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Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission

# Domestic abuse is your business

Bridget's story – the business case for having a policy



## Who we are

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.

## Contact us

If you would like more information please contact:

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This guidance and supporting materials are available online at [www.equalityhumanrights.com/yourbusiness](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/yourbusiness)

You can also download from our website:

- Guidance for developing a domestic abuse workplace policy
- Domestic abuse is your business:
  - Employer campaign pack
  - Trade union campaign pack

You can also view a short three minute digital story.

Bridget has been in a relationship with John for 15 years during which time she has had two children. Throughout their relationship Bridget has experienced, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. For Bridget, work is a place of refuge where she can escape the abuse, interact with others and maintain a sense of self worth. Bridget has a strong commitment to work and currently holds a managerial position. She has been employed by a public authority for over ten years but after a serious physical assault, Bridget takes a week of sick leave to recover.

## Case study 1

On her return to work, Bridget's manager approaches her to discuss her recent absence. Bridget's manager begins to question her about the recent absence in an insensitive manner. As a result of this approach and attitude, Bridget feels uncomfortable in disclosing her situation and states that she was ill with the flu.

The abuse intensifies and Bridget is forced to take more time off sick. She becomes withdrawn at work and her productivity deteriorates. Colleagues notice a change in her clothes and make up. Even on warm days Bridget wears long sleeves to cover the bruises on her body. Yet, Bridget does not feel able to disclose her situation with her line manager.

John becomes paranoid about Bridget coming into contact with other men at work. He starts to constantly phone and appear unannounced at her workplace. Bridget becomes anxious, on edge and finds it difficult to concentrate on her work.

## Case study 2

On her return to work, Bridget's manager approaches her to discuss her recent absence. Bridget's manager delicately and sensitively enquires about her wellbeing. During this discussion, the manager says she has noticed a change in Bridget's behaviour and is concerned about her. Feeling encouraged by her manager's approach and not wanting the abuse to interfere with her work, Bridget decides to disclose her situation.

Bridget's manager recommends that her trade union representative be informed. Bridget agrees and her trade union representative emphasises that her employers are committed to tackling domestic abuse. Furthermore, they perceive it as a health and safety matter and an infringement of women's human rights.

The representative also points out that, to provide better outcomes for staff through the Gender Equality Duty, a domestic abuse workplace policy has been developed.

Bridget finds that John's incessant phone calls are a huge distraction, but she knows not answering the phone or speaking to him will increase the abuse when she gets home. Bridget also feels if her colleagues discover her situation, she will be stigmatised and her managerial capabilities questioned. She also fears that it could hinder her career progression.

John continues to turn up at Bridget's workplace where, on one occasion he verbally abuses and threatens her. The police are called and John is arrested, but Bridget refuses to press charges. Some colleagues become afraid for their safety and wellbeing. These incidents affect both Bridget and her colleagues' morale, causing enormous disruption within the workplace and affecting overall productivity. Colleagues' also start to negatively judge Bridget's inability to keep her 'private life' out of the workplace.

Colleagues start making comments about Bridget's relationship and regularly ask her "why don't you just leave him" or "why do you let him treat you like that?"

These comments make Bridget question her self-worth and places more pressure on her. As a result, she becomes more withdrawn and increasingly isolated at work. Furthermore, Bridget further suspects that her colleagues and manager are questioning her competence.

Seeing that support is available a meeting is arranged with Bridget's line manager and a trained specialist from HR. During the meeting Bridget is given the opportunity to talk about her situation and her employer reassures her that everything will be kept confidential.

Bridget is not pressured into taking any course of action during the meeting but is informed of the options available to her, such as flexible working and compassionate leave. Bridget is given the contact details of various support and specialist domestic abuse organisations.

Bridget's manager also states that by addressing domestic abuse as a workplace issue, the organisation is able to send a message that abuse of any kind will not be tolerated and is not dismissed simply as a private matter.

A risk assessment is conducted which establishes what measures can be taken to improve Bridget's and her colleague's safety within the workplace. During the assessment Bridget indicates that she is considering leaving John. However, she is worried that John will come to the workplace to find her.

After another period of absence, Bridget's manager confronts her saying that she is aware of what is going on and wants Bridget to stop her partner from coming to the workplace. Her manager also warns her that there will be serious consequences if she continues to let her 'private life' impact on her workplace duties. Bridget feels very alone and her anxiety increases.

John continues to physically abuse Bridget. He starts keeping her awake at night and prevents her from leaving the house in the morning. This makes Bridget late for work on a number of days each week. Eventually, Bridget's line manager says she will face disciplinary proceedings for her absenteeism, perpetual lateness, low productivity and overall workplace disruption. As a result Bridget's trade union is contacted.

Other staff see how Bridget is treated and how her experience is seen as a 'private matter'. This leads to reduced workforce morale as it is thought the employer is not interested in the welfare of staff.

This thinking stops Bridget's work colleagues seeking help about further perceived 'private matters' such as work related stress and mental health conditions.

The assessment highlights aspects of safety which could be improved. Bridget is given a secure car parking space close to the office that is well lit and monitored by CCTV. She also agrees to let HR brief security of her situation and for her telephone calls to be screened.

Bridget is also informed that through Occupational Health, the authority offers counselling either in-house or with another organisation. She indicates that she would like the opportunity to talk to someone.

After discussing her situation with the counsellor, Bridget decides to leave John. She then contacts her trade union representative and HR to inform them of her decision to leave the relationship.

Bridget explains that she will need to have some time off work through special leave. During this time she is able to meet with a solicitor and attend outreach support services offered by Welsh Women's Aid. This time off also allows Bridget to arrange property viewings without John becoming suspicious.

Leading up to and throughout the disciplinary proceedings, the abuse continues to escalate. Up until this point John has never hit Bridget in front of the children or directed his abuse at them. But now she is concerned about her children's safety.

When police intervene following an incident of abuse, Bridget flees the family home in the middle of the night with her children. She seeks refuge in secure accommodation. Having fled her home with little preparation, this seriously impacts on Bridget's ability to concentrate at work. While housed in a refuge, she takes two weeks off work sick to recuperate and because she is afraid that John will find her at work.

Bridget struggles to deal with the demands of childcare, trying to secure alternative accommodation and seek legal advice. Even though she tries to prevent the situation impacting on her job, her productivity is affected even more.

On returning to work, Bridget's manager comments that she has made no attempt to prevent her 'private life' impacting on her workplace duties.

After a couple of weeks searching Bridget finds a suitable place to live. This allows Bridget to leave John and to settle the children. HR also arrange for Bridget's pay to be paid into her new account, not her joint account. Soon after Bridget leaves, John appears at her workplace. He tries to gain access, but security officers threaten to call the police and he quickly leaves. John then tries to contact Bridget at work but her calls are screened. Each of these episodes is recorded by security and the information is passed on to HR.

Because of John's behaviour, Bridget's colleagues become aware of the situation. Due to the previous awareness campaigns and training, they all are able to offer Bridget tremendous emotional support. This clearly demonstrates to staff that support is available for other perceived private matters such as work related stress and mental health conditions

Although John stops harassing Bridget, the authority does not become complacent. They continue to conduct regular risk assessments and keep in close communication with her. This ensures they can continue providing the necessary support and protection.

As a result of the workplace support, Bridget feels safe at work and becomes more focused on her work duties. The workplace support allows Bridget to remain in employment while planning and escaping the abuse.

She recommends that Bridget's employment is terminated and Bridget is dismissed from her job.

Bridget is encouraged by her trade union representative to take her case to an employment tribunal on the grounds of unfair dismissal.

Feeling very let down by her employers and disappointed that they were not able to support her through such a difficult time, Bridget decides to proceed with lodging a claim.

After a long and traumatic tribunal, Bridget wins her case and the public authority is instructed to pay compensation.

This tribunal case has economic implications, but also results in unwanted negative publicity for the public authority. In addition the authority incurs recruitment and training costs associated with hiring a new employee and having lost an experienced member of staff.

This provides her with financial security and allows her to retain a positive sense of self.

As a result of this support, Bridget becomes more committed to her organisation and is enthusiastic about her job. What's more, the authority is able to retain a valuable, highly qualified and competent employee.

## Costs of case study 1

### Specific costs relating to Bridget = £155,255

Five weeks sick pay<sup>i</sup> 5 x £545 per week

Low morale<sup>ii</sup>

The cost of presenteeism<sup>iii</sup> £605 per annum per employee (cost associated with mental health).

Employer recruitment and training costs<sup>iv</sup> £6,125

Costs associated with disciplinary action (Unknown)

Trade union involvement (Unknown)

Employer tribunal costs<sup>v</sup> £80,500

Compensation for unfair dismissal<sup>vi</sup> £65,300

Negative publicity (Unknown costs)

## Costs of case study 2

Specific costs relating to Bridget = £745

Specific costs relating to a whole workforce = £17,450 (Based on initial 1<sup>st</sup> year costs)

One week sick pay<sup>vii</sup> £545

Provision of counselling services through Occupation Health<sup>viii</sup> £200

Flexible working hours (Unknown)

Development & implementation of domestic abuse workplace policy<sup>ix</sup> £3,500

Security costs<sup>x</sup> virtually nil

Domestic abuse awareness raising within the workplace, poster campaign, marketing and public relations etc<sup>xi</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> year cost **£6,550** then **£4,500** per year.

Specialist training of Human Resource personnel and management with regard to administering workplace policies around domestic abuse<sup>xii</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> year cost **£7,400** then **£6,900** per year

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<sup>i</sup>Based on the average gross full-time weekly earnings for female managers and senior officials in Wales. Source: National Statistics Wales. 2008. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: SB 80/2008, Cardiff. According to the Home Office two in ten victims of domestic abuse had to take a month or more off work in the last year. Source: Roe, S. 2010. Home Office Statistical Bulletin Intimate Violence: 2008/09. London.

<sup>ii</sup> Qualitative research conducted in the US highlights the negative impact that domestic abuse has on moral within the workplace. For example, colleagues can become resentful if they perceive an increase in their workload as a result of an individuals low productivity due to domestic abuse. Source: Duffy, M. Scott, K. and O'Leary-Kelly, A. 2005. 'The radiating effects of intimate partner violence on occupational stress and well being', in P. Perrewe and D. Ganster (eds.) Exploring Interpersonal Dynamics: Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being, Vol 4. Oxford: Elsevier.

<sup>iii</sup> It is difficult to calculate the financial cost of presenteeism per employee, however, according to the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health the annual costs of presenteeism attributable to mental health problems is approximately £605 per employee. Source: Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health. 2007. Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business Case: Policy Paper 8. London. Qualitative research indicates that an individual's concentration and ability to focus on their workplace duties is adversely affected by domestic abuse and workplace harassment. Source: Beecham, D. 2010. The Impact of Intimate Partner Abuse on Women's Experiences of the Workplace: A Qualitative Study. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Warwick.

<sup>iv</sup> Based on the cost of advertising, recruiting and labour turnover Source: CIPD, 2009. Recruitment, Retention and Turnover Report, London).

<sup>v</sup> This figure relates to the cost associated with a bullying tribunal, however, it is indicative of the costs incurred by an employer when cases go to tribunal. This cost includes, legal costs, administration, managerial costs, investigation costs and the cost of staff/management time. Source: Kamaljeet, J. GMB National Equalities Officer, GMB Trade Union, London).

<sup>vi</sup> As of the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010 this figure is the maximum compensation that can be granted to an individual for loss suffered as a result of unfair dismissal. Source: Citizens Advice Bureau, Employment in England, Dismissal [http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/your\\_money/employment/dismissal.htm](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/your_money/employment/dismissal.htm)

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<sup>vii</sup> Based on the average gross full-time weekly earnings for female managers and senior officials in Wales. Source: National Statistics Wales. 2008. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: SB 80/2008, Cardiff. According to Basildon Council the number of days off sick per worker has fallen from a high of 12.2 to a low of 8.2 days per person, per year as a result of implementing a series of policies, one being a domestic abuse workplace policy. Source: Basildon Council. 2009. In the News:- Council Cuts Sick Days [www2.basildon.gov.uk/Website2/newsroom.nsf/PR30/A1BA3597E923704A8025754A00568880?OpenDocument](http://www2.basildon.gov.uk/Website2/newsroom.nsf/PR30/A1BA3597E923704A8025754A00568880?OpenDocument).

<sup>viii</sup> Based on 4 sessions per person. Source: Martin, R. Domestic Violence and Abuse Service Devon County Council, Devon.

<sup>ix</sup> The initial development cost includes: six days Human Resource Lead at £350 per day, three days Domestic Abuse Lead at £350 per day, and one day Union consultation at £350 per day. **Total cost: £3,500**. In addition there is a cost of £350 per annum associated with the annual review of the workplace policy. Source: Martin, R. 2010. Domestic Violence and Abuse Service Devon County Council, Devon.

<sup>x</sup> Security Costs include telephone screening, escorting staff to their vehicle, enabling parking close to building (Source: Martin, R. 2010. Domestic Violence and Abuse Service Devon County Council, Devon.

<sup>xi</sup> This is the initial set-up costs associated with the development of materials and printing materials which includes three days script writing and photography at £350 per day, 2000 copies of 5 types of materials i.e. posters, handouts etc £1000. There is an annual cost of promoting awareness within the workplace, approximately 12 days of PR/Marketing per annum at £350 per day = £4,200 + £300 reprinting costs. Source: Martin, R. 2010. Domestic Violence and Abuse Service Devon County Council, Devon.

<sup>xii</sup> This is based on initial management training days at £500 per day = £1,500 and annual cost of delivering 12 training days per year, including administration costs, venue, materials etc = **£6,900** or £575 per day. Source: Martin, R. 2010. Domestic Violence and Abuse Service Devon County Council, Devon.