

Home Office statistics from a report published in March 2005 tell us that;

- Domestic Abuse is most likely to be perpetrated against women by men.
- On average, a victim of domestic abuse suffers 35 assaults before they call the police.
- 2 Women every week, and 30 men a year are killed in the UK by abusive partners.
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will be effected by domestic violence at some point during their lives.
- Domestic violence is the leading cause of death for women aged between 19 and 44; that's more women between those ages die due to abuse from a partner than are killed by cancer or in car accidents.

### This issue;

- **Domestic Abuse; Help is out there!**
- **Prostitution is also violence against women**
- **Advice if you are pregnant or have recently given birth**
- **Women's Health Part 2; Eye Strain and RSI**
- **A little bit of history; The Match Girls**



GLOUCESTERSHIRE AMALGAMATED BRANCH

# Women Members Newsletter

Issue 2

Winter 2007

## Domestic Abuse; Don't Suffer In Silence

Firstly, lets get one thing straight; domestic violence and abusive can affect anyone. Men and Women, Black and White, Young and Old, Gay or Straight, however most cases are against women and are perpetrated by men.

### What is domestic abuse?

The Home Office definition defines domestic violence as "Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality"

Domestic abuse can be mental as well as physical. Victims develop low self esteem and can become seriously depressed. They may go sick from work and they may consider suicide.

**Who are the abusers?** Abusers come from all walks of life. They can come from any ethnic group, religion, class or neighbourhood. They may be older or younger. However, whilst they may also be any gender, the majority of perpetrators are men, and the effects of the violence are markedly more severe for women.

Since abusers typically display different kinds of behaviours in public than they do in their private relationships, most people are not usually aware of domestic violence when it is happening in their community.

### Good News; Help is out there if you need it!

Do not suffer in silence. If you, or someone you know is affected by domestic abuse, you can contact the CWU for help in the first instance, or you may find some of the following numbers helpful.

English National Domestic Violence Help Line; 0808 2000 247

Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline; 0808 80 10 800

Men's advice and inquiry line for

Sometimes, it is difficult to believe that a person who behaves so respectably in public can behave so appallingly with their family. This can sometimes make it even more difficult for women who are trying to reach out for support, as they may feel that they will not be believed when they speak out about the violence.



**What is the cause of domestic violence?** Abusers choose to behave violently to get what they want and gain control. Their behaviour often originates from a sense of entitlement which is often supported by sexist, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory attitudes.

Domestic violence against women by men is "caused" by the misuse of power and control within a context of male privilege. Male privilege operates on an individual and societal level to maintain a situation of male dominance,

domestic violence; 0808 801 0327

Victim Support; 0845 3030900 (Or minicom 020 7896 3776 for the Deaf and hard of hearing)

Broken Rainbow (UK-wide service for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic abuse); 08452 60 44 60

Or contact your local Citizens Advice; 75-81 Eastgate Street, Gloucester (01452) 528017 / 527202

where men have power over women and children. In this way, domestic violence by men against women can be seen as a consequence of the inequalities between men and women, rooted in patriarchal traditions that encourage men to believe they are entitled to power and control over their partners.

**Why doesn't she leave?** She may still care for her partner and hope that they will change (many women do not necessarily want to leave the relationship, they just want the violence to stop), She may feel ashamed about what has happened or believe that it is her fault, She may be scared of the future (where she will go, what she will do for money, whether she will have to hide forever and what will happen to the children), She may feel too exhausted or unsure to make any decisions, She may be isolated from family or friends or be prevented from leaving the home or reaching out for help, She may have low self-esteem as a result of the abuse, She may believe that it is better to stay for the sake of the children (e.g. wanting a father for her children and/or wishing to prevent the stigma associated with being a single parent).

There are many reasons. Either way she will need help and support from friends, family and/or professional support bodies.

**Remember; the victim is NEVER responsible for the abusers behaviour. "Blaming the victim" is something abusers do to make excuses. This behaviour in itself is a form of abuse.**

Katy Hartland  
Women's Officer and Equality Rep  
Information from <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>  
[accessed 30/08/2007]

## Prostitution is violence against women



**"82% of adults in prostitution had been physically assaulted"**

The CWU Equal Opportunities Department, in conjunction with EAVES/Poppy Project are seeking to raise awareness of the problems associated with prostitution, in particular the trafficking of vulnerable women into prostitution.

EAVES was formed back in 1977 as a homeless action group and have since expanded the scope of their work to other areas such as domestic violence services to research into issues of violence against women and accommodation for women trafficked into or exiting prostitution.

Michele Emerson, CWU

Nation Equality Officer tells us "Many women who turn to prostitution do so simply to make ends meet. They're put at risk and criminalized because their economic situation leaves them with few options. We need to ensure that we're also campaigning to eradicate poverty and the huge gender pay gap that is still damaging women's life-chances and economic independence"

Denise Marshall, EAVES Chief Executive, says "We operate today in an environment in which prostitution and the sex industry are increasingly normalized, and in which people focus on the de-

bates around women's freedom of choice instead of focusing on the violence, abuse and misery which are the real side of that 'choice'"

According to research by Melissa Farley and Howard Barkan (Prostitution, Violence Against Women, and Post-traumatic stress disorder, 'Women & Health, 27 (3) pp37-49 1998), 82% of adults in prostitution had been physically assaulted, 83% had been threatened with a weapon and 68% had been raped.

For more information, you can go to [www.eaves4women.co.uk](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk) or contact the Poppy Project on 0207 735 2062.

### Some advice about working if you are pregnant or have recently given birth.

Health and Safety regulations say that any risk assessment must take account of how hazards may affect the health and safety of new and expectant mothers.

When employers receive written notification from an employee that she is;

- pregnant
- has given birth within the previous six months,
- is breast feeding

They must conduct a specific risk assessment to identify if she is exposed to any process, working condition or physical, chemical or biological agent which may damage her health and safety, or that of her baby.

The assessment must

take into account any advice provided by the woman's doctor or midwife about her health.

In 2006 an employment appeal tribunal confirmed that the failure to carry out a risk assessment amounted to sex discrimination.

**Employers must take action to remove, reduce or control any risks identified. If the risk cannot be removed, employers must temporarily adjust her working conditions and/or hours of work;**

Or if that is not possible;

**Offer her suitable alternative work( at the same rate of pay) if available,**

Or

**Suspend her from work**

**on paid leave for as long as necessary to protect her health and safety and that of her child.**

The Employment Rights Act 1996 ( as amended by the Employment Relations Act 1999) requires employers, when offering alternative work to a pregnant woman, to ensure that the work is suitable and appropriate for her to do in the circumstances and on terms and conditions no less favourable than her normal terms and conditions.

However if an employer suspends an employee on maternity grounds, they must provide evidence of the risk and show that less drastic measures would be insufficient.

For further information and advice, speak to your Health and Safety rep.



# Women's Health Guide No.2

## EYE STRAIN AND RSI

Twice as many females as males suffer from work-related headaches and eye strain. More than half of these workers attributed the cause to the use of display screen equipment. Regulations require that all workstations have risk assessments.

Help prevent stiffness, aching and more serious conditions such as repetitive strain injury (RSI) by following these basic tips:

Change position frequently and stretch regularly.

Get up and walk around as often as possible.

If your feet don't rest flat on the floor, this can cause pressure on the backs of your thighs or knees, compressing nerves and blood vessels. Try a footrest.

If your chair is uncomfortable, ask for a replacement.

Ideally, when typing your wrists should be loose and flexible above the keyboard. If you find this uncomfortable, wrist rests may be helpful.

**Eye strain** is a common problem in people doing prolonged, visual work. Poor lighting, blurred

screen images and reflections can make this worse. Eyes become drier and are more susceptible to conditions such as conjunctivitis. As your eyes become tired, you will find that you screw up facial muscles, which can cause headaches.

To keep your eyes bright and shiny, look away and re-focus for one-two minutes in every 20. Blink



regularly to prevent eyes becoming dry. Have your eyes tested every two years. Don't sit too close to the screen; ideally, you should be 26 inches away. Under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, if you need to wear spectacles for looking at a display screen, your employer must pay for regular eye and eyesight tests and contribute towards the cost of spectacles. You should

have your eyes tested every two years.

### Repetitive strain injury (RSI)

RSI covers a number of injuries affecting the muscles, tendons and nerves primarily of the neck and upper limbs. There are two types of RSI: Specific Named Conditions including carpal tunnel syndrome and tennis elbow; and Diffuse RSI or non-specific pain syndrome. This is where there is no clear-cut diagnosis but a range of symptoms exist. Symptoms include aches, pain, swelling, numbness, tingling, weakness and cramps. With diffuse RSI there may be no obvious symptoms. People who work with display screen equipment may develop RSI, but other activities - such as text messaging - can also lead to the condition. RSI is caused by a combination of overuse and repetition, awkward or static posture and insufficient recovery time, and stress is often a factor. It is preventable and treatable, especially if early warning signs are heeded. If you develop any of the symptoms of RSI take action on prevention. If symptoms persist seek treatment.

**“Twice as many females as males suffer from work related headaches and eye strain”**

## Suggestions for the prevention of RSI and Eye Strain

Follow the guidelines above on workstations and laptops

Cut down on repetitive tasks where possible  
Maintain good posture and fitness

Try to keep stress levels down

Try to avoid relying on your mouse; use keyboard shortcuts instead  
If you think your workload may be contributing

to RSI, talk to your manager or your safety rep

If you have been diagnosed with RSI, treatment can include physiotherapy, the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, chiropractic and osteopathy.

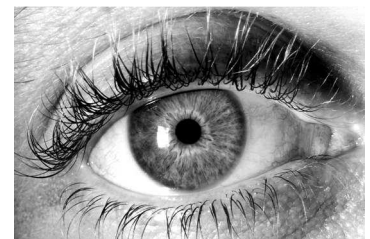
Complementary therapies such as Alexander Technique and Yoga can

also be effective.

Contact:  
Repetitive Strain Injury Association (RSIA):  
0800 018 5012

[www.rsi.websitehosting-services.co.uk](http://www.rsi.websitehosting-services.co.uk)

Information from the CWU website; [www.cwu.org](http://www.cwu.org)  
[accessed 28/08/2007]



# The Match Girls Strike of 1888

On an early July afternoon in 1888 a crowd of 200, mainly teenaged girls, arrived outside a newspaper office in Bouverie Street, off Fleet Street in the City of London. They had left their work at the Bryant and May match factory at Bow in the East End in protest when three of their colleagues had been fired. Management had accused them of telling lies about their working conditions to a radical journalist, Annie Besant. They had come to her for help. In June Besant had heard at a meeting of socialists in Hampstead that Bryant and May, had announced monster profits with dividends of 22 per cent contrasted with paying wages of between 4 and 8 Shillings [20 - 40p] a week.

Annie Besant went down to the factory to investigate. She stood by the gate till the women came out, persuading a small group to talk to her. Besant returned from the East End with a terrible story of cynical exploitation and disregard for the health and welfare of children and young adults. She had recently founded a weekly agitational paper, *The Link*, in which she wrote up her story of life in the match factory. It was entitled "White Slavery in London".

From the crowd of 200 women at the door, Besant brought a small group into her office where they set up an organising committee. Besant had been pessimistic about the organisation of unskilled women factory workers and shortly before the strike had criticised the Women's Trade Union League in *The Link* for espousing unworkable ideas.

Bryant and May tried to break the strike by threatening to move the factory to Norway or to import black-legs from Glasgow. The managing director, Frederick Bryant, was al-

ready using his influence on the press. His first statement was widely carried. 'His (sic) employees were liars. Relations with them were very friendly until they had been duped by socialist outsiders. He paid wages above the level of his competitors. He did not use fines. Working conditions were excellent...He would sue Mrs Besant for libel'.

**"It is easy to see how those women provided the inspiration. They were young. They were loud. They were confident."**



**Bryant and May factory workers**

'Mrs Besant' would not be intimidated. The next issue of *The Link* invited Bryant to sue. Much better, she asserted, to sue her than to sack defenceless poor women.

She took a group of 50 workers to Parliament. The women catalogued their grievances before a group of MPs, and, afterwards, 'outside the House they linked arms and marched three abreast along the Embankment...' The socialist paper *Justice* reported that, 'A very imposing sight it was too, to see the contrast between these poor 'white slaves' and their opulent sisters'.

**Formation of the Union of Women Match Workers.** The Match Workers stayed out for three

weeks. The London Trades Council, at the Strike Committee's invitation, arranged a meeting with the employers. At that meeting, Bryant and May conceded almost all the women's demands. It was agreed that all fines and most deductions would be abolished, that the 'pennies' [a deduction made for the employment of girls to carry out material for the box-filling women which had continued long after the practice had died out] were to be restored, that 3d was to be restored to the packers and that there would be no victimisation and the firm would recognise a union formed by the women.

It is easy to see how those women provided the inspiration. They were young. They were loud. They were confident. They charged about the area holding meetings and parades. They forced the Bryant and May bosses to climb down. And they won! The "Match Girls" have had an astonishing power to speak to us over the last century. The meeting at the factory gate that June, of the socialist activist and the group of angry young working class women, was a key moment in the birth of a vast social movement which would be celebrated in labour and socialist history as the New Unionism. Ben Tillet paid tribute to the Match Workers whose strike he called 'the beginning of the social convulsion which produced the New Unionism'.

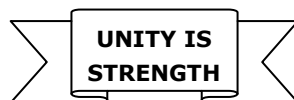
But the strike is not just of historic interest. It is an absolutely critical example of how after decades of low struggle and disappointment a militant movement can revive. Its genesis could come from the most unpredictable and apparently unpromising source. Call centre personnel? Supermarket till staff? Well, not in 1888! It was 12 to 15 year old kids in the match industry!

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION,  
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This text has been extracted from 'It just went like tinder; the mass movement and New Unionism in Britain 1889: a socialist history', John Charlton, Redwords, 1999. ISBN 1 872208 118 £6.99. This excerpt and all pictures are taken from TUC history online <http://www.unionhistory.info/matchworkers/matchworkers.php> [accessed 28/08/2007]