



AXA act on women's issues

Unite's campaigns in AXA on domestic violence and the menopause in the workplace have now borne fruit as AXA have just become one of the first companies in the financial services sector to publish guidelines for its staff and managers on these issues. The importance of support for victims of domestic violence was highlighted again just last week when on the UN stated on their International Day For The Elimination of Violence Against Women (25th November) that one-third of all women are subject to violent attack at some point in their lifetimes.

Unite are very pleased to have worked with AXA to produce this much needed guidance which will not only give support for staff but also for managers in handling employees in their teams who may be victims of domestic violence or going through the menopause.

On hearing about the new guides Unite Equality Office Karen Cole said: *"It's good to see AXA Reps negotiating policies on the important issues of menopause and domestic abuse. The menopause can have a big impact on women at work and many people are not aware of this. In respect of domestic violence it is often difficult for people to discuss and a policy on domestic violence that is well communicated to employees means that victims of domestic violence can have more confidence in raising the topic and the impact it is having on them with their employer"*.

AXA UK's Group HR Director Sonia Wolsey-Cooper agreed that the guides were important: *"Where people have problems outside of work that are having a major impact on their lives at work, it's important that they have a framework within which they can discuss issues with their employer. We believe these guides will help both employees and their managers in these difficult situations. We have worked closely with Unite to draw up these guidelines"*.

AXA UNION NEWSLETTER March 2008

Act on domestic violence

Unite are calling on AXA to introduce a policy on domestic violence to support any employee affected by physical, emotional, sexual or financial violence at home. Victims of domestic violence often feel too scared or ashamed to tell anyone, but this is an area that AXA can make a difference in, by ensuring that the appropriate support mechanisms and policies are in place within the company for any employee who needs them.

A recent report on the Unite website detailed the extent of domestic violence in the UK drawing from the findings of the **British Crime Survey**. 21% of women and 10% of men have experienced at least one incident of nonsexual domestic threat or force since they were 16. If financial abuse (the withholding of money) is included, then 26 per cent of women and 17 per cent of men had experienced domestic violence since the age of 16.

Domestic violence is a crime that affects women and men.

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Unite practical advice to help you deal with domestic violence.

Is domestic violence affecting you?

You may think that domestic violence only affects women, however it is quite common for men to be affected by domestic violence. If you are experiencing domestic violence you need support from your employer.

Job performance may be affected by domestic violence. If you are experiencing domestic violence, your employer should be able to help you. In addition, domestic violence can affect your confidence, self-esteem and your ability to perform your work to the best of your ability.

Visit the Women's Day website for more information.

AXA UNION NEWSLETTER November 2007

Time for change in AXA

The menopause is an increasingly relevant issue in the UK workforce as the proportion of older women in the work place rises. Nationally 70% of women of menopausal age work. However, few employers recognise the menopause as a significant health and safety issue for women despite the fact that it can seriously disrupt the working lives of many female employees.

The menopause is a natural process which occurs in many women in their late 40s and early 50s (although it can occur earlier or later).

The working environment can worsen menopausal symptoms and there is a lot employers could do to make this transition for women easier. Despite this a TUC report into the subject found only 1 in 5 employers offer advice to its staff and many employees suffered harassment and humiliation in the workplace because of the menopause.

With AXA employing 2270 women over 45 out of a workforce of just over 10,000 UK employees, Unite has proposed a model "Menopause Agreement" to the company, which it can incorporate into its policies to help female staff going through the menopause.

Health and safety issues for menopausal women include:

- toilet access and breaks
- unsuitable office clothing
- workstation design
- workplace temperature
- inflexible hours and breaks
- poor indoor air quality
- access to sanitary facilities
- prolonged standing
- workplace stress

Women also suffer from negative attitudes adding to stress at work including criticism from management about menopause related sick leave and subsequent disciplinary action, embarrassment in discussing issues with managers and even criticism ridicule or harassment when the raise the subject.

The "model agreement" we have proposed will demonstrate AXA is a 'preferred employer' and promote the equalities agenda, ensure women are not discriminated against, provide support for employees, demonstrate AXA realises that the menopause is not an illness and ensure AXA complies with its health and safety obligations.

Whilst the subject of the menopause is not one everybody feels comfortable discussing publicly, it is one that has serious effects on the working lives of a lot of our members and consequently it is a subject Unite believes needs to be addressed by employers such as AXA who employ a majority of women in its workforce.

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