

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic demand on domestic abuse services has risen sharply. Since the first lockdown in March last year UK charity Refuge reported an 80% increase in the number of calls to its domestic abuse hotline and a 700% increase in visits to its website.

Worryingly, the problem seems to be worsening as lockdown continues and it's estimated that cases of domestic abuse may have increased as much as 20% since lockdown.

According to a joint investigation by the BBC's Panorama and Women's Aid, two-thirds of women in abusive relationships have suffered more violence from their partners during the pandemic.<sup>[1]</sup>

Male-specific domestic abuse services have also seen a significant increase in demand from men and boys.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Victims feel increasingly trapped

Described as a 'Shadow Pandemic' by the UN, this rise in violence is associated with compulsory remote working, as victims are confined at home with their abuser, putting them at greater risk of abuse.

The workplace often provides victims with respite from their perpetrators, a degree of independence and an avenue to a social network where they can ask for help or access support.<sup>[3]</sup>

Work is often one of the few places where victims can feel safe to speak out.

More than two-thirds (68%) of people who have experienced abuse during their working life said they felt safer at work compared to home.<sup>[4]</sup>

These figures underline what an important lifeline work is to people experiencing domestic abuse, and shows that employers are uniquely placed to provide support to their people.

## Employers urged to be more proactive

For many organisations, the pandemic has highlighted a need for them to rethink how they support and protect their people.<sup>[5]</sup>

A recent study revealed that although over 80% of organisations felt they had a duty of care to their people, only 5% have a specific policy or guidelines on the issue of domestic abuse.<sup>[6]</sup>

A separate report into workplace support for victims of domestic abuse found that worryingly few employers are aware of the signs of abuse.<sup>[7]</sup>

This is concerning when you consider that between 30% and 40% of victims of domestic violence will be in employment at some point in their lives, which means most workplaces will be affected in some way or another.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Make it safe and easy  
for your employees to seek  
domestic abuse support**

[Book a demo](#)



## Domestic abuse doesn't stop at home

The devastating damage done by domestic abuse isn't limited to the home, it often carries over into the workplace.

The Home Office estimates that domestic abuse costs the UK economy £14 billion in lost output due to time off work, high staff turnover and reduced productivity as a consequence of abuse.<sup>[9]</sup>

As many as one in five victims may need to take time off due to domestic abuse, while 2% lose their job as a direct result of the abuse.<sup>[10]</sup>

A recent international study on the impact of domestic abuse, found that two-thirds (67%) of victims say that domestic abuse affected their career, while 1 in 2 (56%) say that the domestic abuse they experienced affected their co-workers.<sup>[11]</sup>

A largely hidden crime, when it comes to domestic abuse, too often the true underlying reason behind poor performance or absence comes to light only during conduct or capability proceedings, and in some cases not at all.

## Spotting the signs of domestic abuse

Spotting the signs of domestic abuse can be hard for a manager since appearing stressed or not responding to calls could be related to heavy workloads or to childcare.

Working from home has made it even more difficult to spot other key signs of domestic abuse such as;

- Changes in behaviour
- Becoming increasingly isolated
- Spending an unusual number of hours at work
- Physical indicators such as bruises or injuries
- Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem
- Social withdrawal or a loss of interest or enthusiasm
- Poor hygiene

When working remotely, we miss those vital daily social connection points that would enable us to see or sense if someone was struggling at home.

## Recognise, respond and refer

Business Minister Paul Scully MP, recently penned an open letter to employers on how they can better support the victims and outlined several practical steps they can take to build awareness of domestic abuse and help workers access the support they need.[\[12\]](#)

Scully urged employers to consider the doing following:

- Providing workers with a safe space to disclose issues
- Building an awareness of domestic abuse

- Providing a way for people to confidentially seek support
- Make organisational support clear to all
- Bridging the gap between workers and support organisations

While the framework he has provided is excellent and his key points are spot on, organisations need to consider how they will apply this to a digital workforce.

With remote working set to remain for the foreseeable future, organisations should consider whatever method they choose as an ongoing comprehensive solution, rather than a short-term band aid.

## Support remote workers suffering with domestic abuse

Helping people to speak up is critical to raising awareness and supporting domestic abuse victims, but often people are scared to ask for support for a number of reasons, such as;

- Concerns over confidentiality
- Fear of being stigmatised
- Unsure of how their manager will respond
- Unsure how to access support
- Feeling ashamed of their situation

With the right tool, such as [Trickle](#), you can provide your employees with access to safe and confidential support at any time.

1 in 3 (33%) of people who experienced abuse during their working life, said that a downloadable app to access help and support would help reduce the impact of domestic violence on the work lives of workers.<sup>[\[13\]](#)</sup>

The Trickle app is available on desktop and mobile devices and removes the need to “wait for the right moment” by providing access to support and guidance when it’s needed most.

Often, if the person is working from home alongside their abuser, it can be hard to find an opportunity to access guidance or to safely conduct a conversation.<sup>[14]</sup>

By removing the limitations of office hours, people can reach when it’s safe to do so at any time. And, with Trickle’s optional anonymity function people can feel secure to share how they’re really feeling or raise any issue no matter how difficult.

Trickle is a workplace engagement, recognition and wellbeing platform used by organisations to connect with their employees to create a high performing work culture.

Within Trickle we have specifically designed our ‘Flares’ feature to give people the opportunity to raise difficult and sensitive issues on a one-to-one and anonymous basis.

**Show your employees that they  
can seek guidance and access  
help whenever they need it**

[Talk to Sales](#)



Build organisational awareness of domestic

## abuse

Similar to poor mental health, domestic abuse is typically viewed as a taboo and sensitive topic. Sadly, the victims can sometimes feel a sense of shame about their experience, which can make them reluctant to admit to being abused.

1 in 2 (51%) of those who did not tell anyone at work about the abuse they were experiencing said they felt too ashamed to mention it at work, or that it was inappropriate to do so. [\[15\]](#)

To remedy the situation, employers should proactively raise more awareness and develop a better understanding of domestic abuse, which can then be disseminated throughout the organisation.

By recognising the problem, managers and employees can work together to break silence around domestic abuse.

Regular, clear, and informed messaging and discussion about the matter will help to dispel harmful misconceptions, break down negative stigmas, encourage the disclosure and discussion of domestic abuse, while building organisational trust.

Through increased awareness and education it will be easier to spot the signs of domestic abuse and thereby enable earlier interventions to support the victims.

Using Trickle's 'Shout Abouts' feature, employers can quickly and easily raise awareness of the support that is available to employees, or sign-post access to appropriate guidance.

## Plan for the challenge ahead

Agencies, such as UN Women, are calling on employers to start ramping up their strategies to support victims of domestic abuse now.<sup>[16]</sup>

They believe that the situation will only worsen after victims return to work and that there will be a further surge in demand for domestic abuse services.

Having a strong workplace policy and guidance on domestic abuse in place will help organisations rise to meet the challenge. Doing this will signal to employees that the organisation is authentically committed to tackling the issue and that appropriate support will be provided.

This approach offers vital reassurance to victims of domestic abuse, and will encourage them to feel safe to disclose the abuse. Only by working with their people to address the problem in an open, transparent and safe way can organisations protect their people's wellbeing and break the silence around domestic abuse.

Ultimately, this is an opportunity for organisations to reassess and reconsider how they engage, raise awareness and support victims of domestic abuse in the long-run.

Whether on-site or working from home, it's time for employers to rethink what their duty of care to their people entails and be more proactive in how they protect and support their people.

Work should be a place everyone can feel comfortable to raise difficult issues, seek guidance and access help.

Find out more about how Trickle can help your organisation support your people



more proactively and make things better and safer for everyone.

Get in touch for more information or to book a short [20 minute demo](#).

Alternatively, you can trial Trickle absolutely free for 30-days, [click here](#).

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