



Women's employment and domestic violence: A review of the literature



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ABSTRACT

A steady and accessible financial outlet is central to living an abuse free life for women who experience domestic violence. In this systematic review of the literature, the relationship between domestic violence and employment instability as a result of workplace disruptions used by abusive men to sabotage their partner's employment efforts is explored. A total of 20 quantitative studies of adult women were selected that measured employment and domestic violence. A quarter of the studies included measured mental health problems, revealing correlations and mediation effects between domestic violence and employment stability. Every study selected found workplace disruptions among women experiencing domestic violence. On-the-job harassment was found in four of the studies reviewed with two studies finding corresponding decline in productivity and performance. Losing paid work time is also a serious cause of employment instability as workplace time reductions workplace time reductions were found in approximately half of the studies reviewed. Job loss or unemployment as a result of domestic violence was found in seven of the studies reviewed. To prevent employment instability, employers can restructure policy and procedures of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and policymakers can further support and expand Family Violence Options for welfare-recipients experiencing domestic violence.

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1. Introduction

Domestic violence is one of the most costly and severe health problems facing society today affecting all cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations, ages, ethnicities, education levels and social economic classes. According to the National Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual

Violence Survey (Black et al., 2011), a nationally representative study of over 9000 women, approximately 1 in 3 women (36%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by a domestic partner in their lifetime. Generally, women who belong to marginalized or oppressed groups are at greater risk for experiencing domestic violence, as they are less likely to have the resources available to flee abusive situations. In fact, studies suggest that as a woman's financial stability increases, the likelihood that she will experience domestic violence decreases (Lloyd, 1997; Raphael, 2000; Renzetti & Larkin, 2009). In the past few decades, a growing body of theory and

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research has discussed this trend and offered insights for promoting women's financial stability.

For women who experience domestic violence, a steady and accessible financial outlet is central to living an abuse free life. Early research established that domestic violence is associated with financial dependency on abusive partners and prevents women from leaving dangerous relationships (Strube & Barbour, 1983). Often, this dependency is a result of abuse tactics used by violent partners to prevent their significant others from accessing education, training or opportunities needed to establish independence. Alarming, the risk of physical violence among women whose finances are controlled by their partners has been found to be 4.68 times greater than those not experiencing financial control tactics (Outlaw, 2009). Specifically, tactics used by abusers to control their partner's finances often include limiting accessible income, withholding money needed for survival purposes, and preventing women from finding and maintaining employment (Sanders & Schnabel, 2011; Staggs, Long, Mason, Krishnan, & Riger, 2007). Given that employment status is key to accessing income and financial dependence, domestic violence victims can benefit greatly from finding employment. As domestic violence advocates have brought to light (Raphael, 2000; Tolman & Wang, 2005), abusers that control their partner's employment status may pose the greatest barrier to victim's ultimate self-sufficiency.

Theoretical support for the impact of domestic violence on employment in previous literature has drawn from several theories and frameworks including Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Chronister, Harley, Aranda, Barr, & Luginbuhl, 2012) Borrowing framework from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, SCCT poses that career behavior is most impacted by beliefs in one's ability to perform workplace tasks, expectations for employment outcomes, and intentions to achieve employment goals while taking into account the contextual factors that support or hinder the cognitive processes (Lent et al., 1994). When using SCCT in a domestic violence context, a victims' self-efficacy and employment outcome expectations are influenced by domestic violence experiences. In other words, domestic violence can result in employment instability by hindering cognitive employment-processes like employment self-efficacy and expectations. Interventions informed by SCCT for victims confirm that improving cognitive employment-processes positively impacts employment outcomes such as goal achievement (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006; Davidson, Nitzel, Duke, Baker, & Bovaird, 2012). However, there may be a need to test these interventions with groups of women who are disproportionately likely to be experiencing domestic violence, like welfare recipients (Tolman & Raphael, 2000).

The concerns of advocates regarding welfare requirements have reached policymakers and it seems legislation is continuously being developed with the needs of domestic violence victims in mind. In 1996, welfare reform legislation was passed into law under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) to encourage Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients to find employment by limiting the total amount of time they could obtain government benefits and in effect, limiting their financial stability. The law encourages welfare-to-work programs and rapid reentry into the workforce, both of which may not be appropriate or feasible for women experiencing domestic abuse. Around the time PRWORA emerged, one study called attention to the fact that many women on welfare were victims of domestic violence (Raphael, 1996). Thus, this law sparked concerns that victims who depended on welfare assistance like TANF would not be able to meet employment requirements due to abuse and could potentially lose their only source of income in the form of government assistance. State policymakers have responded to this concern by adopting the Family Violence Option (FVO) designed to help women experiencing domestic violence avoid TANF requirements and maintain financial stability while receiving welfare. However, there are concerns that FVOs are not being utilized to their fullest capacity

because welfare service providers do not address domestic violence when screening clients (Adams, Tolman, Byee, Sullivan, & Kennedy, 2012; Meisel, Chandler, & Rienzi, 2003). Perhaps, this is due to federal policy that limits the portion of total welfare recipients in each state that can be exempt from work requirements. Threats of losing welfare combined with the financial instability of unemployment have led to an exploration of the effects domestic violence has on women's employment.

Employment offers a viable form of financial independence for women who experience domestic violence and thus is often attacked and sabotaged by abusive partners. In 1988, Shepard and Pence were among early researchers to find that women experiencing domestic violence struggled in the workplace as a result of abuse. Since their study, others have followed in analyzing the direct and indirect effects that domestic violence can have on women's employment. Directly, abusive partners have been found to stalk or assault their victims, during their work day as a way to interfere with their workplace performance (Swanberg & Logan, 2005). Indirectly, domestic violence has been linked to mental health disorders like depression, low self-worth and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which likely effect employment stability overtime (Bonomi et al., 2006; Crowne et al., 2010; Kimerling et al., 2009).

1.1. Contributions

This review of the literature will explore what existing studies have discovered of domestic violence on employment stability particularly in regards to the effects of mental health. By compiling what is known of the relationship between domestic violence and employment stability, implications for employers and public policies can be made. There are existing literature reviews who have made important contributions to the issue of victim's employment (Kwesiga, Bell, Pattie, & Moe, 2007; Pollack, Austin, & Grisso, 2010; Riger & Staggs, 2004; Swanberg, Macke, & Logan, 2006; Tolman & Raphael, 2000) and these studies support the conceptual findings in this study. However, the current study is unique in including both welfare recipients and non-recipient samples, publications after 2005, and findings of mental health effects on victim's employment stability.

1.2. Definitions

Given the extensive conversation surrounding violence against women, it is important to define domestic violence, sexual violence, non-physical violence, and the ways they might relate to women's employment. Throughout this paper, specific terms have been selected for consistency purposes. The terms used reflect definitions found most often in the reviewed literature and best represent the content discussed.

Domestic violence is the pattern of abusive mental, emotional and/or physical behavior between two intimate partners in which one partner maintains power and control over their counterpart (Futures Without Violence, 2013; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011). Domestic violence is used in this paper as a broad term to incorporate intimate partner violence, interpersonal violence, non-physical and sexual violence. Studies reviewed in this paper focus on violence perpetrated by men against women. Undeniably, men are victims of severe domestic violence incidents; however, women are more frequently abused by their partners accounting for 84% of spousal abuse victims and 86% of dating abuse victims as reported by the National Crime Victimization Survey (Catalano, 2007). Thus, domestic violence in this paper refers to abusive men who employ a range of control tactics that interfere with their female partner's employment. Also, it should be clarified that the word victim is used frequently to describe women who have experienced abuse to highlight that women are subject to violent crimes with legal consequences. However, it is certain that those

who experience domestic violence are, in fact, surviving traumatic experiences and should feel empowered to live abuse-free lives.

Sexual violence is unwanted physical contact that is sexual in nature and ranges from touching to forced penetration or rape (CDC, 2013). While a majority of existing literature on women's employment and violence is concentrated on domestic violence, findings could be relevant to sexual violence as well. According to the 2010 NISVS survey, more than half of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner. Additionally, many of the studies in this review utilize the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) to measure domestic violence in which participants are asked about their sexually violent experiences (Adams et al., 2012; Crowne et al., 2010; Kimerling et al., 2009; Tolman & Rosen, 2001).

Non-physical violence includes mental, emotional, economic, stalking, technological and other abuse tactics that do not use physical contact (Basile & Saltzman, 2002; Seff, Beaulaurier, & Newman, 2008). Non-physical violence is likely underreported for domestic violence victims because women may not identify them as abuse and they are not always visible to others outside the relationship. Workplace disruptions are a type of domestic violence and non-physical violence.

Workplace disruptions are abuser initiated disturbances that prevent women from performing in an employment setting to their full capacity or at all. These disruptions can take a variety of forms for women experiencing domestic violence and are situational based upon the abuse occurring. Three forms of workplace disruptions have been selected for discussion in this paper: on-the-job harassment, workplace time reductions and job loss. *On-the-job harassment* is abusive behavior perpetrated while a victim is at work with the intention of interfering with work duties and sabotaging employment. *Workplace time reduction* is the loss of paid work time women experience because of domestic violence. Time lost at work can range from hours to months worked depending on the abuse. *Job loss* or unemployment is an extreme workplace disruption tactic that prevents women from working for money and maintaining financial stability. Job loss can be the result of termination or resignation.

2. Review of research

A total of 20 studies were collected for this research review. Information collected in this literature review reflects the experiences of women receiving welfare, women living in shelter settings or receiving domestic violence services, pregnant women, and women seeking legal protection from abuse from the late 1988 to 2014. While valuable information on the employment and domestic violence relationship has been found in qualitative studies (i.e. Beecham, 2014; Brown et al., 2005; Davis, 2002; Moe & Bell, 2004; Rothman, Hathaway, Stidsen, & de Vries, 2007; Swanberg & Logan, 2005), this review focuses on quantitative surveys to discuss larger sample sizes that can be generalized to a greater number of women. Of note, two mixed-methods studies are included (Lloyd, 1997; Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Swanberg, 2007) but only quantitative results are analyzed. Further limitations are placed to include only studies in English, peer-reviewed journal articles, in the United States, and on women-only samples over age-18 between the years 1985 and 2016. One longitudinal study of women under age-18 at baseline was included (Lindhorst, Oxford, & Gillmore-Rogers, 2007) because outcomes were measured when participants were ages 25–30. Last, studies that tested employment interventions with victims (i.e. Chronister et al., 2009; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006; Chronister et al., 2012; Davidson et al., 2012; Felblinger & Gates, 2008; Swanberg, Ojha, & Macke, 2012; Younger-urban & Bennett, 1999) were not included because it was the purpose of this study is to establish the relationship between employment stability and domestic violence.

Searching for this study occurred in four stages: academic databases searching, Google Scholar searching, journal searching, and hand searching. Keywords “domestic violence”, “intimate partner violence”,

“employment stability”, “employment”, “women's employment” were used in all stages. Initially, MEDLINE, PsycINFO and SocINDEX were selected for their content in the topic area, use in related literature reviews (Pollack, Austin, & Grisso, 2010), and regular maintenance of several hundred sources. A search of these academic databases yielded 481 studies. A title review of these studies was conducted to further eliminate those that were non-quantitative (4), about general violence (44), domestic violence but not employment (209), child welfare (66), health (124), batterers or incarceration (21), and welfare only (10) leaving a total of 3 studies. To increase the study sample size further searches were made. Google Scholar was next searched using previously specified criteria to yield 42 studies. Of these results, studies were eliminated that were not in the U.S. (13), non-quantitative (1), non-peer-reviewed articles (3), domestic violence but not employment (7), child welfare (2), batterers or incarceration (3) and welfare only (12) leaving a total of 1 additional study. In the third stage of searching, Electronic Journal Center was selected for its coverage of journals related to domestic violence and employment yielding 102 studies. Studies were eliminated that were not in the U.S. (25), non-quantitative (11), domestic violence but not employment (26), batterers or incarceration (10), and welfare only (17), leaving a total of 13 additional studies. Hand searching of citations within the studies selected yielded 3 additional studies.

Of the studies reviewed, a vast majority controlled for age, race, relationship status, education level and household size as these variables often impact employment and domestic violence. There was overlap in regards to the measuring and definitions of both employment and domestic violence in the study samples, as discussed below. These similarities allow for comparisons between studies even as each study produces unique findings and contributions to women's employment research. Measurement of mental health problems is also specified as they were measure in a quarter of the studies reviewed.

Employment is measured in two main ways in the studies identified. Around half of the studies compiled ask participants of their employment status at the time of the interview while the others investigated employment over several months or years. This difference in measuring does provide interesting findings given the effects of violence on employment status and stability. Employment status or the dichotomous variable, employed or unemployed, is defined in a few studies by state welfare requirements given the high number of women on welfare experiencing abuse. For instance, Tolman and Rosen (2001) considered a participant employed if she was working at least 20 h per week or the minimum number of hours needed to be in compliance with Michigan's welfare requirements. Employment stability was generally measured by acquiring employment information over the course of several interactions. For example, in Adams et al. (2012), authors measured employment stability by finding the average number of months at any one job since the last interview. In addition to the measuring of employment, domestic violence measurements in the selected studies showed a range of abuse that women experienced and the ways that they were analyzed.

A majority of studies included in this review utilize the CTS (Straus, 1979) to assess violence and victimization in female samples. The CTS measures the frequency of severe physical violence including hitting, beating, choking, threatening the use of weapons, and forcing sexual activity as well as psychological violence including caused fear or safety, tried to control activities, and stalking items (Straus, 1979). The CTS is one of the most widely accepted tools for measuring domestic violence, but has been both praised and critiqued for its assessment. It is proven to have “a stable factor structure, moderate reliability and concurrent validity, and excellent construct validity” (Lloyd & Taluc, 1999, p. 377). However, critics claim that the CTS fails to distinguish between actions taken in self-defense and violent offenses, and for generally not taking into account the context in which incidents occur (Lloyd & Taluc, 1999). While the CTS may be limited in the scope of domestic violence circumstances, researchers have modified the scale to expand on

existing questions. For example, in their study of 824 women in a low-income neighborhood, [Lloyd and Taluc \(1999\)](#), added items of relationship and abuse history to the scale as well as background characteristics of both partners. Certainly, as the CTS is critiqued and expanded on, more comprehensive information on domestic violence experiences can be collected and reveal the effects of domestic violence on women's employment. It should be noted that not all of the articles included in this review use the CTS to measure domestic violence. Two studies included, used a sample of women who were already seeking domestic violence related services ([Beck et al., 2014](#); [Shepard & Pence, 1988](#)) and the remainder used measures adapted from the CTS ([Douge, Lehman, & McCall-Hosenfeld, 2014](#); [Riger, Staggs, & Schewe, 2004](#); [Staggs et al., 2007](#); [Staggs & Riger, 2005](#)).

There was no overlap in the measurement of mental health problems among the studies in this review. Studies of depression only among victims were measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire-8 (PHQ-8; [Kroenke et al., 2009](#)) and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; [Radloff, 1977](#)). Both of these scales have been found to be reliable and the studies that used them found valuable information on depression among victims ([Crowne et al., 2010](#); [Douge et al., 2014](#)). One study focused just on PTSD using a four item screen for PTSD ([Kimerling et al., 2007](#)) and found correlations. Additionally, two studies looked at a range of mental health problems using the Global Severity Index of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; [Derogatis, 1993](#)) and the SF-36 Health Survey ([Ware, Snow, & Kosinski, 1993](#)). Neither study that measured for mental health problems in general found a psychological mediation effect on the domestic violence and employment relationship.

2.1. *The relationship between domestic violence and employment stability*

Research surrounding domestic violence provides important information about employment stability that can illustrate the workplace disruptions experienced by victims of domestic violence and inform supportive responses. From the studies selected, findings on employment stability will be explored in the following sections (see [Table 1](#)). This research review will detail the ways in which abusers cause employment instability for their partners through workplace disruptions like on-the-job harassment, workplace time reductions, and job loss. Findings of mental health effect on the domestic violence and employment stability relationship are included corresponding to each workplace disruption tactic.

2.2. *Employment stability*

Employment stability is the amount of time a woman has been employed throughout several months or years. This is in contrast to employment status or if a woman is working for money or not working for money at one selected time period. Research shows mixed results on the effect of domestic violence on employment status. Three articles reviewed showed employment status does not vary among women with abusive partners ([Beck et al., 2014](#); [Bryne, Resnick, Kilpatrick, Best, & Saunders, 1999](#); [Tolman & Rosen, 2001](#)). However, two additional studies found that domestic violence did have a significant impact on employment status ([Douge et al., 2014](#); [Kimerling et al., 2007](#)). This is taken as an indication that women who experience abuse wish to be employed despite their circumstances. More consistent results of domestic violence on employment stability were found. In fact, nine articles reviewed found an association with employment overtime and domestic violence experiences ([Adams et al., 2012](#); [Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1999](#); [Crowne et al., 2010](#); [Lloyd, 1997](#); [Lloyd & Taluc, 1999](#); [Logan et al., 2007](#); [Staggs et al., 2007](#); [Swanberg, Macke, & Logan, 2007](#); [Tolman & Wang, 2005](#)).

This study focuses on the workplace disruptions of workplace time reductions, job loss, and on-the-job harassment as these were the most frequent themes of employment instability in the articles

reviewed. Women reported experiencing the disruption tactic of workplace time reductions when they worked fewer hours and saw a decrease in their work efforts because of abuse ([Tolman & Wang, 2005](#)). It is likely that losing paid work time is a serious cause of employment instability as workplace time reductions were found in eleven of the studies reviewed (see [Table 2](#)). Additionally, seven studies found that domestic violence was associated with job loss, as many women reported unemployment as a result of abuse. In [Bryne et al. \(1999\)](#), researchers found that of 2863 participants that completed three waves of interviews, those that reported experiencing domestic violence over the course of the multiple year study were more likely than women who did not experience violence to report unemployment. Unlike other studies reviewed, the Bryne and colleagues study includes participants that are not all receiving welfare, domestic violence services or legal protection. This may mean that job loss findings are representative of women experiencing domestic violence versus only those receiving services or welfare. Additionally, four studies found that women experiencing domestic violence were harassed on-the-job. On-the-job harassment is illustrated in [Tolman and Rosen \(2001\)](#) who found that among female welfare recipients experiencing abuse, nearly half were abused while at work. Specifically, on-the-job harassment has been associated with a decline in job performance ([Logan et al., 2007](#)). When women are receiving repeated phone calls or are being stalked on-the-job, they are likely to feel anxious and/or unable to concentrate as is seen in three studies that measured job performance ([Beck et al., 2014](#); [Logan et al., 2007](#); [Swanberg et al., 2006](#)). The overlap in workplace disruption tactics findings may be seen as an indication that employment instability is impacted by the disturbances that abusers engage in.

2.2.1. *On-the-job harassment*

As most domestic violence abusers are familiar with their victim's workplace, on-the-job harassment is an extremely accessible method of abuse. In cases of on-the-job harassment, it is not unusual for women to receive several unwanted phone calls during their work hours or to have their abusive partners show up unexpectedly at their place of employment. In one study of women who experienced domestic violence, 61.4% of employed women were harassed on the phone at work and 39.2% were harassed in person ([Swanberg et al., 2007](#)). In this same study, approximately half of the sample reported poor performance and inability to concentrate because of workplace disruptions. If on-the-job harassment is likely to lead to poor performance, it could be that employment stability is most common for women with partners that stalk and call excessively.

For many women, on-the-job harassment brings the at-home fear and anxiety of abuse to the workplace and is associated with a decline in efficiency and work quality. In a study of 243 women seeking Domestic Violence Orders (DVO) against male partners, women who were stalked at work reported being unable to perform their job to the best of their abilities significantly more often than women who were not stalked ([Logan et al., 2007](#)). In this study, stalking was associated with experiencing a greater number of on-the-job harassment strategies which adds to the notion that abusers are most threatening to women's employment when they are willing to cross workplace boundaries. Further, non-physical contact through phone conversations also distracts women on-the-job. Among women who reported on-the-job harassment, receiving unwanted phone calls may be the most common abuse tactics experienced. In [Swanberg et al. \(2006\)](#), 59% of participants in a sample (N = 296) of domestic violence victims experienced phone harassment in the workplace within a 12-month period and of women who had experienced phone harassment, 62% repeatedly received unwanted phone calls. In this, phone harassment might not just be used as a way for abusers to checkup on their partners but as a constant interruption tactic used to prevent women from concentrating. Further, the inability to concentrate and a resulting decline in job performance for victims has been associated with mental health problems ([Beck et al.,](#)

Table 1
Descriptions of domestic violence and employment stability studies.

Authors	Covariates	Methods	Outcomes	Employment findings
<i>1. The impact of intimate partner violence on low-income women's economic well-being: The mediating role of job stability</i>				
Adams et al. (2012)	Age, race, education level, offspring/childcare, income from others in household, years spent on welfare	Methods: Path analysis-FIML, chi-square, RMSEA, DFI Data set: The Women's Employment Study Longitudinal: Baseline-1997; outcome-2003 (N = 503)	Objective material hardship, anticipated material hardship, and job benefits	Domestic violence was found to have a negative effect on job stability up to three years after abuse ended. Women who had experienced domestic violence recently or within the past three years were more likely than women who had not experienced abuse to struggle to pay for housing, food, and bills. Women who experienced domestic violence recently worked 3.06 fewer months at any one job and women whose domestic violence ended within the last three years worked 2.9 months less at any one job.
<i>2. The association of mental health conditions with employment, interpersonal, and subjective functioning after intimate partner violence</i>				
Beck et al. (2014)	Age, race, education, income, relationship status, separation years, other stress types	Methods: Regression Data set: Victims seeking mental health assistance meeting PTSD Criterion A2 Cross-sectional: (N = 100)	Employment status, social support, self-esteem, quality of life, and negative and positive problem orientation	Employment status was not related to mental health problems. Severity of mental health problems did influence work performance and employment advancement.
<i>3. The impact of recent partner violence on poor women's capacity to maintain work</i>				
Browne et al. (1999)	Age, race, ethnicity, marital status, income, number of children, employment history, substance use, physical health, mental health, childhood trauma, violence history	Methods: Logistic regression, chi-square and Fisher's exact tests Data set: Worcester Family Research Project Longitudinal: Baseline-between 1992 and 1995; outcome-between 1994 and 1997 (N = 285)	Employment stability, hours worked	When controlling for other variables, women who had experienced physical aggression and physical violence at baseline were significantly less likely to maintain work for 30 h per week for 6 months or more at the end of the study. Recent experiences of domestic violence were stronger predictors of work maintenance than experiences prior to baseline.
<i>4. The socioeconomic impact of interpersonal violence on women</i>				
Bryne et al. (1999)	Age, race, income, marital status, employment status, education level	Methods: Chi-square analysis Data set: National Women's Study Longitudinal: Three waves of interviews at one year intervals (N = 2863)	Domestic violence (history and recent)	Women's employment status at baseline was not associated with domestic violence. Women who experienced recent domestic violence were more likely to be unemployed at wave 3 than women who did not experience recent abuse. This pattern was significant for women unemployed at baseline. Among women employed at baseline with a domestic violence history, unemployment at wave 3 was more common for women who experienced a recent domestic violence than for women who had not experienced recent abuse.
<i>5. Concurrent and long-term impact of intimate partner violence on employment stability</i>				
Crowne et al. (2011)	Age, race, relationship status, births of additional children, depression, education level, work history	Methods: Multinomial logistic regressions for bivariate level associations, chi squares Data set: Hawaii Healthy Start Program Longitudinal: Assessed over a 12 month period with 6 follow up interviews when child was 1–3 and 7–9 (N = 512)	Employment stability	Women who experienced domestic violence were significantly more likely to report low or moderate employment stability than women who did not experience domestic violence. Women experiencing physical assault at the age-3 interview had nearly twice the odds of low employment stability. Depression was found to be a partial mediator for the relationship between domestic violence and employment stability.
<i>6. Social support and employment status modify the effect of intimate partner violence on depression symptom severity in women: Results from the 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (BRFSS)</i>				
Douge et al. (2014)	Age, race, ethnicity, income, education, marital status, employment status, health care coverage, health, social support	Methods: Chi squares, ordinal logistic regression Data set: BRFSS 2006 Cross-sectional: (N = 16,106)	Domestic violence (history and recent)	Unemployed women had more severe depressive symptoms compared with employed women. The association between IPV and severity of depressive symptoms differ based on employment status. Of note, there was little difference in the risk of exhibiting moderate depressive symptoms among employed women exposed to a history of victimization (53%) versus recent victimization (52%).

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Covariates	Methods	Outcomes	Employment findings
7. <i>Unemployment among women: Examining the relationship of physical and psychological intimate partner violence and PTSD</i> Kimerling et al. (2009)	Age, race, citizen status, education level	Methods: Logistic regression, multivariate logistic regression Data set: California Women's Health Survey conducted by the Public Health Institute Survey Research Group Cross-sectional: Combined data from 2001, 2003, 2004 (N = 6698)	Employment status	Results indicated substantial rates of unemployment among women who reported domestic violence. Psychological domestic violence but not physical domestic violence was a significant predictor of unemployment. Higher rates of PTSD were found among unemployed women in the sample than employed women.
8. <i>Longitudinal effects of domestic violence on employment and welfare outcomes</i> Lindhorst et al. (2007)	Age, race, ethnicity, psychological distress	Methods: Logistic regression, mediation Data set: Pregnant adolescents Longitudinal: Baseline-1988; outcome-2000 (N = 240)	Employment status, welfare use	Exposure to domestic violence over a ten year period had a significant direct effect on being unemployed but was not mediated by psychological distress. Further, the relationship of psychological distress to unemployment status exists only for those with a history of domestic violence.
9. <i>The effects of domestic violence on women's employment</i> Lloyd (1997)	Age, race, marital status, education level, employment status, household income, public assistance	Methods: Bivariate regression Data set: Low-income women in Humboldt Park, Chicago Cross-sectional: (N = 824)	Employment status, employment history	Domestic violence victims were more likely to have experienced unemployment and held more jobs than women who did not experience abuse. Victims also had lower personal incomes and were more likely to receive public assistance than women who had not experienced domestic violence.
10. <i>The effects of male violence on female employment</i> Lloyd and Taluc (1999)	Age, race, ethnicity, language, relationship status, domestic violence history, household size, cohabit, children in household, education level, employment history, employment status, income, welfare status	Methods: Multivariate analysis, logistic regression Data set: The Effects of Violence on Work and Family, 1997 Cross-sectional: (N = 756)	Employment status	Women who experienced domestic violence were as likely to be employed as women who did not. Women who were prevented from going to work, had threats made to harm their children, or had been threatened with murder were less likely to be employed.
11. <i>Partner stalking and implications for women's employment</i> Logan et al. (2007)	Age, race, education level, income level, number of children, Cohabit, relationship status, IPV history	Methods: Chi squares and one way ANOVA's Data set: Women from four courts (rural and urban) with a protective order who worked in the past year and qualitative data from women recently stalked Cross-sectional: (N = 482)	Work disruptions	Women who were stalked experienced on-the-job harassment, work disruption, and job performance problems more often than women who were not stalked.
12. <i>Domestic violence prevalence and effects on employment in two California TANF populations</i> Meisel et al. (2003)	Age, race, education level, native language, female head of household, number of children in household, TANF applicant, welfare recipient, substance abuse, mental health problems	Methods: Random sampling, postratification weights Data set: TANF recipients eligible for welfare-to-work activities in California Longitudinal: Baseline-1999; outcome-2002 (N = 632)	Employment status, employment stability, hours worked	Domestic violence effects on work vary depending on the type of domestic violence. The best predictor of work interruption was the need for domestic violence services. Women experiencing domestic violence were more likely to report job loss.
13. <i>Intimate partner violence as an obstacle to employment among mothers affected by welfare reform</i> Riger et al. (2004)	Age, race, education ethnicity, number of children, work history, education, job skills, physical and mental health, welfare recipient	Methods: Hierarchical linear regression Data set: The Illinois Family Study Longitudinal: Baseline-1999–2000; outcome-2002 (N = 962)	Employment stability	While a lifetime history of intimate partner violence did not predict employment stability, recent violence accounted for 7.3% of the variance in overall employment stability. Recent violence is also associated with fewer months worked when controlling for other factors.
14. <i>The effect of battering on the employment status on women</i> Shepard and Pence (1988)	Race, education level, marital status, household income, head of household status, welfare recipient	Methods: Exploratory Data set: Women attending support groups for battered women	Employment status, abuse-related employment	Of 71 working women, 55% reported being absent from work as a result of physical abuse. Of the same group, 62% reported that they had left early from work or been late as a result of abuse and 24% reported job loss

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Covariates	Methods	Outcomes	Employment findings
		Cross-sectional: (N = 123)		because of abuse.
<i>15. Intimate partner violence, social support, and employment in the post-welfare reform era</i>				
Staggs et al. (2007)	Age, race, previous IPV, education level, work history, work skills, social support	Methods: ANCOVA, hierarchical multiple regression, mediation Data set: The Illinois Families Study Cross-sectional: (N = 625)	Employment instability	Employment stability decreased over the first two years of the study and bounced back up in the third year. When domestic violence was present at wave 1, less employment stability was present at wave 3 when other factors were controlled for.
<i>16. Effects of intimate partner violence on low-income women's health and employment</i>				
Staggs and Riger (2005)	Age, age at child's birth, race, ethnicity, education, job skills, work history, social support, physical and mental health	Methods: ANCOVA, hierarchical multiple regression, mediation Data set: The Illinois Families Study Cross-sectional: (N = 1072)	Employment stability, health problems	Victims who experienced recent domestic violence only were found to be working 37% of the time, less than women who had experienced abuse in the past only. Employment stability did not significantly vary between groups. Health did not have a mediation effect on the relationship between domestic violence and employment.
<i>17. Intimate partner violence, women, and work: Coping on the job</i>				
Swanberg et al. (2006)	Age, race, urban v. rural, education, relationship status, number of children, workplace support	Methods: Frequencies, cross-tabulation, t-tests Data set: Recently employed women with a DVO (Domestic Violence Order) of four courts Cross-sectional: Women who experienced stalking between 2001 and 2003 (N = 518)	Work disruptions	Of women in the sample with DVO's, 85% had experienced at least one type of workplace disruption by an abusive partner and 56% reported repeated disruptions. Inability to concentrate, inability to go to work and leaving work early because of abuse was reported by around half of the sample. Job loss resulted for 21% of the sample and resignation for 27% of the sample.
<i>18. Working women making it work: Intimate partner violence, employment and workplace support</i>				
Swanberg et al. (2007)	Age, education, rural or urban residence, job tenure, physical and sexual abuse, experience of injury due to abuse, and before-work tactics	Methods: Chi-square test one-way ANOVA, binary logistic regressions Data set: Women with a DVO (Domestic Violence Order) of four courts Cross-sectional: Women who experienced stalking between 2001 and 2003 (N = 485)	Work disruptions, employment status	Experiencing phone harassment in the workplace was reported by over half of participants. The behaviors of abusive partners among women in the sample jeopardized their employment and financial stability. Employed women disclosed violence to someone at work.
<i>19. Domestic violence in the lives of women receiving welfare: Mental health, substance dependence, and economic well-being</i>				
Tolman and Rosen (2001)	Age, race, education level, young children, male partner at home, poverty level, material hardship	Methods: Logistic regression, bivariate analyses Data set: The Women's Employment Study Cross-sectional: (N = 753)	Employment status, mental health problems	While direct work interference occurred among 48% of the sample, domestic violence was not significantly related to work interference. Domestic violence was significantly related to material hardship.
<i>20. Domestic violence and women's employment: Fixed effects models of three waves of employment study data</i>				
Tolman and Wang (2005)	Domestic violence history, mental and physical health, cohabitating, children in household, household size, transportation, child with special needs, race, age, education level, work skills, welfare recipient, work experience	Methods: Fixed-effects regressions Data set: Women's Employment Study Longitudinal: Baseline-1997; outcome-1999 (N = 598)	Hours worked	Domestic violence was associated with fewer work hours for women. Having children under the age of 6, transportation barriers, and low work skills reduced a women's ability to work.

2014; Shepard & Pence, 2005). For instance, in Beck et al. (2014), researchers found that severity of mental health problems influenced work performance and employment advancement. While on-the-

Table 2
Workplace disruption study frequencies.

Workplace disruption	Frequency of disruption
Workplace time reduction	11
Job loss	7
On-the-job harassment	4
• (Job performance)	2

job harassment is associated with feelings of stress and anxiety that prevent women from performing daily tasks; it is also understood that having to carry domestic violence into a work setting may cause other employees to lose focus and unknowingly enter into traumatic situations.

Perhaps more so than any other workplace disruption tactic discussed, on-the-job harassment is likely to involve coworkers and supervisors. Coworkers present abusive domestic partners with the opportunity to isolate their victims in a work setting. Isolation is often apart of cycles of domestic violence as it can effectively eliminate a victim's support group for escaping abuse and extend a victim's

dependency on their abuser. In their study of 518 women, [Swanberg et al. \(2006\)](#) found that women surveyed experienced co-worker related control tactics when their partner lied to their coworkers repeatedly (47%) and threatened their coworkers at work repeatedly (38%). Even though coworkers may not be the focus of an abuser's attacks, they could be at risk for injury or trauma because of their relation to the victim. While coworkers can make violent situations worse, research has shown that coworkers can also play an important role in a victim's support system.

The supportive services that coworkers and employers can provide to women experiencing domestic violence may contribute to victims' wellbeing and relief from abuse. This can be seen by 96% ($N = 518$) of women seeking DVOs who disclosed their violence to their coworkers and received workplace support including a listening ear, schedule flexibility, and help in setting up a security plan for their workplace ([Swanberg et al., 2006](#)). In this study, when support or resources were provided to victims, 72% of women felt the support they received increased their chances of staying employed ([Swanberg et al., 2006](#)). In a subsequent study of women who were employed and unemployed, [Swanberg et al. \(2007\)](#) found that workplace support was significantly associated with being employed. This likely means that coworkers play a crucial role in domestic violence occurring in the workplace and that employers have the opportunity to implement supportive services and organization wide policies for when such situations arise. One common way to support employees is through Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's) led by human resources departments that provide a variety of free services to employees including screening assessments, referrals to community agencies, out-patient counseling, and follow-up care. Employer efforts to support their staff experiencing domestic violence could help employees spend more hours on-the-job working efficiently and benefit employers and victims alike.

2.2.2. Workplace time reductions

Based on findings in this review, one of the most consistently observed workplace disruptions that women who experience domestic violence encounter is a reduction in the amount of time they are able to spend working. Increasingly, time loss is appearing in research as women report working fewer hours, weeks, and months out of the year as a result of their abuse ([Adams et al., 2012](#); [Meisel et al., 2003](#); [Tolman & Wang, 2005](#)). To start, this is seen in [Tolman and Wang \(2005\)](#) who found that domestic violence victims missed 137 h of work per year or a 10% reduction in hours compared with women who have not experienced domestic violence. As many women experiencing domestic violence are working low-wage hourly jobs, if working at all, it is likely that a 137 hour reduction would have a negative association with their financial well-being. For instance, if a woman is employed working a minimum wage job that pays \$7.25 an hour, she is facing a nearly \$1000.00 loss of yearly income, a substantial loss for a low-income family. The amount of hours lost overtime is also found in [Browne et al. \(1999\)](#) study of extremely poor women, in which women that experienced domestic violence at baseline were significantly less likely to maintain work for 30 h per week for 6 months or more two years later. For victims experiencing workplace disruptions, missing hours of work can easily turn into missing weeks of work. In a study of TANF recipients eligible for welfare-to-work activities in two California counties, the mean number of weeks worked by participants between one year interviews was significantly lower among those with an estimated need for domestic violence services in comparison with those who did not need domestic violence services ([Meisel et al., 2003](#)). This suggests that the difference in weeks worked is associated with the instability that domestic violence victims experience in the workplace. Even for those not experiencing domestic violence, missing weeks of work is likely to make someone feel disconnected from their work environment and potentially less valuable as an employee. As weeks compile, it is possible that abusive partners will cost women months of paid employment. In fact, several studies reviewed ([Adams](#)

[et al., 2012](#); [Riger et al., 2004](#); [Staggs & Riger, 2005](#)) show that a recent history of domestic violence is associated with fewer months worked when controlling for other factors. Undoubtedly, all of these amounts of lost work time translate to lost wages for victims and their families.

Although it is difficult to predict the extent to which women experience financial instability as a result of working less, a few studies have attempted to investigate the cost of domestic violence for women. In a study of 1383 female welfare recipients, [Smith \(2001\)](#) reported that women who had experienced physical and sexual violence by a domestic partner earned \$3900 less annually than women who had not experienced domestic violence. Certainly, this sum of money could be a substantial loss for any person but, again, knowing the frequency at which women experiencing violence qualify for welfare, this could mean losing a significant portion of their income. Among the articles reviewed, [Adams et al. \(2012\)](#) found that of 503 single mothers receiving cash assistance from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), 54% reported experiencing material hardships post-abuse. Material hardships in this case included having gas or electricity turned off, food insufficiency, and being evicted as well as the anticipation of these hardships occurring in the future ([Adams et al., 2012](#)). With consideration of the partnership between employment and income, women who cannot maintain employment due to abuse are likely to be at higher risk for poverty and in some cases, homelessness. Reduction in time spent working is likely to not immediately result in homelessness, but it is worth noting that over time, income loss can result in serious adversities like homelessness or job loss ([Bryne et al., 1999](#)).

2.2.3. Job loss and unemployment

Researchers have found evidence of job loss among women who experience domestic violence. Job loss is the most extreme of workplace disruption tactics and can have serious effects on the long-term financial wellbeing of women experiencing abuse ([Adams et al., 2012](#); [Lloyd, 1997](#)). [Shepard and Pence](#) found in their 1988 study of domestic violence victims that 24% of women reported losing their job because of abuse. In this study, participants experienced both on-the-job harassment and harassment outside of work hours that contributed to their job loss ([Shepard & Pence, 1988](#)). Of note, the women who participated in this study were accessing domestic violence services at the time of their interviews including support groups, advocacy services, and shelter beds. Therefore, it is possible that because these women were already to the point of needing social services that they were more likely than women who experience domestic violence in general to have lost their job. With this said, job loss has been found to be prominent among victims in other studies, as well. In [Meisel et al.'s \(2003\)](#) study of 632 women receiving welfare, the proportion of employed women who had lost a job during the year was significantly higher in both years of data collection if women had an estimated need for domestic violence services. Similarly, in a longitudinal study of mothers receiving welfare ($n = 240$), exposure to domestic violence over a ten year period had a significant direct effect on being unemployed ([Lindhorst et al., 2007](#)). In these examples, when domestic violence was present in welfare recipients lives, they experienced job loss even if they were not already receiving advocate services. Building on job loss as a workplace disruption tactic, research of women living in a low-income neighborhood, including women who were not receiving welfare or domestic violence services, reported instability in their employment history ([Lloyd & Taluc, 1999](#)). In this study, [Lloyd and Taluc \(1999\)](#), found that among 824 women surveyed, those who experienced violence were more likely to have had spells of unemployment and job turnover in their employment history. These spells of unemployment or job loss are likely to result in financial instability. Conceptually, a woman who is working for one employer for six months may be in a much different place financially than a woman working for four employers over the course of six months, even though both women may be consistently employed ([Adams et al., 2012](#)). Further,

job turnover could add to the stress and anxiety victims already experience as a result of abuse.

Given the prevalence of negative mental health outcomes for victims, the connection between employment instability and mental health for victims should not go unnoticed. To start, in *Lloyd's (1997)* study, women who had experienced domestic violence were more likely to report having been unemployed at some point in their work history and to have suffered from a range of physical and mental health problems. While this finding illustrates that victims experience both unemployment and mental health problems, three studies in this review have gone farther to test the correlation and mediation effects of mental health problems on unemployment. First, in *Kimerling et al. (2009)*, higher rates of PTSD were found among unemployed women in the sample than employed women. Similarly, in *Douge et al.'s (2011)* nationally representative study of women in 2006 ($N = 16,106$), unemployed women had more severe depressive symptoms compared with employed women. In these studies, a clear relationship between victim's unemployment and mental health can be seen. Beyond correlation, one study examined mediation effects of mental health problems on employment. In *Crowne et al. (2011)*, depression was found to be a partial mediator for the relationship between domestic violence and employment stability. Thus, it could be that mental health problems that result from domestic violence are at least partially causing employment instability for victims. Still, it is unclear how long mental health problems and employment instability can last for victims. For the purposes of this review, the period of time that researchers looked at abuse affecting employment becomes key in understanding how domestic violence relates to women's employment stability.

Due to a range of findings, it could be that the effects of domestic violence on employment stability only last for a short time or in contrast, working inconsistently lasts for several years into a woman's future, post abuse. In *Staggs et al. (2007)*, it was reported that women who had experienced abuse were subject to employment instability for at least two years after their violence had occurred. After this two year time period, employment stability for women who had experienced abuse did not differ significantly from women who had not experienced violence (*Staggs et al., 2007*). Similarly, *Adams et al.'s (2012)* study showed domestic violence can have detrimental effects on women's employment stability not only while the abuse is occurring, but for up to three years after the abuse ends. However, other researchers have found that the effects of abuse may last considerably longer. In *Crowne et al. (2010)*, researchers discovered that when women experienced domestic violence during employment, there was evidence of having employment instability nearly 6 years later. Employment stability was assessed at two time points in this study that related to participants children's ages. After controlling for baseline characteristics, domestic violence was related to low employment stability at the bivariate level and multivariate level (*Crowne et al., 2010*). However, given what we know of mental health and victim unemployment, it is possible that employment instability may last much longer than 2 to 6 years as symptoms of PTSD have been found in victims up to 9 years after ending an abusive relationship (*Kimerling et al., 2009*). The inconsistency in study findings may mean it is not yet clear how long after domestic violence employment instability will occur, but evidence does suggest that instability threatens women's work life through job loss and unemployment.

3. Discussion

From the reviewed literature it can be noted that women who have experienced domestic violence are likely to face employment instability as a result of their abuse including on-the-job harassment, workplace time reductions, and job loss or unemployment. Researchers and domestic violence advocates have responded strongly to these growing trends particularly as welfare reform policies threaten the financial stability of unemployed victims. This paper reviews what is currently

known regarding workplace disruptions in an effort to determine correlates with domestic violence victims' employment stability and how existing information might guide future policies.

The extent to which an abuser will go to sabotage their partner's employment can be extreme. Abusers have been found to call their partners excessively throughout their workday, distracting them from their job duties and keeping them from relaxing in the workplace. These on-the-job harassment distractions are likely to relate to a noticeable decline in work performance and efficiency while working (*Beck et al., 2014; Swanberg et al., 2006; Logan et al., 2007*). As abusers harass their partners during their work hours, women who experience domestic violence are likely to see a decline in the overall amount of time they are paid (*Tolman & Wang, 2005*). Depending on the abuse, reducing the amount of time a woman is working can deplete a victim's income in hours, weeks, and months of lost pay. What's more is that a decline in work performance as a result of on-the-job harassment combined with losing time worked can result in job loss and by association, financial instability. While job loss may not be an immediate result of workplace disruptions, a number of studies collected in this review indicate that unemployment is related to domestic violence (*Bryne et al., 1999; Kimerling et al., 2009; Lindhorst et al., 2007; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999; Meisel et al., 2003; Shepard & Pence, 1988*).

Existing research on the impact of domestic violence on women's employment stability is not without its limitations. First, as most of the studies collected on this topic survey samples of welfare recipients, one of the greatest barriers in generalizing findings to all women who experience abuse is the concern that women receiving welfare are more likely to be unemployed. In *Staggs et al. (2005)*, participants did have histories of welfare receipt which is noted by researchers as being associated with abuse and employment. Not accounting for welfare receipt could mean that women who are receiving government benefits experience employment differently than women who don't and that findings of time loss and instability un-generalizable. Additionally, diverse samples are included in this review but findings are not specific to race and ethnicity. In this, women of color may experience workplace disruptions uniquely to their cultures and the current study does not reflect this. Second, the types of abuse that women experience may have differential impacts on their employment stability. Studies of employment instability and domestic violence are fairly new and it is possible that the best scales and measurements for assessing violent partner behaviors specific to employment have not been discovered (*Swanberg et al., 2006*). A majority of the collected literature measures domestic violence using the CTS which has been critiqued for misrepresenting violent situations and might yield results that do not embody the variety of tactics abusive partners use to control their significant other's employment (*Adams et al., 2012*). For instance, in *Swanberg et al. (2007)*, participants were asked about before-work abuse, transportation interference, and child-care sabotage but most of the literature reviewed measured workplace disruptions at-work only. Third, current research is limited in the time measured for employment stability. In *Adams et al. (2012)*, researchers point out that based on their study, it is unclear as to whether domestic violence causes women's job stability because examination was not completed at multiple time points to determine the order of job loss and abusive incidents. Even in long-term studies with findings of employment instability, it is unclear if women experienced violence before, during, or after periods of employment (*Crowne et al., 2010*). Further, the length of time employment instability is experienced may be impacted by mental health problems like depression and PTSD. Knowing how long the effects of domestic violence last on employment is crucial for shaping employer responses and policies relevant to victims.

4. Policy implications

Structurally, there is an opportunity for policymakers in employment settings and at state and national levels to protect women

experiencing employment instability. On an employment level, studies have shown that women who have support from coworkers and supervisors during their abuse are more likely to maintain employment (Staggs et al., 2007; Swanberg et al., 2006). As previously discussed, EAPs are one viable solution for supporting employees experiencing violence. While it estimated that 68% of employers in the U.S. with 100 employees or more utilize EAPs in their human resources departments, their responses to domestic violence are not uniformly practiced (Pollack et al., 2010). In fact, it has been found that only 18% of EAPs surveyed (N = 28) reported using standard domestic violence screening questions in conversations with callers to an EAP hotline (Pollack et al., 2010). However, this could greatly change if employers develop policy and procedures for training and educating EAP workers, revise screening questions to identify employees experiencing violence, and utilize domestic violence community resources. Of note, EAPs are not required at smaller employers and thus all employers might not have a formal structure for victim's assistance. Thus, it could be necessary for employers to implement agency wide policies for handling these situations. Swanberg et al. (2006) suggest that employer's explicitly identifying domestic abuse behavior and specific procedures to be taken if abusive behavior is discovered. Both enhanced EAP protocol and agency wide policies would make it explicit to employees and their abusive partners that protective measures will be taken if workplace disruptions occur. However, to have a uniform response to workplace disruptions, policies are also necessary on a larger level for women who are employment instability.

As discussed earlier, PRWORA alone poses serious threats to women receiving TANF while simultaneously undergoing domestic violence. Fortunately, all states have either adopted FVOs or similar policies that protect women receiving welfare from the consequences of not becoming employed or participating in welfare-to-work programs (Adams et al., 2012). These options do help protect victims from losing welfare due to unstable employment related to domestic violence. However, there are concerns that FVOs are not utilized to their full capacity due to poor screening practices in identifying clients experiencing domestic violence (Meisel et al., 2003). In Meisel et al.'s (2003) study, only a small percentage of participants reported obtaining a FVO even though most were qualified. As a solution to this, welfare service providers should become educated on domestic violence services and how to assess, screen and safety plan with victims (Tolman & Wang, 2005). Additionally, it could be questioned whether FVOs are designed to protect women for a long enough time period considering findings of unstable employment up to 6 years after abuse ends (Tolman & Rosen, 2001; Crowne et al., 1999). If recipients are experiencing multiple job losses over time because of severe abuse, the period that FVOs protect women from losing TANF benefits could be inadequate given the longevity of their situations. It might also be noted that the current welfare policy limits the total number of families with in that FVO exemptions can only be made on up to 20% of the average monthly number of families to which assistance is provided per fiscal year (Civic Impulse, 2016). By capping the number of FVOs that can be used, federal welfare policy is limiting the number of women that can be protected from workplace harassment and perpetuating employment instability. With this, conversation among employers, advocates, and policymakers should continue to promote women's employment safety. Ultimately, these influential individuals should aim to protect against workplace disruptions with the intent to build employment stability among victims of abuse.

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