

# SHADOW PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

Domestic Violence in COVID-19

*Guidance Tool for Employers and Businesses*

**#UNSTEREOTYPE**  
ALLIANCE

convened by

 **UN**  
**WOMEN** 

# 1. BACKGROUND

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**We are living in unprecedented times with the global pandemic of COVID-19 affecting citizens in all corners of the globe.**

- As the world experiences economic instability, critical strains on health systems and profound disruptions to daily life, women are being impacted disproportionately.
- Since many countries have imposed 'stay at home' regulations to protect their citizens, there has been a huge surge in domestic violence, reported across countries around the globe<sup>1</sup>, in a deadly shadow pandemic<sup>2</sup>.
- 1 in 3 women already face some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime during normal times.
- When households are placed under strain domestic violence usually goes up further, as does sexual exploitation. COVID-19 is driving similar trends right now<sup>3</sup>.
- Calls to domestic violence helplines:
  - went up by 65% over just one weekend in the UK at the end of March<sup>4</sup> and
  - doubled in Lebanon and Malaysia<sup>5</sup>.
- In New South Wales, Australia, 40% of frontline workers reported increased requests for help by survivors<sup>6</sup>.
- The already limited capacities and investments of service providers (health, police, social care, charities) to cope with the increased demand to address violence against women and girls at national level are being further reduced by COVID-19.
- Women and girls are locked in with their abusers and are isolated from the people and resources that can best help them. This is a critical time for women and girls, and urgent action is needed.
- If not dealt with, this shadow pandemic will also add to the economic impact of COVID-19. The global cost of violence against women has previously been estimated at approximately USD\$ 1.5 trillion<sup>7</sup>. That figure can only be rising as violence increases now and continues in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- UN Women has created a Public Service Announcement - a campaign designed to shine a light on this pandemic, with clear advice to enable people and employers to support women and girls in need during COVID-19. This campaign accompanies other UN Women policy and programming initiatives to enhance our comprehensive approach to end violence against women and girls globally.



## 2. WHY IT MATTERS

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Whilst domestic violence is on a terrifying trajectory during this time, under normal circumstances it is already experienced by 1 in 3 women worldwide. That means that within every business organization's leadership team and staff, there are likely women who are currently suffering from domestic violence.

- The USA Department of Labor reports that victims of domestic violence lose nearly 8 million days of paid work per year in the U.S., resulting in a \$1.8 billion loss in productivity for employers.
- For many survivors of domestic violence, work is a necessary respite from the unpredictability of their partner's abuse, and there can be more immediate danger inside the home than outside it.

### 2.1 A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

- Ignorance of the domestic violence issue must not be an excuse for employers.
- The social and economic costs of violence against women are substantial. Creating a safe and empowering workplace and addressing any violence at home is critical for companies to function and prosper.
- Business leaders have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their employees, especially women.
- **Productivity, Profitability, Absenteeism and Presenteeism** -
  - **Productivity:** Women are less productive in the workplace when they suffer domestic violence. This will result in significant loss of paid and unpaid work time, employee turnover, poor performance, safety hazards, negative effects on workplace interpersonal relationships,

and possible decreased concentration on job performance as a result of trauma from witnessing the violence.

- **Profitability:** Data suggests that where sexual harassment is more prevalent, average business profits are negatively impacted.
- **Absenteeism:** Domestic violence causes employees to miss work. For example, a study conducted in Nigeria showed that 62% of victims report being late for work or leaving early as a result of the abuse.
- **Presenteeism:** Presenteeism occurs when ongoing physical and/or mental health conditions prevent employees from being fully productive at work. In short, when employees show up to work and work even when sick, it leads to productivity loss.

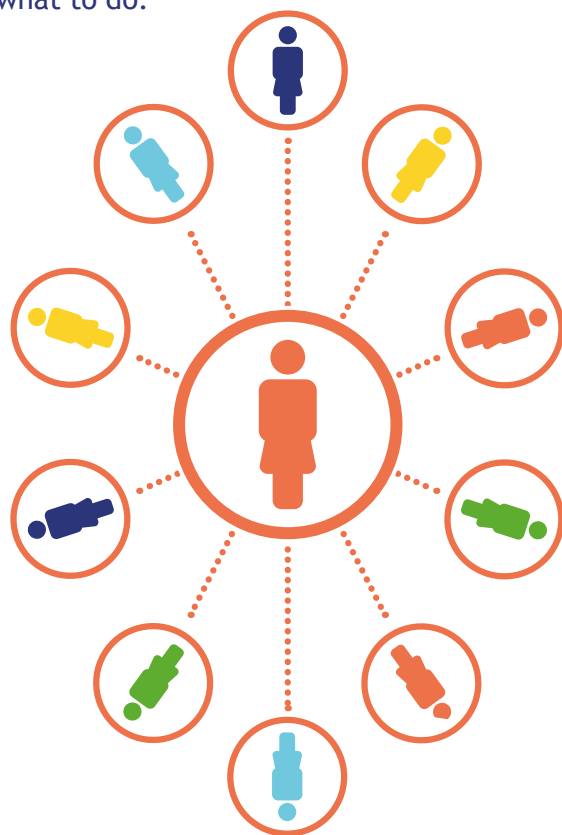
### 2.2 A HUMAN RIGHTS IMPERATIVE

- Violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights with great impact on survivors and their families. Businesses must stand with others to support violence-free families and workplaces, including when employees work from home.
- Businesses increasingly recognize their role in promoting human rights and in the implementation of global agreements and principles.

### 3. WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

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- A survivor-centred approach means a human rights-based approach that puts the survivors' rights and needs at the centre. The survivor has a right to:
  - be treated with dignity and respect instead of being exposed to victim-blaming attitudes;
  - choose the course of action she wants in dealing with the violence instead of feeling powerless;
  - have privacy and confidentiality instead of exposure;
  - experience non-discrimination instead of discrimination based on gender, age, race / ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, HIV status or any other characteristic;
  - receive comprehensive information to help her make her own decision instead of being told what to do.



#### ■ CEO

Because of the expected increase in domestic violence and the particularly challenging circumstances where women and girls may be isolated with the abuser for long periods of time, companies/workplaces may be the only source of immediate contact outside of the home. As such it is critical for employers to lead from the top.

- Brief human resources and managers on violence against women, the risks and consequences as they exist during normal times and how the current situation is exacerbating it, while communicating expectations that managers will support any staff who come forward and disclose.
- Consider establishing a special contact person within human resources that can serve as a dedicated focal point to deal with domestic violence for staff.
- Ensure the organization or business has a team who are trained on how to handle disclosures of GBV in a compassionate and non-judgmental manner and know to whom they can make referrals for further care or bring into treatment centers to provide care on the spot. Holistic support to women employees should include psychosocial support.

#### ■ HR PERSONNEL

- Provide interim measures, if they do not have policies already in place, to support colleagues who disclose abuse by ensuring a list of available and functioning local services (helplines for women and men, shelters, women's organization's providing services to survivors) to refer employees to;

- allow flexible working arrangements, so that women can prioritize the safety and well-being of their children;
- allow 'absences' without penalization to allow survivors to access emergency shelter, support services or court proceedings.
- Explore opportunities to keep women personnel employed, so that they have financial continuity and resources to keep themselves safe and seek support.

#### ■ COMMUNICATIONS

- Consider taking proactive measures through messaging to all employees to challenge gender stereotypes and roles, discrimination, inequality and harmful masculinities to encourage prosocial behavior and healthy outlets of coping with stressful situations.

#### ■ EMPLOYEE TO EMPLOYEE

- 3 PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER when dealing with a gender based violence situation:

**Safety, Confidentiality and Autonomous decision-making/consent.**

- **Safety** is paramount. Actions or words can jeopardize the survivor's safety. Nothing should be disclosed and no action should be taken without the survivor's consent.
- **Confidentiality.** Because of safety issues and the stigma, shame and victim-blaming that survivors often face, it is critical that their experiences and identity remain confidential.

- **Autonomous decision-making/consent.**

Only survivors know the risks they face with regard to their safety and thus should be driving any decision related to the abuse they are experiencing.

- All employees can learn the signs and become an effective support to colleagues and neighbours. They can:

- Check in on friends, family members and co-workers to ask if everything is okay with them and at home.
- Educate themselves about domestic violence, know the details of local services like helpline numbers and shelters to provide them to someone who reaches out.
- If a colleague tells them, or they suspect, the colleague's life or the lives of her children are in danger, call the protection units or the police.
- Give permission-based support and use discretion to make it safe for the abused.



## 4. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- A. [Community support service database - Helplines on your Virtual Knowledge Center for EVAW](#)
- B. [Useful database - HotPeachPage \(country level support services\)](#)
- C. [UN Women & ILO \(2018\) 10 Essentials for addressing violence against women at work](#)
- D. [UN Women \(2018\). Towards an end to sexual harassment: The urgency and nature of change in the era of #MeToo](#)
- E. [UN Women \(2019\). What will it take? Promoting cultural change to end sexual harassment](#)
- F. [UN Women \(2018\). A Global Women's Safety Framework in Rural Spaces](#)
- G. [UN Women Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#)



<sup>1</sup> UN Women (2020). [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

<sup>2</sup> UN Women (2020). [Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic](#)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations (2020). [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#)

<sup>4</sup> UN Women (2020). [Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic](#)

<sup>5</sup> UN News (2020). [UN chief calls for domestic violence 'ceasefire' amid 'horrifying global surge'](#)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations (2020). [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#)

<sup>7</sup> UN Women (2020). [COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

<sup>8</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2003). [Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States](#)

<sup>9</sup> UNDP (2013). [Violence against women also hurts business and development](#)

<sup>10</sup> UN Women & ILO (2019) [Handbook: Addressing violence and harassment against women in the world of work](#)

<sup>11</sup> European Scientific Journal (2004). [Impact of domestic abuse on female employee's productivity in the Nigerian workforce](#)

<sup>12</sup> Pinheiro, M. (2017). [The Economic Impact of Mental Disorders and Mental Health Problems in the Workplace](#)

<sup>13</sup> UN Women & ILO (2019) [Handbook: Addressing violence and harassment against women in the world of work](#)