

Domestic abuse, violence against women and sexual violence policy



Introduction

WCVA recognises that domestic abuse, violence against women and sexual violence is a serious issue within society which affects many people, the majority of whom are women, and will take all practical steps to support employees who are victims of domestic abuse. It also recognises that individuals can be exposed to domestic abuse without being abused themselves.

The support provided under this policy, therefore, applies equally to all employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse, whether they are male or female, or are affected by domestic abuse perpetrated against someone close to them.

Definition

The Home Office's definition of domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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 the abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Within this definition controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

Domestic abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partner's property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation, the telephone, and stalking. The use of social media is also a major source of harassment in domestic abuse.

It can also include violence perpetrated by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim/survivor. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects of living with domestic abuse for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. The effects can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance abuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away.

The Home Office's definition is a full definition which recognises that any person can be the victim of domestic abuse: Women and men can be victims of domestic abuse in heterosexual relationships; domestic abuse can also take place in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. People with disabilities can be particularly vulnerable. The inclusion in the definition of violence between family members ensures that issues such as

'honour crimes' are properly reflected. It also acknowledges that children/young people who experience domestic abuse can be victims of domestic abuse. Importantly, however, while the definition accepts that men can also be victims of domestic abuse, the great majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women and their children.

Domestic abuse cuts across age, race, and religion. Domestic abuse is not necessarily a physical act, it can take many forms.

Domestic abuse is not a private matter and can impact greatly on an individual's working life.

National statistics show:

- In over 90% of domestic abuse incidents, a child is present or in an adjacent room.
- 30% of domestic abuse starts, or gets worse, during pregnancy.
- According to the 2009/10 British Crime Survey, the majority (73%) of domestic abuse is carried out by men against women.
- Domestic abuse accounts for almost 25% of all recorded violent crime.
- One in four women will be affected by domestic abuse in their lifetimes.
- Two women a week are killed by their partner or ex-partner in England & Wales.
- 54% of rapes in the UK are committed by a woman's current or former partner.
- Nearly 75% of children on the Child Protection register live in households where domestic abuse occurs.

Research shows that 75% of domestic abuse victims are targeted at work. It is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources, such as phones, email and other means, to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner.

Domestic abuse can cause performance and productivity concerns. The effects of domestic abuse can include decreased productivity, lateness, stress, absenteeism, errors and increased employee turnover.

Research shows:

56% of abused women arrive late for work at least five times a month.

28% leave early at least five days a month.

53% miss at least three days of work a month.

With the statistic that 1 in 4 women (and 1 in 7 men) will experience domestic abuse at some point in their life, it is likely that WCVA may have staff that have or are experiencing domestic abuse (as well as those who are perpetrators of abuse).

Colleagues may also be affected; they may be followed to or from work or subject to questioning about the victim's contact details or location. They may have to cover for other workers while they are off, try to fend off the abuse and fear for their own safety. Furthermore, colleagues may be unaware of the abuse, or not know how to help.

It is also important to recognise that for some the workplace can be a safe haven and provide a route to safety.

Policy statement

WCVA recognises that, statistically, a number of employees may be experiencing domestic abuse in their personal relationships and, through this policy, seeks to provide effective, confidential and sympathetic support to these employees.

There are also a number of policies in place which can be used to provide support to employees experiencing domestic abuse *eg* flexible working scheme, special leave policy.

WCVA realises that employees who are experiencing domestic abuse may not wish to divulge this fact, even in strict confidence, to any other employee of the organisation. A list of various external organisations which can offer support and guidance is, therefore, given in [Appendix A](#).

In the event that the direct effects of domestic abuse extend into the workplace *eg* by unwelcome visits from an abusive partner, WCVA has a duty of care to protect both the abused person and their colleagues. For that reason, WCVA may, depending on the individual circumstances, arrange for police involvement in such situations.

WCVA will ensure that this policy is widely publicised and made freely available to all employees.

Support for employees experiencing domestic abuse

Any employee who is experiencing domestic abuse and feels that WCVA can offer the support they need, should speak to their director, group coordinator, line manager and/or HR. As outlined, this matter will be dealt with on a strictly confidential basis and only those with a 'need to know' will be made aware of the situation.

There are a number of practical and supportive measures that can be taken in the workplace to ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse are able to work in a safe and supported workplace ([Appendix B](#)).

Individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse often require taking time off work in order to visit solicitors, banks, schools, support agencies *etc* and this can be accommodated through WCVA's Policy on Special Leave or flexible working scheme. Such arrangements should be made, in confidence, through the employee's line manager or HR, who may then discuss the matter with the line manager.

WCVA recognises that individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse may also require to arrange to meet with third parties *eg* support agencies, police *etc*, for short periods during normal working hours and can accommodate requests from staff to hold such meetings on WCVA's premises. Again, such arrangements should be made, in confidence, through the employee's line manager or HR, who may then discuss the matter with the line manager.

WCVA will not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic violence, in terms of their existing employment or career development.

Confidentiality

WCVA recognises that, where an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, confidentiality must be strictly observed by all parties concerned and that any breach of confidentiality could have severe repercussions on the person experiencing domestic abuse. For that reason, WCVA will treat any breach of confidentiality committed by an employee under the provisions of the appropriate employee conduct procedure, in which case the range of penalties open to the organisation will include dismissal.

The only exceptions to this would be where third parties *eg* children or vulnerable adults, were at risk and in such instances the decision to inform an external body would be taken by the Director and or Head of Human Resources.

The need for confidentiality generally includes ensuring that an employee's address, telephone number and work location is not identified. To protect the confidentiality of employees, WCVA will ensure that any disclosures which are required under its data protection registration, or its responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act, do not have the potential to compromise employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse. WCVA will also ensure that, in cases where an employee is known to suffer from domestic

abuse, only those other employees who 'need to know' about the employee's situation are informed.

Perpetrators

WCVA's approach to domestic abuse includes a commitment to consider taking action against any employee who may be a perpetrator of domestic violence and who demonstrates any actions that may be deemed inappropriate and impacts on the employee's role.

Examples of where the WCVA may take action via the Disciplinary Policy:

- Employees who misuse WCVA resources (time, telephones, fax, email or other means) to threaten, harass or abuse a current or former partner or any other person;
- Employees who demonstrate any form of violence, threats or harassment, or other forms of abuse towards their partner, or someone with whom they have had a close relationship when at work, or from work, or representing the WCVA. This includes employees who use WCVA resources to threaten, harass or abuse a partner or family member;
- Employees who intentionally misuse their authority or position to enable abuse to continue or encourage others to do so, during the course of their employment or when representing WCVA;
- Employees who undertake any action or are involved in an incident that brings WCVA into disrepute.

The Disciplinary Policy outlines the informal and formal procedures to be adopted if such allegations are made.

Perpetrators who recognise they have a problem can access confidential support from an appropriate agency.

Roles/responsibilities

Line managers and Human Resources

When dealing with an employee who is or has experienced domestic abuse, the Line managers and Head of Human Resources should be prepared to:

- Raising awareness of domestic abuse via team meetings;
- Listen, reassure and take seriously what is being disclosed without the need to ask for proof, providing a sensitive and non-judgemental approach;
- Prioritising confidentiality wherever possible (taking into account concerns about children or vulnerable adults); ensure all discussions take place in private and are kept confidential in all but the most exceptional circumstances. Such circumstances may arise where there is a need to share information with appropriate professionals and relevant people in a variety of instances including the protection of children and vulnerable adults, the prevention of crime or the apprehension, prosecution of crime;
- Fully supporting employees responding in a sensitive way and ensure the employee is provided with up-to-date information and aware of all the options open to them *eg* time off work to make personal arrangements, seek specialist advice or access the criminal justice system;
- Encouraging the disclosure/discussion of domestic abuse and identifying the appropriate support and respecting their right to decide;
- Taking action against perpetrators of domestic abuse, including support to an employee who is seeking help to address their behaviour.
- Understanding that the employee may not wish to approach their line manager and may prefer to involve a third party such as a colleague, Head of Human Resources.

- Recognising that the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process.
- Discussing measures to prioritise safety in the workplace, ensure that the employee's safety and wellbeing is prioritised;
- Being aware of what support is available and explore these options with the employee. This may address leave and time off work, financial issues and health effects, offer employees who feel that domestic abuse is having an impact on their self-esteem to attend one to one counselling sessions through Employee Assisted programme (EAP). As this would be on the basis of a self referral, the employee will not be asked to tell why they wish to attend such sessions and the counsellor is bound by professional ethics which will ensure total confidentiality

WCVA attaches the greatest importance to health and safety matters and undertakes to provide a safe and healthy working environment, in compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and all other relevant regulations. All managers have a responsibility for the welfare and the health and safety of employees at work.

All managers must be aware that domestic abuse can influence the health and self-confidence of people who may be reticent to confide in others, or seek help. They should, therefore, be alerted to the signs of possible domestic abuse *eg* where an employee is depressed, distracted and/or lacking in self-confidence, which may be reflected in work performance, while being aware that domestic abuse may not always be the reason behind such conditions. Any sign of physical injury, particularly if these are repeated, should also be noted.

All managers should recognise the importance of employee welfare and appreciate that, by supporting an employee who may be the victim of domestic abuse; they will potentially contribute to an improvement in service delivery and a reinforcement of good management/employee relations.

All managers should ensure that employees are aware of the issues surrounding domestic abuse by bringing this policy to their attention.

This can include practical steps to encourage the disclosure and discussion of abuse and identify appropriate support. Managers should endeavour to support those experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, non-judgemental and confident manner. They can also assist in recording details of incidents in the workplace. (Example of questions are included in the [Appendix C](#))

Employees

Employees are responsible for:

- Making themselves aware of the content of this policy;
- Taking basic steps to assist friends and colleagues in gaining confidence to tackle and report the problems that they might experience, where they feel able.

Human Resources

Human Resources are responsible for:

- Undertaking training in domestic abuse in order to understand the risks and consequences in the workplace and how to manage such situations;
- Reviewing other policies, procedures and practices that are linked and ensuring they do not adversely affect the implementation of the domestic abuse workplace policy;

WCVA will ensure that this Domestic abuse, violence against women and sexual violence Policy is included in our staff learning and development programme, and is widely publicised and made freely available to all staff.

Review

November 2018 (Review date: November 2020)

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Appendix A

Local and national support agencies

Below is a list of key agencies locally and nationally that could assist any victim of domestic violence and abuse. Specialist support agencies are included for people with wider needs. With the employee's consent you can telephone them and ask them to contact the employee on a safe telephone number and at a safe time.

[Welsh Women's Aid](#)

Welsh Women's Aid is a national umbrella organisation representing local women's aid groups situated throughout Wales. Welsh Women's Aid can provide specialist training, support and information to member groups and outside organisations.

[Wales live fear free helpline](#)

The Wales domestic abuse helpline offers free confidential information and support to women experiencing domestic abuse. It is also an information service for people who are concerned about someone they know, and for agencies that need information on the support available in Wales for adults and children.

[Black Association of Women Step Out \(BAWSO\)](#)

BAWSO are a specialist agency, which can provide culturally sensitive and appropriate information and services to black and other minority ethnic groups.

[Citizen Advice Bureau](#)

The Citizens Advice Bureau Service offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice on a range of issues including debt, benefits, housing and legal matters. Advisers can help you to fill out forms, write letters, negotiate with creditors and represent you at court.

[Corporate alliance against domestic violence](#)

The corporate alliance aims to raise awareness and reduce the social and economic impact of domestic violence in the workplace. Working together their vision is to create a work environment where employees have the opportunity to seek practical support and advice and, ultimately, take positive action to end domestic violence. Membership is open to any employer, trade union or representative body in the UK.

[Refuge](#)

Refuge is one of the largest single provider of specialist accommodation and services to women and children escaping domestic violence, supporting over 1,000 women and children every day.

[Respect](#)

Respect is the UK association for professionals working with domestic violence perpetrators and associated support services. The organisation's key aim is to increase the safety of those experiencing domestic violence through promoting effective interventions with perpetrators.

[Men's Advice Line - help for male victims of domestic violence](#)

Confidential helpline offering support, information and practical advice to male victims of domestic violence.

[Dyn Project](#)

The Dyn Project works across Wales to support men who experience domestic abuse.

[Forced Marriage Unit](#)

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) is raising awareness about forced marriage.

[Victim Support](#)

Victim support is a national charity giving free and confidential help to victims of crime, witnesses, their family, friends and anyone else affected across England and Wales.

[Mind Cymru](#)

Mind campaign vigorously to create a society that promotes good mental health and that challenges mental health stigma.

Appendix B

Examples of practical support in the workplace

- Identify a work contact for support and an emergency contact should the organisation be unable to contact the employee
- Use existing policies to allow the individual to change work patterns or workload and allow more flexible working or special leave to facilitate any practical arrangements
- Provide information and contact details for the Employee Assisted Programme and the services provided by Care First
- Divert phone calls and email messages
- Alert reception and security staff if the abuser is known to come to the workplace
- Provide a photograph of the abuser to reception
- Check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home
- Where possible arrange a parking space in the car park
- Review content of personal information, such as new addresses, bank details *etc*
- Review the employee's next of kin information - the ex-partner may still be listed
- Where practical, consider offering a temporary or permanent change of workplace, working times/patterns
- Where practical, offer changes in specific duties, such as not expecting the employee to answer telephones or sit on reception
- Move the employee out of public view *ie* ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows
- Ensure that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area
- Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the violent partner/ex-partner telephones or visits the workplace
- Keep a record of any incidents of abuse on the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the employee by their partner/ex-partner.

Appendix C

Asking difficult questions

Indirect questions

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should ask the employee indirect questions, to help establish a relationship with the employee and develop empathy. For example:

- How are you doing at the moment? Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself, is anything the matter?
- Is everything all right at work?
- Are there any problems or reason that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence/under-performance at work?
- Is everything all right at home?
- Are you being looked after properly? Is your partner taking care of you?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

Direct questions:

The manager should ask 'direct questions' to prompt the employee to discuss any possible experiences of domestic abuse, if they are displaying signs of physical assault or injury. The following questions must be asked with great sensitivity and care.

- "I am sorry to ask you this and I don't wish to cause you any offence, but I notice that you have a number of bruises/cuts/burns *etc.* I know that in the UK 1 in 4 women, experience domestic abuse in the home, are you in a relationship where you are experiencing abuse?"

The following are some examples of follow up direct questions, which it might be useful to ask the employee, once it has been established that there maybe or is a problem related to domestic abuse:

- Have you ever been slapped/kicked/punched *etc.* by your partner?
- Do you feel frightened of your partner or someone else at home?
- Does your partner lose their temper with you? If so what happens to you as a result?
- Has your partner threatened to hurt you or your children?
- Does your partner get jealous of you seeing friends, talking to other people, going out? If so what happens?
- Does your partner blame alcohol or drugs for the behaviour towards you?