

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ITS IMPACT IN THE WORKPLACE

ISSUE STATEMENT

One in three women globally will be subject to gender-based violence in her lifetime, however in some African countries the rate is as high as seventy percent ^{1,2}. Violence against women or gender-based violence can take many forms including intimidation, sexual harassment, online violence as well as physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence³. Domestic violence is recognized by many as perpetrated by anyone with a familial or intimate relationship with a person. However, the less understood workplace violence includes any violent act or threat of violence directed towards a person at work or on duty.

There is a significant gap in understanding the extent of workplace violence in the breadth of arenas where work is carried out including professional and non-professional spaces e.g. offices, marketplaces, restaurants, homes, hospitals, and online. Workplace violence can therefore take place wherever work is performed. The following are some examples of workplace violence:

- A customer threatens to assault a retail clerk
- A client refuses to take a meeting with a female lead
- A restaurant patron fondles a server or makes harassing comments
- A patient strikes or is aggressive towards a female nurse
- An employee's ex-boyfriend makes unwelcome calls and visits the employee during shifts
- An investor or bank official asks for sexual favors in exchange for capital (equity or loans)
- A man/woman hits her child's live-in nanny or domestic help
- Physical and online trolling/bullying of women

In addition to the examples above, we know that many women who operate **MSMEs face domestic violence directly tied to their entrepreneurship**. Financial inclusion research by AWB shows several female small business owners report not sharing information on finance or income with spouses because of the fear that their husbands will beat them and collect the proceeds from loans and sales. This may be a strategy directly resulting from previous experiences of domestic violence associated with their entrepreneurial pursuits. Whether workplace, work-related or domestic, violence keeps women out of activities or projects that should propel them into leadership. It presents an emotional burden for women who consider, and, in many cases, drop out of work because of pressure or damage associated with the violence. In addition, women suffer loss of money due to health care services directly associated with abuse and loss of productivity because of increased absenteeism. In essence, violence affects work performance and decreases advancement.

We also know that traumatic events, from natural disasters to war can increase the incidence of violence against women. The current **Covid-19 pandemic** is no exception, many countries including African⁴ ones are in some form of lockdown as the world battles to slow

the spread of the virus. The situation in Africa⁴ is particularly perilous as these events intersect with poverty. Most countries are unable to provide social safety nets resulting in increased demand/stress on families to make ends meet with women bearing the primary burden work in the informal economy (especially open market retail) at great harm to their health. For others working from home, the intersection between workplace and domestic violence is even more ostensible. The tactic of physical distancing and isolations as measures against covid-19 poses greater risk because they are the same strategies which greatly enables abuse. Already there are reports of increased violence against women and even deaths in the past few months.

Along with the **physical, mental and emotional damage caused by gender-based violence** there are also **considerable economic costs (monetary and opportunity)**. The recurring violence against women both in and out of the workplace is a major impediment to women attaining the highest level entrepreneurially as well as in corporate leadership with detrimental effects irrespective of where the violence occurs.

The reality is that violence against women is a complex issue often driven by deeply held patriarchal biases in both women and men, economic hardship, mental instability amongst others. ***For African women to advance entrepreneurially and in corporate leadership, strategies need to be put in place to facilitate safety at work and to reduce effects of domestic violence at the workplace.*** Ultimately, eradicating violence against women will be beneficial in the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as female advancement is particularly important because it has been demonstrated to lift families out of abject poverty, increase prosperity and allow for the graduation of women and families up the income curve.

LONG TERM GOAL

In line with AWB's mission of mainstreaming African⁴ women's voices and fast tracking their trajectory into the leadership roles of the future, our long-term goal is to eradicate violence against African⁴ women and its detrimental effect on growth in the workplace. Therefore, allowing women grow into leadership positions in their communities, workplaces and society at large. This will be done by providing recommendations from the result of surveys and interviews.

MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES

To go beyond anecdotes and present compelling findings based on valid research methods. **We will prepare a project report that presents the results of surveys and questionnaire.** By doing so, we provide various stakeholders including women, workplaces, regulatory bodies and policy makers, a guide to understanding the issues surrounding violence against women and the effects in the workplace as well as economic impact.

In addition, we will organize a **focus group** on this issue with the goal to raise public awareness and educate women on our research findings and proffer solutions to the issue. A more direct goal is to empower women to recognize the existence of all forms of workplace violence and discrimination and equip them with approaches to address these

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issues. Personal accountability and empowerment of women, in addition to institutional and policy recommendations, is an aim of this project. Themes to be explored in the focus group include:

- What is the intersection/relationship between violence against women and growth as corporate leaders/entrepreneurs?
- How do you tackle norms, values such as institutional cultures that propagate the violence consciously and unconsciously?
- How do you build effective support for women who are affected by the violence?
- How are do you support women during period of widespread crises such as a pandemic?

ACTIVITIES

Research - This phase will involve fieldwork involving the collection, interpretation and analysis of data. This will be done through the following methods:

- ❖ **Interviews** - AWB will collect data or narratives through interview(s) of female entrepreneurs, HR managers, employees, etc. recruited from our network of organizations and entrepreneurs. The results of the interviews will be recorded and synthesized using data analysis and visualization software.
- ❖ **Surveys** - We will also be using survey data. Subjects at various workplaces will be required to complete the survey. We intend to have a broad array of recipients across various professional and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Convening - Through our programs, events and seminars create the necessary awareness and present thought leadership. Through AWB Focus: Violence, Women and the Workplace series, we will empower people with tools and strategies so they can recognize, combat and report violence in the workplace. All these will culminate in a symposium presenting our key findings. The discussion/focus points:

- ❖ **Provide** more insights about the issue
- ❖ **Align** with relevant stakeholders and help drive the roll-out forward
- ❖ **Receive** country input and feedback
- ❖ **Agree** on next steps

INDICATORS

By the end of the first AWB Focus: Violence, Women and the Workplace series, we hope to further educate various stakeholders on effects of violence against African⁴ women, and consequences at the workplace.

We want to see increased conversations about violence against African⁴ women in mainstream conversations around gender equity and women empowerment through publications, editorials and social media engagement.

We also hope to garner the required support and establish strategic alliances and partnerships to actively work on creating an enabling environment for the success of women in their families, communities and society at large.

REFERENCES

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4. West Africa – Ghana & Nigeria