



Close the Gap briefing for members' business 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls

November 2019

Close the Gap is Scotland's expert policy and advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation. We have 18 years' experience of working with policymakers, employers and employees to influence and enable action to address the causes of women's inequality at work.

16 days of activism

Close the Gap welcomes the debate on the 16 Days of Activism for the elimination of violence against women and girls, an international campaign started in 1991 by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership. The campaign highlights that violence against women (VAW) is an enduring social problem that undermines communities and workplaces.

This year's theme, 'generation equality stands against rape' aims to raise awareness about the causes of VAW and the address the barriers that prevent women from coming forward. This is a vitally important theme as only 22% of victim-survivors of rape or sexual assault reported to the police. The campaign also identifies that gender inequality enables and perpetuates gender-based violence and creates a culture that normalises VAW and stigmatises victim-survivors.

Equally Safe at Work

Close the Gap has developed an innovative and world leading employer accreditation programme, [Equally Safe at Work](#), that is currently being piloted in seven local councils. Participating council's include Shetland Islands, Highland, Aberdeen City, Perth and Kinross, Midlothian, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire. Equally Safe at Work supports implementation of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy for eradicating violence against women and girls, which crucially recognises that addressing women's labour inequality is a necessary step towards ending violence against women and girls.

The Equally Safe at Work pilot supports councils to improve their employment practice by addressing the barriers that women face at work. It also enables employers to progress work on gender equality and better support victim-survivors of VAW. As part of the programme, councils have developed policies on VAW; delivered internal awareness raising campaigns on VAW; organised training for line managers on flexible working and VAW; reviewed employment policies; and organised a variety of awareness raising events as part of the 16 days of activism.

The programme highlights that employers have a key role to play in supporting victim-survivors and preventing VAW. ESAW also provides councils with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership on gender equality and challenge VAW in their wider communities. Participating councils will be submitting evidence as to how they are meeting the programme's criteria next month. Close the Gap will be subsequently undertaking an evaluation of the programme in the new year. ESAW is currently funded until March 2020.

Violence against women is a workplace issue

VAW is a systematic and widespread human rights issue which is perpetrated at epidemic levels. It affects all aspects of women's lives, and the workplace is no exception. **1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime in Scotland and three quarters of women are targeted at work.** Perpetrators of domestic abuse often use workplace resources such as phones and emails to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner, acquaintance or strangers.¹ Perpetrator tactics such as sabotage, stalking and harassment at work affect women's performance at work, their levels of absenteeism and job retention.

Over 70% of women reported having experienced or witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace in Scotland, with this figure rising to two thirds of women aged 18-24.² Experiences range from unwelcome sexual comments to serious sexual assaults.³ **Most women (80%) who experience sexual harassment in the workplace will never report it due to fear of being blamed, not being believed or losing their job.** Some women have stated that they have not come forward because they feel violence against women is so widespread and commonplace at work that there is no

¹ CIPD (2013) *Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse* available at https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-and-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse_2013_tcm18-10528.pdf

² Zero Tolerance (2017) *Sexism is a waste...': the need to tackle violence and misogyny in Scotland's workplaces* available at <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Sexism-is-a-waste---the-need-to-tackle-violence-and-misogyny-in-Scottish-workplaces-15.pdf>

³ Women and Equalities Committee (2018) *Sexual Harassment in the workplace* available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/725/72502.htm>

point in trying to challenge it.⁴ While other women have expressed their frustration with reporting procedures.

Experiences of sexual assault or rape can significantly impact on women's ability to maintain their job, as a result of needing to take extended periods off because of emotional and physical impact. Victim survivors often experience trauma which can make it increasingly difficult to be in work situations which involve groups of men or being alone with men.

The impact of so-called 'honour-based' violence on women's experience at work is similar to that of domestic abuse. In addition, women can also be shamed or judged for wanting to have a job, or by being coerced into specific occupations. They can also be threatened with being deported or sent away unless they stop work. So-called 'honour-based' violence can include preventing women from going for a promotion because it is seen as inappropriate for a woman, or because they will be expected to interact with men.

Conclusion

In order to end violence against women in the workplace, it is necessary to tackle women's labour market inequality. Violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Without addressing the key causes of women's labour market inequality, such as occupational segregation, toxic male-oriented workplace cultures, the undervaluation of women's work and the lack of quality part-time and flexible roles, progress cannot be made on preventing violence against women in or outwith the workplace.

⁴ Trade Union Congress (2016) *Still just a bit of banter? Sexual Harassment in the workplace in 2016* available at <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>