

**Submission to Australian Office for Women
60th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
14-24th March 2016**

It is estimated that around 1.4 million women in Australia are living in an abusive relationship or have done so in the past, and of these, around 800,000 are in the paid workforce. KPMG estimates that domestic and family violence will cost Australian business \$609 million annually by 2021¹. The most significant predictor of whether a woman experiencing domestic violence remains, escapes or returns to an abusive relationship, are the economic factors.

Worldwide, women's labour force participation (ages 15–64) over the last two decades has stagnated, declining from 57 to 55 percent globally.² In 2014, Australia, as host of the G20 summit, acknowledged that the low level of female participation in the workforce was one of the biggest barriers to global economic growth. Its members made a commitment to a 25 per cent reduction in the gender workforce participation gap by 2025. This target would bring 100 million women into the workforce, and help achieve the summit's goal to boost global economic growth by 2.1% by 2018, adding more than US\$2 trillion and "millions of jobs" to the global economy.

In closing this gap to allow a growing number of women to enter the workforce, domestic and family abuse becomes a key occupational problem as the abuse spills over into the workplace. The costs to society due to violence in and out of the workplace are related not only to salary loss, but also to medical costs and possible hospitalisation, benefits and welfare costs in connection with premature retirement as well as potential loss of productive workers. On the basis of figures from a number of countries it is estimated that, in total, stress and violence at work may account for 1-3.5% of GDP³

In Australia the annual bill to taxpayers for bullying, harassment and "occupational violence" in the public service alone, is now approaching \$80 million.⁴ This figure does not include the health, welfare, medical associated costs mentioned above.

In eS4W's recent research *Lifelong Economic Wellbeing for Women in Australia 2015*, it became obvious from the data from over 5000 comments that domestic, family and kinship group violence has a severe effect on the attendance, performance, safety and consequently the productivity of a woman in economic activity, whether she has children or not.

Women in violent relationships can very quickly become economically trapped. The results of violence often restricts a woman's choice to work, to pursue a job or career or result in absences or lateness for work due to having to deal with the controlling person's demands. Where the violent relationship leads to separation or divorce, women reported severe financial uncertainty, housing insecurities, financial hardships and high levels of stress. This highlights the implications and impacts of divorce, violence and parenting on women in the workforce, and for women wishing to enter or re-enter the workforce.

¹ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/stories/domestic-violence-workplace-issue>

² http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/GenderAtWork_web.pdf

³ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_108532.pdf

⁴ <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/revealed-the-cost-of-bullying-and-violence-in-the-australian-public-service-20150729-gimwfr.html#ixzz40O9dQAB0>

The 2030 Agenda provides a key opportunity to make critical investment in women's economic empowerment in transparent, accountable and measurable ways. This issue of violence in the workplace sits firmly within the CSW60 priority and review theme.

eS4W fully supports the National Women's Alliance joint submission to the UN 60th Session of CSW, especially:

- 2.3.2, the need to ensure availability of sufficient gender disaggregated and gender responsive and transformative data collection that is inclusive of the diversity of ALL women, and
- 2.3.9, especially in relation to addressing the barriers to and the security of women's workforce participation caused by sexual harassment, impacts of domestic and family violence in the workplace and other forms of violence against women.

Some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime⁵. eS4W supports a strategic strengthening of language in the CSW 60th outcomes document to advance female participation in the workforce and to remove all barriers, especially those caused by violence and its impacts in the workplace. This will also help to clarify the global position in preparation for the 2017 CSW61st Session priority theme: *Gender equality and the empowerment of women in the changing world of work*.

Areas of the CSW60th Session Zero Draft that could be strengthened are;

Preamble:

- Recognition of relevant ILO Conventions and Labour Standards
- Bearing in mind that women's economic empowerment is crucial in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals⁶
- Reaffirming that in order to ensure women's empowerment in the economy and their economic advancement, adequate mobilization of resources at the national and international levels, as well as the provision of new and additional resources to the developing countries from all available funding mechanisms, including multilateral, bilateral and private sources, for the advancement of women and their economic empowerment, will also be required⁷

Fostering enabling environments for financial gender equality and women's empowerment

9 (i and/or q) Strengthening language (formally agreed language);

14 (d) E/2010/27 E/CN.6/2010/11 Resolution 54/4 Women's economic empowerment;

To adopt and implement effective measures to promote and protect the rights of women workers, eliminate sex-based discrimination in the workplace, and take action to remove structural and legal barriers as well as stereotypic attitudes and behaviours to women and men at work, addressing, inter alia, gender bias in recruitment; working conditions; remuneration; occupational segregation; harassment; discrimination in access to social protection benefits; women's occupational health and safety; the situation of women working in the informal sector and the need to cover this sector in labour regulations and social protection; unequal career opportunities; the situation of domestic female workers, including migrant women; and the inadequate sharing, by men, of family responsibilities

⁵ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

⁶ E/2010/27 E/CN.6/2010/11 Resolution 54/4 Women's economic empowerment*

⁷ E/2010/27 E/CN.6/2010/11 Resolution 54/4 Women's economic empowerment*