

Domestic Abuse

A Trade Union Guide



**Issued by Irish Congress of Trade
Unions Women's Committee
November 2009**

Contents

- 1. Foreword**
 - 2. Introduction**
 - 3. What is Domestic Abuse?**
 - 4. Why is Domestic Abuse a Trade Union Issue?**
 - 5. What should a Workplace Policy cover?**
 - 6. Key Negotiating Points**
 - 7. Action by the Union Branch**
 - 8. Ways to Help**
- Appendix 1 –
Model Policy on Domestic Abuse Against Women**
- Appendix 2 –
Advice, Support and Helplines for those experiencing
Domestic Abuse**

1. Foreword

Domestic Abuse is a serious crime with serious consequences. It is usually a hidden crime. People suffer silently – afraid for themselves and for their children. It is time to change that. We have moved from the days when no one wanted to intervene in a domestic situation. It is time to act to change attitudes to make sure that women are not subject to violence in their homes or anywhere else.

The workplace can play a key role on raising awareness about domestic abuse. We know for many women work is a place of safety where they may confide in others about their experiences and where they can access help.

Congress and its affiliates have been campaigning over the last few years to ensure that domestic abuse is seen as an issue that unions can – and - should be doing something about for women who are affected by violence at home; work too is likely to suffer unless they get the support they need. Yet, in many instances unions are finding it difficult to

persuade employers to put policies in place to help those suffering from domestic abuse.

Congress urges employers to cooperate with unions in developing a common approach to domestic abuse in the workplace. Working in partnership can change attitudes and help those who experience domestic abuse to get the support they need.

It is intended that this Guide be used in a practical way to give information, ideas and contacts to union representatives in the workplace and to enable them to give consistent and effective assistance to those suffering domestic abuse.

2. Introduction

Domestic abuse is a serious problem. It occurs right across our society and it has devastating consequences for the victims and their families. It knows no boundaries as regards age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, wealth or geography.

Did you know?

- one in four women will experience domestic abuse at some time in their lives;
- Domestic abuse accounts for one-third of all reported crime in Northern Ireland; and
- 5 women will be killed every year as a result of domestic abuse.

While there is a growing recognition that domestic abuse can be directed at men and people in same-sex relationships, such violence is still predominantly by men against women. This guide is to assist unions in negotiating workplace policies on domestic abuse. It is intended that the guide be used in a practical way to give information and advice to union representatives in the workplace and to enable them to give consistent and effective assistance to those suffering domestic abuse.

3. What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is abusive or violent behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another within an intimate relationship or a family.

Domestic abuse is rarely a one-off event. It tends to escalate in frequency and severity over time. It can be physical and can include: slapping, punching, beating, kicking, knife wounds – often leading to permanent injuries and sometimes death.

It can be sexual abuse, this could include being forced to have sex, sexual degradation and forcing sex in ways that hurt and injure.

Domestic abuse can also result in emotional and mental harm caused, for example, by:

- not being allowed to leave the house or spend time with friends or family;
- constantly being criticised, undermined;
- threatening to take your children away and/or not allowing you to see them;
- causing damage to your pets, your possessions or other things you care about;
- humiliating you in front of family and friends;
- depriving you of food, money or sleep;

Sometimes it can be difficult to recognise domestic abuse, especially when there is no physical attack. Just because you don't have a broken nose or a black eye, doesn't mean you're not being abused.

It is well documented that domestic abuse can cause lasting damage to the sufferers' physical and mental health and also their ability to work.

Impact on the victim

- diminished self-esteem;
- loss of self-confidence;
- lack of concentration;
- feelings of fear and guilt;
- insomnia;
- depression;
- agoraphobia;
- difficulty in forming or maintaining trusting and intimate relationships

Impact on the workplace

Home and work issues cannot always be separated and domestic violence can impact greatly on the working life of someone who is being abused. Domestic abuse can result in:

- a deterioration in an employee's performance;
- increased and unexplained absenteeism;
- poor timekeeping;
- threat to job security and prospects

People experiencing domestic abuse are especially vulnerable once they attempt to leave abusive partners and may become vulnerable going to or coming from work or while they are at work as the abuser knows where they can be located. This can give rise to health and safety issues and an increased risk of workplace abuse.

4. Why is Domestic Abuse a Trade Union Issue?

All violence against women whether it happens at work, at home or in the community is a legitimate concern for trade unionists. The effects of domestic abuse, as can be seen from the examples above, can be far reaching.

Women who suffer domestic abuse often feel isolated and unable to tell anybody of their plight for fear that they will not be treated sympathetically. It is the role of trade unions to work with employers to create a safe and supportive working

environment which gives women the confidence to come forward. One of the most useful ways to provide this is to develop with the employer a policy on domestic abuse.

5. What should a Workplace Policy cover?

- a policy statement that has clear aims and states the organisation's commitment to treat domestic abuse seriously;
- a clear definition of domestic abuse and an acknowledgement that the majority of victims are women but that men are also affected as are women and men in same-sex relationships;
- a clear statement that the organisation is committed to the principle that domestic abuse and violence is unacceptable behaviour and that everyone has a right to live free from fear;
- a statement that, where domestic abuse occurs or has the potential to occur in the workplace, the paramount consideration of the employer is to ensure the health and well-being of employees and to ensure that, where appropriate, perpetrators of abuse are challenged and held to account to reduce the potential for re-offending;
- details of the first point of contact for employees who need to discuss issues around domestic abuse;
- a commitment to early intervention by identifying ways of creating a supportive environment and to creating confidential mechanisms for employees experiencing domestic abuse to seek help and information in order to empower them to make their own decisions;
- a commitment to offering ongoing support to employees experiencing domestic abuse including time off, for example, for counselling, visits to a solicitor or support agencies, for re-housing or re-organising childcare;
- the possibility of relocation or redeployment where this would be appropriate and supportive of the employee;
- a commitment to training and educating on domestic abuse issues. This might involve some basic awareness training for

all staff and more detailed training for certain staff e.g. personnel or welfare staff;

- provision of resources within the workplace, such as posters, leaflets etc to raise awareness about the domestic abuse helpline and other support services; and
- mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing the policy's effectiveness and for regularly updating information on help available and how to contact support services.

6. Key Negotiating Points

Congress has been campaigning over the last number of years to ensure the issue of domestic abuse is seen as a workplace issue. Our affiliates have been working with employers to recognise having a workplace policy that supports employees experiencing domestic abuse is also of benefit to them.

It is a good investment, helping them to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the workforce and reduce absence-related costs and increase productivity.

While there has been some success in convincing employers of this there are still a number of employers who remain to be convinced. Below are some key points that may help in negotiating a workplace policy.

Recruitment and Retention

Creating a team of trained and experienced staff costs money. Having a workplace policy is a good investment for an employer, helping to retain skilled, trained and experienced staff and thereby reducing the cost that occurs when staff leave. Also an employer who promotes family friendly policies will be attractive to a much wider pool of potential applicants.

Staff Morale and Productivity

A workplace policy on domestic abuse can help create a positive working environment. If staff feel that they are fully supported and confident in approaching their employer for help then this can increase their morale, loyalty and commitment which in turn can have a positive impact on productivity.

Disciplinary Action

The effects of domestic abuse can impact on attendance, punctuality, work performance, health and safety and productivity. A clear policy on domestic abuse that enables employees to confide in workplace reps at an early stage can prevent unnecessary disciplinary action against an employee.

Public Image and Reputation

Employers who have a policy on domestic violence are communicating a powerful message to employees, potential employees and the wider community that they are committed to supporting employees, the principles of equal opportunities and community investment.

7. Action by the Union Committees or Branches.

If a woman talks to someone from the union it may be the first time she has ever spoken about the abuse she and her children are experiencing. It is vital that the person she talks to reacts sensitively and confidentially.

The second most important thing is understanding.

The third most important thing is information.

Branch Committees should allocate to one of their members the responsibility for dealing with cases of domestic abuse - usually to the Branch Women's Officer. Such an appointment should be widely advertised so that any women

wanting to get in touch know who to approach directly, without having to ask other branch officers.

The Branch Committee also have a vital role to play in raising awareness around the issue of domestic abuse and its effects on women and children.

Effective ways to do this include:

- Ensuring all members are aware of the union's policy on domestic abuse (see Appendix 1).
- Distribute copies of this guide throughout the Branch/workplaces.
- Negotiating a workplace policy and ensuring it is widely publicised.
- Distribute materials, including contact numbers, from Women's Aid and other relevant organisations throughout the Branch and display on Branch notice boards.
- Ensure that domestic abuse is included as a standing item on the agenda of Health and Safety and Equality Committees. Hold a special meeting on domestic abuse or as part of a general branch, committee, regional or executive meeting or AGM's. Invite a speaker from within the union or someone from an outside organisation.
- Raise public awareness by developing and maintaining contacts within your local community, such as local domestic abuse groups who can provide expertise and experience when developing local branch strategies for action.

8. Ways to Help

Changes should be considered within the workplace to make it a safer place for the individual. These could include changing work patterns, workload or just providing support. Persons experiencing domestic abuse know their abusers better than anyone else and when it comes to their own safety they will know what measures are appropriate.

The following is a list of possible adjustments that could be considered to help individuals experiencing domestic abuse:

- allowing flexible or more flexible working or special leave to facilitate practical arrangements that are required such as:

seeking legal advice, attending counselling, attending support group meetings, arranging rehousing, attending court, or to alter childcare arrangements;

- offer financial support by way of an advance in pay;
- provide access to appropriate, confidential, independent professional counselling by providing information on and referral to specialist agencies, such as Women's Aid or local domestic abuse services;
- allow the individual to change work patterns or workload;
- facilitating a transfer to another post or relocation for safety reasons;
- awareness training for all staff so that they understand why there is a need for a workplace policy and know how to behave and help in the situation;
- diverting telephone calls;
- diverting emails to a separate folder;
- with consent advising colleagues of the situation on a need-to-know basis and agreeing what the response should be if the abuser/alleged abuser contacts the office.



Model Policy on Domestic Abuse Against Women

It is ***** policy to publicise and promote the growing debate on the issue of domestic abuse and to campaign for a number of improvements including:-

- (a) Public funding for a network of refuges and an expansion of availability to women in all areas.
- (b) A policy of immediate rehousing of victims of domestic abuse.
- (c) Adequate benefit levels for women who cannot work so that they are not financially coerced into staying within violent relationships.
- (d) Extended paid leave and job security for employees attempting to escape domestic abuse.
- (e) Full redeployment rights on request.
- (f) Training managers in order to support women experiencing domestic abuse and intimidation.
- (g) Provision of free, independent, confidential counselling by trained specialists working in the area for women suffering abuse.
- (h) Work with employers to ensure a workplace policy on domestic abuse is developed, reviewed and maintained.
- (i) Publish and widely distribute guidelines for helping members affected by domestic abuse.
- (j) Ensure that domestic abuse is included as an issue in your union's training programme.
- (k) Ensure that further awareness courses, in partnership with Women's Aid/Amnesty International and other relevant organisations, are expanded and developed.

- (l) Widely distribute up-to-date material, including contact numbers, from Women's Aid and other relevant organisations to all Branches and incorporate material in the new member's pack.
- (m) Ensure that domestic abuse is included as a standing item on the agenda of Health and Safety and Equality Committees.
- (n) Liaise with the various Agencies in lobbying for change in the Law for appropriate sentences.
- (o) To establish a link on your union's Website to the Social Security Offices and other Support Agencies.
- (p) Ensure members affected by domestic abuse have immediate access to your union's Welfare Fund and payments fast-tracked, (if applicable).

Issued by Congress Women's Committee November 2009



Advice, Support and Helplines for those experiencing Domestic Abuse

Anyone who feels in immediate danger should dial 999

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Domestic Abuse Officers are available in all areas (ask to speak to the local Domestic Abuse Officer)

0845 600 8000

Women's Aid

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation responding to domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. Its main aim is to create a safe and supportive society for women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

Women's Aid Federation N Ireland

028 9024 9041

Domestic Abuse Helplines

Northern Ireland 24-hour Free-Phone Helpline

0800 917 1414

Northern Ireland 24-hour Refuge Accommodation

028 9066 2385

Local Women's Aid Advice Centres

Ballymena	028 2563 2136
Belfast	028 9066 6049
Coleraine	028 7035 6573
Cookstown and Dungannon	028 8676 9300
Craigavon	028 3834 3256
Fermanagh	028 6632 8898
Foyle	028 7128 0060
Newry	028 3025 0765
North Down and Ards	028 9127 3196

Omagh	028 8224 1414
-------	---------------

Men's Organisations

Men's Advisory Project (MAP)	028 9024 1929
Men to Men	028 9023 7779

Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Helplines

Cara Friend - Gay Helpline	028 9032 2023
Cara Friend – Lesbian helpline (Thursday evenings)	028 9023 8668
Rainbow Project	028 9031 9030

Other Useful Numbers

Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre	028 9032 9002
Nexus	028 9032 6803
Victim Support	028 9024 4039
Disability Action	028 9029 7880
NI Council for Ethnic Minorities	028 9023 8645
Citizen's Advice Bureau	028 9023 1120
Law Society	029 9023 1614
Opportunity Now	029 2043 6912
Relate	028 9032 3454
Samaritans	08457 909090
Parents Advice Centre	028 9023 8800
NI Legal Services Commission	028 9024 6441

Age Concern NI	028 9032 5055
Help the Aged (Freephone)	0808 808 7575
Children in Northern Ireland	028 9040 1290

RoI Numbers

Women's Aid	1800 341 900
Sonass Housing Association	01 8349027
SAFE IRELAND	090 6479078
Saoirse Women's Refuge	01 463 0000
Aoibhneas Women's Refuge	01 8670701

RoI Men's Domestic Abuse Services

AMEN	046 9023 718 086 7941 880 086 1947 270
------	--

RoI Useful Numbers

Gardai	1 800 666 111
The Samaritans	1850 609090
Comhairle, Citizens information Call Centre	1890 777 121
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre	1800 778888
Childline	1800 666 666

This guide was published through the participation of the ICTU Women's committee and supported by the CONSENSUS INITIATIVE. CONSENSUS supports the participation of all communities in engaging with those issues which are most important to them. info@achieve-concensus.org

CONSENSUS
Let's live and work together



AN ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund
Investing in your future



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND



Useful notes

