

## **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN WORKPLACES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

Gender-based violence is a global issue. It is so common that one begins to wonder whether women are safe to work. Gender-based violence stops women and girls from reaching their potentials. It also increases women's risk of a number of other health problems, physical disability, drug abuse, depression, chronic pain etc. However, the causes of gender based violence are multi-dimensional; they include social, economic, cultural, political and religious factors. But in work places the senior and male co-workers have been reported to be the main perpetrators. Hence, this article argues that, there is immediate need to establish work friendly environment so that all senior as well as junior workers treat each other as a family member and also encourage victims to report violence, whenever it occurs. In order to achieve this, the article made use of newspapers, textbooks, conference and workshop papers, internet material, reputable journals etc. The method adopted in this study is philosophical analysis

**Keywords:** violence, workforce, women, inequality, society

### **Introduction**

The issue of violence against women in the work force is so prevalent in the society that one begins to wonder whether women are safe to work. The high prevalence might be due to lack of rules and regulations, lack of self-defence and empowerment, patriarchal society etc. It could come inform of rape, incest, sexual harassment at work or at school, sexual violence against women detainees or prisoners, trafficking in women, domestic violence etc. Gender-based violence reflects and reinforces inequalities between women and men (Glenn et al 2009). It is one of the most important and widespread obstacles to women's economic empowerment, autonomy and independence and to the realisation of gender equality. It stems from a social and political hierarchy that values and enforces traditionally defined masculinity as an expression of power and prestige. It reinforces a gendered hierarchy within workplaces and this perceived threat to the natural order, combined with women's isolation creates an atmosphere where many of these workers are subjected to abuse.

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. Both men and women experience gender based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>). The issue has become a priority for women's organisation and the subject for feminist thought during the United Nations Decade for women Equality, Development and Peace (1976 – 1985). It is also a cause of concern for a number of international organizations. This is based on its individual, physical and psychological consequences. Gender-based violence against women in the world of work is an epidemic that requires a systematic response.

### **Meaning of Gender Based Violence**

Gender-based violence is an umbrella definition including a wide range of expressions of violence. Gender-based violence is defined as violence that reflects the existing asymmetry in the power relations between men and women and that perpetuate the subordination and devaluation of the female as opposed to the male. This violence exist within the frame work of the patriarchy as a symbolic system that engenders an array of day to day practices which deny women their rights and reproduced existing imbalance and inequity between the sexes. The World Bank defines gender based violence as 'violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender. It constitutes a breach of the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, dignity, equality between women and men, non-discrimination and physical mental integrity'. Sida defines gender based violence as 'any harm or suffering that is perpetrated against a woman or girl, man or boy and that has a negative impact on the physical, sexual or psychological development or identity of a person'. The cause of the violence is founded in gender-based power inequalities and gender based discrimination.

As a general term, it captures violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society. It is a key social mechanism for perpetuating the subordination of women. Since male hegemony (power being considered the generic patrimony of men) is based on social control over women. Gender-based violence was significantly associated with place of residence, witnessing parental violence, substance abuse, marital status and educational status. It includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse from intimate partners or non-partners. Indeed, all acts of aggression against women exhibit some characteristics or other that provides a basis for their classification as gender based violence. Gender-based violence is different from other types of violence because they risk factor is the mere fact of being a woman. Though men tends to experience slightly higher levels of physical violence while women experience

marginally more verbal abuse and sexual assault. These could be due to some men's socialization into gender patterns of behaviour that may lead them to be more likely to meet aggression with aggression, while women may be better at defusing, coping with and avoiding aggressive incident. Concerning males as victims of violence, groups more vulnerable include those who work in nightshifts in small stores, as they are more frequently exposed to armed robberies and related violence; men are also over represented in law enforcement jobs (chappell et al 2006).

The term violence against women means 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 traits of such acts coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following: (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the house hold, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitations; (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community including rape and sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in education institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution and (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state wherever it occurs. Acts of violence against women also include forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptive, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection (Hari et al 2014).

### **Forms of Gender Based Violence**

Throughout history various forms of violence have manifested themselves in the society as a consequence of certain sectors or groups domination over others. They include:

**a. Domestic violence:** Gender-based violence in the household is a behaviour pattern that has become assimilated as a type of marital relationship. It is usually covered up by the society because of the existing bias against intervening in the privacy of married and family life. The truth of the matter is that domestic violence causes more harm to individuals than auto accidents, rape and muggings combined (Alpert et al 1998). The main victims of domestic and family violence are normally children, the elderly and women, but research shows that the most victims are women. In the views of Lee "victims come from a mixed range of backgrounds as do abusers and domestic violence happens to a wide variety of individuals, regardless of socio-economic and educational levels, age, race, sexual orientation or religion". (Lee 2005).

**b. Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment not only arises out of objective differences in the amount of power held in the work place but also out of the cultural power which men exercise over women in accordance with the predominant gender system which discriminates against women through the control, disposition and use of their sexuality and bodies. There are also cases therefore of sexual harassment among colleagues or on the part of lower ranking employees of women managers. Harassment is a mechanism used to debase their role in the work place, their professional capabilities and their leadership abilities and to draw attention to their sexuality. Harassment happening on the job site can create a work environment that feels unsafe, unsupportive, dismissive or even threatening. This can cause employee's stress, anxiety, fear and disrupt concentration, which can lower productivity. The problem of sexual harassment is usually related to the position women occupy in the hierarchy. So, policies and laws must be made to prevent such conduct in order to promote equal opportunities in the work place and to improve the status of women in general. In 1991, Mexico made sexual harassment an offence under title XV of its penal code, and it is punishable by up to 40 days in prison. Sexual harassment is an issue that affects both men and women. In the United States, sexual claims by men doubled between 1990 and 2009, although in other countries, men may feel embarrassed or less willing to report harassment. Reflecting a growing consensus, an increasing number of countries are making workplace sexual harassment illegal (Ellen 2014).

**c. Sexual tourism/illegal trafficking:** Sexual tourism, illegal trafficking and their exploitation through prostitution are other forms of gender based violence which merit special attention, especially in the light of the increase of poverty and unemployment in the society both of which are aggravating factors.

**d. Forced or compulsory labour:** Forced or compulsory labour is when work or service is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not voluntarily offered. A state or individuals can threaten such persons and keep them in such work against their free will, withholding food or wages, threatening or committing physical or psychological violence restricting the labourer's movement or threatening denunciation to the authorities. Forced labour can take the form of debt bondage, trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation and other forms of slavery-like practices such as forced domestic servitude, farm workers kept against their will by illegal tactics with little or no pay.

### **Causes of Gender Based Violence**

The origins of gender based violence can be traced to a variety of socio-cultural factors, namely, hierarchical relationship between men and women,

the differentiated socialization of boys and girls, the political, economic and legal discrimination faced by women, the use of violent means to restore interpersonal conflict and unequal symbolizations and valuations of women's and men's bodies and sexuality. Others include:

(a) Job precariousness, young age and inexperience, for example, a young nurse with little professional work experience may more likely be the target of sexual harassment than an experienced nurse with a permanent contract.

(b) The incapacity of the state to put an end to social, economic and cultural conditions that expose women to gender based violence. The state's failure to actively contribute to eradicating injustices and inequalities that manifest themselves in gender relations.

(c) It is difficult for victims to prove that they have been harassed which heightens the negative consequences not only for their mental health but also in the work place, hence, harassment affects female workers, efficiency and productivity, their attitude towards work, their professional development and the overall atmosphere at the work place.

(d) The victims are often blamed and their version of the facts is placed in doubt, the severity of acts of aggression is often down played especially, when it is associated with such factors as drunkenness and adultery and there is a great deal of resistance to recent legal changes. When employees attempt to access their legal rights by filling a complaint form with a state or federal agency or pursuing a civil lawsuit, they face a number of challenges (Sara et al 2016).

(e) None of the cases of sexual violence like emotional violence had been reported to the Police Station and even when it is reported, sometimes the police response to the demands of victims of gender based violence is unsatisfactory and exhibit a tendency towards secondary victimization. In other words, systematic failure of police, justice personnel and armies put women and girls at risk of violence and prevent access to justice.

(f) Poverty and socio-economic insecurity is also one of the factors contributing to gender based violence particularly trafficking, early marriage and sexual violence in displacement.

(g) Segregation into jobs or occupations which are mainly female or mainly male also often increases the risk of exposure to gender based violence.

### **The Reality of Gender Based Violence**

In reality, gender based violence is based on gender stereotypes such as ideals linking masculinity to the provider role, macho behaviour and violence as well as ideals linking femininity to chastity, submission and victimhood. Evidence has it that, at least one in every five women around the world is estimated to have been coerced into sex, physically beaten and or otherwise abused in her life time. But In reality, they put up with violence because they are economically dependent on the aggressor.

It is obvious that women in sectors like construction that are traditionally male-dominated, experience some of the highest rate of gender based violence. Even, a woman might lose her job for challenging a violent colleague. In the US, gender based violence is responsible for approximately \$8 million in lost paid work days per year. In Australia, for each woman who experiences violence, there is an estimated \$1,500 in lost production related activity (Amy 2016).

In client-facing, tip-based service industry, workers, such as restaurant, entertainment and hospitality workers, are frequent target of gender based violence by bosses, co-workers and customers. Due to public facing nature of their jobs, managers are likely to encourage women workers to dress “sexier” and wear more revealing clothes, creating a climate where commenting and focusing on physical appearance is encouraged and normalized. Unfortunately, the society fails to take measures to defend the human right of women and also denies the public discussion of these crimes, their political significance and societal means of redressing them.

### **Gender Based Violence and Womanhood**

In the past it was assumed that the majority of women are concentrated in lower paying and lower status jobs with little decision making powers while men predominate in better paying and higher status jobs. Women form a significant percentage of workers in occupations at higher risk to violence such as teachers, social and health care workers and as shop and bank clerks. Women are over represented among workers holding typical and precarious jobs and they often lack both individual and collective bargaining power. Some domestic workers who are also predominantly female are especially vulnerable to violence as they work and often live in private homes and hence are isolated from their own families and support systems. They are particularly exposed to risk as migrant workers and domestic workers as dependent family workers and within the informal economy. Poor women are more vulnerable to all forms of violence because they typically live in uncertain and dangerous environments. Violence against women is the main outcome of gender-based inequalities creating far greater consequences for women’s wellbeing and empowerment than previously thought. This is

acknowledged in paragraph 117 of the *Beijing Platform for Action*, which states that “The fear of violence including harassment is a permanent constraint on the morbidity of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate positions.....”. (United Nations: The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1996, p.75)

### **Implications of Gender Based Violence in The Contemporary Society**

Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent and tolerated human rights violations in the world. Of the varied ways in which sex discrimination manifests itself across the globe, such violence is exceptionally dehumanizing, pervasive and oppressive. No other form of sex discrimination violates so many fundamental human rights, as articulated in the 1984 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, UN, General Assembly Resolution 217(111)). Gender-based violence including domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking and other forms of family violence and abuse have long affected women’s lives. In fact, whether violence occurs within the workplace or outside, the detrimental effects of gender based violence at the workplace are substantial (Heise et al 2008).

Gender-based violence is a global public health problem that poses challenges in health care with a higher prevalence in developing countries (Palitto et al 2006). Gender based violence not only plays a significance component in the morbidity and mortality of women, but this form of violence disproportionately affects the health status of women and their children, (Garcia-Moreno et al 2013). It increases women’s risk of a number of other health problems example physical disability, drug abuse, depression, chronic pain, gynaecological disorders etc. In the views of Bloom and others, gender based violence victims showed cognitive defects in working memory, verbal learning and recall, therefore it can be deduced that gender based violence is a predictor of poor performance on neuron cognitive functioning (Bloom et al 2008). The fear of gender based violence or the stigma associated with having being victimized, is also an obstacle to accessing information, care and treatment for HIV/AIDS.

Gender-based violence not only causes pain and suffering but also devastates families, undermines work place productivity, diminishes national competitiveness and stalls development. In addition to pain and suffering, it has direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include those resulting from victim absenteeism and turnover, illness and accidents, disability or even death while indirect costs include the victims decreased functionality and performance, quality of work and timely production. It stops women and girls from reaching

their potentials and perpetuates the devaluation of women and their subordination to men.

Gender-based violence in the world of work not only has profound negative effects on survivors, it imposes high costs on employers, the economy and society at large. It creates an environment in which women may be afraid to go to work. It has a negative impact on all workers, on the victims who are targeted, the perpetrators and other co-workers who might be witnesses to the violence. Wherever gender based violence occurs, it is a major obstacle for the achievement of gender justice, posing a serious threat to democratic development. In other words, violence prevents women from contributing to and benefiting from development by restricting their choices and limiting their ability to act. It also inhibits women from playing a role in decision making within the household, at work and in the political, economic and social spheres and therefore directly influences their participation in public activities and hence the exercise of their citizenship. Hence, it is obvious that if women, girls, men and boys are not safe, they cannot be full citizens nor fully participate in the development of their own society.

Furthermore, in an organization or company violence can also negatively affect the working climate, motivation and commitment among staff. The equality of opportunities for men and women in the labour force is jeopardized by the sexual harassment of women in the work place, which is a violation of the rights to equitable and satisfactory working conditions as well as the rights to sexual freedom. In the views of Williams, violence experienced at home led to absenteeism, lower efficiency at work, resignation and difficulties in recruiting and promoting women”(Williams C 2014). In all, when women are not safe they cannot fully participate in political life or in peace processes and recovery effort. Roxanna Carrillo, the author of *violence against women* was of the view that:

“Violent acts against women, the world over attack their dignity as human beings and leave them vulnerable and fearful. Conditioned to undervalue their skills and abilities and paralyzed by real fears of violence and retribution. Women are marginalized in society and forced out of the decision making process which shape and determine the development of their communities. Violence against women is not limited to any one country. The acts range from battering, incest, assault, rape worldwide to female circumcision in Africa, dowry, deaths in India and militarization in the Philippines. Along this continuum one must also include the limited employment opportunities for women, the lack of access to education, women social isolation and sexual harassment that women experience daily. The manifestations of violence against



women simply alter their forms according to the social, economic and historical realities in which they occur”.

### **Solutions**

The psychological, physical, emotional, financial and health implications of gender based violence in the contemporary society makes its solution an imperative. In order to solve the problem of gender based violence, the following must be observed:

(1)The United Nations should organize meetings of groups of experts on violence against women and take various steps to bring the issue to the attention of the commission on the status of women, the economic and social council, the division for the advancement of women, the United Nation statistical office and the committee on crime prevention and control. The agreed conclusion of the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations commission of the status of women (2013) call on government to take measures to ensure that all work places are free from discrimination, exploitation, violence, sexual harassment, bullying etc  
(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/57sess.htm#ac>).

(2)Society should respond to the phenomenon of gender based violence by eliminating the institutional hurdles facing women, which leads to secondary victimization.

(3)Specific measures should be taken to uphold the human rights of women and to address the gender based violence to which they are subjected.

(4)In technical institutes and universities, effort should be made to incorporate the issue of gender based violence and human right into academic programmes for the professions whose future practitioners will probably come into contact with the victims of abuse and violence.

(5)The crimes associated with gender based violence must be defined as such in the laws of each country and commensurate penalties established so as to put an end to the impunity enjoyed by aggressors and guarantee the judicial protection of their victims.

(6)Trade unions, together with feminist organisations and other civil society allies should campaign for a ground breaking international labour convention on gender based violence in the world of work.

(7)The government should consider introducing legal provisions on sexual harassment in the work place as a key step towards ensuring women’s protection at work.

(8) Effective training programmes should be organized which will eliminate the cultural and societal norms that perpetuate gender based violence and engage men as well as women in changing the culture in the work place.

### **Conclusion**

Women's rights should receive the same attention as the rest and should be considered in conjunction with those regarded as being the most pressing or important. Emphasis should also be laid on interconnected strategies, which includes preventing violence, strengthening legal/policy framework and improving judicial and responsive services for survivors. Also, it is important to work towards transformed norms around gender relations and masculinity, in order to put an end to gender based violence in the society.

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