

EQUALLY SAFE AT  
**WORK**



Guidance for line managers on  
violence against women and work



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# Introduction

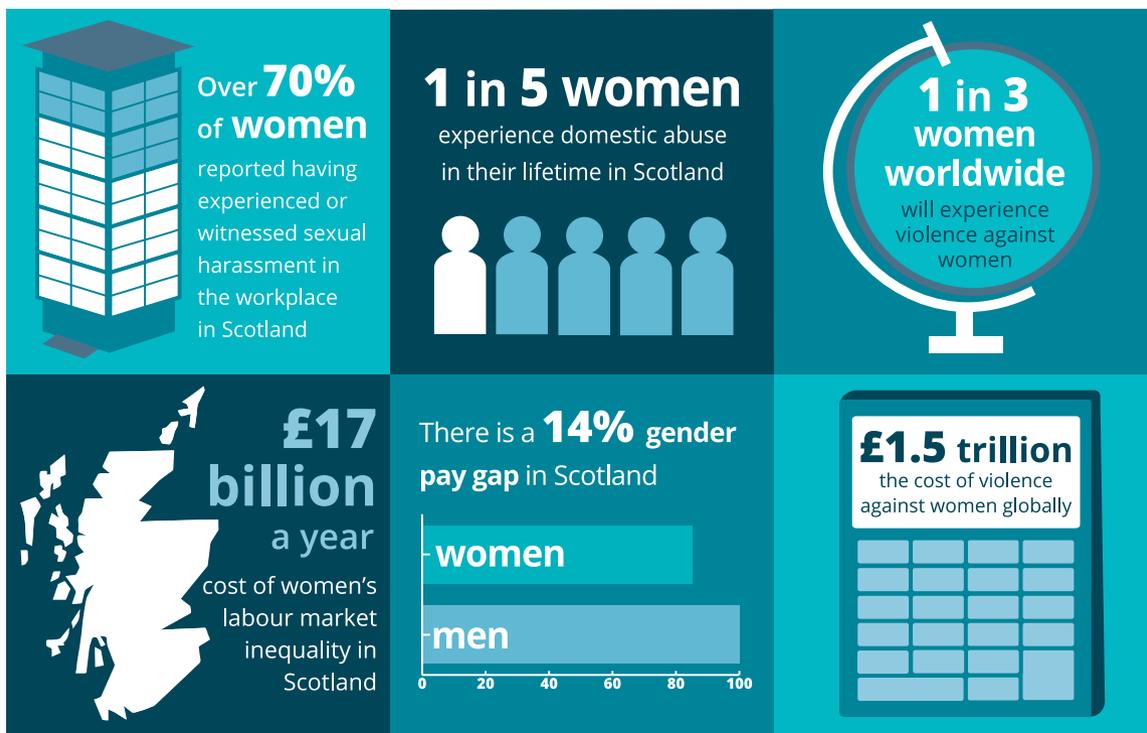
This guidance provides information for line managers on violence against women (VAW). It aims to build capacity and confidence in line managers on VAW which is a core part of meeting the standards of Equally Safe at Work, an employer accreditation programme being piloted in Scotland's local government. The guidance should be used alongside your organisation's policy on VAW that is also being developed as part of Equally Safe at Work. Your practice as a line manager should be guided by the policy and you should refer to the policy if you're unclear about any processes or procedures.

This guidance focuses on forms of VAW most likely to affect the workplace which includes domestic abuse, stalking, sexual harassment, rape and sexual assault, and "honour-based" violence. It provides information on what VAW is; how it relates to women's workplace equality; and sets out the business and economic cases for addressing VAW. It describes the impact of different forms of VAW on employees and the wider workplace; provides information on how to recognise signs of VAW; and outlines best practice for responding to, and supporting, employees disclosing or reporting VAW. The guidance also gives examples of the simple steps you can take to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and minimise the impact on the workplace.

It's recognised that both men and women experience gender-based violence and there are both similarities and differences in the effects on the workplace. The focus of this guidance is women's experiences of VAW, as the vast majority of victim-survivors are women.

On page 7 you'll find 12 facts you need to know about VAW and work, and on page 36 you'll find top tips for responding to VAW. There is also a glossary on page 37.

## VAW and Work: The numbers



# Equally Safe at Work

Equally Safe at Work is an innovative and world-leading accreditation programme being piloted in Scotland's local government. It supports the implementation of Equally Safe, the Scottish Government and COSLA joint strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. Equally Safe recognises that violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Eliminating women's workplace inequality and other inequalities in society is therefore a fundamental step in preventing VAW. Equally Safe at Work uses the shortened "violence against women" (VAW) because of its employment focus.

Equally Safe at Work supports councils to progress their work on gender equality at work and to prevent VAW both in the workplace, and in the wider community. Councils work towards meeting criteria in six key topics: leadership, data, flexible working, workplace culture, occupational segregation and VAW. Work to meet the criteria includes undertaking training, collecting and analysing data, developing initiatives, reviewing and updating policies and practices, and disseminating resources to key people.

An integral part of Equally Safe at Work is ensuring that line managers understand the causes of VAW and are confident responding to disclosures from staff.

# What is violence against women?

VAW is a violation of women's human rights and an enduring social problem that undermines workplaces and communities. The term VAW refers to violence and/or abusive behaviour that is predominately carried out by men and directed at women because of their gender. This behaviour includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and economic abuse and stems from systemic and deep-rooted women's inequality. It's an abuse of power and privilege and can be used to control women. It affects women from all backgrounds irrespective of age, sexual orientation, race, education, culture and socioeconomic demographic.

The term VAW includes, but is not limited to:

- Domestic abuse;
- Stalking;
- Sexual harassment;
- Rape and sexual assault; and
- So-called "honour-based" violence.



Women's experiences of VAW vary depending on their multiple identities.

For example:

- Disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual violence, and abuse is often more acute when the abuser is also their carer.
- Black and ethnic minority (BME) women face additional barriers to accessing race-sensitive support, and they may be unwilling to seek help from statutory agencies because of fear of racism or that their culture will be judged.
- Older women are less likely to report their experiences of domestic abuse.
- Lesbian and bisexual women can be vulnerable to abusers who threaten to out them to colleagues or employers, and family members.
- Younger women are more likely to experience sexual harassment. They are less likely to feel able to report because of their propensity to be in insecure work and think that their job would be at risk if they did.
- Trans women are particularly vulnerable to transphobic emotional abuse. They may also be reluctant to access support services or contact the police for fear they may be met with prejudice or that they may not be understood.
- Pregnancy can be a trigger for domestic abuse and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth.

Although VAW takes many forms and impacts different groups of women in a variety of ways, there are also many commonalities in experiences. It's important to create a supportive and responsive workplace culture for women to feel safe to disclose their experience, and where an alleged perpetrator is also an employee, they are managed in line with best practice.

## 12 facts you need to know about VAW and work

1.	VAW is violence and/or abusive behaviour and can involve physical, emotional, psychological, financial, economic and sexual abuse.
2.	It affects women from all backgrounds irrespective of age, sexual orientation, race, education, culture and socioeconomic demographic.
3.	VAW affects women in different and sometimes similar ways depending on their multiple identities, for example as a BME woman or a disabled woman.
4.	VAW is perpetrated at epidemic levels, with three million women in the UK affected each year.
5.	The trauma from VAW can result in anxiety, depression, isolation, stress and fear.
6.	VAW has a long term and lasting effect on victim-survivors which can impact their daily lives including their experiences at work.
7.	Experiencing VAW can prevent a woman from doing her job effectively.
8.	VAW is usually not a one-off experience. It's often repeated and continuous behaviour that can occur over many years.
9.	Most women don't report VAW out fear of not being believed, fear of being judged, or believing nothing will change.
10.	Some women find it difficult to identify their experience as VAW because sexism is often normalised and ignored in workplace cultures.
11.	VAW affects not only victim-survivors but can also impact their colleagues, the wider workplace, and ultimately the effective running of the organisation.
12.	Gender inequality in the workplace and in all areas of society perpetuates and sustains VAW.

# What does violence against women have to do with the workplace?

Preventing VAW requires action to address women's inequality in all areas of society. Women's labour market inequality is caused, and sustained, by wider gender inequality. Women's labour market and economic inequality reduces their financial independence, restricts their choices in employment and creates a conducive context for VAW. Financial dependence and poverty can make it harder for women experiencing violence or abuse to move on and maintain employment.

The gender pay gap is the key indicator of women's labour market inequality, and the divergent experiences men and women have in the workplace, and in education, training, care and domestic labour. While there are commonalities experienced by all women at work, disabled women, BME women, Muslim women, lesbian and bisexual women, trans women, refugee women, young women, and older women experience different, multiple barriers to participation in the labour market, and to progression within their occupation.

Socioeconomic background also has an influence on women's labour market outcomes, with women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds less likely to be represented in higher paid jobs, and more likely to be in lower paid, stereotypically female work such as care and cleaning. This can result in financial inequality and/or instability which diminish women's options in the face of violence.

Gender norms and stereotyping about women's capabilities and interests results in a stark segregation in the types of work that men and women do. In local government, this means women are more likely to work in homecare, admin,

primary teaching, and early years and childcare, while men tend to work in IT, refuse collection and trades. A lack of quality part-time and flexible jobs, coupled with women's disproportionate responsibility for caring, finds women under-represented in management and senior roles.

# The business and economic cases for addressing violence against women

VAW can affect women's ability to do their job effectively. This can be because of stress, trauma or physical injuries that can make it difficult to do their work as normal. An increase in unexplained lateness or absences can also be a sign that something is wrong. Victim-survivors often require to take time off work to seek help from specialist support agencies, attend doctor's appointments or access legal support. Some women also leave their job as a result of the impact of VAW and may move to a new role that doesn't effectively utilise their skills. This represents a significant loss of female talent to employers, with many organisations missing out on women's skills and experience.

## Impact on the workplace

VAW also affects people who are in the victim-survivor's life on a regular basis. This can include work colleagues, and the wider council. It can have an adverse impact on staff morale, as well as on the council's reputation. The impact on colleagues can include:

- Having to fill in for absent colleagues, or colleagues who are under-performing;
- Reduced productivity or being distracted from their own work;
- Increased stress or anxiety from being followed to or from work, or being subject to questioning by the perpetrator about the victim-survivor;
- Trying to protect the victim-survivor from attention, unwanted phone calls or visits;

- Witnessing a form of VAW and feeling helpless and unsure about how to intervene to support a colleague;
- A negative impact on their own mental and emotional health, especially if they may also be experiencing abuse themselves; and
- Increased staff absence or turnover of key people.

## The cost of violence against women

There are clear economic and business benefits in advancing gender equality and preventing VAW. VAW in the UK is estimated to cost over £66 billion per year, which includes an estimated £14 billion lost due to decreased productivity, administrative difficulties from unplanned time off, lost wages and sick pay.

The cost of VAW includes a significant cost to public services, at a time when there is increasing downward pressure on public spending. Because of VAW and wider gender inequality, women are:

- More dependent on social security;
- More likely to need access to housing services in the face of violence and abuse;
- More likely to have a caring role for children, disabled people, sick people or older people;
- Less likely to be financially independent; and
- More likely to be living in poverty, including in-work poverty.

It therefore makes good business sense for councils to support victim-survivors in the workplace, and to take steps to address gender inequality at work and prevent VAW.

# How violence against women affects victim-survivors and the workplace

VAW has a profound impact on women's capacity to work and victim-survivors are often targeted in and around the workplace. Women report experiencing trauma, stress, anxiety, and depression as a result of VAW and can struggle to find appropriate support in the workplace. VAW can also affect victim-survivors' capacity to work with men, particularly in situations where there is an existing gender or power imbalance. By understanding VAW and how it impacts employees, colleagues and the wider workplace, you'll be better able to support your employees and ensure the council is not adversely affected. As a line manager, it's important that you understand the different forms of VAW, their effect on women, their colleagues, and the organisation.

## Domestic abuse

At least one in four women in Scotland are affected by domestic abuse in their lifetime. Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, which can include sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. Whilst it's recognised that men experience domestic abuse, it's most commonly experienced by women, with male partners or ex-partners perpetrating the abuse. Domestic abuse also happens in same-sex relationships.

The majority of women experiencing domestic abuse are also targeted at work. It can prevent women coming to work, performing well, and in some cases staying in their job. Perpetrators of domestic abuse often use a number of tactics to disrupt and sabotage women's employment including:

- Using workplace resources such as phones and email to threaten, harass or abuse them;

- Sending abusive and threatening phone calls, text messages or emails to their personal phone while at work;
- Preventing them from going to work by locking them in, or by hiding their keys or purse;
- Controlling their finances to prevent them from paying transport costs or tampering with their car to prevent them from going to work;
- Following them into their workplace or waiting outside for them;
- Isolating them from their colleagues by not allowing them to attend social events, or insisting on attending with them;
- Verbal harassment, assault or threats of assault when women leave to go to work;
- Destroying personal documents which may prevent them from applying for jobs;
- Preventing them from attending development or training courses;
- Sabotaging their work clothes;
- Offering to provide childcare and not turning up;
- Threatening to take the children if they go to work;
- For non-English speakers, preventing them from learning English which would enable them to work;
- Discouraging them from applying for promotion or positions where they would become the primary earner in the household; and
- Securing their own employment with the same employer to more closely monitor her activities and increase access to her whilst at work.

## Stalking

Stalking is a persistent and unwanted pattern of behaviour which causes, or has the intention to cause, fear and alarm. It's a form of highly personalised, targeted surveillance underpinned by the communication of that surveillance to the victim-survivor.

Stalking is a common tactic used by perpetrators of domestic abuse, but can also be perpetrated by colleagues, neighbours, friends, acquaintances and strangers. The emotional and psychological impact of stalking can result in increased fear, stress and anxiety, and loss of safety or trust. Victim-survivors of stalking worry that it will impact their job because of unexplained or frequent absences to avoid their stalker.

Stalking can have a significant impact on the workplace because stalkers are able to pinpoint the location of their victim when they're at work. Tactics used by stalkers to disrupt women's employment can include:

- Preventing them from attending work by tampering with their car;
- Using workplace resources such as phones and email to threaten, harass and abuse employees;
- Watching or spying on them, or forcing contact with them through any means, including social media;
- Following victims survivors to and from work;
- Sending unwanted gifts or flowers to their work; and
- Targeting their colleagues.

## Sexual harassment and sexism

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which is intended to, or has the effect of, violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. As a result of the #MeToo movement<sup>1</sup>, the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace is now a high-profile issue and there is increasing pressure for employers to take action.

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<sup>1</sup> #MeToo is a movement started in 2006 that gained global prominence in 2017. The movement highlights the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment.

The Equally Safe at Work survey of employees in early adopter councils found that three-quarters (75%) of respondents had either experienced or witnessed sexual harassment in the last 12 months. Of those, the vast majority (70%) did not report it to their employer. Experiences included unwelcome jokes of a sexual nature; feeling uncomfortable when alone with a male colleague; comments of a sexual nature about a woman's body or clothes; displays of pornographic photographs or drawings in the workplace; unwelcome verbal and physical advances; and unwanted touching.

Sexual harassment is under-reported because of fear of being blamed or not being believed, feeling embarrassed, and a lack of confidence in the complaints procedure. Most women don't report because they feel that their line manager wouldn't support them, it would damage their progression prospects, or it would lead to victimisation.

Women report that their experiences are often minimised by colleagues or dismissed as "banter". This is because of sexist workplace cultures which enable sexual harassment to go unchallenged, and undermine women in the workplace in more or less subtle ways. Everyday sexism is visible in formal and informal interactions, and manifests in a number of ways in the workplace, for example:

- Women's contributions being valued less; for example, their ideas being dismissed in meetings, or their contributions being initially ignored, only to be repeated by a male colleague later and received positively.
- Women being assigned to fewer higher visibility projects despite having equivalent skills and experience to their male colleagues.
- Women being expected or asked to make the tea or take minutes, irrespective of their role.
- Sexist jokes and remarks dismissed as "banter", including a preoccupation with a woman's physical appearance, including her clothes.

- The use of language which diminishes, infantilises or sexualises women, e.g. referring to colleagues as “the girls”, or calling a colleague “darling” or “love”, which creates an environment where women feel they are seen as less valuable or held in contempt.
- Stereotypical expectations around the type of work or the position a woman, or man, would hold; for example, assuming a woman is a lower grade when she is a senior manager, or a man being assumed to be the manager of a team by a visitor from another department.
- Suggesting a female colleague only got a promotion because the hiring manager found her attractive, or implying she had slept with him.
- Referring to a female manager as “bossy” while male managers are seen as assertive and strong.
- The, often unspoken, assumption that women will organise collection sheets, gifts, and nights out for colleagues.

Because of the normalised and everyday nature of these occurrences, it can feel very difficult for women to challenge sexism within councils which in turn makes it difficult to report sexual harassment.

## Rape and sexual assault

Sexual violence, which includes rape and sexual assault, can be defined as any sexual act that takes place without consent. The impact of rape and sexual assault on women’s employment can include:

- Difficulties in holding down a job as a result of needing to take extended periods off because of emotional and physical impacts, or frequent shorter periods to attend other appointments;
- Low self-esteem and depression making it difficult to carry out normal duties or participate socially or professionally at work;

- Leaving a job they enjoy and value without being able to discuss what happened or why their performance dipped;
- Fear of disclosing at work and worry that people will treat them differently;
- Feeling afraid of being alone at work or having to leave work when it's dark outside;
- Difficulties working with male colleagues; and
- Trauma, anxiety or panic attacks which can make it challenging to be in work situations which may involve groups of men or being alone with men.

Experiences of child sexual abuse can also have a lasting impact on victim-survivors. It can have long term emotional and psychological effects, including trauma, lack of trust, inability to develop meaningful relationships, lack of self-confidence, flashbacks and harmful coping strategies. Many victim-survivors of child sexual abuse don't seek support or access services for a long time.

## So-called “honour-based” violence

So-called “honour-based” violence is a form of violence and abuse perpetrated to protect family and community honour. It stems from the belief that family and community honour is rooted in women's behaviour, appearance, and sexuality, and is to be guarded by men. It includes restricting women from doing certain things that are perceived as going against culture, family, community and religion, and can involve physically and/or sexually harming a woman, forcing marriage and isolating them from friends and family. It can also involve controlling finances, preventing migrant women from learning English, where they don't already speak it, restricting movement and using their immigration status to threaten to send them away. In many cases of “honour-based” violence, victim-survivors have multiple perpetrators which can include partners, family members and members of the wider community. Women can be subject to “honour-based” violence for having a relationship or socialising with someone that the family and community

disapprove of, becoming too “western”, refusing a forced marriage or wearing make-up or certain clothing. Victim-survivors of “honour-based” violence are also policed by members of their wider community, particularly around socialising with people from different cultures.

A woman’s behaviour is not only linked to the family’s honour, but also her dowry<sup>2</sup> price which can drastically decrease if it’s perceived that she has not behaved in line with her family and community’s expectations. The concept of dowry is practiced in different ways by different communities, but dowry-related abuse is often associated with the wider family, and occurs when a husband and his family believe the dowry to be inadequate, where the dowry has not been paid or where the dowry has been devalued as a result of the woman’s behaviour.

“Honour-based” violence has similar effects as domestic abuse on women’s experiences of the workplace. It can also affect women’s experiences of work by:

- Being coerced into specific occupations;
- Being coerced into not going for a promotion because it’s seen as inappropriate for a woman, or because they will be expected to interact with men;
- Shaming and judging a woman for wanting a job;
- Threatening to send a woman away or deport her unless she stops going to work; and
- Preventing women from applying for a job by restricting access to a language course.

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<sup>2</sup>A dowry is an amount of money or property brought by a bride or her family to her husband on their marriage day, usually in exchange for the bride.

# Recognising the signs of violence against women

Victim-survivors usually don't disclose their experience to anyone at work or outwith the workplace because of a fear of not being believed, being judged, being treated as a "victim", or believing that nothing will change. They may feel embarrassed or humiliated and not want to share such personal details with their colleagues or their employer. This is due to the stigmatisation of VAW in society which can significantly undermine efforts in the workplace to support victim-survivors.

In situations where VAW was not perpetrated at work, for example if someone was raped or sexually assaulted outwith the workplace, they may think it's inappropriate to discuss it at work, even if it's affecting their job.

Knowing the signs of VAW is therefore important to ensure that you know how to effectively manage an employee and support them in their situation. It's also important to ensure that the impact on colleagues is minimised and that the council isn't adversely affected.

## Performance signs

- Changes in the quality of their work for unexplained reasons, despite a previously strong record;
- Suddenly starting to miss deadlines;
- Turning down professional development or training opportunities;
- Receiving repeated upsetting calls, texts or emails; and
- Constantly checking their mobile phone.

## Attendance signs

- Being persistently late without explanation or needing to leave work early;
- Needing to leave work while it's still light out;
- Having more frequent, sporadic absences without explanation;
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason i.e. very early arrival at work and/or working late;
- Needing regular time off for appointments; and
- Their partner or family exerts an unusual amount of control and demand over their work schedule, for example, they may be dropped off and picked up from work and is unable to attend business trips or events.

## Behaviour signs

- Avoiding lunch breaks or socialising at the end of the working day;
- Changes in their behaviour such as becoming quiet, avoiding speaking to colleagues;
- A loss of confidence and self-esteem;
- Avoiding male colleagues or being visibly uncomfortable around male colleagues;
- Isolating themselves from friends and family;
- Feeling depressed, anxious, distracted, or having problems with concentration;

- Increased stress or being easily overwhelmed;
- Being withdrawn or detached;
- Obsessing about time;
- Exhibiting fearful behaviour such as being easily startled;
- Expressing a fear of their partner;
- Expressing fears about leaving children with their partner; and
- Being secretive about their home life.

## Physical state signs

- Having repeated injuries and/or an explanation for injuries that doesn't fit the injuries they have;
- Frequent and/or sudden and/or unexpected medical problems and/or sickness absences;
- A change in their appearance such as the amount of make up worn, the clothes they're wearing and/or becoming unkempt or dishevelled;
- Fatigue or exhaustion;
- Increased physical tension;
- Panic attacks;
- Sleeping and/or eating disorders;
- Substance use and/or dependence; and
- Depression and/or suicide attempts.

## Other signs

- Flowers or gifts sent to them by their partner for no apparent reason;
- Seeming to have less money than previously; and
- Being a victim of vandalism or threats.

# Starting a conversation

Ongoing stigma around VAW means that most victim-survivors don't report it to their line managers. It's more likely that you'll become aware of a situation through noticing an increase in the number of absences they have, a change in behaviour or a dip in work performance. Victim-survivors may not discuss their experience because they're not aware that support is available for them. Women often report that they wish that someone had asked them about it.

If you suspect that one of your team is affected by VAW, you should facilitate a conversation to discuss and identify appropriate support. It's important to be supportive and non-judgemental. There may be cases where you try to start a conversation and the employee chooses not to disclose. If this happens, it's important to respect their decision. Respecting their decision can show that you're approachable and non-judgemental which, in turn, can encourage the employee to disclose at a later date.

## Questions you can ask to start the conversation

- I've noticed that you're not yourself lately, is everything okay?
- Are there any problems that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence and why you're missing deadlines?
- Is everything alright at home?
- Is everything alright at work?
- Is there anything happening at work that's concerning you?
- What support do you think might help?

# Responding to reports and/or disclosures

It's good practice to respond to disclosures in a non-judgemental and sensitive way. Some women may disclose to you without wanting to make a formal report to HR or the police. You may also be the first person that they have told. The way you respond can affect whether they will access support, formally report their experience, or come forward again in the future. It's therefore important that the victim-survivor feels believed and not to blame.

Women report that line managers seemed at times uncomfortable or unsure of what to say after they disclosed or reported. Some women have also reported that after disclosing or reporting, their line manager either avoided the topic, assumed the issue was resolved, or made inappropriate jokes or comments.

## Simple steps you can take to respond effectively

- Listen to the staff member and take their disclosure seriously;
- Reassure them that you understand how it may be affecting their work performance and what can be done to support them;
- Reassure them that their disclosure will be treated confidentially;
- Respect and accept their thoughts and ideas;
- Reassure them that their needs are a priority;
- Provide information about specialist support services, such as the local Women's Aid group, or Rape Crisis centre;

- Offer practical support, such as a risk assessment and/or safety planning, flexible working, special leave, employee assistance programme or mental health support, as far as possible;
- Provide ongoing support to ensure their safety and wellbeing is monitored;
- Inform them of what the next steps are, this includes whether there will be an investigation or if they need to make a formal report; and
- Organise a time to check in in the future.

## What not to say

No matter what the circumstances are, it's important to support the victim-survivor. Well-meaning comments and opinions intended to be supportive and sympathetic may sometimes have the opposite effect. This may result in a victim-survivor feeling not believed, judged, isolated and reluctant to share further information.

### Consider the following when responding

- Don't blame her for what happened;
- Avoid making comments about her emotional response to what happened, such as "You don't seem very upset about it" or "I thought you would've been angrier";
- Don't give advice to the staff member – for example, don't pressure her into leaving, or going to the police;

- Don't give advice to the staff member – for example, don't pressure her into leaving, or going to the police;
- Don't minimise her experience or try to make her feel better by saying things such as "It's not that bad", "It could be worse", "Other people have had it much worse" or "At least he didn't hit you";
- Don't comment on her behaviour in previous relationships; and
- Don't assume that she wants you to take action, she may just want to tell you what's happening and for you to listen.

## Where you know the perpetrator, or it's happened in the workplace

- Don't blame her for what happened;
- Avoid making comments about her emotional response to what happened, such as "You don't seem very upset about it" or "I thought you would've been angrier"; and
- Don't give advice to the staff member – for example, don't pressure her into leaving, or going to the police.

## Ensuring confidentiality

When an employee has disclosed or reported, it's good practice to be clear that the information they shared will be kept confidential. Line managers are responsible for ensuring privacy is protected and that all employees are aware of their responsibility in relation to confidentiality. It's very important that the

disclosure or report is not discussed openly in the office to avoid stigmatisation or victimisation of the victim-survivor. Confidentiality is particularly important if the police have been involved and in smaller and rural communities, where there is a greater likelihood of people in a community knowing each other. Where the employee is also a service user, it's important that you don't use their service user information to inform employment issues, for example their MARAC<sup>3</sup> assessment notes or score.

## Record keeping

It's good practice to keep records of any disclosure or report of VAW. It's important that the disclosure or report is clearly recorded and is kept confidential. The records should be neutral and shouldn't include any additional subjective commentary. It's possible that at some point the police may become involved and the record may be used to inform their investigation.

## Process and procedure

When a colleague discloses or reports, it should be taken seriously. If the employee doesn't want you to take any action following a disclosure, it's important to respect their decision. However, you can still outline what support is available in the council.

Your workplace policy on VAW should include further information on the processes and procedures for responding to VAW. It should also include information for employees and line managers on reporting VAW.

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<sup>3</sup> MARAC: Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are regular, local meetings where information about domestic abuse victim-survivors at risk of the most serious levels of harm is shared between representatives from a range of local agencies to inform a coordinated action plan to increase the safety of the victim-survivor and their children.

## As part of Equally Safe at Work, the council is developing a policy on VAW

The policy should include:

- A definition of VAW;
- Recognition of the link between VAW and women's inequality in the labour market;
- The impact of VAW on staff and the council;
- Responsibility of staff;
- Reporting mechanisms;
- Supporting and protecting victim-survivors;
- Managing perpetrators;
- Protecting confidentiality; and
- The appeals process.

# Support and safety

In responding to a disclosure or report, you should ensure the employee is safe in the workplace and is receiving support, if they want it.

## Risk assessment and safety planning

Risk assessments and safety planning are important mechanisms for responding to VAW. A risk assessment allows you to identify the level of risk an employee may be experiencing in the workplace. It can reduce the chance of continued abuse or violence and enables you to ensure that the risk to the employee, colleagues and the council is minimised. It's good practice to do a risk assessment and this should be done with the employee, if she's happy to do so, as she'll be most aware of the risks.

Following a risk assessment, it may be useful to implement a safety plan. A safety plan is a way to ensure the safety of victim-survivors in the workplace and to prevent VAW from being perpetrated. A safety plan can include making small changes in the workplace to support victim-survivors and prevent further victimisation.

The following are examples of what could be included in a safety plan.

## Domestic abuse, stalking, or “honour-based” violence

- Creating a plan for arriving at and leaving the workplace. This could include changing start and finishing times and using different entrances or exits.
- Agreeing with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the perpetrator telephones or visits the workplace.
- Diverting phone calls and email messages to block the perpetrator from contacting the woman.
- Agreeing in advance when and who to contact if the employee does not come into work, for example, a friend, their family, a neighbour, or the police.
- Issuing instructions to all staff not to reveal the employee’s personal details to anyone. For example, if the employee moves to a new house make sure that their new address is not shared with anyone.
- Ensuring that the employee doesn’t work alone in isolated areas, wherever possible.
- Providing the employee with a panic button.
- Providing them with an escort to their car.
- Moving the employee into or out of public view, if they think that would be helpful, and where possible.
- Alerting reception and security staff if the perpetrator is on work premises without authorisation.
- Have a list of local specialist support services that is easily accessible and signpost to appropriate organisations such as the local Women Aid groups and Rape Crisis centre.

## Rape or sexual assault

- Agreeing that the employee can work flexibly, for example, leaving early, to avoid traveling home in the dark.
- Changing work patterns or workload to help manage the impact of trauma and other mental health problems.
- Providing an escort or asking a colleague to walk with them to their car or bus stop.
- Have a list of local specialist support services that's easily accessible and signpost to appropriate organisations such as Rape Crisis centres.
- Ensuring that the employee doesn't work alone in isolated areas, or alone with male colleagues, wherever possible.

## Sexual harassment, domestic abuse, stalking, rape and sexual assault and “honour-based” violence where the perpetrator is also an employee

- Changing desk positions or office layouts to move the perpetrator away from the victim-survivor.
- Moving the perpetrator to a new location.
- Encouraging the employee to keep records of any incident in the workplace or any continued inappropriate behaviour.
- Ensuring that any personal information that is kept on the victim-survivor is not accessible to other staff members.

## Case Study

### Safety planning: Nasra

Nasra works in the finance department of South Lowland Council and disclosed to her line manager, Karen, that she is experiencing domestic abuse. She is planning on leaving her partner. He's been unpredictable and violent in the past when she tried to leave. He had previously turned up at her workplace when she wouldn't answer his phone calls. She's worried that if she tries to leave again that he might show up at her work and become violent or harass her or her colleagues.

Karen said that the council are able to provide support while she leaves her partner and relocates to a new house with her children. Karen asked what kind of support she needed. They talked about creating a plan to ensure Nasra's safety at work, as well as getting to and from work. They agreed to change her working hours so her partner wouldn't know when she would be there. They also agreed that if Nasra didn't arrive at work that a colleague would call her sister to let her know. The council offered special paid leave while she moves to a new house and registers her children at a new school. They also agreed that Karen would tell the rest of the team not to share any of Nasra's personal details so her partner wouldn't find out her new address. Karen also gave Nasra contact details for the local Women's Aid group.

Karen set out a time to check in again with Nasra to see if they needed to change or amend any support she was receiving.

## Case study

### Safety planning: Lara

Lara works in admin for Bankgate City Council in the housing team. She reported to her line manager, Simon, that her colleague Gary was sexually harassing her. She reported that he would constantly walk past her desk and make inappropriate, sexualised comments about her appearance. He would also follow her into the kitchen and on occasion would prevent her from leaving until she spoke to him. Lara said that she felt very uncomfortable and often dreaded coming to work because she didn't want to see Gary.

Simon encouraged Lara to report the incident to HR and offered to make small adjustments in the office so she could avoid Gary while they investigated the report. The HR department were also determining whether to remove Gary from the workplace during the investigation. While they waited to hear from HR, they relocated Lara's desk so she was near other colleagues and Gary couldn't walk by. They organised group coffee breaks so Lara wouldn't be alone in the kitchen. As well, they ensured that Lara was never working alone and walked her to her car at the end of the day.

Simon checked in with Lara each week to see if she needed any further support or adjustments including any information on support services. They agreed he would also update her on any progress being made as part of the investigation.

## Ongoing support

Employees affected by VAW will require different types of support depending on their situation. Having a range of practical support you can offer means you're more likely to meet their needs, which in turn will have less of an impact longer term on the council.

VAW can have lasting effects on victim-survivors which stays with them long after the abuse or violence has ended. It's important to remember that victim-survivors may need different support at different times.

### Good practice

- Continue to check in with the employee;
- Review whether the employee needs different support;
- Update on the progress of any reports made;
- Provide an update on any changes made in the workplace as part of the risk assessment or safety plan; and
- If the employee is on leave, communicate with them about anything happening in the workplace as a result of their disclosure or report.

# Managing a perpetrator

When the alleged perpetrator works in the same place as the victim-survivor, it's best practice to prioritise the needs of the victim-survivor and identify how best to support her through the process. It's important to support the victim-survivor once they have reported or disclosed to ensure they are not disadvantaged or unfairly treated. It also builds trust in the reporting process.

If the alleged perpetrator is an employee it's important to take the report or disclosure seriously. The risk assessment you conduct with the victim-survivor should also identify if the alleged perpetrator poses a risk to other colleagues and the wider workplace. This should then inform how you manage the alleged perpetrator in the workplace. Ensuring the safety of your employees should be a priority. It is also important to remember that you have a duty of care to both the victim-survivor and alleged perpetrator. If you are unsure of process or procedure when managing a alleged perpetrator you should refer to the council's policy on VAW.

More information on good practice around managing perpetrators can be found in the [Equally Safe at Work: Guidance on Managing Perpetrators](#).

## Top tips for responding to VAW

1. If you think an employee may be affected by VAW, it's good practice to start a conversation.
2. Be supportive and non-judgemental if one of your team discloses or reports.
3. Go at the employee's pace and if she's finding it difficult to speak or is becoming distressed, suggest taking a break.
4. Work with the employee to identify their support needs and the simple changes that can be made in the workplace.
5. Identify whether other workplace policies could be used to support them. This could include identifying whether they would like to work flexibly, adjust working hours, workload and/or work location, wherever necessary and possible.
6. Protect their confidentiality and communicate to them how you will do that.
7. Provide information on the workplace reporting and investigation procedure and make sure the employee is kept up to date.
8. Organise regular meetings to check in and review their support needs.
9. Agree a safety plan with the employee which is in line with their needs.
10. Signpost staff to specialist support services such as the local Women's Aid group or Rape Crisis centre.
11. Prioritise the victim-survivor's needs when managing a perpetrator in the workplace.

# Glossary

## Coercive control

Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour that seeks to take away the victim-survivor's liberty or freedom, and strip away their sense of self. It's an act or a pattern of acts or behaviour that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. It's used to maintain or regain control of a partner or ex-partner. Coercive control is recognised as a form of psychological abuse in the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.

## Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by partners or ex partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends).

## Equality

Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration - recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men.

## Gender

Refers to roles, attitudes, values and behaviours that men and women are encouraged to adopt by society. These characteristics can vary depending on the society around us and can change over time. For example, historically, gender role stereotyping would suggest that women should look after children at home while men go to work in the formal labour market.

## "Honour-based" violence

So-called "honour-based" violence is a form of violence and abuse that is committed to protect family and

community honour. It's the belief that family and community honour is rooted in women's behaviour, appearance, and sexuality, and is to be guarded by men.

## Intersectionality

An intersectional approach recognises that women are not a homogenous group, but their experiences will vary according to their multiple identities. For example, disabled and Black and minority ethnic women's experiences will be inflected by not only sexism but also ableism and racism.

## Perpetrator

An individual who chooses to use abusive behaviours in order to assert power and control, usually to gain authority over their partner. Someone who is currently or has previously committed VAW.

## Rape and sexual assault

Rape and sexual assault are forms of sexual violence. Sexual violence is what happens when someone does not consent to a sexual act. Rape is when a man penetrates another person against their will either vaginally, anally or orally. Sexual assault is other unwanted sexual

contact, behaviour and activity, including penetration that doesn't meet the definition of rape.

## Stalking

Stalking is persistent and unwanted behaviour which causes or has the intention to cause fear or alarm. It's a form of surveillance underpinned by the communication of that surveillance.

## Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which is intended to, or has the effect of, violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

## Victim-survivor

The term victim-survivor is used to capture that individuals experiencing VAW can be both victim and survivor. Victims are often portrayed as helpless, powerless or passive in contrast to survivors who are active, heroic and resourceful. However, the terms used separately don't capture the experience of VAW or the external factors that affect women's ability to leave.

# List of support services in Scotland

## Scottish Women's Aid

Scotland's lead domestic abuse organisation working towards preventing domestic abuse and supporting victim-survivors.

[www.womensaid.scot](http://www.womensaid.scot)

Scottish Women's Aid local group directory:

[www.womensaid.scot/find-nearest-wa-group](http://www.womensaid.scot/find-nearest-wa-group)

## Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline

Support for anyone experiencing domestic abuse or forced marriage, as well as their family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who support them.

24hr service: 0800 027 1234

[www.sdafmh.org.uk](http://www.sdafmh.org.uk)

## Rape Crisis Scotland

Scotland's national rape crisis organisation providing helpline and email support for anyone affected by sexual violence.

Helpline from 6pm-midnight:

08088 01 0302

[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

Rape Crisis Scotland local service finder:

[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/find-a-service-near-you/](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/find-a-service-near-you/)

## Scottish Women's Rights Centre

Free legal information and advice for women experiencing gender based violence.

Freephone: 08088 010 789

[www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk)

## Shakti Women's Aid

Support and information for Black and minority ethnic women, children and young people experiencing or who have experienced domestic abuse.

0131 475 2399

[www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk)

## **Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre**

Culturally sensitive signposting and support service for Muslim and ethnic minority women.

Helpline from Mon-Fri 10am-4pm:

0808 801 0301

[www.mwrc.org.uk](http://www.mwrc.org.uk)

## **Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid**

Support to Asian, Black and minority ethnic women, children and young people.

Helpline (24hrs): 0141 353 0859

[www.hematgryffe.org.uk](http://www.hematgryffe.org.uk)

## **LGBT Helpline Scotland**

Information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Helpline: 0300 123 2523



Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and unions to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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