



Campaigning  
For Equality

# Women's Equality Domestic Violence and Abuse



A Guide for  
Usdaw reps



# What is Domestic Violence

Here's a definition used by Women's Aid, the national charity providing essential lifesaving services to women survivors and their children across the country and working to end domestic abuse:

**'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'**

Domestic violence and abuse affects women of all ages and races, from all walks of life and every social class. It happens everywhere – from large cities to rural communities. It is just as much about verbal abuse and controlling behaviour as it is about physical or sexual violence. In most cases domestic abuse is a continuous series of attacks, rather than a one-off incident.

**In this leaflet the term 'violence' includes abuse and behaviours that may not be physical.**

Many kinds of domestic violence constitute a criminal offence, including physical and sexual assault, rape, threats to kill, harassment, stalking and putting people in fear of violence.

Domestic violence and abuse affects the lives of many of our members and Usdaw is committed to supporting any member in this situation.

For many, domestic violence and abuse doesn't remain within the home but can follow them into work. For others, work can be a safe place away from the violence of home life.

Domestic violence and abuse is a workplace issue. By working with employers to introduce workplace policies on domestic abuse, we can change attitudes and help people who experience domestic abuse get the support they need.

Statistics and research continue to confirm that the vast majority of those who experience domestic violence are women. Women are significantly more likely to:

- Experience domestic violence over a long period of time.
- Feel trapped in an abusive relationship because of fear, financial worries and concern for their children.
- Be frightened, controlled and seriously injured by domestic violence.

## A Gender Specific Issue

Sexual assault, rape and murder by a spouse, partner or former partner are almost exclusively carried out by men against women.

When women use violence or abuse in a relationship research shows this is likely to be in self-defence or retaliation.

For this reason where we need to be 'gender specific' this leaflet refers to women as those who experience domestic violence at the hands of a man. But it should be remembered that men can experience domestic violence and that it occurs in same-sex as well as heterosexual relationships.

## Facts About Domestic Violence and Abuse

Research shows that domestic violence is both widespread and deep rooted in our society.

- One in four women will experience domestic violence and abuse at some point in their lives.
- On average, two women each week are killed by a male partner or former partner.
- Domestic violence and abuse accounts for a quarter of all violent crime reported in the British Crime Survey.
- Domestic violence and abuse has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other type of crime.
- Evidence shows that women are at greater risk of experiencing domestic violence and abuse at the point of separation, or just after leaving a relationship.
- Every minute in the UK, the police receive a call from the public for assistance for domestic abuse.
- On average, a woman is assaulted 35 times before her first call to the police.
- One in five young men and one in ten young women think that abuse or violence against women is acceptable.
- In a study by Shelter, domestic abuse was found to be the 'single, most quoted reason for becoming homeless' among women.
- A TUC survey showed that 54% of trade union women had experienced, or knew colleagues who had experienced domestic abuse.



Research shows that domestic abuse is both widespread and deep rooted in our society.



## Why do Women Stay in Abusive Relationships?

From the outside it can be difficult to understand why a woman does not just leave an abusive relationship. However, the nature of domestic violence creates a number of barriers to leaving which means most women will need a lot of support before they feel able to do so.

Some of the barriers include:

- She may still care for her partner and hope that they will change (many women don't necessarily want to leave the relationship, they just want the violence to stop).
- She may be scared of further violence.
- She may worry about money, and supporting herself and her children.
- She may be isolated from family or friends or be prevented from leaving the home or reaching out for help.
- She may not know where to go.
- She may believe that it is better to stay for the sake of the children (eg wanting a father for her children and/or wishing to prevent the stigma associated with being a single parent).
- Leaving may mean relocating to an unfamiliar area, away from family and friends.
- Difficulties with housing and money often force a woman to return to an abusive partner.

There is no evidence to suggest that women from certain communities or cultures are more likely to experience domestic violence than others.

Domestic violence affects women of all ages regardless of race, religious belief or social class.

However, the nature of abuse and the barriers to escaping violent and abusive relationships are not always the same for all women. It can help to be aware of these differences when advising members.

## Black and Asian Women

Below are some of the ways in which the experiences of black minority ethnic women might differ from those of white women:

- Domestic violence may be carried out by extended family members such as a parent or parent-in-law.
- It may include forced marriage.
- It may include female genital mutilation.

Women from black minority ethnic communities may face the following barriers, making it very difficult for them to leave violent relationships:

- Leaving a relationship might mean abandoning or being excluded from the entire community including breaking relationships with family and friends who are not abusive.
- The experience of racism can mean women distrust outside agencies and/or receive poor, less appropriate services or on occasions no services at all.
- There may be a lack of appropriate, alternative refuge accommodation.
- English may not be a first language, making it more difficult to access information or get help.
- Women with insecure immigration status face additional barriers, such as not being able to claim benefits, or the threat of deportation.

## Disabled Women

Disabled women are more likely to experience domestic violence than non-disabled women. They may also face additional barriers to getting support:

- They may be reliant on their abuser for personal care or mobility.
- They may be less able to remove themselves from an abusive situation.
- They may have concerns about leaving their home if it has been specially adapted for them.
- They may be socially isolated – both because of their disability and as a result of their abuser's control of their social relationships.
- They may find it harder to disclose abuse because they have no opportunity to see health or social care professionals without the abuser being present.



## Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans Women

Lesbian, bisexual and trans women may experience abuse from another woman, or from a male partner or former partner.

LBT women may face specific types of domestic abuse, such as:

- Homophobic abuse.
- Threats to 'out' them.
- Preventing or trying to prevent them from coming out, if they want to.
- Pressure to 'act straight'.
- Threats to use their sexuality against them in court, when issues relating to children (eg residence or contact) are being decided.
- Force them to look for a 'cure' from a religious or medical practitioner.

Remember that LGBT people in abusive relationships are entitled to the same rights as people who are being abused within heterosexual relationships. They are also entitled to protection from other 'related persons' which includes family members.

## What are the Effects of Domestic Violence and Abuse?

Domestic violence and abuse affects – and can completely overshadow – all aspects of the lives of those who are experiencing it. Women can be overwhelmed by fear and worry; trapped in a relationship without any obvious way out. Fear, economic dependency, lack of alternative housing and concerns about disrupting their children's lives are barriers which can make women feel trapped with no means of escape.

Women experiencing domestic violence will experience a range of feelings, which may include:

- Fear – of further violence or abuse, the unknown, her safety and the safety of her children.
- She may blame herself, believing that she is at fault and that by changing her behaviour the abuse will stop. Research shows that this is not the case.
- A conflict of emotions. She may love her partner, but hate the violence or abuse. She may live in hope that his good side will reappear.



- She may be dependent upon her partner, emotionally and financially.
- Feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment.
- She may feel resigned and hopeless and find it hard to make decisions about her future.
- She may have low self-esteem and feel too exhausted or unsure to make any decisions.
- Depression – domestic abuse is one of the biggest causes of stress and depression amongst women. Usdaw has produced a range of materials which will help reps support members with depression.

The effects of domestic abuse and violence don't just stop when women leave the house to go to work.

## Why is Domestic Abuse a Workplace Issue?

At first sight, domestic violence and abuse may appear to be a personal issue concerned with people's private lives.

But because domestic violence and abuse is so widespread (affecting 1 in 4 women) many workplaces employ someone who has experienced it directly or indirectly. Therefore as a rep, the chances are you will come across it at some point.

The effects of domestic abuse and violence don't just stop when women leave the house to go to work. They spill over into the workplace and into women's working lives.

Domestic violence is now more widely understood, and employers and Usdaw realise that it can have a damaging effect on business and employee morale.

The effects of domestic violence can have an impact on:

- Punctuality.
- Attendance.
- Health and safety – for example the perpetrator of domestic violence coming to the workplace.
- Work performance and productivity.
- The ability to agree to requests to change hours.

All of the above might result in disciplinary action and therefore threaten job prospects and security and career development.



## Domestic Abuse and Changes to Hours

The Union receives many queries in relation to changes of hours from members suffering domestic abuse. There are a range of reasons that domestic violence may make it difficult or impossible to change hours, for example:

- Work may be a safe place; a change in hours may increase exposure to violence.
- A change in hours may not fit the schedule of the abuser, eg they may expect the member to be at home at certain times.
- They may not want to leave children alone with the abuser.

Understandably, women may be reluctant to explain why they cannot change their hours, which can lead to employers trying to force the change through. This can leave women choosing between changing hours and facing increased violence and abuse at home or losing their job, probably also leading to increased violence at home.

If a member discloses domestic violence, the Union would expect this to be taken seriously by the employer. It is likely to be a valid reason as to why a change is not reasonable, as employers have a duty of care to their employees (see the section on Legal Rights).

## Legal Rights

Women who are experiencing domestic abuse can sometimes face disciplinary action at work because of their sickness absence or time keeping. In these circumstances women may have the following rights:

### 1. **Women who have depression or anxiety as a result of domestic abuse may have rights under the disability discrimination provisions of the Equality Act 2010.**

The woman would have to meet the definition of a disabled person as set out in the Act. For more information see Usdaw's leaflet 'Supporting Disabled Members'. In cases of domestic abuse it is worth exploring whether or not the Usdaw member is entitled to the protection of the Act. This would help because the member will be protected from less favourable treatment and may be entitled to the following:

- An adjustment to sickness absence policy triggers or discounting any absence relating to her disability.
- A change to her hours or place of work.
- Allowing her to be absent during working hours for medical treatment, training or counselling.

Employers also have a duty of care to their employees. They have an increased legal responsibility to any employee who discloses that they may be at risk of harm.

## 2. Women facing domestic violence may also have rights under the sex discrimination provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Where a woman is disciplined for reasons relating to absence or for being persistently late and the reason for her absence or lateness is directly connected with domestic violence then it might be possible to argue this is indirect sex discrimination. This is because women are much more likely to be the victims of domestic violence than men. Rules regarding sickness absence that apply to all workers may therefore put women experiencing domestic violence and abuse at a substantial disadvantage. Employers should be aware of this and must be prepared to 'objectively justify' a decision to discipline a woman for absence or lateness that is directly related to her experience of domestic violence or abuse.

**Employers also have a duty of care to their employees.** They have an increased legal responsibility to any employee who discloses that they may be at risk of harm. This means they must take steps to ensure the safety of domestic violence victims who may be targeted in work.

There are four areas of health and safety law relevant to violence at work:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992.
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995.
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.



## Signs that Domestic Violence May be the Underlying Issue

Whilst it is important to avoid making assumptions, there can be signs that someone may be suffering from domestic violence. Being able to spot the signs, and knowing how to respond can help women who may be having problems at work as a result of domestic violence.

Signs may include:

- Changes in behaviour, eg becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted etc.
- Isolating themselves from colleagues.
- An obsession with timekeeping.
- Secretive regarding home life.
- Worried about leaving children with abuser.
- Visible injuries with unlikely explanations.
- Trying to cover up injuries – eg with make up or clothes she wouldn't usually wear.
- Partner/ex-partner appearing at workplace for no reason.
- Spending an increased amount of time in work for no reason.

## How to Support Members Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Most employees do not want their employer or trade union rep to know about their private lives, but letting someone know about domestic violence can be helpful to both the employee and the employer. The employee may be relieved to be able to confide in someone at work, particularly if by doing so they can explain absences at work or deterioration in their performance.

As a rep, you are not expected to act as a support worker or counsellor, but knowing how to respond, and being aware of sources of help can be the first step in supporting a member experiencing domestic violence.

If you are unsure how to approach a situation, or you would like further support or advice about a specific situation, contact your Area Organiser. The Union recognises that advising members experiencing domestic violence and abuse can be distressing and Usdaw is committed to ensuring that reps also feel properly supported.

If a woman discloses that she is experiencing domestic abuse, following the simple steps outlined below should help to create an environment in which she feels supported and encouraged to open up and seek further help:

- Do not judge her.
- Listen to and believe what she tells you – too often people don't believe a woman when she first discloses abuse as abusers behave very differently in public than in private.
- Reassure her that the abuse is not her fault. Abusers will very often blame the person they abuse to make excuses for their own behaviour and it is not at all uncommon for a woman to start to believe that they are to blame.
- Don't tell her to leave or criticise her for staying – this is a decision that she will need to make in her own time. Women often make several attempts to leave before they do so permanently and safely. It is vital that the Union and employers support them for however long it takes.
- Encourage her to get in touch with a specialist support agency – there is a list of organisations at the end of this leaflet.
- Focus on what support you can give her at work.



It can be difficult to raise the issue of domestic violence and abuse, both for the individual affected and the rep. Signs of domestic violence should not be ignored, but at the same time members shouldn't be pressured into disclosing information that they do not feel comfortable about discussing. If you think that someone may be suffering from domestic violence, it might help to consider the following before you raise it:

- Make sure it is a safe time for the individual to talk – don't try to talk to her when the abuser is present or in front of other colleagues.
- Tell her you are concerned about her and want to help.
- Do not criticise the relationship, or her partner.
- Focus on the abuse and her safety.
- Listen to what she says.

Be sensitive, don't force the issue if she doesn't want to talk, but let her know that you are there to help if she needs support.

Be ready to explain why domestic violence and abuse is a workplace issue. Point out the practical ways in which the Union can help address any problems she might be experiencing at work.

Don't be afraid to make it clear that you do not have all the answers but you can help her find further, professional support if she wants this.

Keep in mind that:

- Domestic violence is a crime – it is unacceptable.
- Domestic violence is very common.
- Domestic violence is very dangerous.
- All women have the right to live without fear of violence and abuse.
- The abuser is solely responsible for their abusive behaviour. The woman is not to blame; violence is a choice an abuser makes. There is no excuse.



## Support in the Workplace

It is important that victims of domestic violence are put in touch with local support organisations trained and equipped to support women in escaping domestic violence and rebuilding their lives.

However, there are also practical steps that employers can take to support someone in this situation. It is important not to assume that once a woman is free from an abusive relationship her problems are over. Surviving domestic violence and abuse is almost certainly likely to have a profound, long lasting impact on a woman's mental and physical health. Any adjustments or support measures that are put in place may need to continue for a long time after she has left the abusive relationship.

Remember, if an employee discloses domestic violence, this puts an enhanced duty of care on the employer to protect their health and safety. They may also have protections under the Equality Act.

Some practical steps that can be put in place at work might include the following:

- Identifying an emergency contact person at work.
- Agreeing an emergency contact in case the company are unable to contact the employee (eg if they do not arrive at work).
- Allowing the individual to use an assumed name at work.
- Alerting security staff in case the perpetrator comes to the workplace.
- Discussing arrangements for travel to and from work.
- Arranging a transfer to another workplace.

- A change of hours or working patterns.
- A change of duties, eg away from customer facing roles.
- A period of time off in order to consult specialist advisors.
- Discounting absence relating to domestic abuse from the review level.
- With the individual's consent advising colleagues on a need to know basis so that appropriate action can be taken if the perpetrator contacts the workplace.
- Revised performance targets.

**NB: You should never disclose domestic violence without the individual's consent. Any changes in the workplace should be supportive of the individual, and made in consultation with her, particularly if they involve informing other people of the abuse.**

## Confidentiality

Disclosing domestic violence is a big step which takes a lot of courage. Women should know that if they do take this step, the information will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Reps and managers should not speak to anyone about the abuse without the express permission of the member. The only time when it may be appropriate to break this confidence is if you believe the member, or her children, are in immediate danger, in which case the police should be contacted.

## Useful Organisations

### Women's Aid

Tel: 0808 2000 247  
24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline.

Web: [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)  
email: [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk)

### Refuge

Provides accommodation and specialist support.

Tel: 0808 2000 247  
24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline.

Web: [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

### GALOP

LGBT anti-violence and abuse charity.

Tel: 0300 999 5428/0800 999 5428  
(Mon/Thurs 10am-8pm  
Tue/Wed/Fri 10am-5pm)

Web: [www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)  
email: [help@galop.org.uk](mailto:help@galop.org.uk)

### Jewish Women's Aid

National freephone helpline and services for Jewish women.

Tel: 0808 801 0500  
(Mon – Thurs 9.30am-9.30pm)

Web: [www.jwa.org.uk](http://www.jwa.org.uk)

### Forced Marriage Helpline

Provided by charity,  
Karma Nirvana.

Tel: 0800 5999 247  
(Mon – Fri 9.30am – 5pm)

Web: [www.karmanirvana.org.uk](http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk)

### Forced Marriage Unit

Helpline operated by the Government's  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

Tel: 020 7008 0151  
(or 0044 20 7008 0151 if you are overseas)

Web: [www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)  
email: [fm@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fm@fco.gov.uk)

### Friends, Families and Travellers

Specific guidance available to download to  
support gypsies and travellers living with  
domestic violence.

Tel: 01273 234 777  
(Mon – Fri 10am – 4.30pm)

Web: [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)  
email: [fft@gypsy-traveller.org](mailto:fft@gypsy-traveller.org)

### The Sharan Project

Lead charity supporting South Asian women  
in the UK experiencing domestic abuse.

Tel: 0844 504 3231

Web: [www.sharan.org.uk](http://www.sharan.org.uk)  
email: [info@sharan.org.uk](mailto:info@sharan.org.uk)





## England

### **Rape Crisis Federation (England and Wales)**

Tel: 0808 802 9999  
(12 noon-2.30pm/7pm-9.30pm 7 days a week)

Web: [www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

### **Southall Black Sisters**

Provides a range of services to Asian and Afro Caribbean women and children who have experienced violence and abuse. Can give telephone advice to women outside of the London Borough of Ealing.

Tel: 0208 571 0800  
(Mon, Wed, Fri 9.30am-4.30pm)

Web: [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)

### **FORWARD (The Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development)**

A campaign and support organisation promoting and safeguarding the health and rights of African girls and women.

Tel: 020 8960 4000

Web: [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)  
email: [support@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:support@forwarduk.org.uk)

### **The Samaritans**

24-hour confidential, emotional support for anyone in a crisis.

Tel: 116 123

Web: [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)  
email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **The Sharan Project**

The leading UK charity supporting South Asian women in the UK.

Tel: 0844 504 3231

Web: [www.sharan.org.uk](http://www.sharan.org.uk)

email: [info@sharan.org.uk](mailto:info@sharan.org.uk)

### **Men's Advice Line**

The Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline offering support, information and practical advice to men experiencing domestic violence.

Tel: 0808 801 0327  
(Mon – Fri 9am-5pm)

Web: [www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)

email: [info@mensadvice.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadvice.org.uk)

### **Respect Phoneline**

Helpline offering information and advice to people who are abusive towards their partners and want help to stop.

Tel: 0808 802 4040  
(Mon – Fri 9am-5pm)

Web: [www.respectphoneline.org.uk](http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk)

email: [info@respectphoneline.org.uk](mailto:info@respectphoneline.org.uk)

## Scotland

### Scottish Women's Aid

Tel: 0800 027 1234 (24-hour)

Web: [www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

### Shakti Women's Aid

Provides help in Scotland for minority ethnic women that have experienced domestic abuse.

Tel: 0131 475 2399

Web: [www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk)

email: [info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk](mailto:info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk)

## Wales

### Welsh Women's Aid

Tel: 0808 80 10 800 (24 hour)

web: [www.welshwomensaid.org](http://www.welshwomensaid.org)

### Black and Asian Women Stepping Out (BAWSO)

BAWSO help black and minority ethnic women in Wales who are experiencing domestic violence.

Tel: 0800 731 8147 (24-hour)

Web: [www.bawso.org.uk](http://www.bawso.org.uk)

## Northern Ireland

### Women's Aid Federation

Tel: 0808 802 1414 (24-hour)

Text 'support' to 07797 805 839

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

email: [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)

## Usdaw Contacts

### Usdaw Legal Services

In addition to the legal assistance provided to members about work-related problems, Usdaw operates a Union Law Scheme that gives free legal advice on other matters arising outside of work. This includes domestic violence. Under the Usdaw Scheme you are entitled to see a solicitor free of charge for initial advice. The solicitor may then take up the case for you. Contact Usdaw's Legal Department at the address/ telephone number below.

Legal Department, Usdaw  
188 Wilmslow Road  
Manchester M14 6LJ

Tel: 0161 224 2804



# Usdaw Contacts

Listed below are the contact names and addresses of the Officials who co-ordinate the Union's equality work in your area.

## South Wales and Western Division

Cardiff Office  
Tel: 029 2073 1131  
email: cardiff@usdaw.org.uk

## Eastern Division

Waltham Cross Office  
Tel: 01992 709280  
email: walthamx@usdaw.org.uk

## Midlands Division

Redditch Office  
Tel: 01527 406290  
email: redditch@usdaw.org.uk

## North Eastern Division

Leeds Office  
Tel: 0113 232 1320  
email: leeds@usdaw.org.uk

## Scottish Division

Glasgow Office  
Tel: 0141 427 6561  
email: glasgow@usdaw.org.uk

## Southern Division

Morden Office  
Tel: 020 8687 5950  
email: morden@usdaw.org.uk

## North West Division

Warrington Office  
Tel: 01925 578050  
email: warrington@usdaw.org.uk

## Equalities Section

Usdaw  
188 Wilmslow Road  
Manchester M14 6LJ  
Tel: 0161 224 2804  
email: equalitymatters@usdaw.org.uk



Improving workers' lives –  
Winning for members  
[www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities)

*Usdaw*

Campaigning  
For Equality