



For too long (domestic violence) has been seen as a private matter, leaving those who experience it feeling isolated and alone. But it is a problem for society.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Workplace policy

Domestic violence is a serious problem in Northern Ireland. It occurs right across society and knows no boundaries of age, class, ethnicity, religious groups, disability, geography or sexual orientations. However, in the majority of cases women are the victims.

While it accounts for one fifth of all reported violent crime, many incidents remain hidden and are never reported. Given its prevalence, it is highly likely that workplaces employ those who have experienced domestic violence directly or indirectly and, equally so, those who perpetrate domestic violence.

Domestic violence has a devastating impact on the lives of women and their children. Home and work issues cannot always be separated and domestic violence can greatly impact on a woman's working life. In the workplace the effects of domestic violence can have a damaging impact on business and on employee morale. It can impact on punctuality, attendance, health and safety, work performance and productivity, as well as job prospects or career development.

The workplace, however, is also one of the many places in which abused women can access help and support. It is crucial therefore that domestic violence is recognised as an important issue.

There is no legal obligation on employers to take any action if they are made aware that a member of their workforce is experiencing domestic violence. However, the government strategy to address domestic violence in Northern Ireland, *Tackling Violence at Home*¹, recognises a role for employers in raising awareness of domestic violence. It promotes the adoption of workplace policies on domestic violence.

The development of workplace policies will help increase awareness and allow employees to raise the issue with their employer or Trade Union representative. It will provide opportunities for women to access the help and support they need.

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland has worked collaboratively with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Opportunity Now to produce guidelines for the development of workplace policies on domestic violence.

For further information on developing workplace policies contact Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland on 028 9024 9041 or email info@womensaidni.org

1. *Tackling Violence at Home, A strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland*, page 14, Northern Ireland Office, 2005

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