

Violence against women in the workplace

SNAPSHOT

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Violence in the workplace continues to be a threat to women in Africa and the Arab region

Despite progress on women's economic participation, women in the region still do not enjoy equal access to the workplace. Tunisia has some of the most advanced laws for women's rights in the Arab region, yet even there women are underrepresented in the workforce. Despite Tunisian law endorsing labor equality, patriarchal attitudes and misinterpretation of religion lead many men to assume a role as head of the family and refuse to allow their daughters and wives to work. Women who affirm their right to work are frequently judged and criticized.

Once in the workplace, our partners report that many women are harassed and assaulted by managers and supervisors who use their positions of authority against their female employees to victimize them and keep them silent. This includes phrases, gestures, unwanted touching and even rape, which are all inherently discriminatory and harm women physically and psychologically. What begins as teasing or harassment can escalate into ever more serious crimes. Such problems are not specific to a single place or type of work, it happens in every field. Often women suffering the most workplace violence work in factories and small-scale jobs. In Morocco, violence against women has increased in the pandemic despite laws and policies intended to reduce it.

Many key laws and agreements preventing violence against women and harassment have not been adopted yet, despite advocacy. There is a lack of mechanisms to report, document, adjudicate, punish, and enforce protections against sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. What few penalties exist for sexual harassment in any context are negligible and rarely enforced. In Palestine, there is no acknowledgment of violence against women and harassment, particularly in labor law.

Where laws do exist, they often do not protect women due to weak implementation. Managers at work and officials refuse to comply, and women do not have the resources to seek justice, or do not report sexual harassment at work because they are afraid of being blamed, of bearing the stigma, and of losing their jobs. Women are also harassed on the way to and from work. Women are forced to take care of the family when they come home from work while men spend their time with social activities. Women must undertake unpaid family labor in addition to paid jobs. Officials and supervisors can refuse to give women promotions and high-level work on the premise that she won't be able to fulfill her responsibility to take care of her family. Women have to hide their pregnancy to not be fired or stigmatized. Women who take maternity leave are stigmatized and may be punished or fired.



STRATEGY TO PROTECT WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women gives women the right to be free from all forms of violence. If this agreement is ratified, governments are required to act against workplace violence in both public and private sectors, as well as informal sectors.

Morocco, Tunisia, and several other countries in the region= have enacted many new and progressive laws to protect women and girls from violence in every sphere, including in the workforce. In Tunisia a law now contains several legal provisions for collecting information on harassment in the workplace. High-ranking Tunisian officials have vocally endorsed measures to combat violence against women and harassment, and discrimination. In Morocco, there's a recent agreement between sectors on tackling sexual harassment of women in the workplace. Morocco has also voiced a commitment to factfinding and to combatting sexual violence and domestic violence. A law in Morocco creates spaces in courts and special procedures to combat injustice in the workplace. In Palestine, the CEDAW committee recommended instate laws and create monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to protect women in the workplace. All women's organizations in Palestine are pressing the government and working with them to implement tangible laws to combat violence against women and sexual harassment, including in the workplace. Advocates and the ministry of social development are developing a mobile platform to document sexual harassment in the workplace.

We can:-

- Counter stereotypes and misconceptions of women's ability to work and to lead in the workplace.
- Learn from the courage and resilience of women who have survived harassment and assault, and work to prevent such attacks.
- Push government to create and enforce laws and policies that will protect women who have suffered harassment and prevent others from being harassed.
- Create safe platforms that women can use to document sexual harassment and discrimination. We can expose perpetrators.
- Go into the streets when a woman is raped or killed. Dramatize and draw attention to the problem.