



Domestic Violence

A Trade Union Guide

“NIPSA is committed to campaign on behalf of all victims of domestic violence, at work or at home”

nipsa

The Leading Public Service Union

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Foreword

Violence against women is a serious crime and cannot be tolerated in any society. It is the job of trade unions to fight for social justice in all dimensions. That includes speaking up for the victims of crime. It also includes seeking to change attitudes in society for the good. 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 home or anywhere else.

For trade unions domestic violence is also a workplace issue. In today's world unlike past generations the victims, as well as the perpetrators of domestic violence are likely to be at work. For the victims the workplace must be a place of safety, a place for help and support. Trade unions must be in the forefront playing a key role in ensuring safety is provided. As for the perpetrators, who are and remain pre-dominantly men, they must come to realise that trade unions despise such actions and that we will continue to work with organisations like Women's Aid to raise awareness about this issue, to offer support to those experiencing domestic violence and to raise the issue with employers.

I hope you find this guide helpful in campaigning to improve services and in negotiating workplace agreements to help those suffering domestic violence.



JOHN COREY
General Secretary



MARIA MORGAN
Chairperson
NIPSA Equal Opportunities
Committee

Introduction

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

While there is a growing recognition that domestic violence 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 branches in negotiating workplace policies on domestic violence. 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 violence.





What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic Violence 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 violence 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 violence 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 violence, 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 violence 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 violence 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 violence 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 violence.

The Legal Implications

Employers 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 also requires employers to assess the risks of violence to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.

Why is Domestic Violence 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 violence, as can be seen from the examples above, can be far reaching.

Women who suffer domestic violence 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 violence.

What should a Workplace Policy cover?

- a policy statement that has clear aims and states the organisation's commitment to treat domestic violence seriously;
- a clear definition of domestic violence;
- 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 violence and abuse is unacceptable behaviour and that everyone has a right to live free from fear and abuse;
- a statement that, where domestic violence 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 violence;
- a commitment to early intervention by identifying ways of creating a supportive environment and to creating confidential mechanisms for employees experiencing domestic violence 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 violence 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 violence 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 violence 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.

Key Negotiating Points

NIPSA has been campaigning over the last number of years to ensure the issue of domestic violence is seen as a workplace issue. We have been working with employers to recognise having a workplace policy that supports employees experiencing domestic violence 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 we have been successful in convincing some 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 violence 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 violence can impact on attendance, punctuality, work performance, health and safety and productivity. A clear policy on domestic violence 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 both employees, potential employees and the wider community that they are committed to supporting employees, the principles of equal opportunities and community investment.

Action by the Branch

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 violence - usually to the Branch Women's Officer. Such an appointment should be widely advertised so that any women wanting to get in touch knows 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 violence and its effects on women and children. Effective ways to do this are:

- Ensuring all members are aware of NIPSA's policy on domestic violence (see Appendix 1).
- Distribute copies of this guide throughout the Branch.
- 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 noticeboards.





- Ensure that domestic violence is included as a standing item on the agenda of Branch Health and Safety Committees.
- Hold a special meeting on domestic violence or as part of a general branch meeting or branch AGM. 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 Women's Aid group who can provide expertise and experience when developing local branch strategies for action.

The Role of the Branch Women's Officer

The role of Branch Women's Officer is to offer support, encouragement and guidance to the victim of domestic violence; it is not their role to act as a counsellor as such a task can only be undertaken by a professionally qualified person.

In dealing with a woman who seeks help to escape domestic violence, the Branch Women's Officer should:-

- assure the woman that the matter will be dealt with in a sympathetic and confidential manner;
- adopt a non-judgemental attitude – don't pity her or make her feel different;
- encourage the woman to seek professional help and provide details of the support systems that are available (a list of such agencies is attached at Appendix 2).
- if an agreed policy is in existence they should discuss with the woman the various options open to her and agree a way forward;
- if no agreed policy exists they should offer to accompany the woman, with her agreement, to management with the request that they treat the matter as a request for urgent help under normal welfare provisions.





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 violence 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 violence:

- 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;
- 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;

The Branch Women's Officer should be aware that there may be additional issues facing employees and additional barriers to seeking help because of their ethnic background, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability which might make them feel more vulnerable when talking about their situation.

NIPSA Welfare Fund

The NIPSA Welfare Fund provides support to members at times of unforeseen financial hardship.

Help is available to members who meet our criteria and **urgent attention is always given in those cases where domestic violence is highlighted.** For example financial help may be given towards the deposit on rented accommodation if the member is escaping an abusive relationship.

In all circumstances, cases are handled with understanding, sensitivity and in complete confidence.

For further information you can contact NIPSA Headquarters, Executive Officer for Membership Services on 028 9066 1831.



Appendix 1

NIPSA's Policy on Domestic Violence Against Women

It is NIPSA's policy to publicise and promote the growing debate on the issue of domestic violence 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 violence.
- (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 violence.
- (e) Full redeployment rights on request.
- (f) Training managers in order to support women experiencing domestic violence and intimidation.
- (g) Provision of free, independent, confidential counselling for women suffering abuse.
- (h) Work with employers to ensure a workplace policy on domestic violence is developed, reviewed and maintained.
- (i) Publish and widely distribute guidelines for helping members affected by domestic violence.
- (j) Ensure that domestic violence is included as an issue in NIPSA'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 violence is included as a standing item on the agenda of Health and Safety Committees.
- (n) Liaise with the various Agencies in lobbying for change in the Law for appropriate sentences.
- (o) To establish a link on the NIPSA Website to the Social Security Offices and other Support Agencies.
- (p) Ensure members affected by Domestic Violence have immediate access to the NIPSA Welfare Fund and payments fast-tracked.





Appendix 2

Advice, Support and Helplines for those experiencing Domestic Violence

Anyone who feels in immediate danger should dial 999

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Domestic Violence Officers are available in all areas
(ask to speak to the local Domestic Violence Officer)
0845 600 8000

Women's Aid

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

Women's Aid Federation N Ireland 028 9024 9041

National Domestic Violence Helplines

Northern Ireland 24-hour
Free-Phone Helpline 0800 917 1414

Northern Ireland 24-hour
Refuge Accommodation 028 9066 2385

Republic of Ireland Helpline 1800 341900

Scottish 24-hour Helpline 0800 027 1234

English 24-hour Helpline 0808 200 0247

Welsh 24-hour Helpline 08457 023 468

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
- 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
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	028 9023 8645
Citizen's Advice Bureau	028 9023 1120
Law Society (Legal and Local Solicitor Advice)	028 9023 1614
Opportunity Now	029 2043 6912
Relate	028 9032 3454
Samaritans	08457 90 90 90
Parents Advice Centre	028 9023 8800
Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission	028 9024 6441
Age Concern Northern Ireland	028 9032 5055
Help the Aged (Freephone)	0808 8087575
Children In Northern Ireland	028 9040 1290

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Published by:

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Ref: 02-07