



Violence against women

Guidance for UCU branch officers assisting members suffering from domestic violence



Violence against women

Introduction

According to the UN, violence against women is: 'violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'.

In the UK it includes: domestic violence, rape and sexual violence, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, crimes in the name of honour, trafficking and sexual exploitation. It also includes financial or psychological abuse 'that forms part of coercive and controlling behaviour'. It is mostly committed by men that women know or with whom they are in a close relationship.

One in four women in the UK will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. In any one year there are 13 million separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners. One incident is reported to the police every minute. 54 per cent of UK rapes are committed by a woman's current or former partner. On average two women a week are killed by a male partner.

Domestic violence can affect women of every class, race, religion, age, level of education or occupation. Thousands of women and children in this country each year are the victims. Those suffering domestic violence fear that any action to leave a violent partner may further endanger their lives, jeopardise their children or risk their job security. Leaving a violent partner usually results in financial hardship. Women's refuges report that 13 per cent of women who access their services have either left a job or studies. No one should have to suffer in silence or face difficulties at work without the support of the union.

A key campaign objective on domestic violence is to raise awareness so that women, who find themselves physically or mentally abused at home, can get help quickly.

This guidance has been produced to assist branch officers dealing with members suffering from domestic violence and to assist them in producing a workplace policy.

This guidance covers:

- The definition of domestic violence
- The causes of domestic violence
- Effects on women of domestic violence at home and at work
- The role of UCU – why domestic violence is a trade union issue
- The Gender Equality Duty and violence against women
- Health and safety at work
- Providing a workplace policy
- How can UCU help – a checklist for union representatives
- Working with others to stop violence against women
- Where to go for help
- Sources of guidance and information



What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence can take many forms. It can be defined as the physical, emotional, sexual or other abuse by someone with whom the person has or has had some form of intimate relationship, in order to maintain power and control over that person. The vast majority of cases of domestic violence are perpetrated by men against women but domestic violence can also occur in other situations, including in same sex relationships. Children are also often involved, either suffering or witnessing the violence or intervening to try to stop it.

What causes domestic violence?

Although a domestic situation can be affected by unemployment, poverty, alcohol abuse etc, there is no stereotypical abuser. Social class, level of income, level of education, occupation, ethnic or racial background make no difference.

Work can be a cause of antagonism between partners, as the abuser has no control over that environment. Obsessive sexual jealousy frequently forms part of domestic violence and suspicion about work relationships may escalate.

Women do not choose to be with violent men. Often the violence does not begin until a relationship has been well established and can be triggered by the first pregnancy or birth. Women living with and leaving violent men say they just want the violence to end and try everything they can to stop it.

Effects on women of domestic violence at home and at work

The effect of domestic violence on women can include long-term psychological damage as well as serious injury or persistent ill health. Domestic violence can cause anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, low self esteem and lack of confidence, plus feelings of embarrassment, shame and guilt. Victims may be afraid and unable to confide in others or seek help and may hide the violence from family and friends, suffering in silence for many years. Signs of physical abuse will not always be evident. Some victims go to extreme lengths to cover up any signs and sexual abuse in particular may be hidden.

Women may find it very difficult to keep working while coping with violence at home. Poor timekeeping, frequent sickness or a perception that someone is 'not pulling her weight' may be symptoms of domestic violence, particularly when the victim is trying to conceal

the situation. Some women may be forced to keep to a rigid timetable about their hours of work and will not be permitted to socialise with colleagues outside work.

Some women will be able to make the decision to leave or evict the abuser quickly. However, the process may be much longer for others, particularly where problems of finding new accommodation, new schools for children, and operating on a reduced income may seem insuperable. Finding safe, affordable alternative accommodation is a major problem.

Some groups of women face additional problems. Disabled women are particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence if their partner is their primary carer. They may fear institutionalisation if the support enabling them to maintain independence in their own home disappears. Lesbians experiencing domestic violence often receive little sympathy given society's prejudice against same sex relationships, and those with children fear possible custody hearings if they make a complaint.

Black women face a range of problems in addition to those already outlined, not least racism and stereotyping when seeking assistance. Some minority ethnic women may experience pressure from an extended family network not to leave an abusive partner to avoid bringing shame within the wider community. When black women prefer to go to refuges away from their home area for reasons of safety, but want to be situated in areas with a large black population in order to avoid racism in predominantly white areas and also to be near culturally specific features, this option is not always available.

The role of UCU – why domestic violence against women is a trade union issue

The effects of domestic violence can affect job performance and job security. The health and safety of those suffering domestic violence can be at risk. Women are often forced to leave their home, perhaps making the workplace inaccessible, fearing the perpetrator will harass them at work. Members should be able to depend on the union for support, advice and assistance, especially if facing difficulties at work because of their home circumstances. Identifying this at an early stage can lead to appropriate help and information being offered and the damaging effects minimised. Early intervention can reduce work-related problems and if a workplace policy is in place the culture to address this 'taboo' subject may change, resulting in a more positive work environment for everyone.



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The Gender Equality Duty and violence against women

Employers have obligations under the Gender Equality Duty (GED). The Gender Equality Duty is a law that came into effect in April 2007. It requires all public bodies, including colleges and universities in England, Wales and Scotland to promote equality of opportunity between women and men and to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment in all its functions. This is the general duty. As well as the 'general duty', colleges and universities have specific duties:

- to prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme, showing how the college/university will meet its general and specific duties and setting out its gender equality objectives.

In preparing the scheme the college/university must:

- consult employees, service users and others, including trade unions
- consider how policies and practices affect gender equality in the workplace and in the delivery of its services
- gather information on the effect of its policies and practices on men and women in employment, services and performance of its functions
- use the information to review the implementation of the scheme objectives
- assess the impact of its current and future policies and practices on gender equality
- report on progress annually
- review and revise the scheme at least every three years.

UCU branches can use the GED to ensure tackling the issue of violence against women is included within the gender equality scheme and to ensure impact assessment of relevant procedures such as sickness, dignity at work, takes relevant factors into account.

On the UCU website you can find an Equality Duties toolkit which includes information about how to carry out impact assessments. There is a model initial screening form and a pro-forma for impact assessments: www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2131

Branches should check their college/university's current equality scheme and action plan to see whether

it contains a policy on violence against women and impact assessments of relevant procedures in this regard. If not, now is the time to discuss this with your employer as we approach the April 2010 deadline for the first three-year review of gender equality schemes.

Health and safety at work

In addition to their obligations under the GED, there are other legal implications for colleges and universities to take into account. Employers have a Duty of Care under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974). That means they have a duty to look after an employee's welfare at work and to address issues which are affecting their health. Employers also have a duty to protect employees from violence at work. On the UCU website there is information and advice for members on health and safety in the workplace:

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3385

In the Health, safety and environment resource centre on the website you can also find downloadable information and materials on violence at work, bullying and harassment:

www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3314

Providing a workplace policy

Having a workplace policy on domestic violence helps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff members and may ultimately reduce and prevent the extent of domestic abuse experienced. If staff are fully supported it improves the work environment for all employees as stress and absenteeism is minimised. A workplace policy is also a good investment for the employer, as it helps them to retain skilled and experienced staff.

First and foremost a workplace domestic violence policy should very clearly state that the college/university will not tolerate domestic violence or abuse and that it is committed to supporting staff who are subjected to it as well as committed to taking action against those who perpetrate such abuse.

A workplace policy should cover information about who is the first point of contact in the college/university for dealing with issues around domestic violence. There should also be a named person from the branch. It should be made clear what the role of the named person/s is, ie branch officers shouldn't be expected to act as counsellors, but as providers of information and who will act as the employee's representative to the employer. The policy should make clear that personal



details are strictly confidential, not least so that the woman in question cannot be tracked by the perpetrator. It should set out what support the college/university is offering to anyone experiencing domestic abuse, eg special leave, paid time off for appointments, counselling (if available), changes to hours/duties, increased security, career breaks, relocation to a different office/site etc. It should say how a staff member can go about seeking this support.

Relevant health and safety measures should be outlined in the policy, for example, recording and reporting incidents of harassment or assault and staff not giving out their colleagues' details or work schedules.

It may also be necessary to review health and safety procedures following a disclosure of domestic abuse, such as a risk assessment being carried out for that member of staff leading to temporary or permanent changes to hours or duties.

All staff/members need to be made aware that the policy exists. It should be regularly monitored and reviewed and state who will do this.

For more advice about drafting and negotiating a workplace policy, please contact Charlotte Nielsen in the UCU Equality Unit: cnielsen@ucu.org.uk

How can UCU help - checklist for union representatives

- 1 Raise awareness of the issue amongst branch members and publicise that the union can give practical support.
- 2 Be sympathetic and non-judgemental, have some understanding and awareness of the issue.
- 3 Try to ensure there is a woman on the branch committee who can give initial support to a member suffering domestic violence, since a woman in this situation may prefer to talk to another woman.
- 4 Remember confidentiality is paramount and do not disclose any information to a third party without the prior permission of the woman concerned.
- 5 Provide information on external support available, eg Women's Aid, since members may not wish to seek assistance from management. Find out the local contacts and make these available.
- 6 Recommend that physical violence is reported to the police – it may be or could become life-threatening.
- 7 Be able to deal with the situation if both partners work together – ensure that the harassment procedure is used promptly if abuse takes place at work.
- 8 Allow the member to make decisions about any future action at her own pace without pressure and provide support for as long as it is needed.
- 9 Negotiate a period of paid special leave if necessary to enable the woman to resolve the crisis, relocate and recover.
- 10 Negotiate a policy on domestic violence with management.

The employer should:

- raise awareness in the workplace about the consequences of domestic violence and publicise agreed policies
- provide training, particularly for managers and personnel officers, so they can support staff suffering domestic violence
- ensure staff reporting incidents of domestic violence are treated sympathetically, provided with support, and confidentiality maintained.
- provide advice about organisations experienced in dealing with domestic violence – at no cost and within working hours
- negotiate flexible working arrangements, to include working irregular hours if necessary and/or reasonable paid time off for counselling, to seek legal help, find alternative accommodation etc
- arrange a period of paid special leave if necessary to allow the woman to deal with the crisis and recuperate
- provide an advance on salary if necessary to assist with finding new accommodation
- seek redeployment, if requested, at no cost to the woman and ensure her new place of work is only revealed with her explicit permission
- provide independent counselling at no cost and within working hours
- ensure anyone suffering domestic violence is not penalised for coming in late, going absent at short



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notice or taking sick leave. Disciplinary procedures or scrutiny of sick leave should not be used. These issues should be analysed as part of the equality impact assessment of these procedures.

- reassure the employee about job security and ensure they are not penalised for under-performance in any appraisal or assessment
- liaise with trade unions and student services to develop guidelines for teaching staff to deal with suspected domestic violence issues with students.

Working with others to put a stop to violence against women

Violence against women is also a key issue for women students. UCU branches could consider campaigning jointly with other trade unions on this issue as well as with NUS as there will also be female students who are affected by domestic violence.

UCU is a supporter of End Violence Against Women which is a coalition representing seven million individuals and organisations across the UK who believe we can and must create a world free from the threat and reality of violence against women. UCU also affiliates to Object, a human rights organisation which challenges the sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture. ■



WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

It is essential to find out who the contacts are for your local area. If you contact the national organisations listed below they will be able to assist.

ENGLAND

Women's Aid

0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Refuge)
www.womensaid.org.uk

Refuge

0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Women's Aid)
www.refuge.org.uk

Southall Black Sisters

020 8571 0800/9595
www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

Jewish Women's Aid

0800 591 203
www.jwa.org.uk

SCOTLAND

Scottish Women's Aid

0800 027 1234
www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk

Shakti Women's Aid

0131 475 2399
www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation

0800 917 1414
www.niwaf.org/

WALES

Welsh Women's Aid

0808 8010 800
www.welshwomensaid.org/index.html

Black and Asian Women Stepping Out (BAWSO)

0800 731 8147
www.bawso.org.uk

FURTHER GUIDANCE & INFORMATION

UCU

Charlotte Nielsen
UCU Equality Support Official
cnielsen@ucu.org.uk

TUC

www.tuc.org.uk/equality/index.cfm?mins=385&mins=383

End Violence Against Women (EVAW)

www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk
