



**NORTHERN IRELAND PRACTICE AND EDUCATION
COUNCIL FOR NURSING AND MIDWIFERY**

Regional Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse in the Workplace

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1. Introduction

This Regional Policy is not meant to replace any of the excellent services provided locally, but is meant to compliment and ensure the mainstreaming of good practice.

Domestic violence and abuse is a pattern of behaviour that is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another within an intimate or family relationship. It is also a breach of an individual's human rights and is usually frequent and persistent. While domestic violence and abuse most commonly refers to that perpetrated against a partner, it also includes violence/abuse against ex-partners, and violence/abuse by any other person who has a close or family relationship with the victim.

Domestic violence and abuse does not just refer to physical violence but also to sexual, emotional and psychological, and financial abuse; it is, in many cases, made up of a combination of different forms of abuse. Domestic violence and abuse affects not only adults but may be inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The potential adverse affects, on children, of living with domestic violence/abuse include poor educational achievement, social exclusion and juvenile crime, substance misuse, mental health problems and homelessness.

2. A definition of domestic violence/abuse

'Threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation' (DHSSPS, 2005, *Tackling Violence at Home*).

3. Purpose and Scope of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to support members of staff who experience domestic violence and abuse. This policy is based on the guidelines prepared by the Regional Steering Group on Domestic Violence, *Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse* and has also drawn on policies developed by employers and trade unions. It should also be read in the context of the Zero Tolerance Policy. This policy applies to all employees.

4. Aims and Objectives of the Policy

The aim of the policy is to exercise social responsibility by re-affirming an individual's human right to live free from violence, abuse and threats and to provide a safe and supportive environment for all employees who experience domestic violence/abuse.

The objectives of the policy is to offer practical and other support to employees in addressing problems arising from domestic violence/abuse sympathetically and in confidence; to maximise the safety of employees, and to deal effectively with perpetrators of domestic violence/abuse among the workforce, as appropriate.

5. Policy Statement

Domestic violence/abuse is regarded by Employers and Trade Unions as a serious and widespread problem and has a serious impact upon victims. It is socially harmful and disruptive; it can impinge on an individual's work performance; it can impact on the safety and welfare of employees, and can ultimately affect service provision. Employers and Trade Unions are committed not only to responding sensitively and effectively to those needing help and support, but also to co-operating with criminal justice bodies in taking action against the perpetrators of domestic violence/abuse.

Employers and Trade Unions will take all reasonable steps to deal with domestic violence/abuse through the creation of a safe and supportive environment within the workplace. Employers and Trade Unions will provide information to all employees about domestic violence/abuse and about the support available to address it. Employers will treat the matter sympathetically, sensitively and confidentially, and undertake not to discriminate against those who have been subjected to domestic violence/abuse in terms of their existing employment or career development.

Domestic violence/abuse occurs regardless of social class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, religion or age. Although anyone can be affected by domestic violence/abuse, in the majority of cases of domestic violence/abuse a woman is the victim and the man is the perpetrator. It is estimated that one in five women will experience domestic violence/abuse in the course of their lifetime (NIO, 2005). The unequal distribution of domestic violence and abuse across genders is reflected in the use of

language in this policy document in which the focus is upon women. It is recognised that men can also be victims of domestic violence/abuse, and that both men and women can suffer abuse within same-sex relationships and from other family members as well as from an intimate partner. The procedures that are set out here are thus broadly applicable to both men and women, regardless of the source of domestic abuse. It should also be noted that it is not necessary to be living in the same house as a perpetrator to be a victim of domestic violence/abuse: non-co-habiting partners and, in particular, ex-partners can be victims or perpetrators.

It is known that women are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation from a violent partner. Therefore a woman experiencing domestic violence/abuse may be particularly vulnerable while at work for example, if she leaves a violent partner, the workplace is one place where she can be located and harmed. Clearly, there may be an increased risk if the perpetrator of violence/abuse works within the same workplace as the victim. Although no comparable British or Irish research yet exists, research from the USA found that 75% of victims of domestic violence/abuse were targeted at work, for example from harassing telephone phone calls to physical assaults.

The action plan of the strategy document, *Tackling Violence at Home* (DHSSPS, 2005), states that employers in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors are to be encouraged to adopt workplace domestic violence/abuse policies. Employers and Trade Unions endorse the strategy and its action plan. It recognises that domestic violence/abuse is not purely a private matter between two individuals but that it impinges on the wider society including the workplace. Employers and Trade Unions are aware that domestic violence/abuse can result in deterioration in performance, increased absenteeism or poor timekeeping, and can threaten career development and job security.

Employers and Trade Unions will undertake to do the following:

- Raise awareness in the workplace about domestic violence/abuse and publicise the new policy.
- Designate appropriate members to act as “trusted colleague for domestic violence/abuse” from each directorate.
- Provide or facilitate training for key staff members, particularly managers, staff from Human Resources and trusted colleagues for domestic violence/abuse about the

new policy and its procedures. The training will cover indicators of domestic violence/abuse and appropriate responses to disclosure, including information about the duty of care to pass on information to relevant agencies where a child or vulnerable adult is considered to be at risk.

- Ensure that any employee who reports an incident of domestic violence/abuse is given a thoughtful, non-judgemental and knowledgeable response. Any discussion must take place in private and remain confidential, as far as possible.
- Discuss all available support options and provide information about, and contact details of, organisations and agencies that are experienced in dealing with domestic violence/abuse.
- To become a member of the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence/abuse.

In addition, Employers will consider the following actions where applicable.

- The negotiation of flexible working hours for the employee to visit organisations and agencies that are experienced in dealing with domestic violence/abuse, or to seek legal aid, medical assistance, or find alternative accommodation, if and when necessary.
- The arrangement of a short period of paid special leave, if and when necessary, to deal with an emergency situation (such as leaving the family home to enter crisis accommodation). This would be in line with the agreed provisions of emergency leave for carers (see 'Special Leave Policies to Balance Work with Domestic Responsibilities') and as such would range from one half-day to twelve days in any twelve-month period, with normally no period of leave exceeding three days.
- The negotiation of working arrangements on a short-term or long-term basis, as necessary (for example, moving a woman away from reception or from working in a ground-floor office visible from the street).
- The negotiation of changes to payment of salary, if requested (including a salary advance, if needed, for example, to acquire alternative accommodation).
- Mutually agree additional practical safety measures, as needed, with the employee.
- The facility to move across employers within Northern Ireland without loss of working rights or conditions, etc.

6. Perpetrators who are employees

With regard to perpetrators of domestic violence/abuse, Employers will undertake to do the following:

- Take disciplinary action against any employee who incurs, during their period of employment, a criminal conviction relating to domestic violence/abuse.
- Take disciplinary action against any employee who uses the time, property or the resources of Employers to abuse a partner or family member.
- Require an employee who has a Non-Molestation Order or Occupation Order in place against them, to declare this to Employers. If their job involves working or coming into contact with children or vulnerable adults a change of role should be considered.
- Take action, as appropriate, to minimise the potential for a perpetrator to use their position or resources to find out the whereabouts, or other details, of their partner or ex-partner.
- Provide information about perpetrator re-education programmes such as 'Men Overcoming Domestic Violence/Abuse'.

7. The role of managers

While this policy applies to all employees, it is line managers, in consultation with staff in Human Resources and the Trade Unions, who will play a key role in implementing it in practice. Managers need to make a *managerial commitment*, rather than a personal commitment, to assist a member of staff who is experiencing domestic violence/abuse. The following guidelines are intended to clarify the role of the line manager:

- Where domestic violence/abuse is suspected or known, managers will contact Human Resources for advice before any discussion with the staff member takes place, if it is possible to do so.
- Where it is alleged that a member of staff is perpetrating abuse during work time or using work resources, the manager will discuss this as a matter of urgency with Human Resources.
- Managers will review the security of personal information held on members of staff.

- With the knowledge of the person experiencing the abuse, managers will consider diverting telephone calls and emails if such harassment is a cause for concern.
- Managers will ensure that a safe and secure form of communication is maintained with an employee during any periods of absence.
- Managers will keep a confidential record of any discussions and of any action taken. This will be kept with the knowledge and consent of the staff member concerned, who will be able to access it.

Furthermore, Employers and Trade Unions will facilitate access to appropriate skilled support and information and will set in place a procedure for designating certain staff members to be trusted colleague for domestic violence/abuse who will be the first point of contact for employees experiencing domestic violence/abuse. They will receive training in responding to disclosures of domestic abuse; information about relevant agencies that offer support, and information on current legislation, reports, publications and events to do with domestic violence/abuse. They would also be represented on the Domestic Violence Partnership. Trusted colleagues for domestic violence/abuse will be drawn from a range of areas, but will include staff from Human Resources, Occupational Health Service and Union representatives.

8. Monitoring and Review of the Policy

Employers and Trade Unions will undertake to monitor the implementation of this policy and review it on an annual basis.

Bibliography

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2005, *Tackling Violence at Home: A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: DHSS&PS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2004, *Domestic Violence and the Workplace: A Guide for Negotiators*, Belfast/Dublin: ICTU

Northern Ireland Office, 2005, *Experience of Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland: Findings from the 2003/04 Northern Ireland Crime Survey*, Belfast: NIO Statistics and Research Branch

Opportunity Now and Women's Aid, 2003, *Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Good Practice Guide for Employers*

Area Child Protection Committees, 2005, *Regional Child Protection Policy and Procedures*

Regional Steering Group on Domestic Violence, 2006, *Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse: Guidance for Employers*, Belfast: Domestic Violence Unit

Unison, 1999, *Raise the Roof on Domestic Violence: A UNISON Guide to Campaigning Against Domestic Violence*, London: UNISON

Useful Contact Details

Occupational Health (via Business Services Organisation HR Department)

 (028) 9053 5674 or (028) 9053 5672

Carecall (staff support)

 (028) 9024 5821

Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Service (Belfast HSC Trust area)

 (028) 9056 5444

NIPSA (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance)

 (028) 9066 1831

RCN (Royal College of Nursing)

 (028) 9066 8236

UNISON

 (028) 9077 0813

UNITE

 (028) 9002 0418

 0845 604 1402

24-hour Domestic Violence Helpline (Women's Aid)

 0800 917 1414

Women's Aid (Belfast & Lisburn office)

 (028) 9066 6049 (9am to 5.30pm)

Men's Advisory Project (MAP)

 (028) 9024 1929

Men to Men

 (028) 9023 7799

Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Helplines

Gay Helpline - ☎ (028) 9032 2023

Lesbian Helpline (Thursday evenings) - ☎ (028) 9023 8668

Rainbow Project - ☎ (028) 9031 9030

Police Service of Northern Ireland - Domestic Violence Officers

☎ 0845 600 8000 and ask to speak to your local Domestic Violence Officer

Other Useful Numbers

Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre - ☎ (028) 9032 9002

Nexus - ☎ (028) 9032 6803

Victim Support - ☎ (028) 9024 4039 (office hours)

0845 303 0900 (out of office hours)

Disability Action - ☎ (028) 9029 7880

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities - ☎ (028) 9023 8645

Law Society - ☎ (028) 9023 1614

Citizen's Advice Bureau - ☎ (028) 9023 1120

Action on Elder Abuse Helpline - ☎ 0808 808 8141