

New Research Reveals Employer 'NIMBYism' On Domestic Abuse

Submitted by: The Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse

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New research released today (29 November 2017) reveals that despite the latest Office for National Statistics figures on domestic violence

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearend>

which estimate that almost two million UK adults have experienced some sort domestic abuse in the last year, only one in 20 medium and large UK organisations have a specific policy or guideline to cover domestic abuse among their workforce.

The research, Domestic Violence and Abuse: Working together to transform responses in the workplace

(https://www.vodafone.com/content/dam/vodafone-images/foundation/55376_Vodafone_domestic_violence_report_AW5_V2.pdf

undertaken by Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse and Ipsos MORI, was launched in London at the first conference to be held by the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA)

(<https://eida.org.uk/>).

Nearly three-quarters of HR leads in medium and large UK businesses surveyed (74%) agree companies can empower victims by giving them guidance on how to deal with domestic abuse and only 9% agree it is a personal matter and not appropriate for employees to raise with their employers. Yet, the research reveals there is a perception that at a senior level within organisations it is not seen as an issue that affects their employees. Just 6% strongly agree and 20% tend to agree it is an issue that is on the agenda for HR policymakers.

Despite the high levels of abuse the ONS figures reveal, the research found there was an average of only 0.5 disclosures of domestic abuse per medium and larger UK organisation in the last 12 months.

Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director at the Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse, says: "Over the last few decades we've seen lots of improvements in responses to domestic abuse. But effective responses in the workplace are lacking. The time has now come for more workplaces to step up and join the movement to end domestic abuse."

Elizabeth Filkin CBE (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Filkin), who chairs the EIDA steering group, says: "Despite 86% of HR leads agreeing that employers have a duty of care to provide support to employees on the issue of domestic abuse, it is clear from the research that domestic abuse appears to sit outside organisations' more commonly developed set of 'duty of care' policies and guidelines.

But in those companies which believe domestic abuse has had an impact in their organisation in the past 12 months, 58% say an employee's productivity has declined, 56% that it has caused absenteeism and 46% that it had an impact on other colleagues' productivity. A quarter of these organisations believe that harassment/abuse has occurred at the workplace

"Given the cost of domestic abuse to business at a time when the UK's productivity is falling, it is more important than ever that employers do more to tackle the issue, which is why the EIDA came into existence."

One organisation the report cites which is actively engaged in helping with the issue is EIDA member

Gentoo, a housing organisation in the North East of England. It takes a proactive approach to domestic abuse in terms of its customers and employees. It has a dedicated domestic abuse business manager, provides a free legal clinic for staff (accessed by over 70 people since 2015), provides access to a domestic violence perpetrator programme for staff and its clients, allows paid leave to attend the perpetrator programme and the Freedom programme for victim-survivors, or to attend court or other appointments. It has 25 trained domestic and sexual violence champions. All managers attended a mandatory 'Justice for Jane' session while an employee leaflet recognises that: "For some staff, the workplace is a safe haven and the only place that offers a route to safety."

The new research comes as the Government consults on the scope and content of a new 'landmark' Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech in June 2017 and which includes the establishment of a Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner. The Home Secretary has stated that tackling domestic abuse "requires a multipronged approach which includes legislation, a concerted police response and a culture shift across agencies and within our communities". This provides the opportunity to emphasise the role of employers, and the importance of the employee-employer relationship, in helping to support those experiencing domestic abuse and engage in prevention activities.

The research report offers nine recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Introduce a new provision in the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill which amends the current law so that there is no minimum qualifying period before being able to ask for flexible working for those experiencing domestic abuse; and those experiencing domestic abuse may make more than one application for flexible working in each year.

Recommendation 2: The Government should introduce a minimum entitlement of 10 days' paid leave in any year to an employee experiencing domestic abuse within the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill.

Recommendation 3: The statutory guidelines on Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) should include mandatory education on domestic abuse and its effects.

Recommendation 4: Ensure the role of the new Commissioner extends to reviewing and monitoring employer action, including in the private sector.

Recommendation 5: A UK National Resource Centre should be established to consolidate and share best practice.

Recommendation 6: A national campaign should be developed to raise awareness of domestic abuse in the workplace and signpost to local support.

Recommendation 7: Greater consideration, training, and awareness raising is needed in the UK around health and safety responsibilities in relation to domestic abuse, including risk assessments of perpetrators.

Recommendation 8: Given the central role of employee assistance programmes (EAPs) to some organisations, greater partnership working needs to take place.

Recommendation 9: Researchers should move beyond 'making the case' and seek funding for longitudinal work in partnership with organisations to develop the 'what works' literature in this field.

Employers with any questions about the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse, or that would like to join, should fill in the form at <https://eida.org.uk/contact/> (<https://eida.org.uk/contact/>).

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Notes for Editors

200 HR directors / leads from large- and medium-sized organisations in the UK were interviewed by Ipsos MORI using CATI between 19 June and 14 August 2017. The sample was designed to be representative of UK organisations of >49 employees. Data have been weighted to be representative of the UK medium and large business population by overall sector and region. Within the overall sectors, a broad cross section of industry sub-groups was achieved.

About the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse

The Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse is a network of more than 170 companies and public-sector organisations which have come together, to exchange information about best practice, and to encourage, promote and develop action to help staff who are enduring domestic abuse, or who are perpetrators. It holds network meetings once a quarter at a central London venue on topics suggested by member employers.

About Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse

Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) is dedicated to the production of world-leading, innovative research to advance knowledge about violence and abuse and improve professional and societal responses.