



# **Domestic Violence is a workplace issue**



STRONGER TOGETHER

## **CONGRESS**

Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Northern Ireland Committee



## Domestic Violence - is a workplace issue

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is calling on unions and employers to prioritise domestic violence as a workplace issue.

In 2014 the Irish Congress of Trade Unions participated in a UK and Ireland wide survey into the impact that Domestic Violence has on the workplace.

The survey was open to all and by the closing date of February 2014, 3,423 people had completed it. 1,734 of the responses came from people in Northern Ireland, 82% were women.

What we found was that domestic violence doesn't just shatter the home lives of victims and families; it also impacts hugely on the workplace affecting the health, safety and performance victims **and** work colleagues.

The results revealed that a third of respondents had experienced domestic violence with over 40% of those reporting that it affected their ability to get into work for reasons including threats, physical injury and restraint.



**82%**

**of Survey  
respondents were  
women**

Respondents also reported that the abuse continued at their workplace including being harassed through phone calls and emails. Many people said that their partner physically turned up to their workplace.

Co-workers were also affected by being harmed or threatened and nearly 100% of those who had experienced domestic violence stated that the violence caused conflict and tension with their colleagues. (Full results of the survey available at [www.ictuni.org](http://www.ictuni.org) )

### **What is domestic violence?**

**£180m**

**Domestic Violence  
cost to the N.I.  
Economy each year**

**Domestic violence is defined as threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation.**

Domestic violence happens regardless of age, gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, disability or life style.

### **Domestic Violence – some facts**

- As many as one in four women has experienced domestic violence;
- One domestic violence incident happens every 19 minutes of every day across Northern Ireland;
- Research indicates that 90% of reported cases of domestic violence are perpetrated by men against women;
- 75% of abused women are targeted at work;
- 53% of abused women miss at least 3 days of work a month;
- On average, there will be 5 deaths every year as a result of domestic violence;
- Domestic Violence costs the NI Economy a massive £ 180 million (ref Tackling Violence at Home Strategy 2005) a year.

## Domestic violence – a trade union issue

Domestic violence is a serious crime and must not be tolerated.

Domestic violence violates fundamental human rights, destroys lives and eats away at our social fabric.

It is the job of trade unions to fight for social justice and this means that we have a responsibility to speak up for the victims of domestic violence and to campaign for the changes in the law needed to prevent domestic violence and protect victims.

It is also the job of trade unions to raise domestic violence as a workplace issue.

Victims of violence, as well as perpetrators, are likely to be at work (and sometimes in the same workplace) and may well be trade union members. It's therefore vital that trade unions are in the forefront in ensuring that domestic violence is on the negotiating agenda with employers and that trade union reps are properly trained to support and signpost victims.

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## Domestic violence – an employer's issue

We know that Domestic Violence can have a massive impact on the workplace, through sick days, lowered productivity, low morale etc. It makes good business sense for employers to bring in policies to support workers who are undergoing this horrific experience.

Employers also have a **duty of care** under the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 1992 requires employers to assess the risks of violence to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.



**1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence – mostly by an intimate partner**

Source: UNWomen



**Trade Unions can take action on this issue and putting domestic violence on the bargaining agenda will benefit members and save lives.**

## **So what can be done?**

There are practical steps which trade unions and trade union representatives can take including:

### **Negotiating a policy and effective workplace practice**

- Negotiate and implement a domestic violence workplace policy to prevent domestic violence, provide protection and ensure provision of services for those affected by domestic violence. Check with your employer to see whether a policy already exists and just needs publicised. If not, talk to your union about model workplace policies which can be adapted. You can also access information and resources from the Belfast Area Domestic Violence Partnership website on [belfastdvp.co.uk](http://belfastdvp.co.uk)
- Negotiate a staff training programme. Finding out more about domestic violence could help people understand how best to support members. There are plenty of expert organisations around that can help, get more information from [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)
- Promote domestic violence as a health and safety issue. Make sure health and safety reps know how to deal with the issues arising out of domestic abuse.
- Link the domestic violence policy to other workplace policies e.g. dignity at work, sickness absence, pregnancy and maternity.
- Promote the policy to all union members and ensure they know where to find it and carry out an annual awareness campaign.

### **Raising awareness and ensuring a supportive workplace**

- Encourage members to discuss, disclose and ask for help. Even putting up a poster on the union notice board or placing domestic violence helpline cards in public places and in toilets can help.
- Talk about domestic violence. Contextualise this within discussions about violence against women to make the workplace a safer place.
- In campaign publicity be clear that perpetrators should be held accountable for their behaviour and that those who experience domestic violence should be supported.
- Publicise the services offered by trade unions that are beneficial to those experiencing domestic violence, e.g. legal advice helplines and provide information about local support services.
- Write articles for your union newsletters - provide links to the domestic violence workplace policy.
- Promote helpline numbers in union posters and leaflets about domestic violence and via union emails to members.
- Collaborate with local voluntary groups to run awareness raising days for members.

If you are affected by the issue of domestic violence or know someone who is, you can get help by the calling the 24 hour domestic and sexual violence helpline

24 HOUR

## Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline

FREEPHONE

# 0808 802 1414

Open to *all women and men* affected by domestic & sexual violence

☎ text support to 07797 805 839 ✉ 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

Visit [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

or talk to your trade union

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