

IN OUR OWN WORDS:

Women Workers Address Gender-Based Violence in Indonesian Garment Factories

SUMMARY

While studies have shown the prevalence of violence against women at home and in their communities, no comprehensive data exists to document the extent of gender-based violence (GBV) at work. Therefore, to understand GBV in the world of work, 17 activists and female leaders of workers in three Indonesian unions—FSB Garteks, the Federation of Independent Trade Union (GSBI) and the National Workers' Union (SPN)—conducted a series of GBV action research activities in the world of work. Below is the report they prepared with the research team.

GOALS

Broadly, this report seeks to contribute to efforts to create a world of work without GBV. Specifically, this research is aimed at:

- 1. Building awareness among workers, employers and the government** regarding GBV in the garment and apparel sectors;
- 2. Preventing GBV in the world of work** by conducting in-depth interviews with women garment workers to gather information about the scope and incidents of GBV in the garment and apparel sectors;
- 3. Advocating for elimination of GBV in world of work.** The learnings from this project will be used to advocate for specific action addressing GBV in the garment sector.

"I was working at my desk one day when suddenly somebody grabbed me from my back. It was a leader [at the factory]. I froze for a few seconds, not being able to react. After realizing what was happening, I got angry, slapped him and said, "Sir, watch your hands, and you've done this to other workers, too!"

"I was honestly scared because that man is a permanent worker at the company. I worried he would try to put me into a situation where he can blame and fire me. Being a leader, he can easily do it."

—YULIANA, 25, footwear factory worker

Find out how working women and their unions are campaigning to end gender-based violence at work—and get involved!

Maryati, 40, a single parent and 19-year garment factory employee in Banten, says her manager frequently yells at her, calling her names such as “idiot,” or “dopey.” She often gets transferred to other sections of the factory as punishment. Male workers, on the other hand, who perform their work poorly, not only will not get transferred or verbally abused, but their manager will take time to help them correct their mistakes.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment at work* is a global problem affecting tens of millions of women workers across all jobs and industries, causing them economic, emotional and physical harm, and undermining their economic security. While both men and women can be victims of GBV at work, women are most frequently targeted. Deeply harmful to individual victims, GBV at work reflects and perpetuates the skewed gender power relations that are at the root of much social and economic inequality.

The presence of GBV in the workplace silences not only those who are targeted but those who fear retribution or retaliation if they speak up against the abuse and violence they witness. In this way, it is one of the most effective tools of intimidation, limiting true freedom of association among workers.

Fueling gender-based violence in the world of work is a lack of understanding about GBV, few or no regulations protecting female workers from gender-based violence and little awareness about gender-based violence in the world of work by employers, the government and workers. GBV is a human rights violation and a crime against human dignity. GBV is an institutional issue, with individual victims, and advocacy efforts must be carried out by all parties, including unions.

WORKERS TALKING WITH WORKERS ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

While studies have shown the prevalence of sexual harassment at work, they have not included information about other forms of gender-based violence experienced by workers, nor have they been conducted by the workers themselves.

Trade unions also have not often prioritized addressing GBV. Therefore, as a first step, with support from the Solidarity Center, feminist activists and female garment sector workers and leaders of Garteks, GSBI and SPN unions in Indonesia came together to learn more about gender-based violence in the world of work, including its root causes and impacts, and to identify potential solutions to ending it. Key to this project was cross-movement building with young feminist activists from FAMM, a network of 350 young Indonesian women, representing rural, urban, indigenous, Muslim and Christian groups.

From these convenings, the women saw the need to gather information from their co-workers about their experiences with GBV to make it more visible. The workers also wanted to share with co-workers that gender-based violence is not their fault nor part of the job, and that as a structural and social problem, it is one of the most powerful tools preventing women from achieving equality in the workplace.

During 2018, garment workers and union leaders interviewed and held focus groups with 105 female garment workers, ages 18 to 45, in the textile, garment, shoes and leather sectors from four provinces in Indonesia.

*The ILO uses the concept of “the world of work” to encompass paid and unpaid work activities in the productive and reproductive spheres, and to related contexts, such as public transportation going to work. GBV at work includes: physical abuse, sexual violence including rape and sexual assault, verbal abuse and threats of violence, bullying, psychological abuse and intimidation, sexual harassment (quid pro quo and hostile environment), threats of violence, economic and financial abuse, stalking, mobbing, human trafficking and forced labor, and forced prostitution.

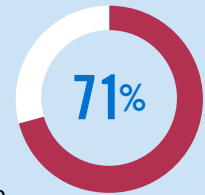
Half of Respondents Familiar with Term “Gender-Based Violence”

Some 53 percent of the women interviewed say that they had heard about GBV from training or in union women committee meetings. Approximately half of the women workers interviewed (47 percent) had never heard of GBV.

Effects of GBV at Work Are Often Severe

Respondents described the impacts of GBV as including stress, depression and resignation from work.

Majority of Respondents Experienced GBV at Work



- Of the 75 respondents who were subject to GBV, **71 percent experienced gender-based violence in the world of work** in the form of verbal abuse (48 percent); sexual abuse (33 percent); psychological abuse (13 percent); and physical abuse (5 percent). One respondent indicates she was sexually harassed at a union’s secretariat office.
- Of the 20 respondents who had not experienced GBV at work, 12 had heard about and/or witnessed GBV, and eight people had neither heard about nor seen GBV at work.

Respondents Experienced Four Main Types of GBV at Work

Those interviewed identified four primary types of GBV in the world of work that women are experiencing: verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence.



VERBAL ABUSE

- Insults
- Scolding
- Ranting
- Snapping
- Scorning/contempt
- Yelling
- Threatened with death



PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Thrown (by grabbing clothes)
- Thrown
- Hit
- Hair pulled
- Forced to work longer than required

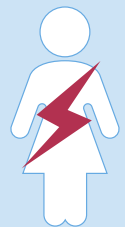


PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

- Said to be incompetent
- Bullied as “no brain”
- Threatened with firing if not performing work well
- Bullied as uneducated

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Wolf-whistled at
- Asked on a date
- Inappropriately touched/poked
- Fondled
- Embraced
- Cheeks pinched
- Sewing machine repair man kisses cheek
- Pressed against or groped
- Unwanted flirting
- Inappropriate text messages
- Asked for an affair
- Bra strap snapped from behind



Workers Face Significant Obstacles to Reporting GBV at Work

The majority of workers said they did nothing when they experienced gender-based violence because of shame or fear of retaliation, especially if the perpetrator was a sewing machine mechanic on whom they rely on to keep working.

Respondents Want Employers and Unions to Address GBV

- Respondents stated they want a safe workplace, language included in the collective bargaining agreement addressing GBV and awareness-raising about GBV.
- Penalties that workers would like to see for GBV include a warning letter and education about GBV.

EARLY RESULTS

These interviews increased awareness and understanding among women workers and their union leadership that already has led to one union prioritizing addressing GBV next year, including negotiating agreements with at least two factories to create "GBV free zones." The union also is supporting a global International Labor Organization (ILO) convention to end violence and harassment in the world of work, including GBV, and is forming a coalition with community-based organizations to urge the Indonesia government to support the convention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on their experiences with this project, including the information and awareness-raising workshops, participants developed the following recommendations for preventing and ending gender-based violence in the world of work for employers, unions, the government and workers.

Employers

- Together with trade unions, promote information sharing and education regarding GBV in the world of work among workers, through education, training, seminars and workshops and/or via publications. Together with trade unions, adopt policies to address GBV that address all forms of GBV at work, establish prohibitions against these forms of GBV, and create a mechanism for addressing GBV, including handling complaints, and adhere to sanctions outlined in collective labor agreements or company regulations. Provide safe, non-threatening, and gender sensitive facilities and workspaces.
- Support adoption of a global standard by the International Labor Organization (ILO) to end gender-based violence in the world of work.
- Support workers' freedom of association and engage in collective bargaining with unions, negotiate over issues and listen to workers to ensure solutions developed to address gender-based violence and harassment at work are effective and sustainable.

Labor Unions

- Join in coalition with other unions to conduct a campaign to stop gender-based violence (GBV) in the world of work.
- Make GBV elimination a major focus of the organization.
- Conduct advocacy by urging the government to immediately establish laws on gender-based violence.
- Urge Parliament to immediately pass legislation addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in the world of work and ensure its implementation. Draft a national bill to end gender-based violence that includes the workplace.
- Support and advocate for the adoption of a global standard by the ILO to end gender-based violence in the world of work.
- Hold an international campaign with other institutions about the proposed ILO convention.
- Increase awareness about gender-based violence in the world of work and in the community.

Government (Legislature and Executive)

- Make GBV elimination in the world of work a major focus through its representatives in the national tripartite cooperation institution.
- Increase awareness about gender-based violence in the world of work and in the community.

Workers

- Respond to and care about the dangers of gender-based violence in the world of work.
- Support the ILO's global standard to end gender-based violence in the world of work.

