



HERrespect

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

Program Summary

Violence Against Women

Violence against women (VAW) is a human rights violation and a barrier to achieving inclusive growth and sustainable business. An estimated 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner rape at some point in their lives.¹ Unacceptable rates of violence and harassment extend well beyond the home into the world of work, as clearly demonstrated by the #MeToo movement.

Rates of violence against women in Bangladesh are among the highest globally. Research conducted by icddr,b, with the support of BSR and the South African Medical Research Council in 2016 as part of the What Works to Prevent Violence Global Programme, found high levels of violence experienced by female

Bangladeshi garment workers in eight factories where data were collected. A third (34%) of female garment workers reported experiencing physical IPV in the past year, and almost half (43%) sexual IPV in the past year.²



In addition, female garment workers also reported experiencing or witnessing very high levels of emotional and physical violence in the factories from managers in the four weeks preceding the survey. Overall, three-quarters (74%) of workers interviewed reported experiencing or witnessing workplace violence. The most common form was workers being shouted at (58%), and half (49%) reported

experiencing or witnessing workers being called unkind names. Just over 1 in 10 reported experiencing or witnessing a worker being pushed or shoved in the past four weeks, and in total 14 percent of workers interviewed experienced or witnessed others experiencing physical violence in the workplace.³

Violence against women at work and at home is driven by multiple factors, as evidenced by What Works research.⁴ Factors driving violence against women at work and in the home include:

- **Dominant gender norms** that reinforce the unequal relationship between women and men, and the power differential between managers and workers. In both the factory and the home, women's subordinate position in relation to men is a central driver of violence against women, placing women in economically and socially dependent relationships to men, making it hard for women to leave violent homes and workplaces. In addition, given the patriarchal gender norms in Bangladesh, women who work are seen as challenging gender norms and often experience violence from husbands and partners as a way to "keep them in line".
- **A general acceptance of harassment and violence against women in the workplace.** Within factories there is general acceptance that enables the use of violence 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. Garment factories operate with very short lead times and demand high levels of productivity, which managers have to achieve. Without adequate skills, managers draw on socially acceptable strategies (violence and shouting) to "encourage" greater productivity. These are seen as key strategies for managing labour in Bangladesh.

- **A lack of policies addressing gender relations and women's rights and health in the workplace,** and a lack of communication regarding these policies to managers and workers. Without policies clearly prohibiting and being enforced around no 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. Experience through HERrespect has shown that factories in global supply chains can be powerful spaces to support women workers holistically. In bringing together large numbers of women and men workers as well as managers, factories provide an opportunity to deliver innovative interventions at scale.



About HERrespect

HERrespect is a part 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 800,000 women.

HERrespect helps promote gender equality in the workplace through participatory training for workers and management, awareness-raising campaigns in workplaces, and review 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](#) was developed collaboratively with the South African Medical Research Council, under the DFID-funded What Works to Prevent Violence Programme.

“What was attractive for us about HERrespect was taking this gender equality to their domestic area, from work to home, where we do not have any control. When you are talking about teaching the worker about soft skills like time management and conflict management, like every other human being they deserve to know how to handle time and conflict in a way that is not going to cause any further deterioration in their relationships in the workplace. And it is a promotion of their own well-being that will transform into benefits for our workplace.”

—Ravi Asrani, Factory Manager, Bangladesh

Key Elements of HERrespect

The goal of HERrespect is to cultivate more equitable relationships and attitudes among women and men in global supply chains, which ultimately prevents violence at the workplace and in intimate relationships.

HERrespect’s approach includes:

- **Skills building:** 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 a specific focus on transforming gender norms.
- **Awareness raising:** Sensitizing management and workers on the causes and consequences of uncooperative relationships at work and in intimate relationships.

- **Strengthening company policy:** Supporting factory management to develop and communicate policies and mechanisms to prevent and address workplace violence.

HERrespect also emphasizes the business case for action on violence against women to ensure more productive and sustainable supply chains.



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 drive evidence-based programming and capitalize on learnings from the pilot, we seek support to complete a substantive review of the content and approach of HERrespect.
- **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.** Working with research organizations, and business, HERrespect will develop a campaign to spur private sector action to address violence against women.

REFERENCES

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4 Naved, op. cit.; Naved, R., Rahman, T., Willan, S., Jewkes, R., Gibbs, A. 2018. *Female garment workers' experiences of violence in their homes and workplaces in Bangladesh: A qualitative study*. *Social Science and Medicine*, 196, 150-157.

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