

## **25<sup>th</sup> November 2013: International Day for the elimination of violence against women and White Ribbon Day**

economic Security4Women (eS4W) acknowledges the 25<sup>th</sup> of November as the International Day for the elimination of violence against women and supports all activities to eliminate this particularly distressing aspect of gender inequality. This day also marks White Ribbon Day and the start of the "16 Days of Activism" that precedes Human Rights Day on December 10 each year.

eS4W recognises the awareness raising efforts of White Ribbon and supports its activities on the International Day for the elimination of violence against women. We join them in urging men to speak out to end the endemic and structural nature of violence against women whilst simultaneously urging men to join women in the campaign to stop violence against women in Australia and across the world.

With a focus on the impact of violence against women and their long term economic security there are two points that the undersigned members of economic Security4Women want to be considered by the members of White Ribbon and the Australian Government:

- the impact of violence on women's workforce participation and their current and long term economic security and
- the impact of financial abuse in the context of family violence.

In responding to both of these issues, we suggest the following:

### **Women's workforce participation**

1. Universal workplace rights that include protections against discrimination for victim survivors of domestic or family violence and for victims of sexual harassment and/or bullying in the workplace.
2. Employers to be encouraged to adopt family violence workplace policies, that introduce entitlements to enable victims of family violence to access leave and manage the range of issues that can arise as a result of family violence including attending medical appointments, seeking safe housing, attending court hearings, and maintaining vital support networks.
3. Better protections and stronger workplace safety measures for those professions such as medical, policing and teaching who assist victims and their families especially children.
4. Government support for educational and training programs, particularly through TAFE, that will enable victims of family violence to regain and rebuild necessary skills and confidence.

General workplace protections will cover the needs of women in the workforce who are unable to take advantage of other mainstream approaches to violence against women.

However, in Australia the current approach is to encourage the inclusion of such protections within the enterprise bargaining process.

While we support this move, we are aware that the work conditions of the least powerful/most marginalised women are often only determined by awards, enterprise bargaining agreements, relevant legislation and the National Employment Standards, and only if they are in formal employment. Therefore, we recommend:

1. *a discussion and exploration of the extension to the NES to provide for a new minimum statutory entitlement to 10 days family violence leave. An employee should be entitled to access such leave for purposes arising from the employee's experience of family violence, or to provide care or support to a member of the employee's immediate family or household who is experiencing family violence.*
2. *that the Australian Government should continue to encourage the inclusion of family violence clauses in Enterprise Agreements.*
3. *Fair Work Australia to consider the ways in which assistance for women experiencing family violence may be incorporated into awards in keeping with the modern award objectives.*
4. *Sections 351(1) and 772 (1)(f) of the Fair Work Act should be amended so that discrimination on the grounds of domestic violence is a ground for an adverse action and unlawful termination application to Fair Work Australia.*
5. *workplaces be encouraged to put in place a safety plan to assist their workers to maintain safe employment and to ensure that workers and those assisting them in matters of violence are better protected.*

## **Financial abuse in the context of family violence**

Increase in funding for Legal Aid to allow advice to be provided around financial and property settlement to ensure women are fully informed about financial abuse in the context of family violence and their legal options. Currently legal advice around property settlements is only available from private lawyers. The cost of this advice is often prohibitive.

## **In conclusion**

Increasing the safety of workforce participation and addressing the impact of financial abuse in the context of family violence are two areas that will support a more secure long term financial outcome for women.

To safeguard the workforce participation of women who are subject to violence, we suggest universal work place rights (as above) and for the inclusion of domestic violence as a ground for protection in human rights legislation.

A key challenge to these inclusive and universal strategies to ensure safety for women in their workplaces, is to overcome aversions to further regulation of the work place. To this end we must make the case to business that it is ultimately in their best interest, based on the related loss of productivity and cost of staff turnover resulting from violence against women. KPMG has estimated the cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy at more than \$13.6 billion, with that figure likely to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2021.

The business case needs to be promoted and resources made available to employers to encourage them to provide safe workplaces for women. A toolkit was launched in 2012 to

improve the way unions, employers and business groups support employees experiencing domestic or family violence and help them remain in work. The Safe at Home, Safe at Work? toolkit can still be downloaded at <http://www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au/what-you-need-know>. These supports can include paid leave to attend urgent court matters, flexible working arrangements, confidentiality and safety measures.

### **Endorsed by the following members of eS4W**

Australian Federation of Graduate Women (AFGW)

Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia (APESMA)

Association of Women Educators (AWE)

Business Professional Women Australia (BPW Australia)

National Council of Single Mothers and their Children (NCSMC)

National Foundation of Australian Women (NFAW)

Northern Territory Working Women's Centre (NTWWC)

Queen Victoria Women's Centre (QVWC)

Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS)

Women Chiefs of Enterprise International (WCEI)

Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE)

Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

Working Women's Centre SA (WWCSA)

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