

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AT THE WORKPLACE

By

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INTRODUCTION

Greetings to everyone who have made it to AFRECON 2015 in Botswana. My names are Milimo Kapombe from the University of Zambia and Allied Workers Union. I am Women's Committee Chairperson of UNZAAWU.

My presentation is about Gender Based Violence at the Workplace. I will start by defining violence against women, give specific forms of workplace violence and then state the effects of GBV. I will also state Trade Union Interventions and further state other strategies against workplace violence.

BACKGROUND

Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking and other forms of family violence and abuse have long affected women's lives. Whether violence occurs within the workplace or outside, the detrimental effects of gender-based violence at the workplace are substantial. Along with this awareness has come recognition of the need for proactive strategies to facilitate employees' safety at work and to reduce employers' economic losses associated with employees' experience with gender-based violence (Heise et al, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The continued segregation of women in precarious, low paid and low status jobs and positions, contributes to the problem. The current global crisis makes it even more difficult for women to find decent work. Privatization, structural readjustment and various "austerity" measures have entailed the loss of important public services and public service jobs which in many countries,

these were “good” unionized Jobs for women, with decent pay, benefits and pensions. Since there is a high concentration of women in public sector jobs, women are disproportionately affected and they are doubly affected: due to their dependency on public services. The crisis, which is also being used as an excuse to scale back human and workers’ rights and cut down jobs, weakens women’s legal protections at work (Glenn S:2009). Women are afraid to lose their source of income and are increasingly reluctant to denounce acts of violence at their workplace. This further perpetuates intolerable situations of violence at work. In addition, the overall cuts in public spending have negative impacts on the effectiveness of prevention measures and social services provided to victims of violence.

GBV exists in workplaces mainly because women are often overrepresented in temporary, lower paying, and lower status jobs with little decision making or bargaining power over the terms and conditions of their labour.

DEFINING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AT WORKPLACE

Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UNAIDS:2000)

The United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines it as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”, in its General Recommendation 19.

Specific forms of GBV at workplaces include:

- Sexual coercion
- Gender -based workplace discrimination, stigmatization, and social exclusion
- Sexual harassment and intimidation
- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Trafficking for forced labour and sex work within and across borders

Negative Effect of GBV at a Workplace

The ILO (2007) argues that lack of bargaining power and labour policies leave millions of workers, particularly women, unprotected and without recourse in the face of gender-based discrimination and workplace violence. Further, workers who do not conform to stereotypical social norms for what a “man” or a “woman” should be or do for their livelihood, or who practice diverse gendered behaviours, can become targets of work-related discrimination, stigma, harassment, exploitation, and abuse.

Along with the physical and emotional suffering, the economic costs of violence against women are considerable and can amount to loss of money due to medical and health care services or loss of productivity because of increased absenteeism. It affects job performance and leads to lateness, decreased job retention and career advancement. Victims of gender discrimination lose motivation and morale necessary to perform their jobs effectively (ILO:2007).

According to USAID (2006), women who experience violence or abuse were significantly more likely to report being in ‘fair or poor’ health, and are almost twice as likely to be experiencing depression. This leads to poor performance at a workplace. Also Women who have been victims of violence are less likely to access preventative and injury related healthcare than non-abused women. They may also be at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because of the aforementioned (USAID, 2006).

Violence against women at workplaces must end because:

- It violates women’s right to a life in safety
- It causes physical and psychological harm that reduces women’s and girls’ ability to lead a normal life, obtain the education they need, earn a living, develop their own future and participate in public life.
- It deepens the unequal power relations between women and men, girls and boys.

TRADE UNIONS RESPONSE TO GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Trade Unions together with Governments and Civil Societies have teamed up to develop, implement and promote strategies aimed at eliminating violence against women at workplaces.

Some of the intervention strategies by trade unions in Southern Africa include:

Proposals submitted to International Bodies like the International Labour Organisation to develop an international standard to guide employers, governments and businesses in formulating strong laws and policies to prevent and remedy gender-based violence at work.

Commemoration of International Women's Day and Sixteen Days Activism against Gender Based Violence are used as a platform to speak against Violence at workplaces by Trade Unions. This is done yearly so that the working class women are given a chance to raise their voices and demand for policies on workplace violence to be put in action. The key objective is to generate greater awareness of the negative impact of violence on the development of working women.

Also campaigns on raising awareness and capacity building are initiated to empower workers and communities to fight the scourge of gender based violence and to:

- encourage anti-violence programmes to combat violence at work
- negotiate policies to eradicate sexual harassment and gender-based violence
- develop safe reporting procedures for victims of violence and ensure that shop stewards are well trained to receive and handle violence cases
- review disciplinary procedures to ensure they deal with the issue of violence
- ensure that gender based violence is on the Agenda of collective bargaining tables

Most of the Unions have put in place the Sexual Harassment Policy in order to develop a code of practice on the handling of sexual harassment cases. It is a policy of the union to provide an environment that is free of any form of unfair discrimination or harassment. This includes any acts or threats that interfere with the performance of any unionised employee or member on account of gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnic, social origin, age, religion, age or disability.

WHAT TRADE UNIONS CAN DO TO END VIOLENCE AT WORKPLACES

- Negotiating Dignity at Work policies and procedures with employers to prevent and deal with sexual and other vices such as harassment, bullying and violence at work
- Negotiating Domestic Violence policies and support.
- Giving women confidence to speak out against violence. This can be achieved through workplace awareness campaigns and agreeing groundbreaking schemes like elected union equality representatives and union women's advocates independently trained by the union, but recognised by the employer.
- Setting up union education for all on harassment and violence at work, and making sure employers train their managers too, and take action against those responsible for or colluding with harassment and abuse
- Campaigning together on 25th November the International day to End Violence against Women and Girls – women in trade unions speaking out, men in trade unions pledging their support.
- Making sure that when we speak out across the world, all women workers are included in the campaign. These are women who are isolated such as those travelling to and from work very early in the morning or very late in the evening, those collecting water, domestic workers and cleaners; women targeted for additional abuse, such as young women workers, disabled women, women facing racism, lesbian, bisexual, trans women; and women facing workplace exploitation including in export processing zones and on zero hours contracts.
- Encouraging male staff across the organisation and different levels to become ambassadors against Gender Based Violence. Since men are culprits of gender based violence, they should be brought on board to help fight the vice.
- Continue to support and implement leadership and mentoring initiatives to encourage and support female employees to undertake leadership positions in the organisations as well as in Trade Unions. This will encourage women to voice out the issues of gender based violence at the workplace

CONCLUSION

The presentation was about workplace violence against women. It stated the specific forms of workplace violence, the negative effect and trade unions contribution to fight GBV.

It has revealed that risks of work-related GBV may be higher in low-wage industries where women workers predominate and hold few managerial positions. It has also revealed that GBV diminishes women's participation and advancement in the workplace. Despite several strategies, violence against women is still increasing at an alarming rate, we should therefore strive to come up with resolutions on this problem. We all come from different countries and I know that we have specific challenges but we are here to share, discuss and put our heads together to come up with strategies that will help us push the agenda forward.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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