

Violence and Harassment in the Workplace

Violence and Harassment in the Workplace – Gender-Based Violence

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Who can be affected by gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence refers to when people experience violence based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender. Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities that society associates with girls, women, boys, men, and gender-diverse people.

While violence can affect anyone, the [Government of Canada](#) states:

“... some people are more at risk of experiencing violence because of various forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism. Certain populations, based on key statistics, are more likely to experience gender-based violence, including:

- women
- young women and girls
- Indigenous women, girls and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual Plus (2SLGBTQIA+) people
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) and people of other sexual orientation than heterosexual
- Transgender and gender diverse people

- women living in Northern, rural, and remote communities, and,
- women living with disabilities.”

The Government of Canada also states that when an individual has more than one of these characteristics, they may be at a higher risk of gender-based violence. Other groups that experience high levels of gender-based violence include Black women and women who are newcomers to Canada.

The 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym represents Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender-diverse communities.

What does gender-based violence look like?

Gender-based violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, societal, and technologically facilitated violence. Neglect, discrimination, social isolation, and harassment can also be forms of gender-based violence.

It can include behaviours such as name-calling, hitting, pushing, blocking, stalking, control, manipulation, criminal harassment, rape, or sexual assault. Many forms of this violence are against the law. It can also take unique forms for people with different identities. For example: for someone with a disability, it may include taking away their assistive device. For someone who is racialized, it may include racist name-calling. For someone who is part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, it may include threatening to “out them” to loved ones.

It can happen between people in romantic relationships. It can happen in families, at work, and between friends and acquaintances and strangers. It often occurs in private places between people who know each other, and it is often a pattern of behaviour.

What are the impacts of gender-based violence?

Social isolation may occur, as well as impacts on physical and mental health (such as depression, sleep disorders or chronic pain).

The effects of gender-based violence can reach beyond the individuals who directly experience them. Experiencing and witnessing violence has the potential for long-lasting and negative health, social, and economic effects that can span generations which can lead to cycles of violence and abuse within families and sometimes whole communities.

Is gender-based violence a workplace issue?

Yes. Gender-based violence is about someone wanting to assert power and control over others. At the workplace, this violence may occur between co-workers, from a supervisor, manager or employer, or between workers or customers.

It may also come from a partner, family member, teacher, classmate, friend, or stranger.

Gender-based violence that takes place outside the workplace can also have an impact. Absenteeism, being made to arrive late to work, interruptions at work, and lower productivity may occur. Concerns about job security can be a result. Interruptions to the person's sleep, anxiety, depression, or needing to take time off work also negatively impact their job performance whether they report to a work location or work from home.

Co-workers may hear about or witness the effects of the violence. Co-workers may experience stress due to the concern for the person experiencing the violence or for their own safety. In some cases, this violence can be a safety risk for co-workers. For example, in intimate-partner violence, the partner may enter the workplace.

Should persons experiencing violence disclose their situation?

The choice is up to that person. Telling someone what is happening can be the most difficult step in accessing support. Persons experiencing gender-based violence or survivors have the right to come to their own decisions about their relationships.

In a workplace setting, there may be a need to ask for access to services or accommodation, such as time off to meet with a medical professional, counsellor, police, lawyer, or others. Disclosing a situation to the employer may help the individual access these services, receive accommodations, or make a safety plan for work.

How can the workplace help?

The workplace should develop a [violence and harassment prevention program](#) that includes a written policy that will inform everyone about:

- What to do when incidents occur or are reported.
- Contact information for reporting incidents.
- The procedure that will be followed when an incident is reported.
- A list of resources and support services at work and in the community.

Be clear about the workplace's response. Knowing the workplace will respond in a supportive manner can help individuals feel more confident about discussing their situation at work and receiving assistance.

- Train all staff, including how to respond when a situation is disclosed.

- Honour concerns about confidentiality.
- Provide leave to address aspects of gender-based violence such as time off to consult with a medical professional, counsellor, police, lawyer, or others. Consult the [employment standards](#) legislation for your jurisdiction.
- Acknowledge the effects of abuse on the individual and that co-workers can be affected and how.
- Hold abusers accountable.

The workplace may be able to offer other supports, such as changing a work phone number or e-mail address to reduce cyberbullying or providing a buddy system to accompany the person to their vehicle in the parking lot or to their transit stop.

How can individuals help?

When concerned about an individual, always get consent from that person before taking action or speaking on their behalf. Both parties must be respectful and understand what the other is comfortable with.

- Reach out to them safely and discreetly, and let them take the lead.
- Be supportive. Listen to and respect the person's lived experience.
- Focus on the person who is hurt and let them lead.
- Believe the information they share.
- Respond without judgment.
- Help them feel cared for, supported, and unashamed.
- Instead of saying, "What did you do?" or "Why don't you leave?" say "It's not your fault." or "I am here for you."
- Ask how you can best support them.
- Respect their decisions. The person experiencing violence can explore what works for them and will decide how they want to respond.
- Learn about signs of abuse.
- Have their permission before sharing information.
- Do not make assumptions about what the person needs or what the next steps are. Let the person decide.
- Do not assume your presence or opinions are wanted.
- Do not allow your anger, shock, sadness, or fear to lead the conversation.

NOTE: If you think someone is in immediate danger and you have no way to reach them, calling 911 or emergency services is an appropriate response.

Where can I find more information about gender-based violence?

More information is available from:

- [What is gender-based violence?](#) Government of Canada
- [Here to Help.](#) A project of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information
- [Women and Gender Equality Canada](#)
- [Canadian Women's Foundation:](#)
 - [The Facts about Gender-Based Violence](#)
 - [Become a Signal for Help Responder](#)

(*We have mentioned these organizations as a means of providing a potentially useful referral. You should contact the organization(s) directly for more information about their services. Please note that mention of these organizations does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by CCOHS of these organizations over others of which you may be aware.)

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