

Domestic violence

Uppsala University does not tolerate threats and violence. No co-worker should be subjected to threats or violence, neither at work nor in their private lives. However, domestic violence is more prevalent than many people know. This is a societal problem that needs to be carefully considered, since it may have severe consequences for a person's health, ability to work and their whole situation of life.

The employer must actively work towards a safe environment for all co-workers at our university. During the Corona pandemic, the work situation and work environment has largely changed, since more people are asked to work from home. Working from home may be a risk factor for someone with a prior alcohol abuse, who suffers from mental ill health or who is subjected to threats and violence by a partner. In such circumstances, i.e. working from home, as manager you need to maintain a closer contact with your co-workers, and ask questions on the organisational and social work environment, in order to see early warning signs of ill health.

Should you suspect or is told that a co-worker is subjected to threats and violence, you should talk about it with the co-worker. As manager, you can act from a perspective of work environment. Primarily, however, it is about acting out of concern for your co-workers. The work place functions as a free zone for many of those subjected to threats and domestic violence. As manager, you can be a firm support for a co-worker subjected to threats and violence by creating a safe work situation and by supporting the co-worker in getting the right help.

Using this information as a guideline, you can raise the issue of vulnerability and experience of violence. You will find brief information on domestic violence and advice on how to act as manager. It also contains information on where to direct a co-worker who needs support. The information is tailored to managers, but can also be used by other professions, such as HR.

This information has been prepared in conjunction with The National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women, NCK, at Uppsala University and the Uppsala University Hospital.

The following information can be found below:

What is domestic violence?

How common is domestic violence?

What are the consequences of domestic violence?

What can you do as manager?

How do we go on? Support from other actors

Read more on NCK's web:

[Website in English](#)

[Further knowledge on domestic violence \(Swedish only\)](#)

[Online basic introductory course on men's violence against women and domestic violence \(Swedish only\)](#)

[Online resources \(Swedish only\)](#)

What is domestic violence?

The term domestic violence encompasses all types of violence between close relations. This applies to relationships between both heterosexual and homosexual couples, violence in other types of family and kinship relations as well as children who experience violence in their family. Domestic

violence is characterised by the fact that the exposed person has a close relationship with and often strong emotional ties to the perpetrator.

Domestic violence affect both women and men, but the majority of those exposed are women. In most cases, the perpetrator is a man. There are also occurrences of women exposing men to violence in heterosexual relationships. Violence also occurs in LGBTIQ-relationships. Fear of being exposed as a homosexual, bisexual or transsexual person, unless already open about it, can make such violence even closer to handle.

Domestic violence can take many forms. It can be physical, sexual, psychological, material and financial violence, and usually becomes more serious the longer the relationship continues.

Physical violence

Physical violence ranges from a push, a hit, a kick, a stranglehold or attempted suffocation to the use of different weapons.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence encompasses everything from unwelcome touches to being forced to perform sexual actions or being subjected to them, inclusive of rape, or witnessing different forms of sexual actions. The exposed person can also be photographed or filmed for a sexual purpose against their will.

Psychological violence and threats of violence

Different types of isolation, verbal humiliations, emotional blackmail, shaming and using children to control the other parent are examples of psychological domestic violence. Threats can also be directed towards children, pets or close friends. Stalking (illegal pursuit) and other harassments are other examples of psychological violence.

Material and financial violence

Such violence can consist of material damage, such as the perpetrator destroying furniture and other things in the home. The exposed person can also be forced to destroy property of special significance. Violence may also be directed against pets. The perpetrator can take control of the economy and material assets in order to increase isolation and vulnerability, and to make it more difficult to end the relationship.

[Read more about the expressions and mechanisms of violence at the NCK website \(Swedish only\)](#)

How common is domestic violence?

Swedish and international research both show that serious and repeated violence in relationships between heterosexual couples mostly concern men's violence against women. Studies also show that men and women are subjected to different types of violence. Women are more often subjected to serious, repeated and controlling violence by a partner than men are. It is more common that men states that they have been subjected to psychological violence rather than physical violence. For moderate types of violence, men and women are subjected to a similar degree. Compared to men, it is more common for women to be subjected to sexual domestic violence.

In the national investigative study "Violence and health in Sweden. A National Prevalence Study on Exposure to Violence among Women and Men and its Association to Health" [Våld och hälsa – en befolkningsundersökning om kvinnors och mäns utsatthet för våld samt kopplingar till hälsa (NCK-rapport 2014:1)], the women stated to a much higher degree an exposure to serious sexual and psychological violence. C. 20 percent of the women and 5 percent of the men stated that they had

been subjected to a type of serious sexual violence during their lives. 13 percent of the women and 4 percent of the men had been exposed before the age of 18. Further, 20 percent of the women and 8 percent of the men stated that as adults, they had been subjected to repeated and systematic violence by a current or previous partner. Concerning physical violence or threats of physical violence, 14 percent women and 5 percent of the men stated that they had been exposed by a current or former partner as adults.

The results also showed that few of those subjected to sexual violence had reported this to the police, and the majority of those exposed in childhood had not spoken of the events to anyone. The study showed clear connections between having been subjected to sexual violence and mental and physical ill health later in life. In addition to the immediate consequences of sexual abuse, it can thus also create long-term effects regarding health.

[Read more about the extent of violence at the NCK website \(Swedish only\)](#)

What are the consequences of domestic violence?

Being subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence can contribute to a higher risk for different types of mental and physical ill health, both short and long term. Chronical conditions of pain and intestinal problems are doubly prevalent among individuals subjected to violence. Anxiety and depression are up to four times as common among women subjected to violence. Alcohol abuse is also more common among men and women who have been subjected to serious violence, as well as physical symptoms such as headaches, vertigo and pain in shoulders or neck.

Many of those subjected to violence contact the health care, either acutely or at a later stage, owing to effects of the violence, but voluntary testimonials of what they have been subjected to are rare.

The ill health affecting the exposed individual can also affect the ability to work. Absence owing to sick leave is increased by 20 percent for women subjected to violence. Each year, Försäkringskassan process 11 000 cases related to violence.

[Read more about the consequences of violence at the NCK website \(Swedish only\)](#)

What can you do as manager?

It is important to be aware of how your co-workers feel, as part of the work on work environment. Increased remote working means a change in work environment and risk of isolation. This can be a risk factor for a person with a previous history of alcohol abuse, who suffers from mental ill health or who is subjected to threats and violence. In such circumstances – increased remote working – managers may need a more frequent contact with their co-workers than usual to be able to notice early signs of ill health. By being observant and daring to ask questions you can contribute to reduce the risk for a co-worker being abused in their home environment, which in turn may affect their ability to work. Awareness of domestic violence primarily means maintaining a perspective of staff policy focusing on concern for the co-worker.

Warning signs

The following conditions *may* be signs of a co-worker being subjected to violence or threats of violence. There are no single signs or symptoms as firm indicators of such exposure. Nevertheless, examples of signs that should lead to questions being asked are:

- Recurrent short-time absences
- Decreased capacity and work performance
- Long-term leaves of absence owing to illness without known cause
- Difficulties in changing schedule or switching work shifts
- Difficulties in participating in activities outside work hours
- The partner always drops off and collects from work
- Frequent phone contacts with the partner during the work shift
- Extensive responsibility for home and partner/children
- The partner is overprotective and controlling
- Lack of socialising with extended family and friends
- Recurrent pain caused by unidentified problems
- Anxiety, depression, insomnia, eating disorders or drug abuse.

When you suspect exposure to violence – a dialogue with the co-worker

If you suspect that a co-worker is subjected to violence you should talk about your suspicions with the co-worker and ask how they are, how work is and what support might be needed.

If there is immediate danger, you should take care of the exposed co-worker and ask direct questions on whether s/he has been beaten, pushed, kicked etc. Measures should be taken in accordance with the situation.

Should the exposed co-worker need a rehabilitation investigation, there are many possibilities for you as manager to ask questions on health, home conditions and relationships in a natural way. Such questioning signals that you see the co-worker. Asking questions and interfering in time is to care.

Some things to think about before and during the conversation:

- **Remember that you do not need to know everything to ask questions and introduce a conversation.** However, it is important that you let the person know that support and help is available. The conversation as such is important to the co-worker and for them to experience a safe work place.
- **Choose a quiet place where you will not be disturbed** and can discuss in a respectful way based on what you have seen and noticed. If the meeting is digital, ensure that you will not be disturbed during the conversation. Try to ensure that the co-worker can take the call alone and undisturbed.
- **Prepare yourself to accept and handle** the answers you might get
- **Be careful to emphasise that you ask the questions out of concern.**
- **Remember that a good reception is a requisite** for the person subjected to feel trust and to dare to communicate their exposed situation.
- **Listen actively, ask questions and believe in the co-worker's story.** Do not question that which the co-worker tells you. A person subjected to violence often feels guilt and shame. Such feelings will be enhanced if you question what has happened. Emotions for the perpetrator are often double, there might be still be affection and perhaps the couple have children together.
- **Consider how you express yourself, and what your body language says about you.** People in crises can react very differently, and you should be sensitive to the person's needs.

- **Book a time for a follow-up dialogue.** Several meetings may be necessary since it can be difficult for a person subjected to violence to explain their situation. It is also important to follow up on the situation for the affected co-worker.

You can introduce the conversation by stating that you have noticed that your co-worker has a changed behaviour and signals that something is not right. Explain what you have seen, what makes you concerned or worried and what consequences you see at/on work. Emphasize that you have the meeting out of concern.

The following questions might be useful during the talk:

- How to you like it at work?
- *If the co-worker rarely participates in joint activities:* Do you get on with your colleagues?
- Do you live or have you lived with someone?
- How does the scheduling of work hours function with your home situation?
- How do you feel about working from home?
- Are you taking most of the responsibility for house, home, partner and children?
- Lately, have you been subjected to something that made you feel frightened, worried or violated?
- Has anyone treated you badly, physically or psychologically at work or at home?
- Have you ever been pushed, threatened, beaten etc.?
- Are you frightened of anyone?
- *Another way to ask questions is to describe how violence can be expressed, and then ask a follow-up question regarding whether the person has experienced this. Example:* People can be subjected to different types of negative actions from the person with whom they live. This could be hitting, kicking, and controlling e.g. phone, email or economy, deciding which clothing to wear and which friends to see, breaking possessions, threatening or committing sexual activities with which you are not comfortable. Is this something you recognise/or have experienced?
- Based on my view of the situation, I am worried about you; is there anything I can do?
- What would you like me to do now that I know of your situation?

If the co-worker does not want to tell

It is not uncommon for the person subjected to deny the violence. In such cases, it is important not to pressurize or force the co-worker to tell. If the co-worker does not want to tell, s/he does not have to. You have achieved a great deal if you show that you believe the co-worker if and when s/he confides in you.

How to proceed? Support from other actors

Inform your co-worker of the existing possibilities for getting help and support. You can also supply the contact details below to the relevant support or counselling bureau. Encourage the co-worker to request support, but let them decide the pace and which contacts to take.

The National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women

The National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (NCK) have been given the mission by the government to increase knowledge on men's violence against women nationally. NCK provides support to women subjected to violence and runs the Women's helpline.

[Kvinnofridslinjen] and the NKC Clinical Division [kvinnofridsmottagningen] at Uppsala University Hospital [Akademiska sjukhuset]. You are welcome to contact NCK if you have questions on handling and support of their work.

Director Åsa Witkowski: 018-611 28 01 or info@nck.uu.se

[National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence against Women](#)

The Women's helpline

The Women's helpline is a national support line where women subjected to violence can phone for support, 24/7. There is no charge for the call. The caller can be anonymous. Men can also phone the Women's helpline; they will be referred to a suitable actor for support and help. The staff has access to interpreters for most languages spoken in Sweden.

Close family and people who meet persons subjected to violence, such as HR and managers, are also welcome to call.

The Women's helpline: 020-50 50 50

[Women's helpline](#)

The NKC Clinical Department [Kvinnofridsmottagningen]

Clinic and advice for women subjected to violence. The clinic offers counselling and the option of medical assessment, and offers both planned and emergency appointments.

The NKC Clinical department: 018-611 27 92 (Monday – Friday kl. 8.00-16.30)

[The NKC Clinical department](#)

Occupational health service

The occupational health service can offer first-line support to co-workers subjected to violence and know where to refer for further support and help. Co-workers at Uppsala University can book two anonymous appointments a year with a behavioural scientist/psychologist without first consulting their manager.

[Occupational health service \(Previa in Uppsala, Avonova in Visby\)](#)

Social services

The social services can provide support and protection, such as protective housing. The responsibility of the social services is regulated in the Social Services Act.

Report to the police

Encourage the co-worker subjected to violence to report the incidents to the police. The police can make a risk analysis and where needed, assist in different types of protection.