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# Submission to the UN Human Rights Council

On Women’s Rights in the World of Work

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## Overview of the submission

This submission principally concerns women’s safety at work, and the interconnections between women’s safety in the home and public sphere with women’s well-being and enjoyment of rights in the workplace. It also addresses the trends related to women’s safety in the “gig” or “demand” economy. The submission draws on our four-year study on the economic and social impacts of violence against women (VAW) in Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan. The study was conducted through household surveys and business questionnaires, and had a unique focus on women in work. With this submission, we outline the evidence that we have gathered on the impact of violence on women’s human rights in the world of work.

We demonstrate that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) harm women as workers, by:

* Reducing individual productivity in the workplace;
* Diminishing women’s earnings and increasing their out-of-pocket expenses, potentially driving them into poverty;
* Increasing women’s unemployment;
* Undermining women’s human capital; and
* Contributing to the gender wage gap.
* Furthermore, women in insecure, home-based and informal work are more vulnerable to violence and to its impacts.

This evidence comes in addition to the already-well-established physical and mental health impacts of violence (eg: Ellsberg, 2006; Garcia-Moreno and Pallitto, 2013), and demonstrates that VAW is an issue for employers and businesses, and anybody concerned with women’s rights in the world of work.

We conclude by indicating some promising initiatives we have encountered to address these specific trends.

## Introduction to the What Works Component 3 costing study: methodology

Recognising the lack of knowledge on the impacts and costs of VAWG, particularly in fragile and developing contexts, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded this research project, as one component of the three-component What Works to Prevent Violence research and innovation programme. The study was carried out in Ghana, South Sudan and Pakistan in order to establish the unrecognised costs of violence against women. Building on a growing literature, the study estimates micro- and macro-economic impacts of VAWG, and seeks to empirically establish the *cost of inaction* on VAWG for women, families, businesses/ communities and countries. The countries were chosen to enable the development of common tools for very different contexts: stable; fragile and in active conflict.

The study used both quantitative (Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan) and qualitative approaches (Ghana and Pakistan). Household surveys were administered to 2,002 women in Ghana, 1,996 women in South Sudan and 2,998 women in Pakistan, to collect information about: 1) household size and socio-economic status; 2) women’s personal experiences; and 3) impacts of VAW on individuals, families and communities. Business surveys were conducted with about 100 businesses in Ghana, 107 businesses in Pakistan and 99 businesses in South Sudan. They were carried out with employees and managers to assess the impact of VAWG on worker productivity and business output. In Ghana and Pakistan, participatory focus group discussions and in-depth interviews provided an insight into the pathways of violence impacts in the lives of women and their communities.

## Trends regarding intimate partner violence and the workplace

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the single most prevalent form of violence against women in the world (Garcia Moreno and Pallitto, 2013). This violence affects women victims-survivors in the workplace and it affects the workplace as a whole.

In Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan, **27%, 9% and 35% respectively of female employees** who participated in the business survey reported experiencing IPV in the last 12 months.

We note that in all three countries we studied, IPV affected women in the workplace across the different levels of education and skills: the impacts were not limited to low paid women. In South Sudan, for instance, extremely high levels of intimate partner violence affected women at all levels of educational attainment, with 63.6% of respondents with a primary-only education, and 65.6% of respondents with a university degree, reporting physical IPV in the last 12 months.

### The impacts of IPV on women’s rights in the workplace

IPV often bleeds into the workplace, for example when perpetrators prevent their partner from working or when they intimidate or attack their partner in her place of work. The evidence on physical and mental health impacts of IPV make it clear that individuals carry these impacts with them to the workplace, even when the abuser is not physically present. We have assembled new evidence from household survey data to demonstrate that, in addition to physical and mental health impacts, IPV results in women losing days of waged work/economic activity, as well as creating opportunity costs. The data outlined below demonstrate how intimate partner violence is a workplace issue, removing women from the workplace, impoverishing them, and, in the long term, harming their human capital and capabilities.

* + Working women with paid and unpaid employment and experiencing IPV in the last 12 months reported on average **missing 11 days of work in Ghana and 7.5 days in South Sudan**. This is similar to studies in other countries, such as an average of 5.5 days lost in Vietnam (Duvvury, et.al 2012) and a range of 7 to 10 days in the US (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).
  + Women in formal wage employment, studied in our business survey, reported **even higher missed days due**. In Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan, 19% (14 days or 3working weeks each), 6% (17 days each), 28% (10 days each) of female employees respectively reported productivity loss due to IPV. The estimates include absenteeism and presenteeism[[1]](#footnote-1).
  + Lost days of work equates to lost income in many cases: in Ghana, **the loss of income for women who experienced IPV came to $36 million annually – equivalent to 4.5% of women in Ghana, in effect, not working.**
  + Lost income, combined with hefty out of pocket costs, can push women and families into poverty. In Pakistan, women who accessed services related to experiences of violence incurred on average US$52 annually for medical/ legal/ replacement of property expenses; this is equivalent to **19% of the annual per capita expenditure** on non-food consumption.
  + Previous studies (Duvvury, et al 2012; NUI Galway and Safe Ireland, forthcoming) confirm that exposure to violence results in the individual being less productive at work. In a study of 50 women IPV victims-survivors in the Republic of Ireland, productivity, in the form of lost income, was the dominant cost (NUI Galway and Safe Ireland, forthcoming).
  + These impacts have a cumulative impact on the business itself, but also on the long-term prospects for individual women, whose career progression may be affected by the productivity impacts of violence. This, in turn, is likely to go on to **contribute to the gender wage gap**, with women’s earning prospects negatively impacted by violence (Vyas, 2013; Duvvury, Minh and Carney, 2012, Morrisson and Orlando,1997).
  + In the Irish study, **unemployment increased as a result of IPV**: the number of women currently unemployed in the sample has doubled since the outset of the abusive relationship, predominantly as a result of IPV.

## Trends regarding violence in the workplace

We also surveyed women on their experiences of different types of violence in the workplace. In Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan, 16%, 30% and 46% of female employees respectively reported experiencing non partner sexual violence (harassment or assault) in the last 12 months by either a colleague, supervisor, strangers, or family members.

In South Sudan, 31% of all women in paid employment reported verbal violence in the workplace in the last 12 months, and 18.5% reported physical violence. In Pakistan, the most common type of violence in the workplace was psychological: 15% of women in paid employment reported this type of violence. Verbal and psychological violence are the most prevalent across all three countries; although levels of physical and sexual violence in South Sudan were also very high. This high level of violence is indicative of the lack of safety in spaces outside the home including the workplace, and the responsibility of employers to ensure that the workplace is safe for women workers.

As with IPV, we investigated the impacts of violence in the workplace on individual women workers. Female employees reported productivity loss (absenteeism and presenteeism) in all three countries as a result of non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) in the workplace. In Ghana, 9% of female employees reported productivity loss of an average of 7 days each as a result of NPSV; in Pakistan 10% lost 8 days each, and in South Sudan **22% of female employees lost an average of 9 days productivity** each as a result of NPSV. As is the case for intimate partner violence, violence in the workplace undermines women employees’ physical and mental health and damages their productivity, in turn leading to loss in income and opportunities, and damaging their potential in the workplace.

## Trends related to the “gig” and “on demand” economy

* + Research on violence has shown that **employed women, particularly those who are self-employed, are likely to have higher prevalence rates of IPV** (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 2004; ICRW and UFPA, 2009; Aegnor, et. al., 2012; Duvvury, et al., 2013; and Cools & Kotsadam, 2017). For example, our study in Ghana showed self-employed women had an IPV prevalence rate of 39% compared to 30% for wage/contract employed women.
  + This trend has been noted by the ILO Committee of Experts in their Conclusions Report, Oct 2016 – ‘Work in the home where workers are isolated and labour inspectors cannot enter non-traditional workplaces’ was identified as a risk factor for violence in the Asian garment sector (Global Labour Justice, 2018).
  + The majority of Gig workers work under similar conditions as they are considered self-employed, work in isolation and have no ‘office environment’, are not subject to labour laws and have few standard benefits of regular contracts. Additionally, much of the financial risk of the business is borne by the gig workers, increasing their economic vulnerability, and thus their vulnerability to violence by an intimate partner.
  + A study of female microentrepreneurs in Ecuador found that 51% were subject to IPV at some point by their current partner or former partner, and 14.7% experienced IPV in the last year. Women who experienced violence in the last year lost on average 54.25 days, which is equivalent to $70 of annual income. In addition, women incurred out of pocket expenses for health care and legal orders that amounted to $185 or 9% of the generated revenue by these entrepreneurs in the last year (Vara Horna, 2014).
  + The productivity impacts of IPV mentioned for Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan for women working in the ‘gig’ and ‘on-demand’ economy, especially those who are primarily working from home, would be much greater than those working in a ‘traditional’ office environment.

## Emerging practices for the realisation of women’s rights at work

### Gender responsive economic costing and budgeting tools

New approaches to costing and budgeting can be used to give greater clarity on the real costs to governments and businesses of inaction on violence against women, as opposed to the real costs of action. These approaches provide very concrete evidence on the benefit for society of investing in the elimination of VAW wherever it occurs. As an example, a productivity study was carried out in Vietnam (Duvvury et al, 2012), finding that VAW resulted in a productivity loss of US$2.26 billion, or 1.78% of the national economy. By contrast, Gender Responsive Budgeting in Kiribati demonstrated that the cost to government of providing VAW services and prosecuting perpetrators came to US$235,472, or 0.12% of the economy. By using these economic tools, advocates can demonstrate that the prevention of and response to VAW are neither luxuries nor unaffordable, and further demonstrate that expenditure on prevention and response is a sound economic investment.

### Emerging business prevention models

A prevention model for businesses has been designed and is being implemented in Bolivia, including an impact evaluation (see Vara Horna, 2018). The model is based on the direct involvement of management in prevention, which is integrated into the daily business processes. A unique aspect of the model is that prevention activities are integrated into recruitment, induction and training processes, and the creation of a network of prevention within the entire business. The model has been tested from 2015 to 2018, and preliminary results indicate that:

* The prevalence of violence in the company had decreased by 28.2 %, as reported by female employees
* The business costs declined by 44.6% between the 2015 and 2018.
* The organizational culture has changed, with a greater sense of personal empowerment and a greater work commitment

Some of the important lessons of the work in Latin America are the following:

1. The prevention of VAW is profitable.​
2. Three interconnected elements are critical for a sustainable cultural change in businesses: prevention activities; equitable management practice; and personal empowerment.
3. Top management and the management structure are key to the success of the model. Equitable management is the context that ensures effectiveness.​
4. A gender-informed approach based on feminist theory are necessary to understand change.​
5. It is a process of long-term change.​

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1. Presenteeism refers to a situation where an individual is at work but unable to be productive [↑](#footnote-ref-1)