

## Zero Tolerance at Work 1: Background for employers

### INTRODUCTION

One in three women experience violence such as domestic abuse, rape and/or sexual assault in their lifetime. Prevention can involve crimes such as sexual harassment and stalking as well as other forms of abuse which may be 'under the radar' and obvious only to the victim and perpetrator.

Zero Tolerance works to prevent violence against women (VAW) wherever it happens, to make lives better for all. This means stopping something from happening in the first place. And, if it does happen, taking prompt action to stop things getting worse and/or happening again.

In our 2016 survey of 600 people about their experience at work, we found that:

- ▶ 1 in 10 respondents had experienced mental or physical abuse at work including rape or sexual assault
- ▶ Over 7 in 10 had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, teasing or innuendo at work
- ▶ Around a third of employees did not know if they would receive support from their employer if they experienced such abuse at work
- ▶ Almost a fifth of managers did not know what steps to take if VAW were reported to them
- ▶ A majority did not know if there was a VAW policy in their workplace

### EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Employers have legal obligations to their workforce, for example, under the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998 and health and safety legislation. Employers can make their workplaces better, safer and more equal for all by:

1. Creating a culture of respect
2. Developing underpinning policy
3. Supporting employees who experience VAW
4. Responding effectively to employees who perpetrate VAW

But it's not just about legal obligations, ensuring a successful, productive organisation, where all employees are equally safe, is prerequisite for all leaders, whether public, private or voluntary sector.

Your workplace is part of a bigger movement in Scotland. The Scottish Government and partners want to ensure that Scotland is **equally safe** for all women, men and children at home, in the community, online and at work. People spend a lot of time at work and workplaces influence attitudes and experiences.<sup>1</sup> If an employee experiences abuse at work and their employer responds poorly:

1 World Health Organization. Global strategy on occupational health for all: the way to health at work  
[http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/globstrategy/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/globstrategy/en/index2.html)

- ▶ It can trivialise the victim's experience
- ▶ Leave them and other employees vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation/victimisation
- ▶ Possibly force the victim to leave work
- ▶ Sanction the perpetrator's behaviour and, possibly, sanction abusive behaviour generally in the workplace
- ▶ Destabilise the culture of the organisation as a whole
- ▶ Leave the employer open to tribunal and negative publicity

**“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”**

**SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Employer Responsibility	Why bother?
Meet legal obligations	Employers have a legal responsibility to recognise VAW as a workplace issue. This includes protecting employees from criminal offences (such as assault and harassment in the workplace); complying with legislation, for example health and safety at work; and protecting human rights at work. Employers also have general duties in protecting and safeguarding their employees. Not doing so could mean they are breaching codes of conduct or legislation.
Maintaining employee wellbeing and productivity through health promotion/prevention	There are many forms of VAW but their effects are broadly similar, and include fatigue, low mood, difficulty in concentrating, absence, physical and mental ill-health, often chronic and long-term.  Maintaining employee wellbeing is important for individual workers. It also minimises business impact including lack of productivity, missed deadlines, client/customer dissatisfaction and strain on colleagues providing cover. <sup>2</sup>
Encouraging a resilient workforce	When employers look after staff wellbeing, retention rates improve. Workplace health initiatives encourage a healthy and resilient workforce, which in turn, brings business benefits. Research shows a link between employee job satisfaction and their health and wellbeing; high levels of job dissatisfaction correlate with increased staff turnover.
Supporting staff improves the work environment for all staff, reduces absenteeism and encourages loyalty and performance	Those who experience VAW (for example domestic abuse or sexual harassment) typically say that they feel distracted, unable to concentrate and stressed at work. They may also be frightened, for example of an abusive partner harassing them at their workplace. Employers can help by supporting staff to disclose abuse or report safety concerns; make necessary adjustments to enable employees to work; ensure there is zero tolerance of sexist bullying and harassment. This will improve the work environment for all employees; minimise stress and absenteeism; and increase staff commitment to their organisation.
Demonstrating fair and consistent employment practices is good for business and sets a good example to service users, customers and communities	Organisations which promote equal opportunities for all, offer fair work practices, and look after the health and welfare of their employees, contribute positively to Scotland and its economy. When employers are willing to respond effectively to VAW and the attitudes which perpetuate it, they demonstrate corporate social responsibility and are positive role models for all.
Prevention approach means employers are making a positive long-term contribution	Employers can contribute positively to preventing VAW through workplace culture underpinned by policy and responsible practice, and formal and informal sanctions. How an individual behaves is determined not only by their own attitudes but also by their perceptions of how their behaviour <sup>3</sup> will be perceived by others. When employers take a prevention approach, it sends out a clear message to all.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/speech-by-lakshmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women>

<sup>3</sup> Walden, I. and Wall, L. (2014) Reflecting on primary prevention of violence against women: the public health approach. Australian Institute for Family Studies: <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/reflecting-primary-prevention-violence-against-women>

## WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

Workplaces need an effective and systemic response to VAW including preventative measures which are **primary, secondary and tertiary**.

WHAT	WHY	EXAMPLES
<p><b>Primary prevention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Workplace programme and approach, including clear policies, procedures and training on equalities and VAW</li> <li>▶ Promote ethos of equality and respect</li> <li>▶ Attitude and behaviour change</li> <li>▶ Improve knowledge and skills</li> <li>▶ Focus on underlying causes of VAW: gender inequality and unhelpful cultural attitudes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Prevent violence before it occurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Modelling equal relationships at work and at home (encouraging equal parental leave take-up)</li> <li>▶ Promoting equality in leadership</li> <li>▶ Ensuring equal pay</li> <li>▶ Paying the living wage</li> <li>▶ Discouraging sexist assumptions about the division of labour at work</li> <li>▶ Encouraging a zero tolerance approach to workplace sexism such as degrading/sexist 'banter'</li> <li>▶ All employees receiving information in induction packs</li> <li>▶ A designated member of staff who is trained to respond to complaints</li> <li>▶ Using a source such as Rape Crisis Scotland's <b>information</b> on sexual harassment at work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Secondary prevention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Prevent violence from continuing or escalating</li> <li>▶ Increase options and resilience of those experiencing VAW; reduce power of those perpetrating VAW</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Respond immediately to VAW or threat of VAW</li> <li>▶ Inform and train staff so they have the skills and resilience they need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Reducing workload responsibilities for someone experiencing VAW (for example domestic abuse-related exhaustion or anxiety)</li> <li>▶ Making work-based adjustments so that an employee experiencing VAW can continue to work</li> <li>▶ Ensuring that managerial/HR staff know about and are trained to respond effectively to disclosures or incidents</li> <li>▶ Responding promptly to any allegation; taking grievances seriously</li> <li>▶ Ensuring that policies and procedures are effective for complaints against managers at all levels as well as general staff</li> <li>▶ Ensuring that staff know about policies and procedures and are confident about approaching someone in the organisation without risking their job or being subject to victimisation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tertiary prevention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Implemented after VAW occurs</li> <li>▶ Minimise the impact of violence</li> <li>▶ Restore health and safety and preventing violence from re-occurring</li> <li>▶ Reduce opportunities for victimisation and continued perpetration of abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Deal with the violence/abuse</li> <li>▶ Prevent reoccurrence or escalation</li> <li>▶ Minimise long-term issues such as mental health problems/employee having to leave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Providing support for women who have experienced abuse, such as counselling and time off</li> <li>▶ Responding effectively to those committing VAW in the workplace through disciplinary or other procedures</li> <li>▶ Making necessary adjustments to allow staff to work safely during any investigation</li> <li>▶ Making necessary adjustment to ensure staff can work to their best ability after any investigation</li> <li>▶ Ensuring that all staff know that their employer has dealt with the issue responsibly</li> </ul>

## NEXT STEP?

Read Zero Tolerance at Work 2: Checklist for Employers

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

For further information please call **0131 556 7365** or email **info@zerotolerance.org.uk**

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity: SC023484