VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Anna-Karin Jatfors, Deputy Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

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OVERVIEW

- Violence against women (VAW) is the most pervasive violation of human rights worldwide – affecting some 1 in 3 women and girls in their lives
- VAW is also an economic issue, which carries significant costs to individuals, households, the public sector, businesses, and society.
- VAW and Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) are closely interlinked, but the relationship between them is not linear
  - VAW – both at home and in the workplace – hinders WEE, significantly impeding women’s ability to fulfil their true potential
  - WEE can both increase and decrease VAW – benefits are not automatic
THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

• Violence against women significantly undermines women’s educational and employment opportunities, income earning capability, and advancement in the workplace.

• Violent relationships often include economic abuse – controlling assets & income, limiting movement.

• VAW, both at home and at work (such as sexual harassment), has a significant negative impact on women’s performance and productivity in the workplace.
It is estimated that **150 million girls are subjected to sexual violence** each year.

**Child marriage** and violence against girls at school can reduce the likelihood of school attendance and result in a reduction in girls’ long-term potential.

A survey among Benin schoolchildren found that 43% of primary students and 80% of secondary students knew girls who had dropped out of school owing to sexual abuse.

VAW has serious **inter-generational effects**: children from households where VAW is perpetrated have lower job performance and earnings in later life – and are at greater risk of engaging in violent behavior as adults.

Surveys in the Philippines revealed that boys who witnessed their father using violence against their mother were 3 times more likely to use violence against their partners later in life.
THE COST OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN - FOR WOMEN

- VAW results in loss of income and increased costs for women who experience violence, due to the cost of accessing services and days off work. In addition, women who face violence tend to have lower earnings.
  - in Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Korea, 30 - 40% of women suffer workplace sexual harassment.
  - Women who are exposed to intimate partner violence are employed in higher numbers in casual and part-time work.
  - Their earnings from formal wage work are 60% lower, compared to women who do not experience such violence.
  - In Vietnam, direct costs of domestic violence represent 21% of women’s monthly income and domestic violence survivors earn 35% less than women not abused.
  - In Papua New Guinea, on average, each staff member loses 11 days of work per year as a result of the impacts of gender violence.
The economic costs of VAW have been estimated at between 1.2% and 3.7% of GDP.

- In Vietnam, the persistence of domestic violence has resulted in a total loss of earnings equivalent to nearly 3% of the country GDP.
- In Fiji, the annual estimated cost of intimate partner violence cost was 7% of the GDP.

VAW significantly lowers the productivity and profitability of businesses, through higher turnover, lower individual work’s performance, increased health expenses, absenteeism, lateness and HR costs.

- Peru businesses lost 70 million workdays due to partner violence, equivalent to 3.7% of GDP in 2013.
THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VAW AND WEE

- Women’s empowerment can reduce the risk of violence by improving women’s financial autonomy, bargaining power and self-esteem.
- Earning an income and owning assets can reduce economic stress for women, which is a frequent factor in domestic violence.
- Women’s enhanced financial contributions to their households can increase their bargaining power at home, which can reduce their vulnerability to domestic violence.
- WEE can also give women the means to prevent and escape abusive relationships and help women to support themselves.

A research in India showed that women’s ownership of property is associated with significant lower levels of both physical and psychological violence.
The complex relationship between VAW and WEE (cont.)

- On the other hand, in some contexts, women’s economic empowerment can increase the risk of violence – especially in the short term.
- A 2014 baseline study for a VAWG reduction programme in India found that women who earned and controlled their own income were more likely to report violence experienced both at home and in public spaces.
- By disrupting traditional gender roles, WEE can result in backlash from partners or communities.
- This risk is higher in culturally conservative settings, where gender norms are rigid and rates and acceptance of VAW are high.
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THE BENEFITS OF ADDRESSING VAW AND WEE IN TANDEM

- **Addressing harmful gender norms makes a difference:** The IMAGE intervention in South Africa combined micro-finance programmes with trainings on HIV prevention, gender norms, cultural beliefs, communication and intimate partner violence. After two years, there were improvements in all nine indicators of empowerment and a **55% reduction in intimate partner violence.**
The role of business in addressing VAW in the workplace

- The business sector can and must do their part to realize women’s human rights to live free from violence – and create safer, healthier and more productive workplaces.
- The workplace often presents a unique opportunity to help women who may be living with violence at home, to identify the problem and assist with seeking help.
- Workplaces can also contribute to preventing violence against women in general by promoting gender equality and by changing social norms that condone or tolerate violence.

There are financial benefits for the private sector to address VAW in the workplace. Providing safe and supportive environments can optimize productivity and profitability of a private company through:

- Better individuals’ work performance
- Higher retention rates and staff morale
- Better health outcomes
- Less absenteeism and lateness
- Reduced recruitment and training costs
HOW TO ADDRESS VAW IN THE WORKPLACE

To achieve better workplace rights that support women who experience violence to stay safely in their jobs and in their homes, the private sector should:

- Introduce domestic violence and sexual harassment policies and written procedures that emphasize safety, accountability, and options for workers who are abused;
- Provide safe transportation to and from the workplace;
- Build education and awareness on the issue of violence as a workplace issue;
- Train key resources;
- Develop workplace information and support systems.
The Women’s Empowerment Principles offer practical guidance to businesses on how to address VAW and to establish workplaces where sexual harassment and violence against women are not tolerated.

The 3rd Principle is to “Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.”
THANK YOU!

Anna-Karin Jatfors
E-mail: anna-karin.jatfors@unwomen.org