

# Research highlights impact of sexual violence on employees

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A new study by researchers from UNSW's Gendered Violence Research Network highlights how sexual assault and child sex abuse can impact employees in the workplace, whether or not the violence takes place at work.

This is the first research in Australia to focus on the intersection between sexual violence and the workplace. The report findings were launched at Government House in Darwin today – the Northern Territory is the first jurisdiction in Australia to offer a paid leave provision to employees who have experienced sexual violence.

Speaking at the launch, Heather Nancarrow, CEO of the National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, reiterated the significance of the research.

"This pioneering study has shed light on what sexual assault victims may need from their employers to move forward in their recovery while remaining at work. It is a very welcome and commendable addition to the existing body of knowledge about the possible effects of [domestic violence](#) on women's experiences at work and implications for employers," Ms Nancarrow said.

Survivors of [sexual violence](#) reported difficulty maintaining employment due to the need to take leave for health and emotional reasons or the time required to attend medical and legal appointments. The majority of respondents of the study also reported low self-esteem and depression which made it difficult to continue normal work activities or participate socially and professionally in the workplace. As a result, several [study participants](#) left jobs they valued without disclosing the circumstances to their employer.

Some study participants reported benefiting from appropriate support from their employers during their time of crisis, including time off to attend counselling, legal and other appointments. Others indicated that they may not have left their workplace if the appropriate support and flexibility had been offered by their employer.

The study found that the ideal workplace support includes strict confidentiality as well as consideration for ongoing employee needs such as reducing the risk of triggering trauma and increased safety for employees at work.

The prevalence of [sexual assault](#) and [child sexual abuse](#) in Australia means that a large number of employers, whether or not they are aware

of it, are affected by corresponding lost productivity and staff turnover. One in six women and one in 20 men are estimated to have been sexually assaulted since they turned 15 (ABS Personal Safety Survey 2012); and almost one million women and 337,400 men report experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 15 (Tarczon & Quadara, ACSSA Resource Sheet, December 2012).

**More information:** The full report is available online:  
[www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au/research](http://www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au/research)

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