



## **Close the Gap briefing for Members' Business: Condemnation of Misogyny, Racism, Harassment and Sexism**

**March 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.

### **1. Introduction**

The gender pay gap, which is currently 14% in Scotland<sup>1</sup>, is an important indicator of women's labour market and economic inequality. Its persistence is evidence of the entrenched discriminatory workplace cultures that continue to exist across Scotland's workplaces.

Evidence highlights that women continue to face systemic harassment, racism and sexism in Scotland's labour market. The #MeToo movement has highlighted the magnitude of sexual harassment and that women face significant barriers in coming forward about their experience, violence against women is a workplace issue and Black and minority ethnic women face a dual labour market disadvantage, facing racism and sexism simultaneously.

Consequently, private and public sector employers have an important role in tackling misogyny, racism, harassment and sexism in the workplace. It is also essential that an intersectional approach is adopted in tackling these issues.

### **2. Violence against women is a workplace issue**

Violence against women is a systematic and widespread human rights issue which is perpetrated at epidemic levels. **Three million women each year in the UK experience violence against women**<sup>2</sup>, with many more women living with past experiences of abuse. It affects all aspects of women's lives, and the workplace is no different. The prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace is now a high-profile issue with increasing numbers of women coming forward and there is increasing pressure for employers to take action.

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<sup>1</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *Everything you wanted to know about the gender pay gap but were afraid to ask*

<sup>2</sup> End Violence Against Women & Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) *Maps of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women support services in Britain*.

**In the UK, more than half (52%) of women have experienced sexual harassment<sup>3</sup>, with this figure rising to two thirds of women aged 18-24.** Experiences range from unwelcome sexual comments to serious sexual assaults. **Research found that 70% of women in Scotland had witnessed or experienced sexual harassment.<sup>4</sup>**

**One in five women in Scotland experience domestic abuse in their lifetime<sup>5</sup>, and three quarters of women are targeted at work.<sup>6</sup>** Perpetrators of domestic abuse and stalking often use workplace resources such as phones and email to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partners, acquaintances or a stranger. Perpetrator tactics such as sabotage, stalking and harassment at work affect women's productivity, absenteeism and job retention.

Research on experiences of sexual harassment<sup>7</sup> at work is likely to be affected by under-reporting because **most women will never report it because of a fear of being blamed and a lack of confidence in the complaints procedure.** Women report sexual harassment as having a negative impact on their mental health, making them less confident at work, and inducing them to avoid certain work situations in order to avoid the perpetrator. All of these effects and responses are likely to diminish their performance at work, and their propensity to apply for and be appointed to promoted posts. Sexual harassment therefore contributes to the glass ceiling, to women's subordinate role in the workplace, and to the gender pay gap<sup>8</sup>.

In order to end violence against women in the workplace, women's labour market inequality must be tackled. Violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequality and without addressing occupational segregation, toxic male-oriented workplace culture, undervaluation of women's work, lack of quality part-time and flexible roles, along with harmful attitude and stereotypes, progress cannot be made on preventing violence against women in or outwith the workplace.

### **3. Equally Safe at Work**

Close the Gap has developed an innovative and world leading employer accreditation programme, [Equally Safe at Work](#), which is being piloted in seven councils throughout 2019. The participating councils are **Aberdeen City Council, Highland Council, Midlothian Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Perth and Kinross Council, Shetland Council and South Lanarkshire Council.** The accreditation programme supports the implementation of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence

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<sup>3</sup> TUC (2016) *Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016*

<sup>4</sup> Zero Tolerance (2017) *Sexism is a waste: The need to tackle violence and misogyny in Scotland's workplaces*

<sup>5</sup> Engender (2017) *Gender Matter Roadmap: Towards women's equality in Scotland.*

<sup>6</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission (2013) *Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse.*

<sup>7</sup> TUC (2016) *Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016*

<sup>8</sup> Engender (2017) Engender Submission to the Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation in Scotland.

against women and girls. The Equally Safe strategy recognises that violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequality.

Addressing gender inequality in the workplace is a fundamental step in preventing and eradicating violence against women, both in the workplace and in society. *Equally Safe at Work* will support employers to take steps to address the causes of their gender pay gap, and support employees who have experienced sexual harassment, domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking, so-called 'honour-based violence' and other forms of violence against women both in and outside of the workplace. *Equally Safe at Work* will enable councils to create a zero-tolerance culture towards violence against women through improved employment practice, policy development, training and capacity building, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the reporting process. At the end of the one-year pilot period, to gain accreditation, councils will need to demonstrate that they have met the criteria set out in the framework, and provide evidence of the changes they have made in the workplace.

#### **4. Intersectionality: Black and minority ethnic women's experience of employment**

While there are commonalities experienced by all women at work, disabled women<sup>9</sup>, Black and minority ethnic (BME) women<sup>10</sup>, lesbian, bisexual and trans women<sup>11</sup>, refugee women<sup>12</sup>, young women<sup>13</sup>, and older women<sup>14</sup> experience different, multiple barriers to participation in the labour market, and to progression within their occupation. In line with this multiple labour market disadvantage, there is a particularly high risk of poverty among BME women, disabled women and refugee and asylum-seeking women.<sup>15</sup>

Close the Gap's newly-published research, [\*Still Not Visible: Research on Black and minority ethnic women's experiences of employment in Scotland\*](#), highlighted that BME women continue to face high levels of racism, racial prejudice, discrimination and bias in the labour market which ultimately impacts their ability to secure, retain and progress within sustainable, good employment.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *Response to the Scottish Government Consultation on Increasing the Employment of Disabled People in the Public Sector*

<sup>10</sup> Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Experiences of Employment in Scotland*

<sup>11</sup> Stonewall (2014) *The Double-Glazed Glass Ceiling: Lesbians in the workplace* and House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (December 2015) *Transgender equality*

<sup>12</sup> Scottish Refugee Council (2014) *One Step Closer*

<sup>13</sup> YWCA Scotland (2016) *Status of Young Women in Scotland*

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Commission on Older Women (2015) *Older Women and Work: Looking to the future*

<sup>15</sup> Close the Gap (2018) *Women, Work and Poverty: What you need to know*

<sup>16</sup> Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research on Black and minority ethnic women's experience of employment in Scotland*

Providing an important insight into the lived experiences of BME women at work in Scotland, the research captures data on key aspects of employment across recruitment, development and workplace culture. The key findings include:

- **Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) reported they had experienced racism, discrimination, racial prejudice and/or bias in the workplace.**
- **47% of respondents believing they had experienced racism, discrimination, racial prejudice, and/or bias when applying for a job and 41% had experienced this at interview stage.**
- **42% of respondents indicated they had experienced bullying, harassment or victimisation because they are a BME woman.**

BME women reported that they face many forms of overt racism, discrimination and implicit bias including colleagues giving them a nickname or alternative name that was seen as 'easier to pronounce' or being subject to stereotypical assumptions about the type of work or position they would hold, for example presuming they are a secretary or cleaner.

Despite this, **just over half (52%) of respondents who had experienced racism, discrimination or harassment in the workplace said they did not report it** and of those who did report, **less than a quarter were satisfied with how their complaint was handled**. Reasons for not reporting included feeling that their line manager would not support them; feeling it would not make a difference; a belief that their complaint would not be kept confidential; and a belief that reporting would make things worse. These findings highlight critical failings in current reporting mechanisms and suggests poor employer equalities practice.

## **5. Conclusion**

In tackling workplace sexism, racism, and harassment, there is a need for employers and public agencies to take dedicated, targeted action. Only leadership can change workplace cultures and tackle inequalities in the workplace. Adopting a zero-tolerance approach to sexism, racism and harassment requires changes to policies, practices and reporting mechanisms, ensuring individuals feel confident that they will be supported if they come forward to share their experiences and that perpetrators will be held to account.

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