

***'Sexism is a waste....'* the need to tackle violence and misogyny in Scotland's workplaces**

**Z**

ZERO TOLERANCE

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Zero Tolerance  
1 Papermill Wynd  
Edinburgh EH7 4QL  
0131 556 7365  
[www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk)

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity (SC023484) which promotes gender equality and challenges attitudes which normalise men's violence against women and girls. Our approach is practical and evidence-based.

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## 1. Introduction

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity working to end men's violence against women (VAW) by promoting gender equality and challenging the attitudes which normalise violence and abuse. Our vision is of a world without men's violence; in which women enjoy full gender equality and their human rights are upheld. To achieve our vision, we work with employers, educators, the media and policy makers to promote evidence based policies that enable change.

VAW will affect the lives of 1 in 3 women worldwide. The United Nations (UN) defines VAW as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life'<sup>1</sup>. VAW exists on a continuum ranging from sexist jokes and street harassment, to rape and femicide. Understanding this continuum needs recognition of the fact that discrete incidents do not occur in a vacuum but within a broader set of gendered social relations which both create and perpetuate gender inequality<sup>2</sup>.

In 2016 Zero Tolerance undertook research to gain further insight from a Scottish perspective on what VAW in the workplace looks like. Our primary focus was gauging the level of support available for those disclosing violence to their employer; and what employers were doing to combat the sexist attitudes which underlie VAW.

We received over 600 responses from women (80%), men (19%) and non-binary (1%) individuals from across the public sector<sup>3</sup> (83%) the private sector (6%) and third sector (9%)<sup>4</sup>. Men were asked to take part in our research if they had witnessed violence or sexism in the workplace; or were in management positions where they would be required to support employees who had experienced either.

This is the first Scotland-specific research assessing the measures employers are undertaking to prevent and respond to VAW in the workplace. This report situates our findings in the broader UK policy context and makes recommendations for stakeholders<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/userfiles/file/resources/nationalresources/Continuum%20of%20VAW.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Our survey was shared with individuals in local and national government bodies, education and University sectors

<sup>4</sup> For anonymised data tables please contact [amy.marshall@zerotolerance.org.uk](mailto:amy.marshall@zerotolerance.org.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Zero Tolerance wishes to thank our contributors for their guidance in shaping our research and recommendations

## 1.1 Key findings

### **Violence against women occurs in Scottish workplaces every day:**

**1 in 10 respondents reported mental or physical abuse including rape or sexual assault at work.**

**Over 70% of respondents described experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment, teasing or innuendo.**

### **VAW prevention and protection is not a key feature of workplaces:**

**73% of respondents were either unsure or unaware of any VAW policy in their workplace and nearly a third were unsure that they would be supported if they experienced VAW at work.**

**Only 26% of managers reported confidence in taking the necessary next steps, with 17% uncertain about what the next steps were.**

**77% of respondents agreed that employers have a role influencing workplace culture however 62% of respondents were unable to describe any positive measures being taken to counteract sexism.**

### **Everyday sexism is every day:**

**Over a third (37%) said they felt it was implied that their work wasn't as good in some way because of their gender.**

**42% of respondents felt that they were asked to do tasks that they shouldn't be or that were stereotypically female.**

**25% felt excluded from professional networks.**

## 2. Context

### 2.1 Women, Violence and Work

We spend over a third of our lives at work<sup>6</sup> - the workplace is a key factor in our daily experience. If you are experiencing abuse at work but your employer responds well it can transform your experience, enhance your resilience and enable you to stay in employment. If they respond poorly it can trivialise your experience, leave you vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation<sup>7</sup>, or even force you to leave work.

One third of women will experience gender-based violence during their lives<sup>8</sup>. The likelihood of this occurring at work is reasonably high considering the percentage of our time we spend there. If employers lack awareness, the hidden and insidious nature of VAW can result in inaction or inappropriate actions being taken and victims failing to receive the support they need. Indeed, in the UK more than 20% of those experiencing abuse or violence in any one year will take time off without telling their employer<sup>9</sup>. This has consequences beyond the individual victim's experience - the Equality and Human Rights Commission estimates that domestic abuse costs employers over £1.9 billion a year<sup>10</sup>.

Even though not all VAW will originate *within* the workplace this may not prevent it bleeding into that arena too. A recent study by Unite the Union in Scotland found that of women who experienced domestic abuse whilst employed, 66% reported that it had affected their working life in some way<sup>11</sup>. For 81% of these women, the effects were felt through harassing or abusive emails or phone calls<sup>12</sup>. For half of those who reported that the abuse continued at work, the abuse took the form of their partner turning up at their work meaning that workplaces, if failing to respond appropriately, can offer opportunities for perpetrators to continue abusing<sup>13</sup>. There has also been high profile cases of abusers

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/globstrategy/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/globstrategy/en/index2.html)

<sup>7</sup> In 2016 an employee at Midlothian council was awarded damages after her repeated calls for action after being harassed and stalked by a colleague were ignored by her employer because they felt she might be 'over reacting' to the problem ([http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/news/14654345.Council\\_worker\\_wins\\_18\\_000\\_after\\_bosses\\_failed\\_to\\_protect\\_her\\_from\\_lovelorn\\_colleague\\_who\\_waited\\_for\\_her\\_after\\_work/](http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/news/14654345.Council_worker_wins_18_000_after_bosses_failed_to_protect_her_from_lovelorn_colleague_who_waited_for_her_after_work/))

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/devolved-authorities/commission-wales/past-projects/your-business-workplace-policies-domestic-abuse-and-mental-health/domestic-abuse-your-business>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/new-guidance-launched-help-employers-support-staff-experiencing-domestic-abuse>

<sup>11</sup> Unite the Union 2015 (unpublished)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

utilising workplace resources to abuse in worktime<sup>14</sup>. A quarter of victims have also seen their co-workers harmed or threatened by their perpetrator – meaning that there were negative consequences and safety implications for other employees at work that employers needed to address<sup>15</sup>.

The fact that VAW can be hard-to-spot, with subtler forms of perpetrator behaviour including interfering with women's employment status through removing access to childcare or preventing access to the resources needed to attend work, is no excuse to fail in the provision of an adequate workplace response.

Within the workplace European studies have found that between 40% and 50% per cent of women have experienced unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment since the age of 15<sup>16</sup>. Law firm Slater and Gordon found that over 60% of female workers have had a male colleague behave 'inappropriately' towards them with 27% of those feeling unable to report the behaviour to someone senior<sup>17</sup>.

Women's vulnerability to violence can be compounded by a variety of other social inequalities. The Trade Unions Congress (TUC) has observed that experiences of sexual harassment can intersect with racism<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, evidence from the Scottish Transgender Alliance shows that workplaces are one of the most common arenas for trans people to experience harassment<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, disabled women are twice as likely to experience abuse as their non-disabled counterparts at work<sup>20</sup>. Such complexity needs well-planned responses to VAW in every workplace.

The effects of VAW on our workplaces shouldn't be underestimated. When women are unable to enjoy the most basic rights and freedoms at work, this sends a powerful message about how women are valued. It can damage their mental health, and hamper their long-term prospects by disrupting their career.

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<sup>14</sup> In 2012, the Scottish Ambulance service was criticized for failing to act when an employee reported her then husband for repeated stalking and harassment for utilising work systems to track her whereabouts ([http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13111282.Ex\\_ambulance\\_boss\\_jailed\\_for\\_terrorising\\_wife/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13111282.Ex_ambulance_boss_jailed_for_terrorising_wife/))

<sup>15</sup> Trade Unions Congress (2014) "Domestic violence and the workplace"

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.slatergordon.co.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2013/10/sexual-harassment-rife-in-the-workplace-new-study-reveals/>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/04/7520/4>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/help-for-women/help-for-disabled-women/>

## 2.2 Gender inequality

At its base level, VAW is both a cause and consequence of women's inequality. Gender inequality means that women have less economic, political and social power than men, enabling some men to abuse their power. It also means that women are expected to be more caring and passive, while men are expected to be physically strong, unemotional and 'in charge'. These stereotypes can then go on to normalise violence and abuse towards women.

Gender inequality is a factor in women's experiences of the labour market. Women can be concentrated in low paid or insecure work<sup>21</sup>, are segregated by occupation, undertake most caring work<sup>22</sup> or are not rewarded equally for their contributions. This can embed their reliance upon men and increase the opportunities for violence to be committed against women by entrenching the balance of power in favour of men<sup>23</sup>. Preventing women's labour market inequality, as one aspect of preventing women's poverty and enhancing their security, therefore has a role to play in preventing violence by providing women with resources and a level playing field. For example, financial resources are an important factor for women experiencing domestic abuse in seeking safety and independence from their abusers, particularly for those experiencing financial abuse<sup>24</sup>.

However, access to the workplace and income alone will not prevent violence or embed long term safety. Taking the example of domestic abuse again, perpetrators have been shown to interfere with access to income across the income spectrum<sup>25</sup> and unequal patterns of work over the life course can hamper women's inability to not only leave relationships, but could also hamper their long-term career.

Employers therefore have a role to play in preventing women's workplace inequality by recognising the long-term employability needs for those experiencing violence (trauma, periods out of work) through seeking to dismantle the barriers that can see them

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.closethegap.org.uk/content/gap-statistics/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/1081/2>

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/Research\\_series/WRIB-470\\_Genders\\_At\\_Work\\_Paper\\_v03.pdf](http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/Research_series/WRIB-470_Genders_At_Work_Paper_v03.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Financial abuse includes control over money, exploitation of the survivor's assets and sabotage of survivor's efforts to work, study or interact with others. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/FinancialAbuse.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/FinancialAbuse.pdf> A Women's Aid and TUC study found that 18% of women being abused for example were earning over £50k

concentrated in part time, low paid work<sup>26</sup>. In complementing the role of the public sector (providing services, housing etc.) employers can offer equal access to lifelong learning and material support such as childcare to ensure women achieve equality in the workplace.

Tailoring the workplace to prevent and respond to all forms of violence is also crucial. Taking sexual harassment for example, creating the right accompanying workplace culture is necessary. Evidence exists that workplaces are shrugging off instances of sexual harassment. This turning of a blind-eye to acts on one end of the VAW continuum emboldens perpetrators. The Trade Unions Congress (TUC) found that 35% of employees remembered hearing comments of a sexual nature about other women<sup>27</sup>. Recent research from the Chartered Management Institute also reveals that 81% of managers have seen some form of gender discrimination or bias in their workplace in the past 12 months<sup>28</sup>. These findings, in conjunction with our own, illustrate the distance we have to travel before examples such as those documented by the 'Everyday Sexism' project cease to be everyday:

*"Went to HR about sexist and flirty CEO. Told to put up with it as I'm 'young and pretty and they're men, what do you expect?'"*

*"I was on a night out, stood in a crowd of male colleagues who were considerably older than me (I was 19) when one of them interrupted me by leaning through the circle and touching my boob while the rest laughed. Not one of them said anything or even seemed to think it was wrong."*

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/The-Changing-Labour-Market-2.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.managers.org.uk/cmi-women/blueprint-for-balance/Promoting-leadership-equality/Research-reveals-four-in-five-managers-have-witnessed-gender-discrimination-in-past-year?utm\\_source=social&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=Men-As-Role-Models](http://www.managers.org.uk/cmi-women/blueprint-for-balance/Promoting-leadership-equality/Research-reveals-four-in-five-managers-have-witnessed-gender-discrimination-in-past-year?utm_source=social&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=Men-As-Role-Models)



## 2.3 The Policy Landscape

All employers in Scotland are bound by UK wide regulations that seek to enforce standards of health and safety, employee rights and equality at work. In Scotland, some public-sector employers are further bound by the need to report on Scotland-specific duties such as ending the gender pay gap, as well as locally-set outcomes designed to mainstream equality, which can include anti-violence measures<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless a 2013 study from Scottish Women's Aid found that local authorities were either not including VAW as one of their equality outcomes or were poorly defining indicators designed to address the problem<sup>30</sup>.

In recent years, the Scottish Government has taken several actions to seek to influence employer behaviour. In 2016 the Scottish Government committed to removing tribunal fees in future for those seeking justice from employers for sexual discrimination<sup>31</sup>. The Fair Work Convention was introduced to promote fair working standards in the third, public and private sectors<sup>32</sup>. This convention notes that workers' experiences of violence and bullying are detrimental to the enjoyment of work. It acknowledges that, since 2010, 30.8% of workers across Europe have reported some form of adverse social behaviour (verbal abuse, threats or humiliating behaviour, physical violence, bullying or harassment) at work<sup>33</sup>, but fails to highlight the different consequences of such behavior on women and men. And finally, the Scottish Business Pledge sets out several measures for private employers such as the need for a 'balanced workforce' which prioritises flexible working and diversity<sup>34</sup>.

Equally Safe, Scotland's Strategy for preventing VAW, states that *'leadership in key organisations and agencies will be crucial in helping to develop positive cultures and behaviours around violence against women...there is a role to be played in workplaces to champion a culture of zero tolerance of harassment and abuse and one in which there is understanding of the needs of those experiencing violence and domestic abuse'*<sup>35</sup>. Pockets of good practice on tackling VAW do exist. In the public sector for example, the NHS gender-based violence programme delineates policies which deal with perpetrators and promotes risk assessment at work<sup>36</sup>. The Scottish Trades Union Congress and

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/sites/www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/files/SWA%20-%20Analysis%20of%20local%20authority%20Equality%20Outcomes.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2014/jul/28/employment-tribunal-fee-victory-bad-employers-tuc>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.fairworkconvention.scot/index.html>

<sup>33</sup> [www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/data-visualisation/european-workingconditions-survey-2010](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/data-visualisation/european-workingconditions-survey-2010)

<sup>34</sup> <https://scottishbusinesspledge.scot/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/06/7483>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.gbv.scot.nhs.uk/>

affiliated unions such as Unite have taken crucial steps through the promotion of guidance aimed at employers and educational institutions such as the University of Strathclyde are now developing employee policies aimed at eradicating gender-based violence<sup>37</sup>. Together with the work of third sector agencies such as Zero Tolerance, policies and practices to prevent or respond appropriately to VAW are beginning to appear in the workplace. Yet such good practice is the exception not the rule. Employers must not only lead on policies to prevent and respond to VAW in the workplace but take measures to challenge the root source of such violence in unequal attitudes towards women. So-called 'everyday sexism' is prevalent, insidious, and undermines wider efforts to promote gender equality at work.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.stuc.org.uk/about/equalities/women/health-and-safety>

### 3. Research findings

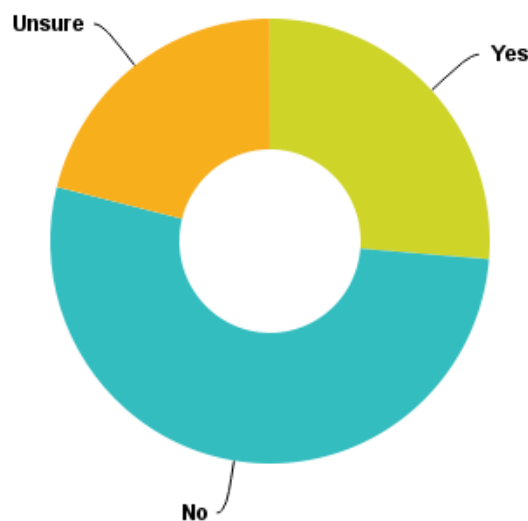
Our survey was disseminated to a variety of sectors including universities, colleges, local and national government agencies. We received over 600 responses from women (80%), men (19%) and non-binary individuals (1%) across the public (83%), private (6%) and third sector (9%). The overwhelming majority were in the 22-64 age category, with over a third (35%) of all respondents in the 45-54 category.

Following analysis, three key themes emerged from our findings:

#### 3.1 Support mechanisms are lacking

We sought to establish the number of Scottish employers that had VAW policies and the extent to which employees felt comfortable reporting VAW.

Firstly, we asked: *Are you aware of a violence against women policy in place at your work?*



Results showed that 73% of respondents were either unsure or unaware of a VAW policy in their workplace. Many of those who responded that they did have a policy tended to comment that whilst there were violence-related policies at work, they did not specifically mention gender-based violence. In responding to violence, policies often suggested treating everyone with 'dignity and respect' rather than specifying real-world measures like enhanced leave or tailored support to remain at work, which should form the bulk of an employer response to VAW.

When asked what support mechanisms employees might need should they experience violence (including paid time off, flexible working, reduced/negotiable workload and enhanced security measures to deter perpetrators) 80% said 'all the above'.

Respondents were also clear that individual needs might differ, reflecting an understanding of the numerous forms of VAW and the policy responses that would be required to prevent and protect:

*"It would depend on the nature of the violence and the extent to which it was (or was not) linked directly with work. For instance, in my area, online abuse of women academics during their work is not uncommon. In that context, the University has a specific duty of care about risk in the context of undertaking one's job. Other forms of violence which are not experienced in/through work may require a different approach"*

Our results found that despite reasonable awareness of the issues at hand, confidence about reporting to line managers was lower than expected. Whilst 59% of respondents were certain that their employer would provide some form of support, 21% felt unsure that their employer would be supportive and 19% said their employer would not support them. When asked to expand, respondents said that although they felt they might receive partial support, they weren't confident it would be fully implemented by managers or that they would receive the right response for their personal situation.

*"I feel that I would be partly supported but not fully. E.g. my leave policy allows one day special leave for victims of domestic abuse - seems very rigid"*

Such uncertainty may contribute to other findings in previous studies which report that over one third of respondents felt that reporting incidents of sexual harassment would actually adversely affect their career<sup>38</sup>. We found a basis for this fear in our data where victims of workplace VAW had been removed by their employer:

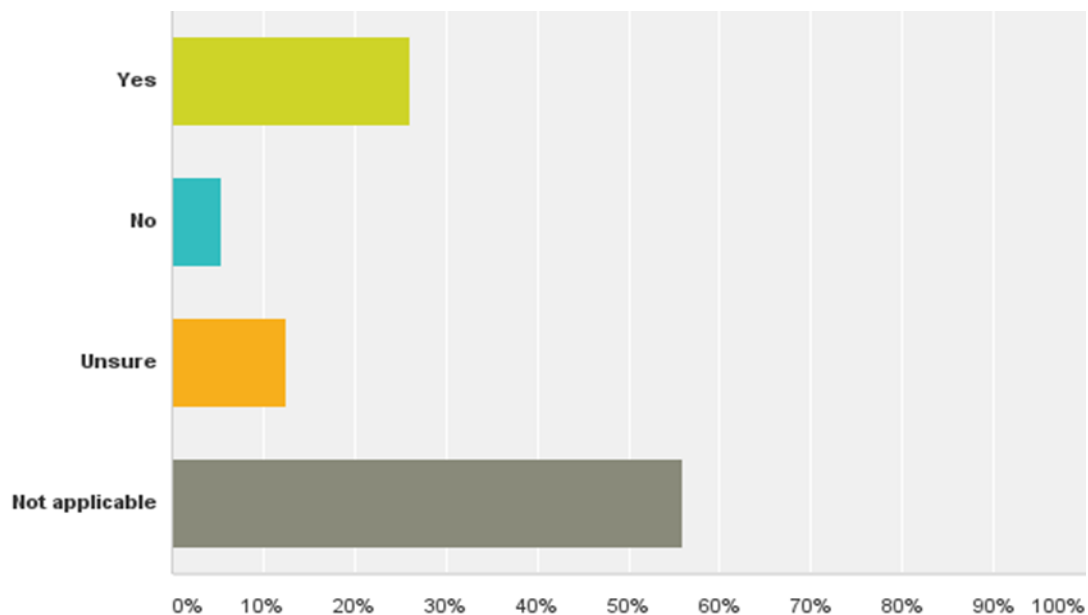
*"I was made redundant because I didn't respond to the CEO's advances – 6 months later he was sacked for sexually harassing another woman"*

For those managers who identified themselves as bearing responsibility to engage with staff reporting VAW (45% of respondents) only one quarter reported confidence in doing so. 17% stated that they either did not know or were unsure what steps to take upon the disclosure of abuse.

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

*If you are a line manager, would you feel confident if a woman disclosed that she was experiencing violence that you would know the next steps to take?*



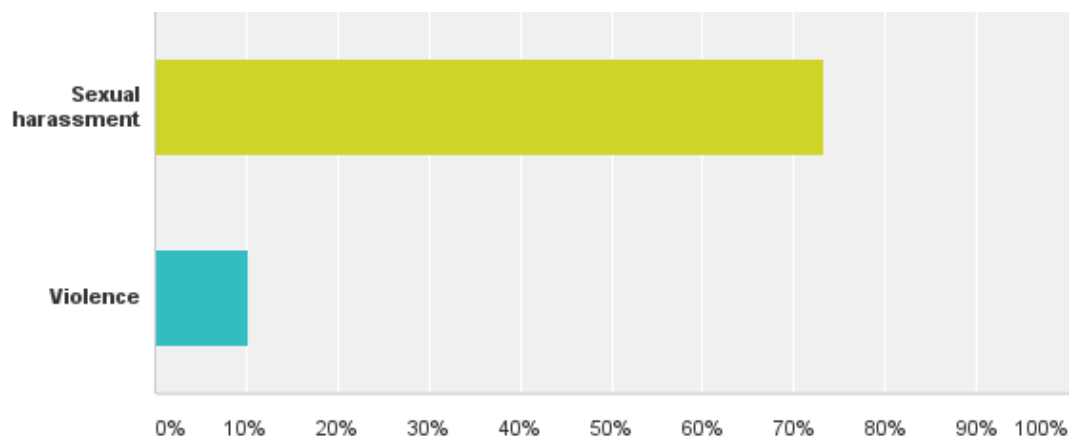
*"I would do my best but I think I would not feel confident in handling the situation"*

Of those that were confident, responses tended to focus on the need to refer to other agencies rather than displaying knowledge of mechanisms which could support or prevent the violence from occurring. Our results indicate that training to build confidence for intervention should be a feature of workplaces seeking to prevent VAW. This must be a priority as our findings show 10% of employees are experiencing violence at work and 74% are experiencing sexual harassment (see below).

## 3.2 Everyday sexism is every day

We asked respondents a variety of questions to assess their understanding of subtler forms of gender bias in the workplace. They were presented with examples of casual sexism including wolf whistling, grouping individuals at work by gender, ignoring women's input, and dismissing women as being 'overly emotional'. Respondents were nearly universally aware that it would be bad practice if they were to experience this in a *hypothetical* situation<sup>39</sup>. Yet despite this, when presented with the following options about their lived experience, the results were high:

*Have you witnessed or experienced the following at work?*



Key:

'Harassment' = Experiencing sexual innuendo, harassment or teasing (74%)

'Violence' = Experiencing violence of a physical nature i.e. rape or mental violence or of a mental nature i.e. patterns of bullying, degradation or mental cruelty (10%)

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<sup>39</sup> Hypothetical examples we gave respondents are below with corresponding statistics of those positively confirming the scenarios as sexist:

- Witnessing a colleague ask a woman to take the minutes of a meeting despite them being more senior – 67%
- Wolf whistling at work in jest – 70%
- Witnessing colleagues talk about whether a woman might be right for a promotion given her caring responsibilities – 82%
- Commenting on someone's appearance – 51%
- Overhearing a colleague remark 'ignore her, maybe it's that time of the month' – 90%
- Witnessing colleagues grouped and referred to as the 'ladies team' – 70%
- A manager seeking a second opinion from a male colleague, having received an answer from a female colleague – 66%

Some respondents described the ways in which their experiences of harassment had become a part of their daily working life and even a barrier to their career progression:

*"I was repeatedly assumed as the assistant, secretary or minute taker rather than the lead. Although my senior male colleague would correct this when I was given coffee orders (without asking) and referred to as 'honey', 'sweetheart' and even patted on the ass, the same male colleague would then take credit for the business and [money] brought in by these meetings at all staff get-togethers."*

One respondent described being made to feel 'neurotic' and felt pushed out of her job after reporting being sexually harassed by a customer:

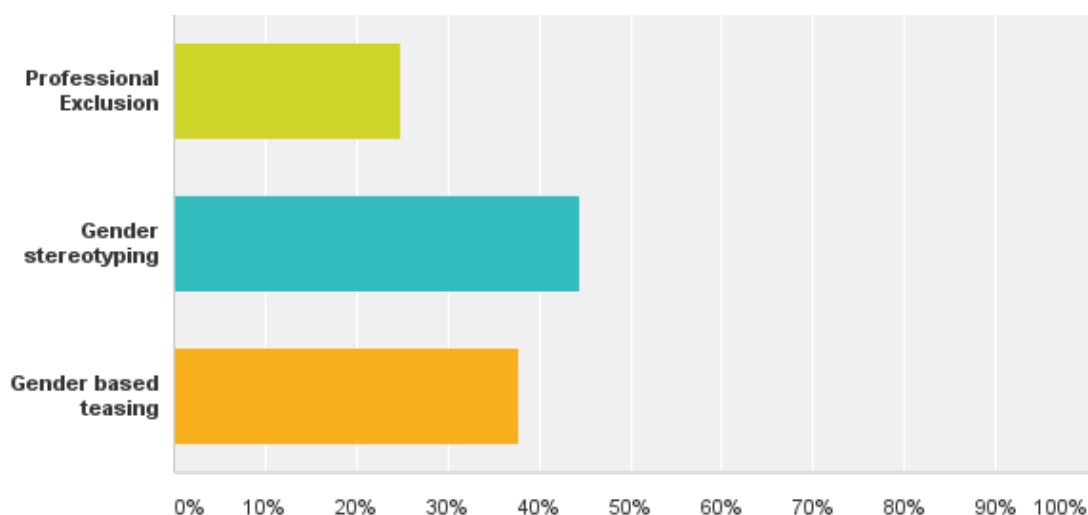
*"The customer suddenly stopped and said 'you are so unbelievably beautiful'. I just kind of laughed awkwardly and tried to change the subject. He later said he'd like to get me alone 'to see if I was beautiful all over'. He returned later to get me alone with no security cameras. When I reported to my line manager he did nothing, simply saying he was a customer and there was nothing he could do about it"*

Respondents were clear that in situations like these *perpetrators* needed to be dealt with, not just the victims, particularly if the perpetrator was employed at the same institution. Respondents felt perpetrator-specific responses would include their removal from the workplace to ensure victims safety. Some felt that:

*"Perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions within their employment. Unless this happens, it is unlikely societal change will happen. The college (where I challenged a staff member on domestic abuse) told me at the end of the investigation that they could do nothing as the abuse happened in his private life. It 'does not affect his working life'. Evidence was provided. I felt like they gave the OK to abusive partners as long as it is behind closed doors"*

Respondents also noted how the weight of cultural assumptions about gender sometimes frustrated or trivialised their efforts - 37% identified experiences where they felt it was implied that their work wasn't as good in some way because of their gender ('gender-based teasing' in the chart below). Other examples of so called 'everyday sexism' included 42% of respondents feeling that they were experiencing gender stereotypes in working patterns such as men and women being chosen for certain tasks in the workplace regardless of seniority, or that they were asked to do tasks that were stereotypically female ('gender stereotyping' in the chart below).

*Have you ever witnessed or experienced the following?*



Key:

'Gender-based teasing' = i.e. because of your gender it's implied a woman the task wasn't done well (37%)

'Professional exclusion' = feeling excluded from professional networks (25%)

'Gender stereotyping' = experiencing men and women chosen for certain tasks despite seniority for example (42%)

The presence of gender stereotypes within work-based tasks extended further in some instances where respondents felt they actively experienced opportunities at work differently compared with their male counterparts:

*"Women gossip, men discuss. Men get informal flexible working because they're likely to be working. Women don't because it'll be for childcare, so they need to organise their life better. I was told I would not be allowed flexible hours just because I'd a newborn child. Same manager allowed my husband - who worked in another building - the flexibility he (without being asked) denied me."*

Further commentary included a quarter of respondents feeling excluded in some way from professional networks.

*"Being excluded from informal networks, as the networking takes place out of hours (when most women are unable to attend due to childcare or due to location of 'networking' such as lap dancing clubs)"*



To elicit qualitative as well as quantitative data we asked respondents *'If you experienced sexism or discrimination at work how did it make you feel?'* The most common responses are illustrated by the following word cloud:



Our findings indicate a potential mental health time bomb and a multitude of litigation issues for employers, factors which may harm employees' commitment to their organisations:

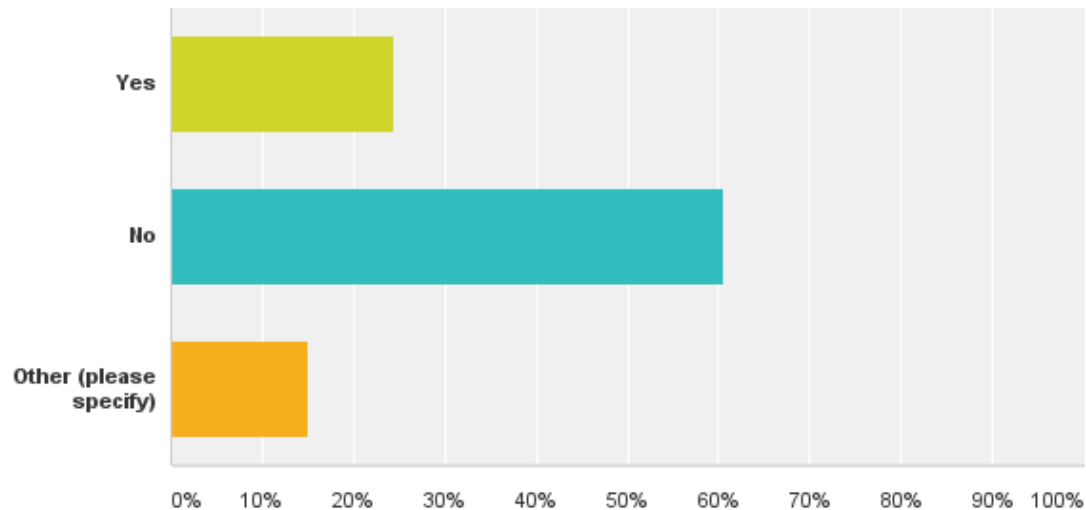
*"I questioned my loyalty to the organisation. I didn't work as hard for a while. I took longer lunch breaks, came in late and left early. I didn't care about the organisation, its aims or objectives and took no active part in trying to help move things forward."*

*"It made me feel like I wasn't valued as highly as my male colleagues. It's a subtle thing but it gives you the message that you aren't as interesting, important or worthwhile. It feels like you don't have a voice unless you speak on 'so called' male terms. You must cover up how you feel and pretend to be more calculated and without feeling because in the dominant 'corporate' culture those are the traits people want to see."*

### 3.3 Employees want action

*"Sexism is a waste of time and resources"*

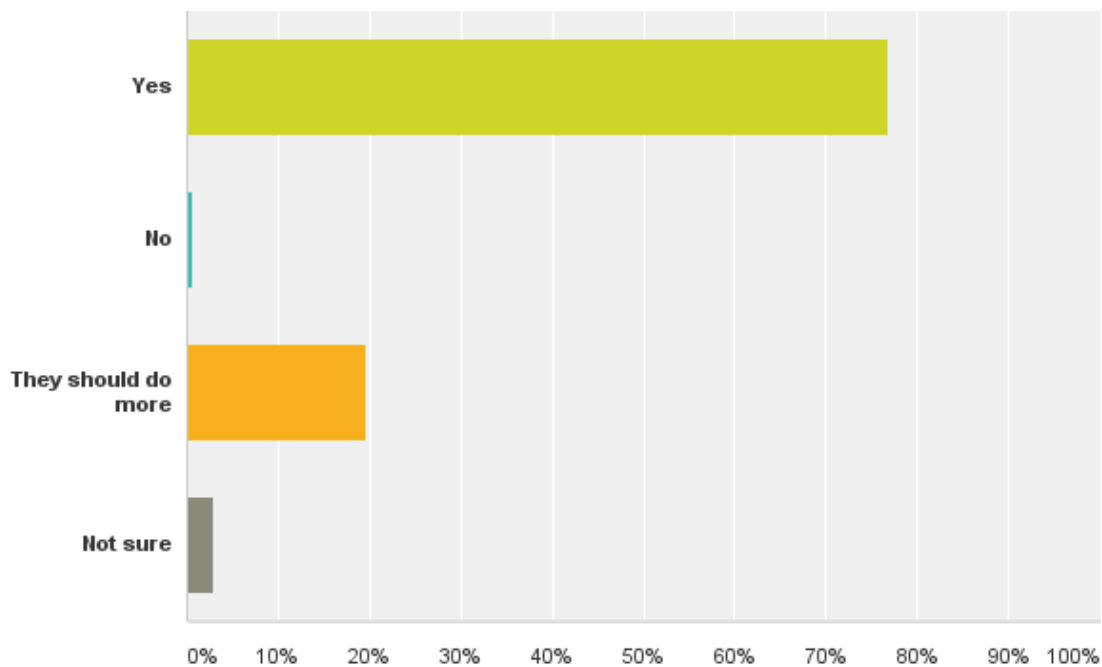
*Can you name any measures to counteract sexism at your workplace?*



Respondents didn't feel that enough action was taking place to reduce workplace sexism, specifically in areas where the Scottish Government and public sector have the most leverage, for example, health promotion and the setting of standards.

62% felt they couldn't describe any positive measures being taken to counteract sexism or promote gender equality in the workplace. For those who could (24% of respondents), descriptions sometimes lacked specificity; respondents indicated that there were codes of conduct and training on interpersonal respect but that these didn't mention violence or gender. More robust examples included equality impact assessments and measures which built in accountability for promoting gender equality, such as the Athena SWAN awards or training packages.

### *Can employers take responsibility for influencing culture?*



One striking finding was that employers may be vastly underestimating the appetite that employees have for gender equality. When asked whether employers had responsibility for influencing culture, 77% of respondents agreed and a further 20% indicated that 'employers should do more'. This suggests that if employers took the lead, employees would engage willingly. As one respondent said:

*"Employers are the pivotal starting point for influencing culture. If the employer does not take responsibility themselves, staff cannot be expected to do the same."*

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1 Discussion

A variety of things make our working lives good. These include decent pay, paid time off, supportive line managers, flexibility and freedom from discrimination<sup>40</sup>.

Our study shows that women's experiences of work are undermined by unacceptable levels of VAW in Scottish workplaces. The most disturbing finding is that 10% of women reported physical or mental violence occurring during their work and over a third were unsure whether their employer would support them should they disclose this violence. Instances of violence were often accompanied by workplace cultures which passively undermined women's reports of being harassed or undermined because of their gender. Such cultures enable employers to downplay their responsibility to protect employees.

For those workplaces that had a violence or equalities policy there was a lack of specific VAW measures either covering discrete incidents or general workplace culture. Our survey shows that policies which cover 'respect' are not necessarily tailored to women's experiences and for those that are, continuous training for employees responsible for the policy is important and that good practice is embedded across a whole institution. Encouragingly, employers can be certain of generating the employee buy-in required to undertake this work: many employees would engage willingly with employers who took the lead in promoting a culture of gender equality.

One of the ways to foster healthy cultures is to begin to dismantle the attitudes that allow violence to flourish. Studies show that supporting gender equality can influence the 'violence supporting norms' that dismiss or trivialize VAW<sup>41</sup>. In workplace settings, such attitudes can take a variety of forms but typically include dismissive attitudes towards reports of violence and the toleration of cultures where women feel they are treated differently from their male counterparts. This will require dedicated work to not only provide a tailored package of assistance for women experiencing violence, but require employers to look to wider institutional mechanisms by which to raise awareness and promote attitudes conducive to gender equality.

Indeed, the key challenge in future for Scottish employers is to recognise that violence does not exist in a vacuum. When workplaces promote gender equality, employers can prevent violence by tackling its root cause.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/what-makes-for-decent-work-a-study-with-low-paid-workers-in-scotland-600955>

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/gender.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf)

## 4.2 Recommendations

Based upon the findings of this study, we make the following recommendations:

### The Scottish Government and public sector

VAW should be considered a workplace issue, with action and accountability following suit from employers across the public sector. A variety of actors such as the Equality and Human Rights commission, the Scottish Government and the Universities sector could consider the following actions:

- **Design a workplace VAW prevention policy** for the Scottish Government that can be replicated throughout the Scottish public sector. Encourage the public sector to prioritise primary prevention, not just responses to VAW, to change attitudes and therefore workplace cultures.
- **Embed VAW prevention at work** by including it in the brief of the forthcoming expert group on women and work, or encouraging the Fair Work Convention to utilise its full potential by working closely with unions, to ensure that safety is viewed as a factor in fair and equal employment.
- **Begin gathering intersectional data** (including for trans women, ethnic minority women and disabled women) on violence and sexism in the public sector to monitor all Scottish women's experiences and design appropriate responses.
- **Build good practice in the private sector** by considering other ways in which gender equality indicators and VAW prevention might be included in measures such as the Fair Work Convention and the private sector 'Business Pledge'.
- **Lead by example through embedding good practice in the education sector** who have a key role to play in implementing campus-wide VAW prevention policies which challenge the social norms and attitudes that underpin violence. To ensure consistency, it is essential that this sector's own workplace policies articulate their responsibilities as employers to support staff affected by VAW.

### Employers

All employers can take action in several areas. Zero Tolerance would recommend:

- **Enacting a VAW policy which includes:**
  - A definition of VAW which understands violence as rooted within women's inequality with men.
  - A clear process on the support you will provide should anyone disclose violence.

- How you intend to train and support your workforce to recognise and respond to the potential signs of violence and sexism.
  - Details of how you will promote the policy in your workplace so all employees are aware of the support available to them.
  - Guidance on dealing with perpetrators both in and outside of the workplace.
  - The ways in which your workplace is prepared for different types of violence. Women experiencing stalking may need different immediate support from women experiencing sexual assault but all will need long term support.
  - Recognition for the work of your trade unions who have a clear role in negotiating policy, offering ongoing support and advocating for rights such as enhanced paid leave for victims<sup>42</sup>.
- **Offering training for core staff** to equip them to understand and respond to VAW covering:
    - Equalities legislation.
    - Assessing the barriers to reporting VAW.
    - How to handle cases of VAW at work including:
      - Dealing with perpetrators.
      - Offering appropriate support to victims.
  - **Embedding healthy attitudes:**
    - Through a clear zero-tolerance code of conduct for behaviour – to ensure a culture that counteracts sexual aggression, gender-based bullying or “banter” of a sexist nature.
    - By building a supportive environment by working to remove gender stereotypes including the removal of unseen unconscious bias.
    - By assessing leadership mechanisms for women - leadership that explicitly supports gender equality is important, so leaders should assess their organisations’ structure and how it supports gender equality.
    - Undertaking gender equity audits to assess whether there are hidden inequities in your workplace and developing gender action plans for the organisation thereafter. Plans can include policy changes, awareness raising events, improved communication channels, etc.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.afr.com/news/policy/industrial-relations/telstra-introduces-domestic-violence-leave-20150113-12na7h>  
 Such as in Australia where some unions have successfully negotiated with employers for additional and ‘protected’ paid time off for those experiencing violence

**For more information on Zero Tolerance's PACT (Policy, Action, Communication, Training) programme for employers, please click below**

<http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/employers-pact?destination=node%2F355>

## **Sources of information and support**

### **Rape Crisis Scotland**

08088 01 03 02

Deaf or hard of hearing: 0141 353 3091

[support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

### **National domestic abuse and forced marriage helpline Scotland**

0800 027 1234

[helpline@ndafmhs.org.uk](mailto:helpline@ndafmhs.org.uk)

### **National Stalking Helpline**

0808 802 0300

[stalkinghelpline.org](http://stalkinghelpline.org)

### **Victim Support Scotland (VSS)**

0845 6039213

[www.victimsupportsco.org.uk](http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk)

### **Scottish women's rights centre**

08088 010 789 Tuesdays 6-9pm; Wednesdays 1.30-4.30pm; Fridays 10am-1pm

<https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/>

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

0808 800 9060

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice/>

### **Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)**

0808 800 0082

[equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://equalityadvisoryservice.com)

### **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)**

0300 123 1100

[acas.org.uk](http://acas.org.uk)



ZERO TOLERANCE

[info@zerotolerance.org.uk](mailto:info@zerotolerance.org.uk)  
[www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk)

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity: SC023484