

Gender-Based Violence in the Workplace



Acts of gender-based violence (GBV) including intimate partner violence, stalking, assault, rape, and harassment affect workers and their workplaces across the world every day. Gender-based violence can have particularly troubling implications for survivors' livelihoods, productivity, and workplace safety.

Beginning with gender stereotypes that keep women from achieving education and job preparation on par with men, women workers hold positions in lower-wage and lower status jobs. Women are expected to provide primary unpaid care work to their families and are often discriminated against by government and workplace policies that ignore or penalize women during pregnancy and after pregnancy.

Women are often disproportionately represented in work associated with higher rates of workplace violence and are more likely to work in positions with less job security or contractual protection, and in positions outside of the formal labor market. Particularly at risk include forced and bonded laborers, migrant workers, domestic workers, health service workers, and sex workers. In 2002, 17 % of all health care workers in South Africa reported experiencing physical violence in the workplace in the past year. In 2000, 48 % of "all non-fatal injuries from occupational assaults and violent acts" in the United States "occurred in health care and social services." In a 2008 study, in a sample of Sri Lankan domestic workers employed abroad, 5 % reported that they had been raped.

Sexual harassment is also an all too common occurrence in many workplace environments. For example, in Asia and the Pacific Island countries, approximately 30-40% of female workers have reported workplace sexual harassment. In the European Union, approximately 40-50% of female workers report having experienced sexual harassment in their workplaces. In the United States in 2011, over 11,000 cases of sexual harassment were filed. Of these complaints, 83.7% were filed by women.

Gender-based violence in the workforce is aggravated by existing social, structural, and legal factors that perpetuate gender segregation and inequity in the labor force, where sexual harassment, negative stereotypes about women workers and lack of women in top management posts.

Domestic violence also seriously impacts women's lives in the workforce. Studies have found that an estimated 74 % of domestic violence survivors were harassed by their partner while at work, while 21% of perpetrators contacted their partners from work to threaten them, and 29% contacted partners to scare or intimidate them. Whether harassment takes place in the form of threatening phone calls or office visits from their intimate partner, these actions can jeopardize a woman's workplace safety, work productivity, and working relationships.

Survivors of domestic violence are more likely to experience greater workplace absenteeism due to health problems and legal proceedings directly related to domestic violence. On average, workers who experience domestic violence miss "26% more work time due to absenteeism and lateness" than workers who do not experience domestic violence.

Little research exists about workplace violence in the informal sector and in rural areas. In many cases, calculations for existing and commonly used statistics regarding GBV in the workplace are outdated. Perhaps most importantly, the ILO notes that there is a scarcity of studies evaluating best practices for mitigating gender-based violence in the labor force, particularly in programs that engage men and boys in the process. While numerous studies have explored risk factors for GBV in the workplace, relatively little research has been devoted to developing effective agents of change. It is necessary to actively engage in understanding and implementing appropriate government policies and workplace programs that address gender-based violence in the work place, to invest in research that meets these goals, and to advocate for responsive regulation in the work place against GBV.

Resources

- "Closing the Gender Gap." OECD. 2011. http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/social-issues-migration-health/close-the-gender-gap-now_9789264179370-en#page17
- Cruz, Adrienne and Sabine Klingler. "Gender-based violence in the world of work: Overview and selected annotated bibliography." International Labour Office. Bureau for Gender Equality. 2011. http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/WCMS_155763/lang--en/index.htm
- Duncan Chappell and Vittorio Di Martino. "Violence at Work." 3rd Ed. International Labour Organization. 2006. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_publ_9221108406_en.pdf
- "Expert Group Meeting: Gender-Based Violence and the Workplace Background Brief." UN Women. 13-14 December 2011. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/egm/Background-Brief-EGM-Gender-Violence>
- The Facts on the Workplace and Domestic Violence. Futures Without Violence. http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Children_and_Families/Workplace.pdf
- "Taking Action Against Violence and Discrimination Affecting Migrant Women and Girls." International Organizations for Migration. http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/brochures_and_info_sheets/violence_against_migrant_women_factsheet.pdf
- "Violence Against Women." United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women. United Nations. http://endviolence.un.org/pdf/pressmaterials/unite_the_situation_en.pdf
- Workplace Violence, Gender-Based Discrimination and Human Resources for Health in Rwanda." August 26, 2008. IntraHealth. <http://www.intrahealth.org/page/workplace-violence-gender-based-discrimination-and-human-resources-for-health-in-rwanda-1>