

Domestic violence: what role can we play as union members?

Why should
we care about
domestic violence
in the workplace?



Since 2025, the *Act to modernize the occupational health and safety regime* has required the implementation of measures to prevent psychosocial risks, including domestic and family violence.

As such, the *Act* requires workplaces to ensure a healthy and safe work environment for everyone, even though domestic violence occurs primarily at home. The effects of domestic violence are felt in the workplace in the form of absenteeism, decreased productivity, staff turnover and other problems.

Since October 6, 2021, employers have been required to take measures to protect workers exposed to physical or psychological violence in the workplace, including domestic, family or sexual violence. In cases of domestic or family violence, employers must take measures when they know or should *reasonably* know that a worker is exposed to such violence. **Section 51(16), Act respecting occupational health and safety**

The workplace has a role to play in identifying, analyzing and reducing the risks associated with domestic violence.

Statistics



- Women are the majority of domestic violence victims (over 75%)
- Between 2005 and 2024, there was an increase in the number of victims of domestic violence, across genders (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2025)

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Nearly one in three female workers has been a victim of domestic violence at some point in her life, and for more than half of them, this violence has continued in the workplace in various forms (Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, 2014)

Domestic violence in a nutshell: It is characterized by a series of repetitive acts, usually of increasing frequency and intensity, and it includes psychological, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, as well as acts of financial domination.

What should the union do?

Help raise awareness among its members, such as:

- at general assemblies;
- through social media;
- by supporting the struggles in which women are engaged on issues such as equality, pay equity, harassment and violence;
- by sharing the name(s) of the resource person(s) in the workplace.

Ensure that the employer fulfills its role and legal obligations, in particular by exerting pressure for:

- adoption of a policy tailored to the workplace by the employer;
- a procedure for reporting an incident (including preventive measures) that is clear and known to all members;
- adequate measures to protect all workers, for example by including paid training for all employees.

When a situation is brought to its attention, the union:

- must ensure that the employer acts appropriately, and especially that the victim keeps their job, despite any difficulties experienced at work due to the violence they have suffered;
- must support members in their efforts to ensure that the employer implements measures to assist them.

Negotiate new provisions of collective agreements to assist victims— for example, by securing additional paid leave beyond what is provided for under the *Act respecting labour standards*.



The key to union involvement?

Union officers must be prepared to support members in their efforts to ensure that the employer introduces appropriate accommodation measures.

How?



The preparation of union representatives will help understand domestic violence and how to recognize its signs. They should then be able to build a relationship of trust with the victim by listening, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting the victim's wishes regarding any proposed action. However, if there is a threat to the victim's safety or that of their children, the situation must be reported to law enforcement.

What else can be done?

Do not hesitate to refer victims to specialized resources when the need arises.



Resources

Milieux de travail alliés contre la violence conjugale [Workplaces united against domestic violence]

Through this program, launched in 2021, the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale [women's shelter network] and its member shelters offer Québec employers and unions a number of awareness-raising initiatives and measures to support victims of domestic violence. Overall, 71% of employers have already faced a situation where they had to protect a victim of domestic violence.

The network comprises 47 support houses and shelters located across 16 regions of Québec. Their services are free and confidential.

Milieux de travail alliés contre la violence conjugale
milieuxdetravailallies.com
438-372-3865

Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes [federation of women's shelters]
fmhf.ca

SOS violence conjugale
www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca/en

Maison pour femmes immigrantes
www.maisonpourfemmesimmigrantes.com/en

Institut national de la santé publique du Québec
List of specialized resources, their missions, and contact information:
www.inspq.qc.ca/violence-conjugale/victimes

Canadian Labour Congress
Videos on domestic violence and the workplace:
<https://canadianlabour.ca/domestic-violence-work/>

CSN
Resources on preventing violence and harassment:
<http://www.csn.qc.ca/agir/english>
Support networks: <https://www.csn.qc.ca/entraide/>

Web platform against coercive control
<https://controlecoercitif.ca/>



Contact us

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Union tools to combat domestic violence

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