



**European Project « Violence against women at work...
Let's talk about it ! »**

Policy Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, national working conditions surveys have shown that an increasing incidence of work-related health problems develop as a result of psychological rather than physical causes¹. Psychological violence can include different forms of violence such as sexual harassment, bullying or mobbing. Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in the European Union reported some form of sexual harassment in the workplace².

A research paper of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions³ found that in the 31 European countries surveyed, female employees are significantly more exposed to workplace bullying than their male colleagues.

Violence against women is a structural phenomenon arising from patriarchal societies, where the domination of men over women has become normal in both public and private life. The *Beijing Platform for Action*, which was endorsed by all EU Member States, states that "violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement."

This persistent discrimination against women is very often compounded by a lack of opportunities in both training and education, contributing to lower incomes for women and higher levels of poverty⁴. Violence against women is a reflection of societal gender roles.

¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007) "Women and Violence at Work", <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/110/en/1/ef07110en.pdf>

² United Nations Factsheet, 2006

³ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007) "Women and Violence at Work", <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/110/en/1/ef07110en.pdf>

⁴ Report of the IV Conference on Women (1995), <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwew/off/a--20.en>

In many countries women make up a growing proportion of the workforce. However, a substantial number of female workers are employed in precarious jobs, often with little job-security, unfavourable working conditions and remuneration. This situation is not limited to the industrialised world: many female workers in developing and industrialising countries experience mistreatment and sexual harassment at the workplace. Moreover, whilst a growing number of women are taking on managerial jobs, they are still faced with problems connected to exclusion or undermining behaviour from men who may consider them a threat. In these cases sexual harassment is frequently used as a tool of control.

The following recommendations represent the outcomes of a European project carried out in 2009-2010 and financed under the European Commission's Daphne Programme. They have been jointly prepared by Mental Health Europe and the project partners and completed after the final conference held on 7 December 2010 at the European Parliament in Brussels.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU AND THE EU MEMBER STATES

- To raise awareness of the links between mental health and employment widely across Europe
- To combat violence against women at the workplace in all European countries and promote attitudes of zero tolerance
- To support the development of retention policies for employers which recognise the rights of the victim and the responsibilities of the perpetrator
- To ensure that all professionals receive specific training, especially occupational health doctors and human resources professionals
- To ensure that the particular vulnerability of women working in high risk occupations is recognised

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATIONS

- To develop relationships with employers and Trades Unions in order to facilitate the recognition of the links between violence at work and mental health problems
- To offer training to Trades Unions encouraging their role in recognizing and responding to this issue
- To promote awareness raising campaigns
- To identify and disseminate examples of good practice, especially in those countries with a high level of recorded incidents
- To find a common definition of what is considered to be violence

- To promote the introduction of safe contact points in each workplace
- To develop guidelines for Employee Assistance Programmes, counselling and mediation services on recognising and working with women who have been victims of violence
- To develop and promote specialist resources and training for occupational health doctors, family doctors, HR professionals and all the relevant professionals
- To train professionals to ensure they have a thorough knowledge of the psychological problems linked to violence against women at work and can then offer the appropriate support

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- To support awareness raising campaigns
- To support the development of safe contact points in all workplaces
- To provide support for women who have experienced violence at work
- To ensure that occupational health doctors, human resources professionals and appropriate mental health staff have access to training and information

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS AND TRADE UNIONS

- To raise awareness amongst employees
- To adopt a zero tolerance regime within the work place
- To introduce safe contact points in all workplaces

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