

IN OUR OWN WORDS:

Women Workers Address Gender-Based Violence in Garment Factories in Cambodia

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, 23 women leaders from seven unions in Cambodia representing garment-sector workers came together in 2018 to learn more about gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment in the workplace, and to determine how best to increase awareness, understanding and effective responses to gender-based violence in our unions and our workplaces.¹

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.

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

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment at work² 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 targets 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, 23 women from 10 different factory-level unions in three provinces, along with three Cambodian feminist activists, 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.

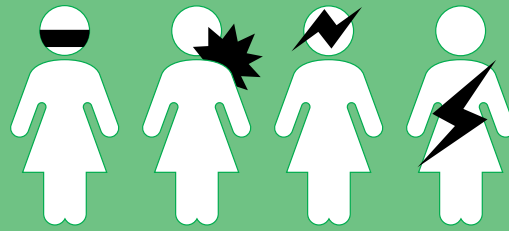
From these convenings, the women saw the need to gather information from their co-workers about their experiences with GBV to make it more visible. The workers also wanted to share with their co-workers that gender-based violence is not their fault or a part of the job, and that it is a structural and social problem that is one of the most powerful tools preventing women from achieving equality in the workplace.

Nine women workers representing three unions in six garment factories throughout Cambodia drafted a questionnaire based on their own experiences. During 2018, these women interviewed and held focus groups with 83 female co-workers in garment factories. Their findings include:

1 The unions spearheading this project are the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Unions (C.CAWDU), Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU), the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC), and the Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW).

2 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.

3 Being asked to be a mistress or second wife means being asked to have sex whenever asked.



48% of respondents self-identified as **targets** of gender-based violence at work.

87%

experienced **verbal harassment** or **unwanted touching** based on their gender.



46% had a supervisor or manager force them to become their **mistress** or “second wife” with the understanding that it would improve their working conditions.³

28%

stated that someone at work had forced them to **sleep with them** to extend a contract, fix their sewing machine or to obtain a bonus.

35%

said that **managers** were the perpetrators of GBV.

24%

said **sewing machine mechanics** were perpetrators of GBV.

72%

The majority were on **short-term contracts**.



Even **pregnant workers** are targets...
17 out of 40 have had direct experience with or seen verbal violence against pregnant workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this education and awareness process and participatory research, the women worker/leaders recommend the following for addressing gender-based violence in the garment sector.

Government

- Ensure that laws and policies regarding gender-based violence and sexual harassment at work are effectively enforced.
- Expand the role of Cambodia's national labor advisory committee (composed of representatives for workers, employers and government) to discuss policies and mechanisms to prevent and address GBV at work.
- Encourage workers and employers to create workplace committees involving labor and management to regularly discuss strategies for preventing and addressing gender-based violence.
- Endorse the establishment of a new ILO convention and recommendation to end violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment.
- Ratify the ILO convention that addresses elimination of gender-based violence at work after its official endorsement.
- Develop materials to educate the public on gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace.

Employers

- In consultation with worker organizations, ensure all workplaces establish and adopt policies and measures to prevent and address GBV and harassment-related issues.
- 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.
- Install high-quality security cameras in all public spaces and work areas to capture incidents of gender-based violence and harassment to ensure security for all working people.
- Take necessary measures in collaboration with local authorities and governmental agencies to ensure safety and security of workers traveling to and from work.
- Conduct regular workplace dialogue to oversee GBV and harassment-related issues and take action in a transparent and fair process to rapidly address such issues that occur.
- Conduct training and education for all levels of managers and those in charge of preventing and addressing gender-based violence and sexual harassment at work.

Trade Unions/Worker Organizations

- Establish regulations, policies and measures, and negotiate with employers to prevent and address GBV and sexual harassment-related issues.
- Increase awareness about the importance of workplaces free of violence and discrimination with relevant trade union leaders and workers by embedding discussion of the issue in training and education activities, policies and collective bargaining agreements.
- Support an ILO convention and recommendation to eliminate sexual harassment and violence, including GBV, in the world of work.
- Ensure the government endorses and ratifies this important ILO convention.
- Develop and disseminate educational messages to stop violence and sexual harassment at work.

