

# Listening to Ontario: Experiences of Gender-Based Violence in Public Sector Workplaces

## What is GBV and Why it Matters at Work

Gender-based violence (GBV) is harm linked to a person's sex, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological. GBV can happen in person or online and can involve coworkers, clients, members of the public, or someone in a worker's personal life, such as a partner or family member.

GBV affects worker safety, trust, retention, and service delivery across Ontario's public sector.



*Image: A person with one hand raised toward the camera, palm open, partially obscuring their face.*

## What we did

To identify the current gaps, we:

- Collected input from workers and employers through surveys and focus groups
- Reviewed research
- Reviewed laws, policies, and workplace tools

**“When the workforce is more reflective of society... that’s one of the things that will help reduce the instances of gender-based violence.”**

**- Focus group participant**



## What we found

### 1. Policies aren't consistent in practice

Many workplaces have GBV or related policies, but they are not used consistently or are not clearly communicated. Smaller and non-unionized workplaces also have fewer policies and weaker follow-through.

### 2. Reporting doesn't feel safe

58% of workers said they fear retaliation or do not trust leadership or HR, and 30% of employers said they do not have a safe or anonymous way to report GBV.

### 3. Training is uneven

84% of employers said they offer GBV training, but only 36% of workers said they have received it. Employers said some training feels like it does not prepare workers for what to do after a report.

### 4. Risk assessments are inconsistent and reactive

Risk assessments are often reactive rather than proactive. Employers do risk assessments more often for sexual harassment (74%) than for domestic violence (64%) or intimate partner violence (62%).

### 5. Online GBV is growing

Workplace harassment is increasingly happening online, and policies and training have not kept up. Remote and hybrid work can increase exposure, and harassment can follow workers home through personal devices.

### 6. Higher risk for marginalized workers

Some workers face higher risk and more barriers to support. 85% of employers identified higher support needs for women, and 81% identified higher needs for racialized workers and new Canadians.

Workers also reported limited access to inclusive resources, supports, referrals, and languages.

## Actions for workplaces

Use **CLEAR** to remember the five actions that help turn evidence into everyday practice:

- **C**larify how policies work day-to-day
- **L**ead with clear roles, staff, and tools
- **E**nsure reporting is safe and confidential
- **A**ctivate practical training with refreshers
- **R**each workers facing the biggest barriers with tailored supports

## PSHSA's next steps

PSHSA will turn these findings into practical resources that:

- Are easy to use
- Are trauma and violence-informed
- Address barriers faced by workers with intersecting identities

**The bottom line** is that GBV is common and **addressing it requires more than policies**—ongoing follow-through, safe reporting, and practical training are still needed.

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