

# HERrespect

How Business Can  
Make a Difference  
on Violence against  
Women and Girls

## Program Summary

### Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects women and men but women make up the majority of victims: Over one in three women worldwide will experience physical and/or sexual violence from men at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> GBV is no longer considered a private matter but a global pandemic that has become a leading issue on the global development agenda—as shown by goal 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, most donors allocate only 1% of their funding to this issue.<sup>2</sup>

The business community is also taking note of this important issue. In the wake of the #MeToo moment, violence against women at corporate level and in the supply chain represents a major risk, negatively impacting productivity and corporate reputations. In Cambodia, a 2017 study found that one in three female garment factory workers had been sexually harassed in the past 12 months. Given the high turnover, absenteeism, and presenteeism related to violence, this represents a cost of US\$89 million per year for the industry (0.52% of Cambodia's GDP).<sup>3</sup> In addition, companies will face increasing pressure to act in light of a new ILO convention on violence and harassment in the world of work, which is expected to be ratified in June 2019, as well as a framework on Gender Dimensions of the UN Guiding Principles on Human Rights. Now more than ever, companies must consider their role in preventing and addressing violence within the workplace and beyond.



## Violence and Harassment Is a Widespread Problem in Supply Chains

Female workers in global supply chains experience high levels of harassment and violence:

- In **India** and **Bangladesh**, Fair Wear Foundation found that 60% of garment workers have experienced some type of harassment at work, verbal abuse or physical abuse.<sup>4</sup>
- In **Cambodia**, CARE International found that nearly one in three female garment factory workers reported experiencing sexually harassing behavior in the workplace in the 12 months preceding the study.<sup>5</sup>
- In **Vietnam**, Fair Wear Foundation found that nearly half the women interviewed reported having faced abuse in the past year<sup>6</sup>, and Better Work found that garment workers needed one additional hour per day to reach production targets in environments where verbal abuse is prevalent<sup>7</sup>.
- In **Bangladesh**, icddr,b, BSR, and MRC found that 74% of garment workers reported experiencing or witnessing verbal abuse at work in the four weeks preceding the survey.

This violence deprives women of their basic human rights and compromises their well-being. In addition, an increasing amount of evidence shows that businesses and economies are also negatively impacted.

### The Causes of Violence

Jobs in global supply chains provide a range of opportunities for women. Yet women are exposed to violence at work and at home. This is driven by multiple factors, including:

- **Dominant gender norms** that reinforce the unequal relationships between women and men, and the power differential between managers and workers. Women's subordinate position makes them dependent on men, which in turn makes it hard to leave violent homes and workplaces. In addition, women who work might be perceived as challenging men's breadwinning and decision-making roles, which may result in intimate partner violence.
- **A general acceptance of harassment and violence** in the workplace against women, who are perceived to have transgressed gender norms. Within factories there is a general acceptance that enables the use of violence and verbal abuse against female workers by predominantly male managers.
- **A lack of essential skills among management** to handle stressful environments and a perception of violence as the most accessible and effective way to achieve production targets. At high-demand times, such

as the arrival of large work orders or an impending shipment date, abuse increases. In Vietnam, a study found a high correlation between overtime and workplace abuse.

- **A lack of policies addressing gender relations** and women’s rights and health in the workplace, and a lack of internal communication of such policies when they exist. Without enforced policies clearly prohibiting violence in factories, it is highly unlikely that change will happen.

## The Role of Business

Business has a critical role to play in addressing violence against women. BSR’s HERrespect program (see below) has shown that factories in global supply chains can be powerful spaces to support women workers. In bringing together large numbers of women and men workers as well as managers, factories provide an opportunity to deliver innovative interventions at scale. HERrespect has demonstrated that gender-transformative methods can be implemented in the workplace, which benefits women workers while also creating a better working environment for workers and management.



## About HERrespect

HERrespect is a pillar of HERproject — a collaborative initiative that strives to empower low-income women working in global supply chains.

Bringing together global brands, their suppliers, and local NGOs, HERproject™ empowers women and strengthens business responses through workplace-based interventions on health, financial inclusion, and gender equality. **Since its inception in 2007, HERproject™ has worked in more than 800 workplaces across 14 countries and has increased the well-being, confidence, and economic potential of more than 850,000 women.**

HERrespect helps promote gender equality in the workplace through participatory training for workers and management, awareness raising campaigns in workplaces, and reviews of policies and practices. By shifting norms that reinforce unequal relationships between women and men, supporting improved communication and teamwork, and strengthening factory systems, HERrespect aims to address the root causes of violence against women.



HERrespect has been piloted in **Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, and Kenya.**

HERrespect is a unique initiative that builds on existing assets of BSR's HERproject:

- **A detailed understanding** of global brands and their supply chains. HERproject has implemented programs in over 800 workplaces on behalf of 60 international brands.
- **Evidence-based programming** that addresses the specific forms and causes of violence against women in factory settings and within communities
- **Partnerships with NGOs and gender experts** in each country of operation, ensuring that the program is adapted to the local context and gender dynamics

## Key Elements of HERrespect

The goal of HERrespect is to cultivate more gender-equitable attitudes and relationships among women and men, which ultimately will contribute to preventing violence against women in the workplace and in intimate relationships.



HERrespect uses a combination of intervention strategies tailored to the local context:

- **Develop assertive communication skills** by enhancing managers' and workers' abilities to build harmonious working relationships in the workplace through enhanced communications, problem-solving skills, and stress management. This also includes using effective behavior change methods, critical reflection, experiential learning, and a focus on building empathy.
- **Build an understanding of gender and power** and its impact in relationships by sensitizing management and workers to the causes and consequences of uncooperative relationships at work and in intimate relationships, and by reaffirming that violence is never justified.
- **Strengthen company policy** by supporting factory management in developing and communicating policies and mechanisms to prevent and address workplace violence.
- **Inform female workers of external service providers** and of support available within the factory, as well as of factory policies and local laws.
- **Emphasize the business case for action** on violence against women to ensure more productive and sustainable supply chains.

## Outcomes from HERrespect Pilots in India

The HERrespect pilots showed significant impacts in changing attitudes to harassment and gender-based violence. This intervention was conducted in a particularly difficult setting: the program was piloted in countries with strong patriarchal gender norms, and in garment factories with very high production targets. The following findings highlight how HERrespect is a promising intervention to improve the life of women workers by addressing the root causes of VAW:

- Significant impacts in changing attitudes to harassment and gender-based violence.

*At baseline, 34% of participants believed that there are times a woman deserves to be beaten, compared to 15% at endline*

- Less acceptance and normalization of the use of violence by workers and managers, which suggests a shift in workplace culture

*At baseline, 36% of participants thought that making a suggestive comment is not necessarily sexual harassment, compared to 18% at endline*

- Workers becoming more willing and equipped to engage in respectful dialogue with managers/colleagues at work and with intimate partners, and developing better coping mechanisms to handle work stress

*At baseline, 67% of participants disagreed that there are times when a worker deserves to be shouted at by their supervisor, compared to 84% at endline*

- Greater awareness on protection mechanisms and support for affected women inside and outside of the workplace

*At baseline, 43% of participants reported the policy on violence and harassment was being implemented, compared to 86% at endline*



## The Future of HERrespect: Funding for Scale

HERrespect seeks investments to consolidate learnings from the initial phase and integrate and scale HERrespect across HERproject's global programming:

- **Scale up HERrespect.** To reach more women and men in global supply chains, we seek support to scale HERrespect in Bangladesh, India, Ethiopia, and Kenya, and to roll out the program in Vietnam.
- **Integrate HERrespect into broader worker well-being programs.** We will enhance our own broader HERproject programs to incorporate a stronger gender perspective. Outputs of the workstream will include revised curricula for HERhealth and HERfinance that integrate HERrespect components.
- **Communicate the business case for addressing violence against women.** We seek to work with business and other stakeholders to understand impacts of violence on business and the benefits of preventing and addressing violence.



### REFERENCES

- 1 [https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Counting\\_the\\_costofViolence.pdf](https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Counting_the_costofViolence.pdf)
- 2 [Ibid.](#)
- 3 [https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/SHCS\\_Full\\_Technical\\_Report\\_March\\_2017.pdf](https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/SHCS_Full_Technical_Report_March_2017.pdf)
- 4 <https://www.fairwear.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FWF-ILO-submission-final.pdf>
- 5 [https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SHCS\\_Research\\_Summary\\_March\\_2017.pdf](https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SHCS_Research_Summary_March_2017.pdf)
- 6 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/apr/07/violence-sexual-abuse-vietnam-garment-factory>
- 7 <https://betterwork.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Research-brief-Verbal-V2-WEB.pdf>

### More Information

For more information on HERrespect, please visit [www.herproject.org/herrespect](http://www.herproject.org/herrespect), or reach out to:

**Lauren Shields**

Associate Director, HERproject

[lshields@bsr.org](mailto:lshields@bsr.org)