

TOOL 4.2

The Business Case for Respectful Workplaces

- » **GOAL:** Explains how GBVH can affect your businesses, employees, and the communities in which you operate
- » **TARGET UNITS:** All Readers

A respectful workplace is a safe workplace that is free from all forms of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH), where employees and others associated with the company treat each other with dignity, courtesy, and respect. The key to addressing GBVH and respectful workplace issues is grasping key definitions.

Definitions:

Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH): GBVH is an umbrella term that covers a range of behaviors, including sexual, physical, psychological, and economic abuse. What sets it apart from other types of violence and harassment is that it is directed at people because of their sex or gender, or disproportionately affects people of a particular sex or gender.²⁹ GBVH is rooted in gender inequality and unequal power, which can leave people, especially women and girls, vulnerable to violence and harassment and prevent them from reporting it.

Prevalence: Rates of GBVH increased during COVID-19.³⁰ Before the pandemic, one in three women worldwide reported experiencing either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner in their lifetime.^{31,32} Anyone can experience GBVH, regardless of their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or intersex status; however, some forms of GBVH are most commonly experienced by women and girls. Other factors that increase the risk of experiencing violence include race, income, religion, ethnicity, age,³³ sexual orientation, or disability.³³

Impact: GBVH affects individuals their families, and communities and affects the business bottom line. In some countries, GBVH is estimated to cost up to 3.7 percent of GDP.³⁴ GBVH can occur in the workplace and can cause employees stress, anxiety, and fear, disrupt concentration, and affect their physical and psychological well-being.

²⁹ WHO, [Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence](#), 2013.

³⁰ Shelby Bourgault, Amber Peterman, and Megan O'Donnell, [Violence Against Women and Children During COVID-19— One Year On and 100 Papers In: A Fourth Research Round Up](#). Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development (CDG), 2021.

³¹ UN Women, [“Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women.”](#)

³² This data is being used as a proxy for prevalence of all forms of GBVH, given limited research and prevalence data on different forms of GBVH.

³³ These issues often “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects in systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination. This is often referred to as intersectionality.

³⁴ J. Klugman, L. Hanmer, S. Twigg, T. Hasan, J. McCleary-Sills, and J. Santamaria, [Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity](#). Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2014.

GBVH directly affects the financial performance of companies. GBVH can increase health and safety risks, reduce employee engagement and productivity, increase absenteeism and presenteeism³⁵, accelerate turnover of employees, and cause lasting damage to public image, business reputation, and social license to operate³⁶. GBVH's effects on workplace culture can be significant: Disengaged workers have 49% more accidents, 60% more errors and defects, 37% higher absenteeism, and almost 50% greater voluntary turnover.³⁷

IFC research from Fiji shows companies lose almost 10 days of work per employee each year due to lost staff time and reduced productivity³⁸; and similar costs have been found in Papua New Guinea³⁹, Myanmar⁴⁰, and Solomon Islands⁴¹. In Peru, it is estimated that GBVH costs private businesses approximately USD 7 billion each year.⁴²

By addressing GBVH, employers can:

- **Help fulfill employers' duty of care**—all employers are responsible for providing a safe workplace.
- **Improve staff health, safety, and wellbeing** by creating an environment that is safe and supportive, where every individual is treated with dignity, courtesy, and respect.
- **Increase staff engagement and loyalty**, which can improve employee motivation and teamwork, and decrease absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover.
- **Position the organization as an employer of choice**, as the organization will become known as a good place to work. This will help the organization attract and keep the best people.
- **Demonstrate corporate social responsibility** by creating positive perceptions of the company in the community and mitigating against costs that would otherwise be borne by the community.

Together, these factors drive and strengthen financial performance. Creating respectful workplaces is every employer's responsibility, and that includes proactively and ethically addressing workplace GBVH should it arise.

³⁵ Presenteeism occurs when staff have compromised productivity due to GBVH and respectful workplace issues.

³⁶ While there isn't a universally accepted definition, social license to operate is the idea that there is more to running a business successfully and sustainably than legal and regulatory compliance, and that companies need to earn the support of the community and society in which they operate. It means ongoing acceptance by the people who live in the area of impact or influence of a project; it is also a form of risk management against delays, conflict, and additional costs (World Bank. 2014).

³⁷ Emma Seppälä and Kim Cameron, "[Proof That Positive Work Cultures Are More Productive](#)," Harvard Business Review. Brighton, Massachusetts, 2015.

³⁸ IFC, [The Business Case for Workplace Responses to Domestic and Sexual Violence in Fiji](#). Washington D.C.: IFC, 2019.

³⁹ IFC, [Workplace responses to Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: Measuring the Business Case](#). Washington D.C.: IFC, 2021.

⁴⁰ IFC, [Respectful Workplaces. Exploring the Cost of Bullying and Sexual Harassment to Business in Myanmar](#). Washington D.C.: IFC, 2019.

⁴¹ IFC, [The Impact of Domestic and Sexual Violence on the Workplace in Solomon Islands-Executive Summary](#). Washington D.C.: IFC, 2019.

⁴² A. Vara Horna, [Violence against women and its financial consequences for businesses in Peru](#). Lima, Peru: GIZ, 2013.

BOX 4C | Measuring the Business Case for Workplace Responses to Family and Sexual Violence in PNG

GBVH is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality, and gender equality in the workplace can improve outcomes in addressing GBVH. Recent research in Papua New Guinea found a correlation between the gender balance of the workforce, the level of support that companies provide to respond to family and sexual violence, and positive outcomes.⁴³ Researchers found less acceptance of family and sexual violence, higher reporting of family and sexual violence, fewer days lost to the impacts of family and sexual violence, and more helpful responses.

BOX 4D | IFC Respectful Workplaces Program

IFC's Respectful Workplaces Program seeks to enhance business value by addressing gender-based violence and harassment, including customer and client aggression, workplace bullying, and sexual harassment, domestic and sexual violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse connected to the workplace. The program supports the private sector in emerging markets to create safe and resilient workplaces through demonstrating the business case for action and providing businesses with advisory services, resources, and tools to help them address the issue. For more information, visit the [Respectful Workplaces Program](#) website.

⁴³ IFC, [Workplace responses to Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: Measuring the Business Case](#). Washington D.C.: IFC, 2021.