also includes costs that are avoided, such as future diseases that do not occur and stress that is eliminated.

Some people think you have to pick only one measurement technique. They think that you should use either ROI or VOI, but not both. This approach makes no sense – the best workplace well-being programmes can impact a wide variety of outcomes within an organisation. These programmes, such as domestic violence plans, are being used to improve productivity and to create added value from the workforce from the start. There is little need to conduct an ROI analysis when VOI is the primary reason a programme exists. You might be surprised to learn that most employers with an effective employee well-being programme are no longer concerned about the ROI.

Employers face numerous human resource concerns, with limited time and money. Often a decision to focus on a specific problem is not made until the problem becomes significant and costly. You can make a difference in your workplace and the lives of your employees who are facing domestic abuse by deciding now to make domestic violence your business's business. What starts as a pursuit of a greater return on investment turns into a realisation that there is tremendous value in having healthy, happy employees. It is as if these employer groups gradually discover the true value of having a healthy, vibrant, and productive workforce. It turns out that the VOI of an effective well-being programme ends up being the most important outcome of the programme.

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