

Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

IMPACT OF TRAUMA

It is essential for workplaces and workforce systems to be trauma-informed. While women workers experience high rates of sexual harassment, workplace bullying, and other types of violence, women with disabilities have an even higher incidence of trauma-related issues. They are subject to trauma by their partners and personal care providers, and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and live in poverty.

Having a disability can result from a traumatic event, and can present other mental health issues such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. Trauma can dramatically increase the costs of absenteeism, turnover, and other workforce issues.

Statistics on women with disabilities and the impact of trauma on women with disabilities in the workplace can be found in the first Federal Partners' Report on Women and Trauma at <http://nicic.gov/Library/025082>

How a Trauma-Informed Approach Can Make a Difference

ODEP's mission is to ensure that people with disabilities are fully integrated into the 21st century workforce, and to increase the hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities. Trauma-informed approaches are essential, not only because women with disabilities experience violence at a higher rate than women without disabilities, but also because women may become disabled after experiencing a traumatic event, with a resulting physical, emotional, or cognitive disability.

ODEP has worked to develop various partnerships, initiatives, and programs to examine the issues that women with disabilities experience, while working to eliminate employment barriers and ensure that workplace policies, benefits, and practices are structurally and programmatically accessible to all.

Trauma-informed workplace policies are valuable in multiple ways. The ability to work and return to work in a healthy environment and continue to be employed is a central to both recovery and economic self-sufficiency.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL)

Major Accomplishments 2010-2013

In 2012, ODEP contributed to the Office of Personnel Management's Guidance for Agency-Specific Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Policies. ODEP reported that 37.3 percent of women with disabilities experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime, compared with 20.6 percent of women without disabilities. Agencies should consider the needs and risk factors of employees with disabilities in training, workplace flexibility arrangements and reasonable accommodations.

In 2012, ODEP and the DOL's Women's Bureau released a Workplace Flexibility Toolkit for employers, policymakers and researchers. The Toolkit provides case studies, fact/tip sheets, issue briefs, reports, and articles; discusses universal strategies around time, place, and tasks; and can assist employees who have experienced trauma to be productive in the workplace.

Also in 2012, ODEP, in collaboration with the National Working Positive Coalition, sponsored an Institute on HIV/AIDS and Employment at the XIX International AIDS Conference. The U.S. Department of Labor is among six lead federal agencies responsible for implementing President Obama's National HIV/AIDS Strategy – a first for the nation. A conference report was published in 2012. With childhood and adult trauma increasingly being recognized as important factors associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic among women, this conference report can serve as an important tool for this community.

New Directions and Collaborations

ODEP is working on an Information Memorandum that will address successful strategies for returning to work after experiencing a traumatic event, using a trauma-informed approach. The Memorandum will be disseminated to approximately 3,000 American Job Centers and state and local Workforce Investment Boards throughout the United States, as well as to other stakeholder groups within the disability community.

Additional Resources

Update contact: Thal.Adrienne@dol.gov

Women with Disabilities

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/women.html>

Employees with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

<http://askjan.org/media/ptsd.html>

Employees with Mental Health Impairments

<http://askjan.org/media/psychiatric.html>

HIV/Aids report

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20120728HIV/AIDSReports.pdf>

Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence, DOJ/OVW site

www.workplacesrespond.org/