



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Unite Equalities Advice and Guidance







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This Unite guidance considers the problem of domestic violence and abuse and how UNITE representatives in the workplace can help those who experience domestic violence and abuse. Information includes:

- effects of domestic violence and abuse
- what action employers can take
- negotiating a policy at work
- what to do if you or another member is experiencing domestic violence and abuse
- where to get help

You can raise the issue of Domestic Violence and Abuse through your collective bargaining structures, through a reps meeting or work place branch, and then with your employer. Once you have a negotiated domestic violence and abuse policy, please do share it with your regional women and equalities officer, and send a copy to equalities@unitetheunion.org.

If you would like reps training on this issue then please do contact the equalities department, your Unite regional women and equalities officer or your Unite regional education officer.

What is domestic violence and abuse?

Women's Aid UK defines¹ domestic abuse as

An incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.

Domestic violence and abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

¹ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/> accessed 16 July 2020

How widespread is domestic violence and abuse?

Evidence is clear that the majority of those who suffer domestic violence and abuse are women and the majority of perpetrators are men, which it is important to recognise when developing policies and raising awareness.

It is very likely that in any workplace, there are employees who will be personally affected by domestic abuse, either as a survivor or a perpetrator. A TUC survey of Trade Union women found that 54% either had experienced domestic violence themselves, or knew a colleague who had.

One in four women experience domestic violence and abuse over their lifetimes. It forms 25% of all reported violent assaults, and has the highest rate of repeat victimisation of any crime. Two women a week are killed by their current or former male partner in England and Wales. Domestic violence and abuse is not class-specific or age-related and occurs across our society - and many Unite BAEM, LGBT+ and disabled members are affected.

Not all domestic violence and abuse takes place in the home, or during a current relationship. Often women are most vulnerable when they are leaving a relationship, or after it has ended.

Domestic abuse also seriously impacts on children's safety and well-being and there is a significant correlation between domestic abuse and child abuse.

Domestic violence and abuse is very often a hidden issue, many women live in fear of revealing that they are experiencing domestic abuse because the perpetrators often threaten further abuse. Confidence in knowing there is a workplace policy in place that can offer confidential support and help can make all the difference.

COVID-19 and domestic violence and abuse

Lockdown and uncertainty during the COVID-19 crisis has made matters worse. For women who are working from home, women are finding it more difficult to escape violence and abuse. For those women continuing to work in front line jobs, they are concerned that the COVID-19 crisis is disrupting their working arrangements and leads to further abuse.

More than 40,000 calls and contacts were made to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline during the first three months of lockdown, most by women seeking help, and there was an 80% increase in calls and contacts in June 2020.²

Unite is campaigning for a nationally funded network of domestic violence and abuse support services. These services are there for you. Though there have been financial cuts please do not hesitate to contact them. Please see Where to get help at the end of this leaflet. This includes specialist services for BAEM and LGBT+ people, and men.

The Government's rule about staying put at your home does not apply if you need to leave home to escape domestic violence and abuse. You can find more information here;

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53498675> accessed 3 August 2020



Financial and economic abuse

This can include stealing, depriving or taking control of money, running up debts and withholding benefit books or bank cards. An abusive partner may use the COVID-19 crisis to gain or increase their control over finances

- interfere with ability to work by insisting that the women is responsible for the childcare
- preventing her from accessing the equipment needed for work at home such as a laptop
- use the current uncertainty to suggest cutting back on heating, food and other essentials or withhold food, hand sanitiser, medicines or disinfectants
- If you are concerned about how coronavirus may affect your finances and leave you vulnerable to economic abuse, please see the advice provided by HM Treasury on what support is on offer. The charity Surviving Economic Abuse has also provided additional guidance and support.

<https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Economic-abuse-and-the-coronavirus-outbreak-v16.pdf>

Domestic violence and abuse is a workplace Issue

Domestic violence and abuse causes distress to members and can affect their employment through lower productivity, absenteeism, and in some cases acts of violence being carried out in the workplace.

Employers are required under health and safety legislation and at common law to protect the health, safety and welfare of all their employees while they are at work, including where domestic violence and abuse affects employees and their colleagues when they are at work.

The workplace is one of many places in which women can access support and information. Indeed it may be the only place women feel safe.

It's important to recognise that in order to leave a violent partner, women will often have to make arrangements with 7 or 8 different agencies in secret, and coordinated, i.e. schools, housing, social security benefits, social services, police and courts. Work is one component of this and the support we can provide needs to be clear, timely and in confidence.

Effects of domestic violence and abuse on work

Members may face extreme difficulties in keeping the job going if they are affected by domestic violence or abuse or are trying to get out of an abusive relationship.

Symptoms may include "poor" time-keeping and frequent sickness, poor concentration, low self confidence and self-esteem, anxiety, depression, insomnia, agoraphobia or post-traumatic stress disorder, where painful memories resurface and cause problems months or years later. Some survivors may turn to alcohol and drugs to help them deal with the situation. A woman may have to keep a rigid timetable about her hours of work and never socialise after work. Access to work is also

an issue: a TUC survey in 2013 found that of those who had experienced domestic violence, over forty per cent said it had affected their ability to get to work, for example car keys or cash for public transport being withheld by the abuser.³

It is important to note that not all women who are being abused will show signs of experiencing domestic abuse. Signs of physical and especially other forms of abuse may be concealed for months, even years. Nearly a third of women experiencing domestic violence seek help only after 10 years of living with it, and over a third seek help after 2-10 years.

Discrimination may also prevent disabled, BAEM and LGBT+ people, and men, suffering domestic violence and abuse from being able to speak out.

Employers are becoming more aware of the cost of domestic violence to their business, for example reduced productivity and abuse-related costs (absence, turnover). It is estimated that the cost of responding to domestic violence in 2016/17 across England and Wales alone to be approximately £66 billion.⁴

If there are perpetrators of domestic violence in the workplace this may also affect the business costs, productivity and workplace safety for example if an abuser visits the workplace or both partners work in the same workplace.

“Why doesn’t she leave him?”

Often women experience practical and psychological barriers to seeking help. Women find it difficult to tell anyone about the abuse they are living with because of the stigma involved. BAEM women may face additional problems, both from within and outside their community including racism from organisations. Shame and dishonour are powerful cultural notions, and Asian and other minority ethnic women may face social ostracism and rejection if they seek help.

LGBT+ people can also experience domestic violence and abuse and may also encounter prejudice from the police and within support services; the situation of trans men and women needs particular recognition. Additional barriers are also faced by older women, disabled women, men, and those living in rural areas.

Many women fear not being believed and they fear losing their children (which is a common threat by perpetrators). Even when women do manage to leave their partners, contact arrangements for children do not always take account of one parent’s violence to the non-abusive parent and children.

These problems, together with the imposed social isolation within abusive relationships, low self-esteem, financial concerns, and fear of future abuse, mean that women may feel that they have no option but to continue the relationship, particularly if there are children or other adults dependent on them.

³ https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Domestic_Violence_And_The_Workplace_0.pdf accessed 7 August 2020

⁴ The economic and social costs of domestic abuse, Home Office, January 2019
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772180/horr107.pdf



What Unite can do

Domestic violence and abuse policies form an essential part of Unite's strategy to achieve equal opportunities in the workplace. Women experiencing domestic violence and abuse are far more likely to reach out for support; if they know what support is on offer, that they know the issue will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, that their employer and union reps are aware of the issues and have that framework of support ready and in place.

Overall our aims are to:

- Negotiate a policy with the employer, whether as a stand alone policy or as part of other policies, ensuring that crossovers between different policies are identified and highlighted, and that they are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that new developments such as the COVID-19 crisis are addressed.
- Ensure the workplace is a place of safety for those suffering domestic violence and abuse with measures in place for protection, for example a new address
- Create an environment where individuals experiencing domestic violence feel confident that they will be believed, listened to, treated supportively and sympathetically, and not judged – whether or not they are ready to take a decision to leave
- Be able to advise members where they can get support, including from qualified counsellors, including if both partners work together
- Raise awareness in the workplace, and campaign nationally for improved policies to prioritise the safety and empowerment of those who suffer domestic violence, and abuse and take action to support women's and other refugees – for example Unite branches may wish to consider making a donation to their local refuge.

NEVER tell a member to take action s/he isn't happy with, but do always recommend that physical violence is reported to the police – it may be, or may quickly become, a life-threatening situation.

There are examples of sectoral guidelines which have been agreed in discussion with Unite you can refer to, for example the NHS Staff Council Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partnership Group's Domestic Violence and Abuse: supporting NHS staff which is online

https://www.nhsemployers.org/-/media/Employers/Publications/Health-and-wellbeing/HSWPG_DV_Policy-document.pdf



What action should employers be taking during the COVID-19 crisis to support employees suffering from domestic violence and abuse?

The DV@work network makes the following suggestions.⁵

Communicate, stay in touch and build trust with employees during this difficult time

- Communicate information and resources to all employees about the heightened risk of domestic violence due to confinement.
- Give clear guidance of what workers can expect guaranteeing confidential, non-judgmental support, non-retaliation for disclosing domestic violence and job security.
- Publicise an up-to-date list of domestic violence support services that survivors can access for online and telephone support, counselling, legal assistance and where necessary as a last resort, safe housing.
- Where existing workplace or company policies, procedures and collective agreements on domestic violence are in place, refocus these so that they are relevant to confinement in the lockdown.
- Ensure that managers and team leaders receive guidance on how to support survivors of domestic violence, for example, through online management meetings, training and webinars.
- Consider holding a dedicated online meeting or webinar on the issue, and invite domestic abuse support organisations such as Women's aid or Refuge.

Find new ways to provide support to employees working from home, 'think outside the box'

- Have regular contact with employees in online team meetings and one-to-one calls, checking in on team members and identifying any potential signs of domestic violence.
- Respond immediately to requests for support in a non-judgmental manner and aim to build trust.
- Allocate resources for security measures in the home, counselling, legal advice or financial assistance.
- Support employees to gain legal and police protection, including where necessary the exclusive use of the family home (e.g. provide your evidence of pre-existing domestic violence and its impacts at the workplace, phone records of abusive phone calls or other evidence).
- Large companies - or a network of companies and employers - could work together to introduce a domestic violence help-line for confidential advice and emergency assistance for their employees (through telephone, text or social media).

⁵ http://dvatworknet.org/sites/dvatworknet.org/files/dvatworknet-brief1.pdf?utm_source=ETF+Contacts+Database&utm_campaign=40c3c2fa1e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_07_30_10_22&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a3110b567d-40c3c2fa1e-79220709



Adapt and/or introduce security plans to work/home settings

- Where workplace security plans are already in place, adapt these to the new home/work context.
- Introduce new security measures such as a code word or phrase that can trigger a management intervention to find a safe way to discuss strategies to ensure their safety or to trigger a line manager or team leader to call the police.
- Ensure that company-established website access has a password with extra security that cannot be accessed by a perpetrator.
- Work with police or domestic violence experts to carry out an immediate risk assessment and safety plan if an employee discloses.

A negotiated policy

These are the Unite priorities for a domestic violence and abuse policy. Each workplace will be different, and it is essential that the policy you negotiate is tailored to the work arrangements in place, what is relevant to a call centre will in some aspects be different to a bus garage or hospital. Contact your regional Women and Equalities Officer if you need support in negotiating a domestic abuse policy and remember to email the finalised policy to equalities@unitetheunion.org

1. A strict confidentiality clause for members who seek help at work; in particular personal details of members (addresses, telephone numbers, work locations, shift times) must be kept strictly confidential. With so many people now working from home keeping their address confidential is crucial.
2. Allow the employee to decide the course of action taken throughout.
3. Recognition of the effects of domestic violence on work and agreement that members will be believed, and treated sympathetically and flexibly. In particular, a commitment that time-keeping problems and increased sickness, caused by domestic violence and abuse, will not affect a member's work record.
4. A commitment to grant 2 weeks' paid leave for members experiencing domestic violence and abuse, to enable them to sort out the practical and legal problems.
5. Extended leave if the member needs to go to a refuge or move away.
6. Paid leave to attend appointments e.g. for legal, housing, medical or childcare issues, or for professional counselling – the employer should also cover the cost where there is a legal route to do so.
7. Redeployment to a different workplace, or a non-frontline job, if possible and if the member wishes.
8. Other security measures e.g. changing entry codes, should be implemented if employees are being harassed by abusers. Employers should provide a secure workplace and ensure reception and other relevant staff have appropriate domestic violence training.
9. Rights to flexible working may give a woman more control over her situation. Not requiring women to work overtime without sufficient notice – abusive partners are often very controlling of their partners' time.
10. If the couple work together, employers must take responsibility for and have in place a procedure to ensure that they or individual employees are not used as actors in the abuse. There should also be prompt use of the harassment procedure if abuse takes place at work.

11. Named staff (managers, personnel and/or shop stewards/workplace reps) to provide listening and guidance (though not formal counselling) for employees on welfare or domestic issues. These staff should have training in domestic violence and dealing with personal issues.
12. Information on domestic abuse services, the workplace policy, the role of the named contacts, and protocols for identifying and responding to domestic abuse (victims and perpetrators) to be given to all staff as part of induction, health & safety, and management training.
13. Promote a 'zero tolerance' culture. 'Jokes' about domestic abuse should not be acceptable in the workplace.
14. Salary advances in cash or to an alternative bank account to be available where it is identified that this may help a woman flee a violent situation.

What is Unite Campaigning for?

The law covering employment and domestic violence and abuse needs to be strengthened to support our collective bargaining agenda. Unite is campaigning for the following;

1. A specific legal duty on employers to prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying at work including a duty to protect the victims of domestic violence and abuse. The ongoing reports of racial and other harassment from front line workers in particular strengthen our call for this specific duty on employers.
2. Introduce statutory 2 weeks' paid leave for workers suffering from domestic violence and abuse and rights to flexible working.
3. Amend the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 to require the recording and reporting of domestic violence and abuse incidents at work
4. Develop statutory guidance for employers on managing domestic violence and abuse in the workplace in consultation with trade unions and employers' organisations.
5. Provide authorities such as the Health and Safety Executive and the Equality and Human Rights Commission with enhanced funding to enforce health and safety law and equality law.
6. Introduce a stalkers and domestic violence perpetrators register to enable the police to proactively identify, track, monitor and manage perpetrators
7. Reinstate Section 40 of the Equality Act 2010 which requires employers to prevent harassment from third parties.
8. Give statutory status to trade union workplace equality representatives
9. Give statutory status to workplace women's advocates, a specialist type of equality representative who is trained to support women affected by violence at work.
10. Better funding for domestic violence and abuse charities and services.
11. Ratification and effective implementation of ILO Convention 190 (C190) and Recommendation 206 (R206) and the adoption of prevention and protection measures for victims of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence and Abuse Services

If you are being abused, or worry that you may commit domestic violence, then the following services are available:-

NATIONAL DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINE

This is a free and confidential number run by Refuge UK which operates 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247

They also have a web site that provides guidance to anyone with concerns or worries about friends or loved ones.

<https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk>

REFUGE

<https://www.refuge.org>

Women's Aid has a variety of services for survivors. They have developed additional advice, specifically designed for the current coronavirus outbreak.

Survivors Handbook: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook>

Live chat: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk>

They can also be contacted at: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

HESTIA

Hestia is a charity supporting adults and children in times of crisis. This includes victims of modern slavery, women and children who have experienced domestic abuse, young care leavers and older people in London and the surrounding area. Hestia also campaigns nationally on issues affecting the people they work with.

HESTIA DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE

Bright Sky is a free to download mobile app, providing support and information to anyone who may be in an abusive relationship or those concerned about someone they know.

Information and support mobile app: <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

Available in 5 languages: English, Urdu, Punjabi, Polish and Welsh

MEN'S ADVICE LINE

This is the confidential helpline for male victims of domestic violence, and those supporting them:-
0808 8010327

<https://mensadviceline.org.uk/male-victims/>

GALOP IS FOR MEMBERS OF THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY.

GALOP

The National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

Phone number 0800 999 5428

email – help@galop.org.uk

<https://www.galop.org.uk>



SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS provide support and advice to BAEM abuse victims.

Phone number 0208 571 9595

Email

info@southallblacksisters.co.uk

Through their website at www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS SERVICE

Advocacy, information and support for migrant women provided in English, Spanish and Portuguese

Phone numbers 020 7336 0888; 0844264 0682

<http://www.lawrs.org.uk/violencia-domestica-durante-el-aislamiento>

Scotland

SCOTTISH WOMEN'S AID

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline - open 24/7

0800 027 1234

Email helpline@sdafmh.org.uk

Website and online chat

<https://womensaid.scot>

SHAKTI WOMEN'S AID – for BAEM women in Scotland

Phone number 0131 475 2399

Email info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk

Website

<http://shaktiedinburgh.co.uk>

Wales

Welsh Women's Aid

Phone number 0808 8010800

Information and support: <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk>

BAWSO – Black women in Wales who are victims of domestic violence

24/7 helpline 0800 7318 147

Email info@bawso.org.uk

Website <https://bawso.org.uk>

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Domestic Abuse

24-hour helpline: 0808 802 1414



Other sources of help

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>

ECONOMIC ABUSE

If you are concerned about how coronavirus may affect your finances and leave you vulnerable to economic abuse, please see the advice provided by HM Treasury on what support is on offer.

SURVIVING ECONOMIC ABUSE CHARITY

Website

<https://survivingeconomicabuse.org>

Guidance leaflet Surviving Economic Abuse

CHAYN is a global volunteer network addressing gender-based violence by creating intersectional survivor-led resources online.

CHAYN provides online help and resources in a number of languages, ranging from identifying manipulative situations to how friends can support those being abused.

<https://chayn.co>

END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk>

Briefing on Covid-19

<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/covid-19-new-evaw-briefing-urges-government-to-act-now-to-prevent-secondary-abuse-disaster/>

Other sources of information and help

VICTIM SUPPORT – HELPLINE 0808 168911

Website

www.victimsupport.org.uk

HOUSING ADVICE

Shelter

Helpline 0808 800 4444

Website www.shelter.org.uk

SAMARITANS – National helpline 24/7

116 123

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

If you are concerned about the safety or well-being of a child call the Police on 999 or contact the NSPCC Helpline – 0808 800 5000.

DEBT

STEP CHANGE CHARITY – advice on line

<https://www.stepchange.org>



LEGAL HELP

RIGHTS OF WOMEN

National family law legal helpline: 020 7251 6577 or
www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/family-law

Unite Regional Women and Equalities Officers

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