

## BRIEFING 3

# Domestic violence at work

Taking action to end violence and harassment in the world of work requires a good understanding of the most important issues for transport workers, particularly for women transport workers.

This transport specific toolkit on C190 – the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) violence and harassment convention – consists of eight briefings which focus on aspects of violence and harassment that affect transport workers most significantly.

The briefings are available as separate documents, so that unions, officials, activists and members can focus on the issue or issues most important to them. Briefings can be hand-picked or the toolkit can be used in its entirety.

**You are commencing Briefing 3: Domestic violence at work.**

## Understanding the issues

Domestic violence is violence and harassment that takes place between members of the family or domestic unit. It can also be between current or former partners. It can take many different forms of violence or harassment – physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, economic, online, stalking and/or coercive control. Perpetrators use violence and harassment to maintain power.

*“My grandfather and my father did control women in our family...I feel that I also need to control my wife to maintain the tradition and keep our family intact.” – Male Perpetrator<sup>27</sup>*

Domestic violence can affect anyone, but women are more at risk due to the inequality between them and men, who are predominantly the perpetrators. Women who face intersectional discrimination experience increased inequality, may be disproportionately affected, and face additional barriers to getting support.

*“Some days he wouldn’t let me go to work, and when I was allowed to go to work, he’d call and he’d threaten me...I would go into work covered in bruises” – Domestic Violence Survivor, Canada<sup>28</sup>*

Worldwide, approximately one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate-partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in

their lifetime, and most is intimate-partner violence. In some national studies, this figure can be as high as 70%.<sup>29</sup> According to 2018 Equality testing survey by the ITF revealed that 57% of women transport workers had experienced domestic violence.<sup>30</sup>

## Domestic violence has physical and mental impacts for workers. It also affects the wider world of work.

Domestic violence may negatively impact work performance. Workers may find it difficult getting to work, be late for work, or take time off, leading sometimes to job loss. Perpetrators can also locate their victim at work. An International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) study in the Philippines found that nearly 84% of those who had experienced domestic violence reported that it affected their attendance at work.<sup>31</sup> A study by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) also found that 82% said it negatively impacted their work performance, and 38% of those who experienced domestic violence said it impacted their ability to get to work.<sup>32</sup>

The effects of domestic violence often stay for years after the abuse, limiting women’s economic empowerment. Women with a history of domestic violence have a more disrupted work history and are more likely to be employed in more precarious working arrangements.

## Domestic violence is a workplace issue says ground-breaking Indian study

A study on domestic violence in India led by ITF rail and road transport affiliates of more than 15,500 workers (98% women) found:

- 75% reported direct or indirect experiences of domestic violence in their lifetime
- Nine out of 10 women said that experiences of domestic violence affected their ability to work
- 74% of respondents reported that workplace support can reduce the effects of domestic violence on workers' work lives.<sup>33</sup>

To find out more, watch a film on the study [here](#) or read the Executive Summary of the report [here](#).

*“The report’s findings are clear: domestic violence is a workplace issue, and it’s time that governments, employers, unions and civil society organisations establish proactive practices, agreements and legislation to address the impact of domestic violence at work.” – Sheela Naikwade, MSTKS, India and ITF Women Transport Workers’ Committee member<sup>34</sup>*

Domestic violence also impacts co-workers, who may feel worried or distracted and face safety risks from abusive perpetrators at the workplace.

An ITF study in 2019 conducted with men engaging in domestic violence in Maharashtra, India, found that when perpetrators of domestic violence come to work, their work performance and productivity is negatively impacted. It also impacts the workplace environment and safety for all workers, including by causing workplace accidents which puts the safety of passengers and fellow workers at risk, and costs the employer.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

*“Once I went to work after a conflict with wife, I was lost while driving and the tire exploded. Not only the vehicle got damaged but since tire exploded in the middle of Ghat [valley] it could have been a very serious accident. I am lucky that my life was saved...Accidents happened many times, twice it happened in the same month due to this tension.”  
– (Driver F)<sup>lxxxv</sup>*

*“I can’t concentrate at work. Once I met an accident while there were passengers on board. Me and a passenger got injured in that accident.” – (Auto Rickshaw Driver A)<sup>lxxxvi</sup>*

Domestic violence also has economic impacts for businesses and governments:

- In Switzerland, intimate partner violence costs an estimated CHF 164 million per year.<sup>35</sup>
- In Canada, the cost was estimated at CAD 7.4 billion.<sup>36</sup>
- In the USA, the Department of Labor reports that survivors of domestic violence lose nearly eight million days of paid work per year, resulting in a \$1.8 billion loss in productivity for employers.<sup>37</sup>

There is stigma attached to domestic violence. Despite its impact on the world of work, many continue to believe that domestic violence is a private issue that should not be dealt with in the workplace.

Unions often do not see it as a union issue. Some societies treat survivors as culprits (victim-blaming). Survivors overwhelmingly blame themselves. Some even consider domestic violence to be ‘normal’ or justified because of incorrect myths about why domestic violence happens. These myths are often reinforced by the media.

*“If man is under stress, he commits violence. If woman does any mistake in household work then it’s okay to beat her.” – Male perpetrator<sup>38</sup>*

*“It is a family... such incidences are going to happen...not a big deal. A man can slap his wife if she does any mistake.” – Male perpetrator<sup>39</sup>*

There is also a lack of confidential spaces for women to share their experiences. Legal redress is often difficult, or impossible, which means often nothing is done. Many women do not report domestic violence because of these social and institutional prejudices, leading to a culture of silence. But these myths are shaped by the inequality between women and men. Domestic violence is never justified.

### **Domestic Violence is a workplace issue**

Domestic violence is not a private issue. It is a workplace and a union issue. The world of work can help to deal with domestic violence.

Work provides financial security for workers to escape abusive relationships, and unions can help to protect the jobs of workers experiencing domestic violence.

Work can be a safe space for workers to speak freely and can provide information about support services. A study in Australia found that 78% of respondents believed that workplace entitlements could reduce the impact of domestic violence in the workplace.<sup>40</sup> Work can be a place to refer perpetrators for counselling or reform.

*“Once I mentioned the incidents at home to my friend at work. She had seen domestic violence hotline posters put up at the railway station. She suggested that I speak to a union women’s advocate. In talking to her, I felt that after 5 years I had gained enough strength to fight my problems. She ensured that I was transferred to her office where I felt much safer. She helped me connect with an NGO. They helped me file my divorce case.” – Domestic violence survivor, National study on Impacts of domestic violence in workplaces in India*

**Increasingly, unions are raising awareness and addressing domestic violence as a union issue** from training members to recognise warning signs through to negotiating for employer support to train trade union contacts for workers experiencing domestic violence.

### **ITF Global Women’s Advocate Programme**

The ITF Global **Women’s Advocate Programme** is successfully tackling violence and harassment against women in transport. The programme is based on a successful model originally developed by Unifor in Canada.

The programme trains union activists to become ‘Women Advocates’ to provide a workplace response to gender-based violence and harassment, including domestic violence. Women Advocates are trained in early intervention, providing confidential support and help to access community services, and advocating for workplace safety planning and job security.

The programme also helps to empower women as individual survivors to collectively lead and shape change. The initiative is implemented together with local unions and responsible workplace management.

So far, the ITF has worked with transport unions in 11 countries on building women’s advocacy. The work has demonstrated the crosscutting global need for women’s advocacy in transport unions to support women survivors of violence and the need to fight for the prevention of gender-based violence in the workplace and in society. The model programme can be adapted for implementation in transport workplaces globally.<sup>41</sup>

**[Click here](#)** for more information on the programme.

### **Many governments are starting to legislate measures to provide support for workers experiencing domestic violence.**

- In the Philippines, the law gives 10 days paid leave for workers experiencing domestic violence. It also protects colleagues who help workers.
- In Australia, the law gives workers 5 days of unpaid leave to deal with the impact of domestic violence.
- In Canada, all provinces give leave (paid and unpaid) for cases of domestic violence. The Canadian Labour Code also provides 5 days of paid leave for workers in federally regulated workplaces.
- In New Zealand, the law gives 10 days paid leave and workers experiencing domestic violence have access to flexible working arrangements.

## Some employers are starting to recognise domestic violence as a world of work issue.

- In Australia, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) reached a workplace agreement with port operator 'Hutchison Ports' which included 20 days paid domestic violence leave.<sup>42</sup>
- In the UK, 'Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse' is a network of businesses encouraging employer action on domestic violence. Many employers are already taking action in their own organisations, developing policies on domestic violence, raising awareness amongst employees, training staff to identify those in need of help, and providing access to support for survivors and perpetrators.<sup>43</sup>

## Why is domestic violence a workplace issue?

- ✓ A safe workplace is an employers' responsibility.
- ✓ When workers are experiencing violence at work or at home, the impacts are felt in the workplace. Survivors and perpetrators often have trouble focusing on their work. Many co-workers who see signs of domestic violence are also worried and distracted
- ✓ Abusive partners and ex-partners can pose a safety risk to the entire workplace.
- ✓ Domestic violence costs the employer money. Implementing measures in the workplace through domestic violence clauses can save businesses money and result in a more positive work environment.
- ✓ Domestic violence is a recurring issue. If it is not addressed through workplace prevention programmes it can end tragically.
- ✓ The workplace can play an important role in addressing domestic violence and supporting survivors and perpetrators.

## How C190 can help

### C190 recognises that domestic violence is a world of work issue.

*"Noting that domestic violence can affect employment, productivity and health and safety, and that governments, employers' and workers' organizations and labour market institutions can help, as part of other measures, to recognize, respond to and address the impacts of domestic violence..." (Preamble C190)*

### C190 states that employers and governments should take measures to mitigate its impact in the world of work.

*"Each member shall take appropriate measures to: (f) recognize the effects of domestic violence and, so far as is reasonably practicable, mitigate its impact in the world of work" (Article 10, C190)*

### Recommendation 206 gives more detailed guidance on how to mitigate the impact of domestic violence at work.

*"Members should take appropriate measures to:*

- a) promote the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining at all levels as a means of preventing and addressing violence and harassment and, to the extent possible, mitigating the impact of domestic violence in the world of work" (Paragraph 4, R206)*

*"Appropriate measures to mitigate the impacts of domestic violence in the world of work... could include:*

- (a) leave for victims of domestic violence;*
- (b) flexible work arrangements and protection for victims of domestic violence;*
- (c) temporary protection against dismissal for victims of domestic violence, as appropriate, except on grounds unrelated to domestic violence and its consequences;*
- (d) the inclusion of domestic violence in workplace risk assessments;*
- (e) a referral system to public mitigation measures for domestic violence, where they exist; and*
- (f) awareness-raising about the effects of domestic violence." (Paragraph 18, R206)*

# ACTIVITY TO ENCOURAGE UNION ACTION

## Facilitator notes

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### Aim

The aim of this activity is to enable participants to understand why domestic violence is a union and world of work issue, and to consider how domestic violence can be integrated into the union bargaining agenda.

### Tasks

This activity is in two parts.

**Part 1:** Organise participants into small groups. Ask them to read the briefing 'Domestic violence at work' and then consider the questions within their groups. Based on their discussions, ask participants to describe the reasons why domestic violence is a union issue.

**Part 2:** In small groups, ask participants to read the section on 'How C190 can help' in the briefing on 'Domestic violence at work' and consider how the language is useful in their local context. Ask them to imagine that they have a meeting with the employer and/or government to discuss support for survivors of domestic violence. Their aim is to come up with demands that address the issue. The discussion questions can help to facilitate their discussion. The box 'Why is domestic violence a world of work issue?' can help participants to develop arguments which support the demands.

For more information see the 'Joint Global Union Toolkit':

- For further information about domestic violence see: [Section 1.2](#)
- For further information about concrete action points that unions can take see: [Section 2.3](#)

## Activity

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### Aim

This activity will help us to understand why domestic violence is a union and world of work issue and to consider how C190 language on domestic violence can be integrated into the union bargaining agenda.

### Tasks

**Part 1:** In small groups, read the information briefing '*Domestic violence at work*' and then consider the following discussion questions based on your union and experiences.

- Does the union have a policy on domestic violence? If so, what is it? Is it effective?
- What are the links between domestic violence in the world of work and the home?
- Why should domestic violence be considered a priority union issue?
- Why could some trade union leaders be reluctant to take up the issue?
- How can we encourage them to change their minds?
- How might we use the Convention to educate our members and raise awareness on this issue?

Based on your discussion, suggest five key arguments that can be used to demand domestic violence be recognised as a union issue. Share your ideas with the wider group.

**Part 2:** Read the section on ‘**How C190 can help**’ and the box on ‘**Why is domestic violence a world of work issue?**’. Imagine that you are meeting with the employer or government to discuss support for survivors of domestic violence. Your aim is to come up with a list of demands and arguments to put to them.

Draw a table with two columns and label them **Employer** and **Government**. In small groups, read the questions below and discuss within your group. Write down your demands and arguments in the appropriate column.

- Does your employer have a domestic violence policy? If so, does it align with C190/R206?
- What arguments can we use to convince them to recognise domestic violence as a world of work issue? Consider the economic costs of domestic violence for businesses. *Remember this does not make employers responsible for perpetrator behaviour but encourages them to adopt measures to reduce the impact of domestic violence.*
- What counterarguments can we use to downplay myths about domestic violence, such as that domestic violence supports are a huge cost? *Consider the box ‘Why is domestic violence a world of work issue?’ for more information.*
- What support measures can we ask them to provide?
- How can we integrate domestic violence into the union agenda on occupational safety and health, and into occupational safety and health in the workplace (workplace policy, identification and assessment of risks, prevention, and control measures)?
- Does the law in your country already provide support for survivors of domestic violence? If so, what does it offer? What happens in reality? If not, what are the gaps?
- What demands can we make to government?
- What arguments can we use to convince them?
- How might we use the Convention when negotiating with employers?
- How might we use the Convention in our campaigns or negotiations with governments?
- How can we build alliances or public support around this issue?

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## Useful resources

- [Impact of Domestic Violence in Workplaces in India, ITF](#)
- [YouTube video](#)
- [Domestic Violence and the Workplace: A Qualitative Study with Men, ITF](#)
- [Domestic Violence at Work: Study Film \(video\)](#)
- [India: Domestic Violence Survivors’ Voices](#)