

Briefing 7.2 – Practical strategies for integrating gender-based violence into occupational safety and health

1. Introduction

Summary of key points

- Sexual harassment and violence are significant safety and health risks.
- Gender-based violence affects women's physical, sexual and reproductive health and can result in lost days from work, poor motivation and women leaving their jobs.
- Inadequate toilets, limits on use of toilets and toilet breaks can have health consequences for women, especially pregnant women, such as increased risk of cystitis and other infections.
- Employers and managers have a key role to play in changing workplace behaviour and in addressing the health-related consequences of gender-based violence in the workplace, including raised level of HIV/AIDS infection.
- Addressing health-related issues can help to retain workers and promote a positive working environment, which is good for company productivity.

This briefing outlines the importance of sexual harassment and violence as an integral part of occupational safety and health measures. Sexual harassment and violence are significant occupational risks facing women and men in the workplace.

2. Addressing gender-based violence in occupational safety and health

It is important that sexual harassment should not be side lined as 'just a women's issue' and that it is a central part of safety and health for workers, as well as a gender equality issue. In some sectors and in some countries, safety and health policies and factory inspections are often inadequate and rarely focus on the safety and health impacts of sexual harassment and violence.

Taking steps to identify and address gender-based violence in occupational safety and health

Here are some of the initial steps that can be taken by managers and/or supervisors and workers to identify the main occupational safety and health risks in the workplace.

- ✓ Highlight risks that apply particularly to women or particularly to men (Consider gendered job roles – e.g. as identified in a simple gender audit).
- ✓ Map how many of these risks are covered in the workplace.
- ✓ Identify if sexual harassment and violence are included and what gaps exist.
- ✓ Find out what impact violence and sexual harassment have on women's physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health.
- ✓ Consult with women workers to find out what can be done to reduce the risks identified.

The type of work carried out by many women in global supply chains, coupled with societal roles and social structures, means that women face a higher risk of psycho-social hazards and risks that can cause work-related stress, burnout, violence, discrimination and sexual harassment.

Bringing sexual harassment into mainstreaming occupational safety and health

The **IUF Action Program for Equality** includes a commitment to fight for safe and decent workplaces for women; to ensure that a policy on bullying and sexual harassment is agreed upon at every workplace; and seeks to address women's safety and health at work with a special emphasis on domestic violence and violence in the workplace. Including gender-based violence in the occupational safety and health agenda is a way to get these issues incorporated into the mainstreaming agenda affecting all workers. Framework agreements and collective bargaining has been important ways to set this agenda.

Training for women to address gender-based violence in Tanzania

The Tanzanian unions TUICO and TAMICO have addressed women's health and gender-based violence in the workplace through training 25 women from textile, mining and energy companies. Topics included gender-based violence and how to address sexual harassment and rape. The project found that young women from textile factories are often victims of gender-based violence by senior staff, mostly expatriates. Many of the young women come from villages far away and live in hostels within the factory compound, where, in most cases, no other activities beside work are available. There is a very high pregnancy rate among young women in the factory. During the workshop women were encouraged to report any offence to their trade union representative at the plant. The average age in the factory is 23 years. Source: IndustriALL <http://www.industriall-union.org/issues/building-strong-unions/health-and-safety/hiv-aids>

An ILO Code of Practice on safety and health in the agriculture sector is an example of a code that covers sexual harassment and includes a model sexual harassment policy.

➔ Refer to Information Sheet 5: ILO Code of Practice on safety and health in agriculture.

Gender-based violence in the world of work and HIV/AIDS

Workplace HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health programmes can play an important role in combatting gender-based violence. Successful work-based HIV/AIDS programmes – usually negotiated between union and employer – focus on educating men and women about the consequences of violent and unprotected sexual behaviour.

For further information on drawing up a workplace HIV/AIDS policy see ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, including guidance on how policies can be gender-specific: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/publication/wcms_113783.pdf

See also leaflet on ILO Recommendation on HIV/AIDS in the workplace: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/publication/wcms_157866.pdf

In Africa trade unions play an important role in challenging violence, as part of innovative HIV voluntary testing and education programmes. Through education and collective bargaining, unions can bring about changes in the workplace. The factory or the farm can be an excellent entry point to deal with sexual harassment, as has been shown with HIV/AIDS workplace initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa.

➔ Refer to Case Study 7.2: The South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union: Worker Health Programme, for an example of an innovative programme and a good model for organizations designing sexual rights and reproduction health programmes as part of gender-based violence programmes at production points in global supply chains.

➔ Refer to Case Study 7.3: Social dialogue examples from the transport sector on changing men's behaviour.

Tool 6: Tips for addressing gender-based violence in occupational safety and health initiatives

- ✓ Ensure that sexual harassment and violence is part of occupational safety and health policies.
- ✓ Promote the participation of workers and their unions, especially vulnerable women workers and younger workers who are most at risk of sexual harassment and violence.
- ✓ Address gender-based violence issues that impact on women's safety and health. Restricting access to toilets, toilet breaks and access to drinking water is a form of gender-based violence, and represents major occupational safety and health risks.
- ✓ Different fire exits for women and men may mean fewer and less safe exits for women.
- ✓ Requirements to work excessive hours especially impact on mothers.
- ✓ Ensure that occupational safety and health training for workers include information about risk prevention and workers' rights. This should cover psycho-social risks associated with stress, work-related violence and harassment and measures to prevent or control those risks.
- ✓ Include measures to protect male and female workers' reproductive health, including protection for pregnant women from chemical, biological and physical hazards.
- ✓ Draw up gender-sensitive indicators to measure outcomes, for example, related to the number of working days lost due to sexual harassment and violence, and women's and men's participation in training on occupational safety and health risks.