Business Case for

Creating Respectful Workplaces in Sri Lanka

Disclaimer

About IFC

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2022, IFC committed a record $32.8 billion to private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity as economies grapple with the impacts of global compounding crises.
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About IFC's Women in Work Program in Sri Lanka

Women in Work (WiW) is a six-year, $9.5 million initiative launched in partnership with the Australian government in April 2017. It is IFC's largest, standalone country-based gender program designed to close gender gaps in the private sector while improving business performance. The program, which benefits from multisector program design and works closely with the World Bank on research, tackles women's access to jobs and assets at the same time. It aims to increase women's workforce participation in Sri Lanka's private sector, create more and better jobs for women, and has the potential to increase profits and drive overall economic growth. WiW also contributes to the vision of the government of Sri Lanka where all citizens can achieve higher incomes and better standards of living by 2025.

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Key Terms

Bullying	Repeated and unreasonable behavior directed toward a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety. This can include:[1] • Abusive, insulting, or offensive language or comments • Unjustified criticism or complaints • Aggressive and intimidating conduct • Repeated threats of dismissal or other severe punishment for no reason • Constant ridicule and insults • Humiliating a person • Practical jokes or initiation rituals • Spreading gossip or malicious rumors about a person • Deliberately excluding someone from work-related activities • Setting unreasonable timelines or constantly changing deadlines • Setting tasks that are unreasonably below or beyond a person's skill level • Deliberately changing work arrangements to inconvenience a particular worker or workers • Sabotaging a person's work, such as by denying access to guidance and support from a supervisor, or other resources; withholding information or supplying incorrect information; hiding or sabotaging documents or equipment; not passing on messages; and/or getting someone into trouble • Interfering with someone's personal property
Disability	People with "disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."[2]
Domestic violence	Intimate partner violence as well as any violence that occurs between household members, including violence against children and older people.[3] Domestic violence can have spillover effects in the workplace, including in relation to employment, productivity, and safety and health.[4]
Gender-based violence	Violence and harassment because of someone's sex or gender, or that disproportionately affects a particular sex or gender.

Intimate partner violence	Behavior by a current or former intimate partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors.[5]
LGBTQI	Lesbian women (L) and gay men (G) are attracted to individuals of the same sex and/or gender identity as themselves. Bisexual people (B) may be attracted to individuals of the same or different sex and/or gender identity. Transgender people (T) may include people who identify as third gender, those whose appearance and characteristics are perceived as gender atypical, and whose sense of their own gender is different from their assigned sex at birth. Queer (Q) is an umbrella term that is commonly used to define lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Intersex people (I) are born with physical or biological sex characteristics (including sexual anatomy, reproductive organs and/or chromosomal patterns) that do not fit the traditional definitions of male or female.[6]
Online violence	Violence that is committed, assisted by, or aggravated, in part, or in full, using information and communication technology, such as mobile phones, smartphones, the internet, social media platforms, and/or email.[7]
Sexual harassment	Unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated, and/or intimidated. This can include:[8] • Suggestive comments or jokes • Insults or taunts of a sexual nature • Unwanted invitations for sex • Persistent requests to go on a date • Intrusive questions about another person's private life or body • Inappropriate advances on social networking sites • Sexually explicit pictures, posters, screen savers, emails, social media posts, and instant messages, including SMS, Viber, Messenger, and WhatsApp • Accessing sexually explicit internet sites at work • Intrusive contact or conduct of a suggestive nature outside working hours • Behavior that would be an offence under criminal law • Unwelcome touching, hugging, or kissing • Unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against someone • Staring or leering
Victim blaming	Victim blaming accuses the targeted individual and/or their behavior for causing the harassment and/or violence they have experienced, rather than the structural causes (such as gender inequality) that underlie the harassment and/or violence. Victim blaming assumes that people can avoid harassment and/or violence by not taking risks or engaging in particular behaviors, such as walking alone, staying out after dark, or wearing "provocative" clothes.[9] Victim blaming wrongfully portrays victim-survivors as passive individuals who seek, and submit to the violence they experience. Conversely, offenders are viewed as unfortunate people who act violently because of forces beyond their control.[10]
Workplace violence and harassment	A range of unacceptable behaviors, or threats of these, once or repeatedly that aim to cause, actually cause, or are likely to cause, physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm. These behaviors arise in, or are linked with the workplace, and include: • public and private spaces where work takes place; • places where the worker takes a break, a meal, or uses sanitary, washing, and changing facilities; • work-related trips, travel, training, events, or social activities; • work-related communications, including those enabled by information and communication technologies; • employer-provided accommodation; and • commuting to and from work.[11] International Labour Organization Convention 190 notes that domestic violence can affect employment, productivity, and health and safety, and that governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and labor market institutions can help, as part of other measures, to recognize, respond to, and address the impacts of domestic violence.[12]

Executive summary

Between 2020 and 2022, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) conducted a study to better understand the prevalence and impact of violence and harassment on employees and businesses in Sri Lanka. This research covered workplace experiences and behaviors, and how these affect employees.

The findings presented in this report will be used to develop tools and resources to help companies prevent and address violence and harassment connected with the workplace.

This study comprised a survey of 1,653 employees (8 percent of the total workforce of the participating companies), in-depth interviews with 43 employees from three companies, and a further 10 interviews with human resources managers in nine companies. Where relevant, policy documents, news articles, and research literature were used to support interpretation of this study's findings. Once the research was completed, the findings were reviewed by a representative from both the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Sri Lanka.

This study found:

Three out of five people surveyed experienced some form of workplace violence or harassment.

Of all the survey participants, 61 percent reported experiencing at least one form of workplace violence or harassment (bullying, sexual harassment, and/or online violence), or domestic violence. Bullying, which was the most prevalent form of workplace harassment, was experienced by 59 percent of all survey participants.

3/5

Experienced workplace violence or harassment

Nearly one out of five people surveyed felt unsafe at work in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Of all the survey participants, **19 percent** (almost 1 in 5 people) agreed, or strongly agreed, with the statement 'In the past four weeks, I have not felt safe or at ease at work because of the issues mentioned in this survey'. Employees' concern about their safety is incompatible with decent work, a respectful workplace culture, and a productive business.

1/5

Felt unsafe at work
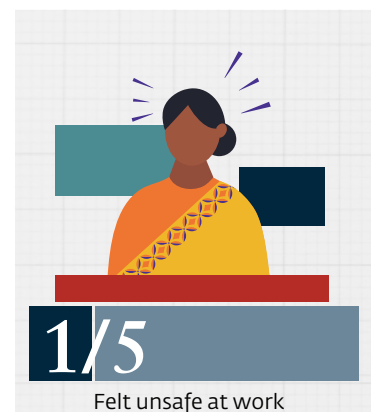
Workplace violence and harassment impacts employees of all genders and ages, although some people are especially vulnerable to it.

Surveyed employees across all genders and age groups reported that they were impacted by bullying, sexual harassment, and/or online violence. These results challenge the conception that only younger women are vulnerable to workplace violence and harassment. Employees with a disability were more likely to experience all forms of workplace bullying (68 percent versus 59 percent of employees who did not have a disability). People with a disability also said that their work was affected by domestic violence at a rate that was more than four times higher than the rate for other survey participants.

Sexual harassment and online violence seemed to be the most underreported forms of workplace violence.

Participants were more likely to say that their colleagues had experienced sexual harassment and online violence, rather than stating that this was their own experience. This suggests that personal experience of sexual harassment and online violence are underreported. Few of the managers interviewed for this study seemed to be aware of the pervasiveness of these problems, or what to do about them.
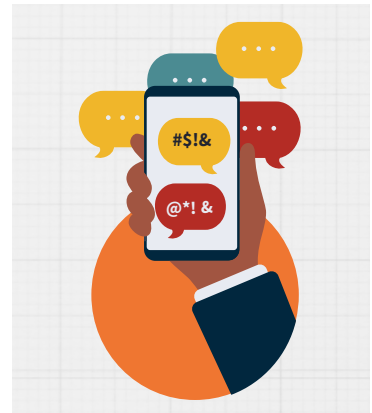
Workplace violence and harassment cost participating companies at least $1.7 million[13] every year.

Due to the impacts of workplace violence and harassment, each company surveyed lost six working days per employee, per year, which is the equivalent of at least $1.7 million across all nine companies. This is a modest estimate as it does not include the costs for addressing the time lost to workplace violence and harassment, which include payment for overtime, turnover costs, recruitment costs, and/or productivity delays.

$1.7 million lost every year
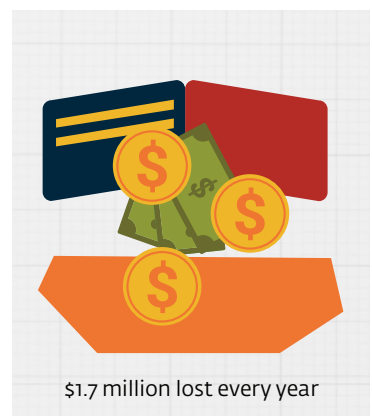
Recommendations

In line with International Labour Organization Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, companies can draw on promising practices to prevent and address workplace violence and harassment.[14] The Convention defines violence and harassment in the workplace, and it also provides a framework for preventing, addressing, and eliminating the problems.

1. Adopt policies and implement good practices to proactively address workplace violence and harassment, including by:

    a. Introducing policies and procedures, including an anti-workplace violence and harassment policy that supports employees who are victims, and holds employees accountable if they perpetrate workplace violence and harassment.

    b. Leaders modeling respectful behavior and encouraging their employees to disclose workplace violence and harassment.

    c. Providing a trained and supported team of employees (called a contact team) that refers colleagues who are impacted by workplace violence and harassment to relevant services, and helps to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace to improve employees' wellbeing and safety at work.

    d. Raising employees' and managers' awareness through training, information, and internal campaigns that challenge their acceptance of workplace bullying and harassment, and of victim blaming. The training and campaigns should also encourage employees to disclose workplace violence and harassment and seek support.

    e. Providing training that will help the company's executives to counter and respond to workplace violence and harassment. This training should include information on what constitutes workplace violence and harassment, policies and practices for preventing and responding to workplace violence and harassment, and guidance on how to deliver training and information campaigns for managers and employees.

    f. Monitoring and evaluation of disclosures and responses, and reviewing and updating policies and procedures, periodically.

2. Manage the risks of online violence related to the workplace by:

    a. Strengthening the company's code of conduct to ensure appropriate use of the company's online resources.

    b. Providing training for managers and employees about
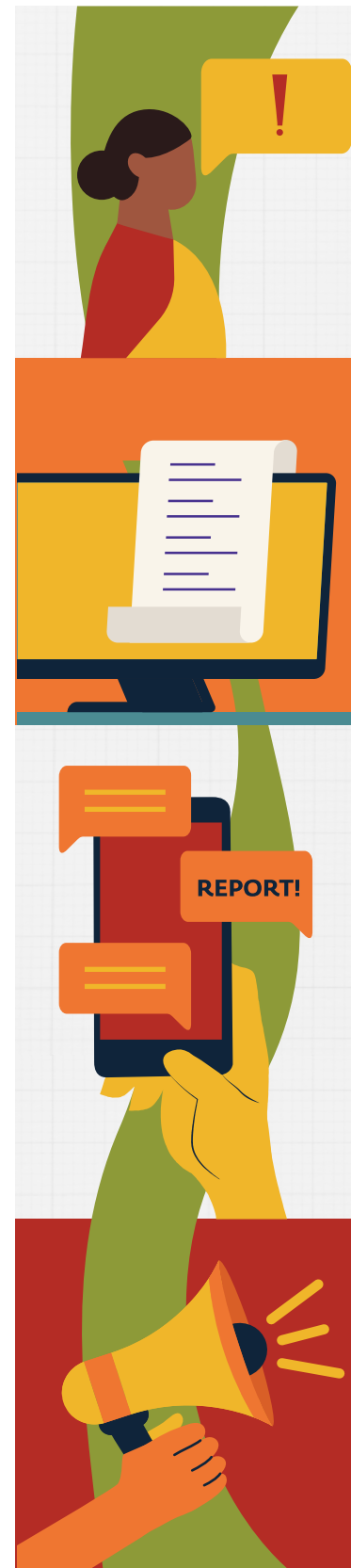
the nature of online violence, online safety (such as privacy settings), relevant policies and procedures for reporting incidents, and the support services that are available.

3. Encourage staff to use available support in the community such as CCCline or WIN (Women in Need), and by:

    a. Building/strengthening relationships with support services and encouraging employees to use these. This may involve company outreach to services and inviting service representatives to make presentations in staff meetings.

    b. Regularly scheduling sessions in the company training calendar to raise employees' awareness about company policies, procedures, and services related to workplace violence and harassment, as well as the services that are available in the community.

    c. Including messages in internal company communications (such as the intranet, leadership and human resources messages, and signs in canteens and bathrooms) to encourage all genders and ages to seek help if they experience workplace violence and harassment.

    d. Emphasizing to employees that if they experience workplace violence and harassment, they will get help from services, without cost to themselves, and that their case will be treated confidentially.

4. Improve workplace diversity and inclusion and reduce incidents of workplace violence and harassment by:

    a. Updating company policies to ensure they are inclusive with regard to gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and disability.

    b. Conducting awareness-raising sessions for company managers and employees on diversity and inclusion, and the vulnerability of employees to workplace violence and harassment based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and disability.

    c. Ensuring that company communications, including visual materials, are inclusive and representative of society's diversity.

    d. Seeking information from EQUAL GROUND about the inclusion of LGBTQI employees, and from Enable Lanka, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, or The Valuable 500 about the inclusion of employees with a disability.

1. Introduction to workplace violence and harassment

Workplace violence and harassment is pervasive, and it affects all countries, occupations, and work arrangements.[15] This problem comprises a range of unacceptable behaviors that result in, or threaten physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm, including gender-based violence and harassment.[16] These behaviors are incompatible with decent work, a respectful workplace culture, and a productive business.

In 2019, through Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment, the International Labour Organization formalized the right of employees to work in an environment free from violence and harassment. The convention brings together principles of equality and non-discrimination, with safety and health at work to "address violence and harassment that occurs in the course of, linked with or arising out of work, both in the formal and informal economy, and whether in the private or public sector." [17] Trade unions and advocacy groups have been urging the Government of Sri Lanka to ratify the convention.

1.1 What this research is about

The study that is summarized in this report was conducted to improve understanding about the prevalence and impact of violence and harassment in private sector workplaces in Sri Lanka. The study's findings will be used to develop tools and resources to help companies prevent and address violence and harassment connected to the workplace. The findings demonstrate the importance of employers' measures to address workplace violence and harassment, including through implementing measures that are consistent with International Labour Organization Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment.

1.2 How this study was conducted

The study summarized in this report comprised a survey of 1,653 employees (8 percent of the total workforce of the participating companies), in-depth interviews with 43 employees in three companies, and 10 interviews with human resources managers in nine companies. The study also included a roundtable session with stakeholders in businesses, trade unions, employee rights' organizations, and the Sri Lanka police to present and validate this study's findings. In addition, policy documents, news articles, and research literature were used to support interpretation of the study's findings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which reached Sri Lanka in the first half of 2020, this study's research plan changed several times, and necessitated conducting interviews online or over the telephone, rather than face-to-face.

In October 2021, 1,653 employees from nine companies were surveyed. These companies were in manufacturing, banking and finance, fast-moving consumer goods, and some other sectors that included tourism and hospitality. The survey was supplemented with interviews with 10 human resources (HR) managers from the same nine companies. Following the survey and interviews with the HR managers, to validate the research findings, IFC held a roundtable with business stakeholders, trade unions, employee rights' activists, and the Sri Lanka police. To assist in interpreting the findings from the survey and interviews, where relevant, comments from the roundtable have been included in this report.

As noted above, because COVID-19 restrictions[18] were in place at the time of the survey and supplementary interviews, face-to-face research activities could not take place. Thus, the employees who participated in this study were ones who had access to the internet or who could be reached by telephone. Factive Consulting supported IFC in conducting the desk research and qualitative interviews, while Nielson IQ conducted the employee survey.

To minimize distress and promote the safety of all participants, this study followed World Health Organization guidance on how to conduct research on violence against women. These measures included ensuring:

- Voluntary participation—all employees of the participating companies were invited, but not compelled, to complete the survey.
- No identifying information was collected through the survey. Interview quotes in this report have been edited to remove any identifying information.
- Survey participants were encouraged to complete the survey during work time.
- Information on support services was provided in the survey.

Figure 1.1: *Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka research components*

The research involved:
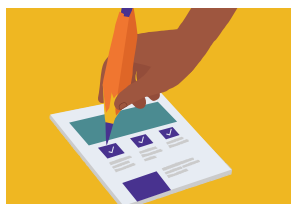
Surveys of 1,653 employees from 9 companies, in sectors that include banking and finance, manufacturing, and fast moving consumer goods

In-depth interviews with 43 employees from 3 companies (retail, automotive, and banking and finance sector)

Interviews with **10 human** resources **managers from 9 companies**

Roundtable discussion with business stakeholders, and trade union and employee rights activists to validate the research findings.
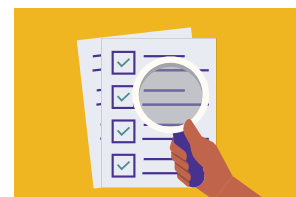
Review of policy documents, news articles and research literature to support interpretation of the findings

SRI LANKA

INDIA

80°E   81°E

10°N   10°N

Palk Strait

Point Pedro

Jaffna

Delft Island

Elephant Pass

Palk Bay

Killinochchi

Iranamadu Tank

Mullaittivu

Manakulam

NORTHERN

Ferry

Talaimannar

Adam's Bridge

Mannar Island

Mannar

9°N   9°N

Pulmoddai

Aruvi Aru

Vavuniya

Gulf of Mannar

Karaitivu Island

NORTH CENTRAL

Trincomalee

Rambewa

Anuradhapura

Mutur

Galkulama

Yan Oya

Kaudulla Oya

Kalpitiya

Kala Oya

8°N   8°N

Puttalan

Habarane

NORTH WESTERN

Maho

Deduru Oya

Madura Oya

Bay of Bengal

Batticaloa

Kattankudi

EASTERN

Madura Oya Reservoir

Chilaw

Kurunegala

Mahaweli Ganga

Kalmunai

Maha Oya

CENTRAL

Ampara

Gal Oya

Negombo

Kegalla

Kandy

Victoria Falls Reservoir

UVA

Senanayake Samudra

7°N   7°N

Kelani Gang

Pidurutalagala (2,524 m)

Badulla

COLOMBO

Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte

Moratuwa

Pottuvil

Monaragala

Kalu

Ratnapura

Wellawaya

Krindi Oya

Moratuwa

Kalutara

SABARAGAMUWA

Kumana

Laccadive

Sea

Walawe Ganga

Kataragama

INDIAN OCEAN

SOUTHERN

Galle

Hambantota

6°N   6°N

Matara

Tangalla

Dondra Head

Legend

- ○ SELECTED CITIES AND TOWNS
- ⊙ PROVINCE CAPITALS
- ⊛ NATIONAL CAPITAL
- ～ RIVERS
- — MAIN ROADS
- — RAILROADS
- — PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
- —·— INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES

SRI LANKA

0   20   40   60 Kilometers

0   10   20   30   40 Miles

80°E   81°E   82°E

SEPTEMBER 2004

2. Background

Region:
South Asia

Income level:
Lower middle income

10,509,851
Male population (2020)

Main sources of income:
Manufacturing and service sectors, agriculture[19]

11,409,149
Female population (2020)[20]

Geography: Island in the Indian Ocean, located to the south of the Indian Subcontinent, comprising a total land area of
65,525 sq.km[21]

Languages: Official languages are
Sinhala and Tamil[22]

Gross national income per capita (2020):
$3,720[23]
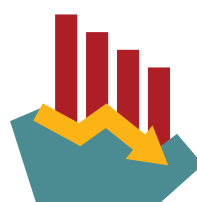
Global gender gap ranking (2020):
116 out of 156 countries[24]

65.6[25]
Index Ranking
Women, Business and the Law 2021

Figure 2.1: *Proportion of ever-partnered women who have experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence*[29]

Legend:
- Last 12 months
- Lifetime

Country	Last 12 months	Lifetime
Sri Lanka	4%	24%
Bangladesh	23%	50%
India	18%	35%
Maldives	6%	19%
Nepal	11%	27%
Global	13%	27%
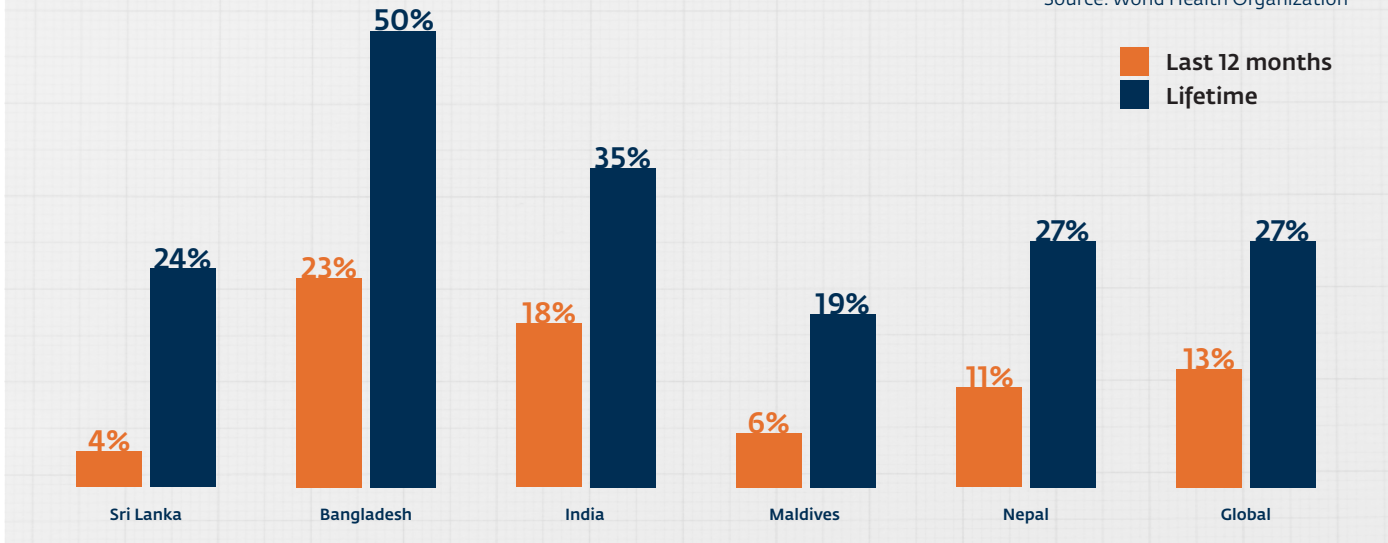
2.1 What do we know about gender-based violence in Sri Lanka?

Gender-based violence is often, but not always, an aspect of workplace violence and harassment. Reliable data on gender-based violence and workplace violence and harassment are limited. Data for the most commonly perpetrated form of gender-based violence—intimate partner violence committed by men against women—shows that almost one in four ever-partnered women in Sri Lanka between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced intimate partner violence.[26] This estimate is just below the global average of 27 percent.[27]

According to the World Health Organization, the actual prevalence of violence against women would likely be much higher if the full range of experiences, including physical violence by non-partners, and online violence and sexual harassment, were included in estimates. This report aims to contribute to the evidence base about workplace violence and harassment, which includes gender-based violence. Prior to this study, very little research had been carried out with companies in Sri Lanka to demonstrate the business case for addressing workplace violence and harassment.[28]

3. Research findings

3.1 Profile of survey participants

Figure 3.1: *Employees of participating companies*

12,296
59%

8,608
41%

■ Male   ■ Female
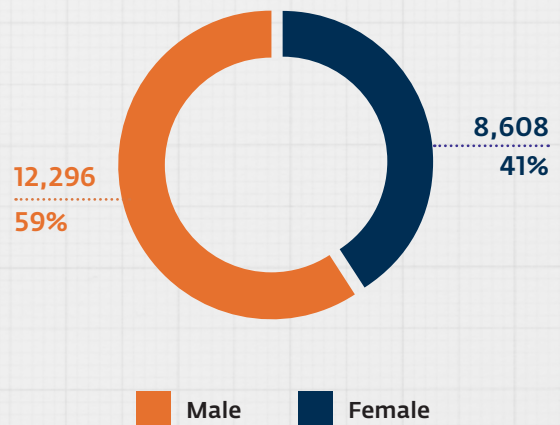
Figure 3.2 : *Survey participants*

837
51%

786
48%

The Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey was completed by 1,653 employees in nine companies in banking and finance, fast-moving consumer goods, manufacturing, and some other sectors that included tourism and hospitality.[30] The survey was completed by 8 percent of the total workforce in the nine participating companies (20,904 workers).[31]

Although men comprised nearly two thirds of all the employees in the participating companies, the numbers for male and female survey respondents were almost the same.[32] Employees between the ages of 25 and 44 comprised 71 percent of survey participants, 11 percent were under age 24, and 1 percent were over age 55.[33]

At the time the survey was carried out, 91 percent of respondents said that they were employed full time, and 61 percent said they were based in the workplace (office or factory), while 29 percent said they were based remotely (at home). A small percentage of respondents (9 percent) said they worked both remotely, and in the workplace.

Just over half of all survey participants (52 percent) said that they supervise at least one other person in the workplace, although a significantly larger percentage of men (69 percent) than women (35 percent) reported having supervisory responsibilities.

3.2 Workplace violence and harassment affects all genders and ages

The results of the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey demonstrate that violence and harassment are common in the workplace, with 61 percent of all survey participants reporting at least one form of workplace violence or harassment.[34] Bullying—including being yelled at, scolded, rudely dismissed, teased, subjected to hurtful jokes, and victimized by gossip and rumors—was the most prevalent form of workplace violence or harassment. More than half of all survey respondents (59 percent) experienced some type of bullying.[35]

3.2.1 Workplace bullying is common

People across all age groups said that they were subjected to workplace bullying, with respondents aged 45 to 54 experiencing the highest rate of being yelled at, teased, and subjected to hurtful jokes. People over age 55 did not report being teased at work, but did report being yelled at, subjected to hurtful jokes, and victimized by gossip and rumors spread about them.

Bullying may be even more prevalent than survey respondents reported, given that for each type of

bullying listed in the survey, participants were more likely to report that their colleagues had experienced each type of bullying than they had, themselves (see Figure 3.4). Research shows that participants are likely to underreport the problems they experience, which they consider to be sensitive, and more likely to report the problems others experience.[36]

These survey results align with what the human resources managers said in their interviews for this study—that bullying was a pervasive and normal part of workplace culture:

> 66
>
> **"Traditionally in [this] industry, the hierarchical system puts people into positions of power where they believe that in talking to someone at a junior level, using certain words that are a little bit harsher than normal, is one of those things that just happen."**
>
> —————
> **Interview with human resources manager**

> 66
>
> **"To be honest, I don't think the person bullying me was aware that [they were] bullying me, because that is [part of] our psyche and make up in this country, and in our society."**
>
> —————
> **Interview with human resources manager**
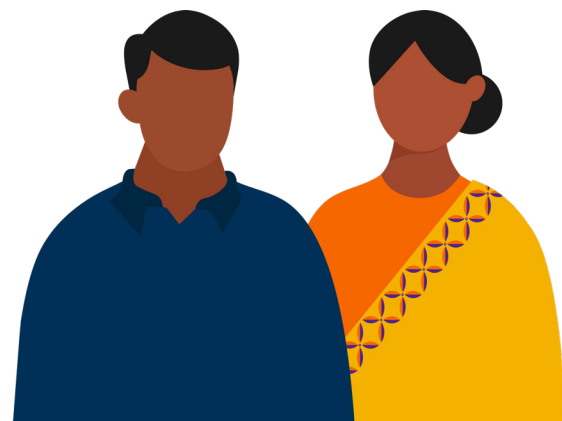
Figure 3.3: *Proportion and number of participants who experience forms of workplace violence and harassment*

- 1,004 employees — **61%** — Any form of workplace violence or harassment
- 979 employees — **59%** — Bullying
- 184 employees — **11%** — Sexual Harassment
- 53 employees — **3%** — Online Violence
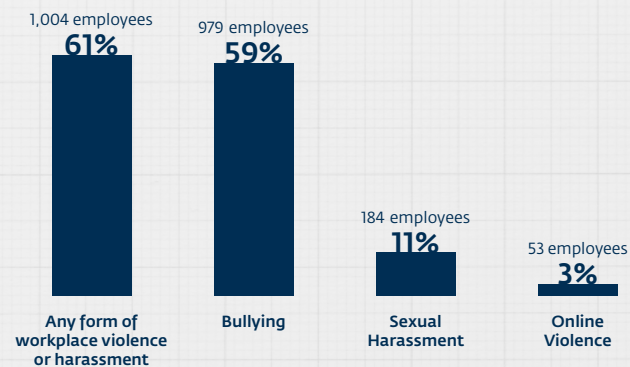
Figure 3.4: *Survey participants were more likely to report that colleagues experienced bullying than they had*

- Yelled at/shouted at: 37% (I have experienced), 58% (Others have experienced)
- Subject to hurtful jokes: 34% (I have experienced), 47% (Others have experienced)
- Gossip/rumors spread about them: 34% (I have experienced), 54% (Others have experienced)
- Teased, scolded, rudely dismissed: 27% (I have experienced), 42% (Others have experienced)

Legend: ■ I have experienced ■ Others have experienced
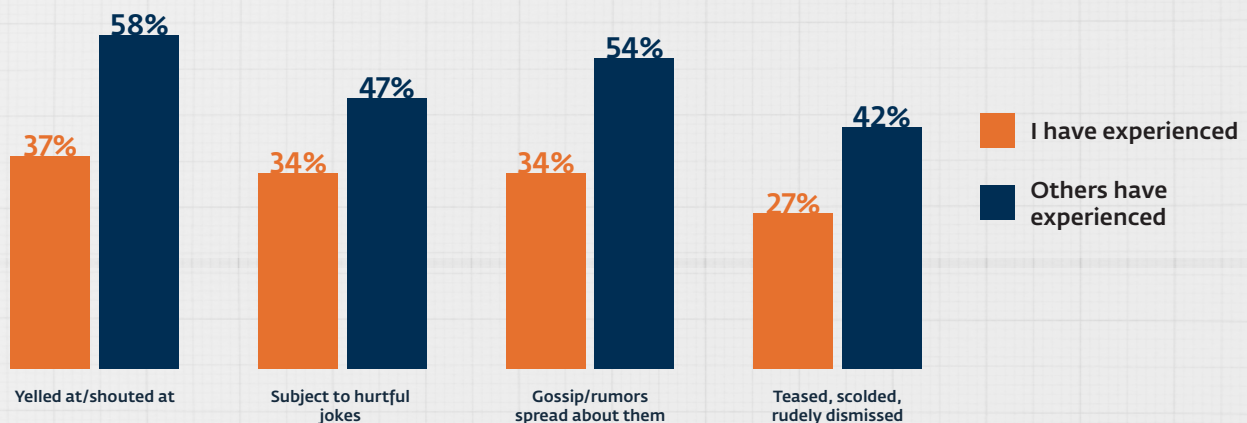
While these comments acknowledge the widespread nature of bullying, at least one manager held the misconception that bullying is not experienced by people who are educated and work in professional jobs:

> " **" I think when it comes to workplace harassment, it all depends on the environment. I mean these are all [educated] professionals."**

Interview with human resources manager

3.2.2 Sexual harassment is likely to be underreported

Compared to bullying, a much smaller percentage

of participants (11 percent) said that they had been subjected to sexual harassment, which suggests that sexual harassment is underreported. Underreporting is a common issue identified in studies about gender-based violence because the topic is usually perceived as "taboo" and stigmatizing, and the victims are likely to be blamed for it.[37]

Survey participants of all ages said that they had experienced sexual harassment. People over age 55 did not report being subjected to as many types of sexual harassment as other age groups. For example, they did not report being invited for intimate social activities (such as dates) or being subjected to unwanted touching or unwanted questions about their sexual life. However, 4 percent of people in this age group said they had been told or sent sexually suggestive jokes.

While the survey results suggest that sexual harassment appears to be less prevalent than bullying, there are indications that it may be underreported.

For each type of sexual harassment asked about in the survey, participants were more likely to say that their colleagues had experienced it than they had (see Figure 3.5).

Interviews with human resources managers suggest that sexual harassment may be a less-well-understood issue than is the case with bullying. One HR manager denied that the problem occurs in their company:

"

"This is a very friendly environment, [with] no sexual harassment. So, everything, I think, is safe."

Interview with human resources manager

Other human resources managers acknowledged that sexual harassment occurs, but expressed difficulty in addressing it:

"

"Sexual harassment is a little bit tricky, in the sense that sometimes we get complaints and we do look into them, but in subsequent investigations we find sometimes [that the allegations] are very flimsy, or it's one person's word against another person's word."

Interview with human resources manager

According to another manager, dealing with sexual harassment appears to be further complicated when staff work off-site:

"

"In a couple of incidents that occurred, what happened was that the client was trying to be a bit funny with one of our female staff, so we took it up [with the client]."

Interview with human resources manager

3.2.3 Online violence is emerging as an important workplace issue

Like sexual harassment, online violence appears to be underreported by this study's survey participants, and poorly understood by participating companies' human resources managers. Only 3 percent of all participants said that they had been subjected to online violence by colleagues or supervisors at their workplace. In contrast, 10 percent of participants said they believe that other employees had been subjected to it (see Figure 3.6).

Other research examined in this study reinforces the apparent underreporting of online violence in the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey. For example, a survey by the NGO WIN (Women in Need)[38] found that 21 percent of 1,533 people surveyed in Sri Lanka (24 percent of women and 18 percent of men) knew someone whose intimate pictures or videos were shared on the internet, social media sites, or apps. Additionally, 11 percent of those who answered the survey (15 percent of women and 8 percent of men) said that they knew someone who was threatened or

Figure 3.5: *Survey participants were more likely to report that colleagues experienced sexual harassment than had*

- Told or sent sexually suggestive jokes: I have experienced 8%, Others have experienced 17%
- Subject to unwanted questions about sexual life: I have experienced 4%, Others have experienced 9%
- Subject to unwanted touching, hugging or kissing: I have experienced 3%, Others have experienced 10%
- Invited for intimate social activities: I have experienced 2%, Others have experienced 8%

Legend: I have experienced / Others have experienced

blackmailed with intimate pictures or videos. Another study, released in March 2021, by The Economist Intelligence Unit, revealed an 88 percent prevalence rate of online violence experienced by women in the Asia Pacific region.[39]

Globally, online violence appears to have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic as more people spent time using the internet.[40] Despite the problem appearing to increase, the HR managers interviewed in this study held misconceptions about the prevalence of this form of violence. A manager in the manufacturing sector said that employees in the sector do not have time to engage in online violence. Similarly, a manager in the banking and finance sector said that because the company uses premium platforms for online meetings, online violence has not been reported.

Another HR manager said that they think that online violence tends to take place among young people. This appears to be a misconception, however, as online violence was reported by survey participants across all age groups, apart from those over age 55.

3.2.4 Domestic violence may have worsened during COVID-19

International research consistently argues that the stressors brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic such as job and income loss, as well as the demands of unpaid caregiving, have resulted in greater exposure to violence by partners or other household members, and women are usually the victims.[41] Anecdotal evidence compiled by the UNFPA in Sri Lanka indicates an increase in sexual and gender-based violence owing to lockdowns and travel restrictions.[42] Therefore, it was somewhat surprising that only 15 percent of this study's survey participants (n=255) reported that the issues mentioned in the survey had worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. [43]

Furthermore, only 4 percent of all survey participants said that their work was impacted by having a family member or friend who experienced violence by their current or ex-partner, or someone else in their family or household. Owing to the safety risks of asking people who work from home, directly, about their experiences of domestic violence, the survey posed the relevant question in broad terms. Nevertheless, the survey result indicates underreporting, as the managers interviewed for this study repeatedly raised the concern that employees' experience of domestic violence may have increased due to the stresses of changed financial and living arrangements brought about by COVID-19. The following quote from a manager in the banking and finance sector was especially illustrative of this impact:

> **"**
>
> **"[There were] a lot of pressures, especially because the kids were at home, [staff] had to manage the online classes. And then there were a lot of expectations, especially, on the female staff to manage all these, plus, their work during normal working hours. There were a few instances of domestic violence where staff had to be moved out of the house, and other issues like that."**
>
> **Interview with human resources manager**

Figure 3.6: *Survey participants were more likely to report that colleagues experienced online violence than they had*

3%
I have experienced

10%
Others have experienced

Shutterstock: Westock Productions

> **"We usually get over 100,000 domestic violence reports per year to the Police, but during COVID-19, complaints reduced. This was because regular complaints procedures were interrupted. Many officers were also affected while others were deployed on COVID-19-related assignments. Considering the previous pattern of reporting, violence increased in the family but victims were unable to report abuse. Lack of reporting is a major issue now."**

Deputy Inspector General of Police Renuka Jayasundara

In the roundtable to discuss the findings of the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey, the Detective Inspector General of the Child and Women Bureau of Sri Lanka Police stated that a lack of reporting of domestic violence owing to COVID-19 had become a major issue:

IFC has conducted research with companies in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands,[44] which consistently found that domestic violence impacts employees for reasons that include missing work; feeling tired, distracted, and unwell; or spending time supporting colleagues affected by domestic violence. Moreover, domestic violence can be perpetrated in the workplace, or in ways that sabotage the victim-survivors' employment, as well as companies' ability to provide a safe work environment for their employees.

Higher rates of workplace violence and harassment are experienced by people living with a disability

Global evidence indicates that children and adults living with a disability are more likely than the general population to be subjected to violence.[45] Two percent (n=28) of all the people who completed the survey in this study said they live with a disability. Of these participants, 68 percent reported experiencing at least one form of workplace violence and harassment, compared to 61 percent of all survey respondents. With regard to experiencing bullying, 68 percent of participants with a disability said they had been bullied at work, compared to 59 percent of all survey respondents. For sexual harassment, reports were the same for staff with a disability, and staff who said they did not have a disability (11 percent for each). People with a disability said that their work was affected by domestic violence at a rate that was more than four times higher than for other survey participants. See Figure 3.7.

These findings are mostly consistent with global evidence that indicates that children and adults living with a disability are more likely than the general population to be subjected to violence. [46] Available data indicate that 26 percent of ever-partnered women with a disability in Sri Lanka have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.[47]

Despite these results, interviews with company managers in this study indicated that they had limited understanding of the issues related to workplace violence and harassment that people who live with a disability experience. For example, one manager said that no violence affected people with a disability at the company, and when questioned further, the manager admitted that the company did not employ any people who live with a disability. As illustrated by the following quote, some of the interviewees in this study

made assumptions about the work capacity of people living with a disability:

Such perceptions were noted in the Sri Lankan Government's National Human Resources and Employment Policy (2012), which identified the workplace entry barriers faced by people who live with a disability as negative social attitudes, lack of required entry qualifications, lack of a disability-friendly working environment, and transport difficulties.[48]

The 1988 Government Circular on Employment of Persons with Disabilities stipulated that 3 percent of job opportunities in the government sector should be filled by people living with a disability.[49] It is not clear whether this quota was implemented. Sri Lanka's 2012 National Human Resources and Employment Policy suggests that more awareness needs to be created to address the inadequate implementation of the 1988 quota.[50]

"

"[There's] not much [of a connection between disability and violence], to be honest. Yes [we have employed people with a disability], but very small numbers. We need people who can talk to the guests, welcome them, be there with them. But now we are focusing to see if differently abled people can come in and do different jobs, even in the back of the house."

Interview with human resources manager

Figure 3.7: *Rates of workplace violence and harassment by disability status*

Category	Survey participants living with a disability (n=28)	All survey participants (n=1,653)
Any form of workplace violence	68%	61%
Yelled at/ shouted at	57%	37%
Subject to hurtful jokes	43%	34%
Had gossip/ rumors spread about them	36%	34%
Teased	36%	27%
Affected by domestic violence	18%	4%
Sent sexually suggestive jokes	11%	8%
Online violence	4%	3%
Unwanted questions about sexual life	0%	4%
Unwanted touching	0%	3%
Invited for intimate social activities	0%	2%

Survey participants living with a disability (n=28)

All survey participants (n=1,653)

3.2.5 Close to 1 in 5 of survey participants recently felt unsafe at work

Several questions in the survey asked participants to gauge their feelings of safety when travelling to and from work, or at their workplace.

In response to the statement 'I feel safe and at ease at this workplace', 3 percent disagreed, or strongly disagreed. However, in response to a later, more specific statement in the survey 'In the past four weeks, I have not felt safe or at ease at work because of the issues mentioned in this survey', 19 percent of all respondents (close to one in five people) agreed, or strongly agreed. As discussed in Section 3.3 'Workplace violence and harassment costs to businesses', these results have implications for companies, as they can experience a productivity loss when employees' safety is compromised, and employees find it difficult to perform at their best.

A small proportion of all the survey participants (7 percent, n=108) said they felt unsafe traveling to and from work. This result appears to be low, given that sexual harassment on public transport appears to be significant problem. A report by the UNFPA found that 90 percent of women surveyed across all nine provinces in Sri Lanka had been sexually harassed on public transport at least once in their lifetime, and 37 percent said that their workplace performance was impacted by the harassment.[51] The relative feelings of safety in traveling to and from work, which were reported by this study's survey participants, may be attributed to only 2 percent of participants (n=32 people) using public transport to get to work (see Figure 3.8).
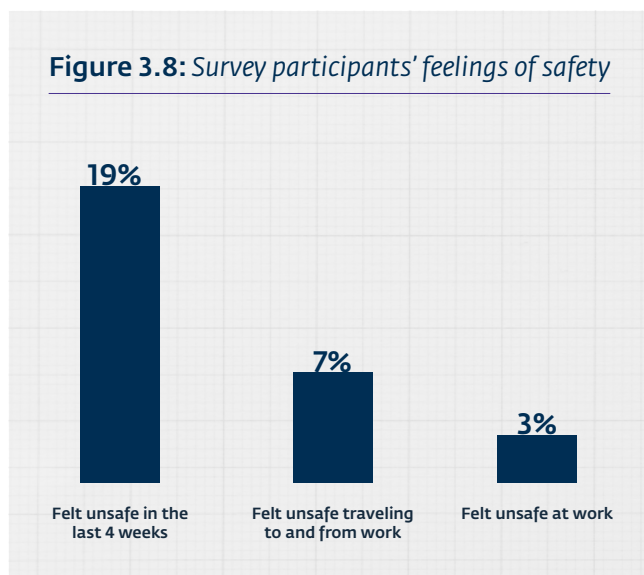
3.2.6 Victim blaming related to sexual harassment and online violence

The survey asked participants to identify the reasons why a person might be subject to bullying, sexual harassment, and online violence. By identifying misconceptions about the causes of workplace violence and harassment, companies can respond to these mistaken beliefs by establishing a respectful workplace in which employees can work safely and productively.

The most common reasons survey respondents gave about why people were bullied, were their personality or job level in the company, followed by their clothing, and their body shape or appearance. In contrast, when asked about the reasons why some employees are sexually harassed or subject to online violence, the top answers were their clothing and their body shape or appearance. Both women and men identified similar causes for workplace violence and harassment. These responses suggest that while participants perceive bullying to be somewhat related to factors within the company, such as a person's job level, sexual harassment and online violence may be perceived to be caused by the victims' behavior, such as wearing inappropriate clothing. Common vulnerabilities[52] to workplace violence and harassment such as disability, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, were not well recognized in responses to these questions, even though these vulnerabilities appear to be factors in workplace violence and harassment (see Figure 3.9).

This quote from an employee interviewed in the initial phase of this research highlights the perception of individuals' behavior as a cause of sexual harassment and online violence:

Figure 3.8: *Survey participants' feelings of safety*

19%
Felt unsafe in the last 4 weeks

7%
Felt unsafe traveling to and from work

3%
Felt unsafe at work

“

"I do not think religion and language matters here, [workplace violence and harassment] mainly happens based on the way you dress as it increases the desires of others. If you have some manners in the way you dress, talk and behave, the possibility [of workplace violence and harassment] can be reduced. When the others' desires go higher, the possibility [of workplace violence and harassment] goes higher as well."

Employee[53]

Figure 3.9: *Perceived causes of workplace bullying*

% of total responses

Personality	18%
Job level in the company	17%
Clothing	16%
Body shape or appearance	15%
Age	12%
Level of education	10%
Gender	9%
Sexual orientation	7%
Marital Status	7%
Ethnicity/home town	5%
Disability	4%
Religion	3%
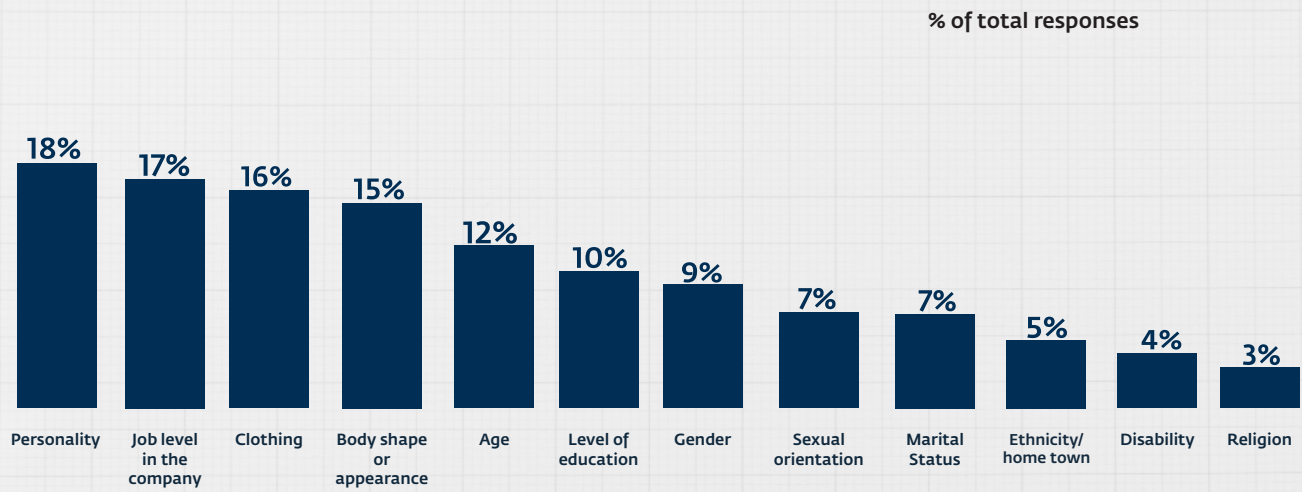
Figure 3.10: *Perceived causes of sexual harassment*

% of total responses

Clothing	29%
Body shape or appearance	23%
Gender	17%
Marital Status	14%
Age	13%
Personality	13%
Sexual orientation	12%
Job level in the company	9%
Level of education	5%
Ethnicity/home town	3%
Disability	2%
Religion	2%
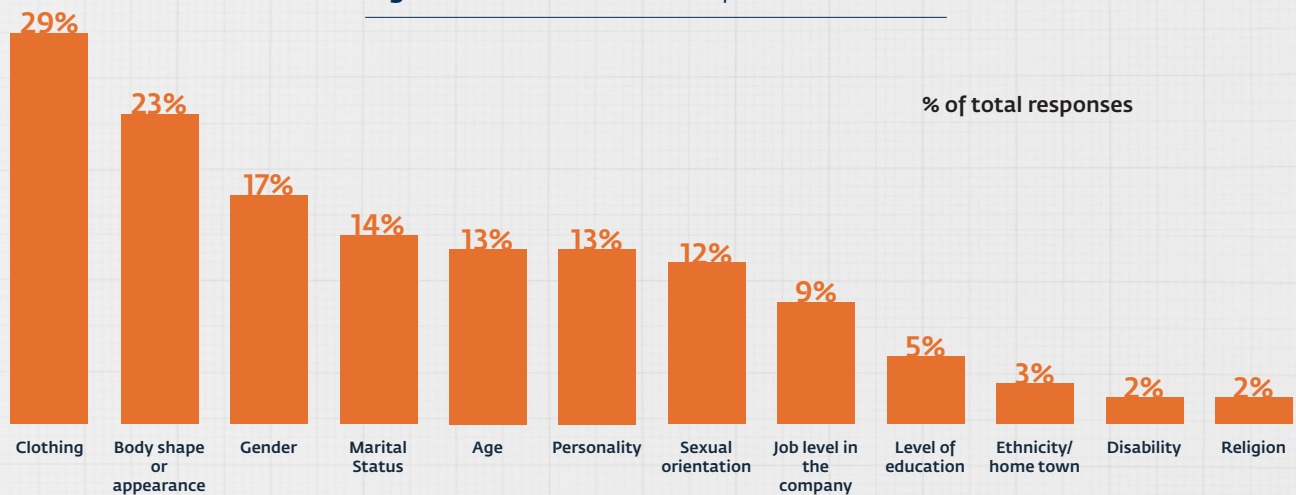
Figure 3.11: *Perceived causes of online violence*

% of total responses

Clothing	18%
Body shape or appearance	15%
Age	14%
Personality	13%
Gender	12%
Marital Status	11%
Sexual orientation	10%
Job level in the company	9%
Level of education	7%
Ethnicity/home town	4%
Disability	3%
Religion	2%
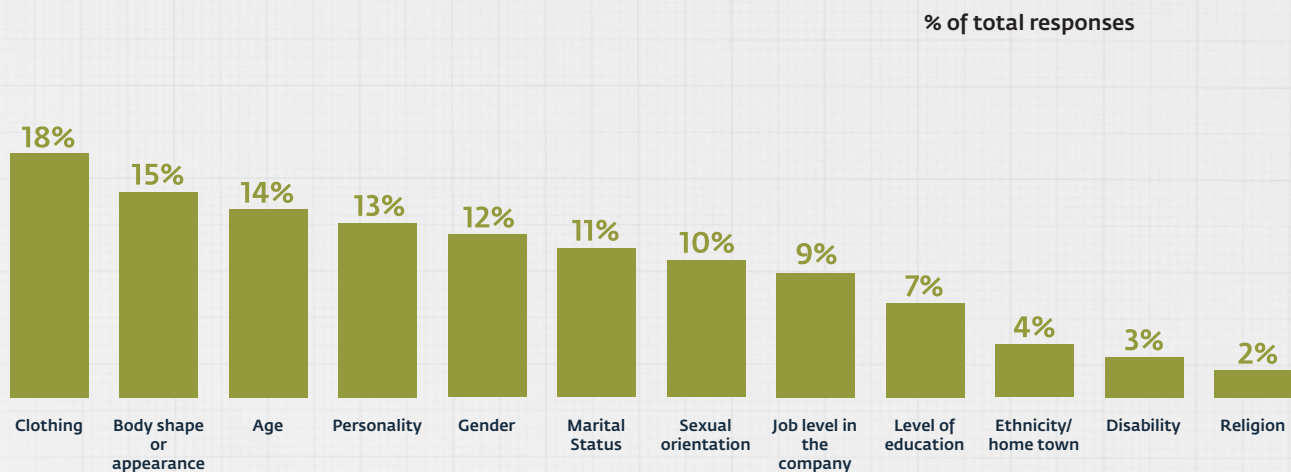
Workplace violence and harassment faced by employees who are LGBTQI

The survey did not ask participants about their sexual orientation or gender identity; although, in response to questions about the perceived causes of workplace violence and harassment (See Figures 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11), the belief that a person may be bullied or subject to sexual harassment or online violence due to their sexual orientation did not seem to resonate strongly.

However, in the roundtable discussion held with business stakeholders, trade unions, and employee rights activists to validate the survey findings, some participants asserted that employers tend to ignore workplace discrimination that is based on sexual orientation and gender identity, due to law in Sri Lanka that criminalizes same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults.[54]

> ❝
> **"Companies are not willing to advocate for LGBTQI persons and immediately shut down the subject [of discrimination] saying it [same sex relations] is illegal."**
>
> **Bani Chandrasena, Vice President, Diversity Collective Lanka.[55]**

In addition, EQUAL GROUND's research into workplace discrimination of people who are LGBTQI[56] reveals that workplaces in Sri Lanka are often unsafe for employees who are LGBTQI. Of the 193 LGBTQI people surveyed by EQUAL GROUND:

- 50 percent said that they would face discrimination and stigma if their colleagues knew of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- 58 percent stated that they have encountered verbal harassment at their workplace
- 31 percent faced sexual harassment
- 49 percent (n=22) said they believe that LGBTQI people face workplace discrimination and harassment.

John Keells Group, one of the largest employers in Sri Lanka, is seen as a model for efforts to formalize a LGBTQI-inclusive workplace culture. The conglomerate has included the terms "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" in all human resources policies since 2015, and it has worked with EQUAL GROUND to conduct group-wide awareness raising sessions on LGBTQI inclusion.[57]

> ❝
> **"The business case for diversity and inclusivity is clear – it increases our talent pool, it brings innovation, and starts rich discussions and debates during decision-making; all of which support the notion that companies must work towards being more inclusive."**
>
> **Krishan Balendra, John Keells Group Chairman.[58]**

John Keells Group's approach challenges the belief held by some companies that they will "lose business" if they address LGBTQI discrimination, when, actually:

> ❝
> **"[There is] big business potential in being a LGBTQI-friendly country. And we [EQUAL GROUND] have worked with large conglomerates in Sri Lanka that are making positive strides to be more inclusive."**
>
> **Rosanna Flamer-Caldera, Founder, EQUAL GROUND.[59]**

3.2.7 Most participants who admit to bullying or sexual harassment are supervisors

The survey asked participants to reflect on their own behavior, and to consider whether they may have bullied or sexually harassed someone in the workplace without knowing that these behaviors are wrong. Although bullying is widespread (see Section 3.2.1 'Workplace bullying is common'), only 7 percent (n=113) of all participants said that they had engaged in this behavior. Most of the participants who admitted to bullying (69 percent, n=78) were workplace supervisors. A minority—3 percent (n=46) of all survey participants—said that they had sexually harassed someone at the workplace without knowing it was wrong. Most of the people who admitted to sexually harassing behavior were supervisors (70 percent, n=32).

It is perhaps not surprising that participants may have been reluctant to disclose their own behaviors that constitute workplace violence and harassment. Along with not wanting to reveal information that reflects badly on them, participants could fear being reprimanded or even fired by their employer.

3.3 Workplace violence and harassment costs to businesses

3.3.1 More than one week of staff time is lost per employee every year due to workplace violence and harassment

Based on answers to several questions in this study's Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey, it is estimated that every year companies lose nearly six working days for each employee due to the impact of workplace violence and harassment.[60] This is calculated on the basis that the survey participants are representative of all employees. The lost days of employees can be attributed to:

- working less productively due to feeling tired, distracted, and unwell at work (4.07 days)
- coming to work late or leaving work early (0.18 days)
- missing work (1.71 days)
- Total: 5.96 days

3.3.2 $1.7 million is lost every year due to workplace violence and bullying

Based on the estimate of 5.96 days lost per employee, per year, and the 2022 average monthly wage of the nine companies participating in this study, every year, collectively, the companies lose $1.7 million due to the impact of workplace violence and harassment. See Annex 2 for details on this calculation.

Figure 3.12: *Disclosures of bullying behavior*

I bullied someone at this workplace not knowing it was wrong

5%
2%
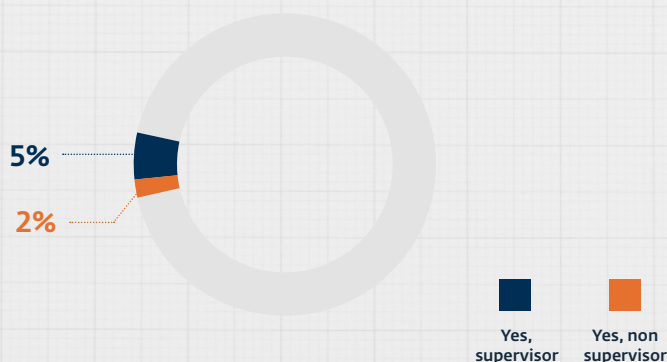
Figure 3.13: *Disclosures of sexually harassing behavior*

I sexually harassed someone at this workplace not knowing it was wrong

2%
1%

Yes, supervisor   Yes, non supervisor
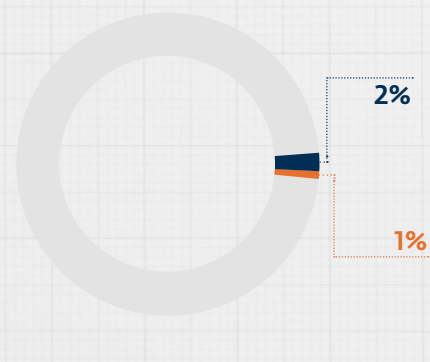
Calculating lost days

- For survey participants who reported feeling distracted, tired, or unwell, a productivity-loss multiplier based on the frequency of the effect reported, was applied: rarely = 5 percent; sometimes = 10 percent; often = 15 percent; always = 20 percent. That is, for someone who reported 'always' feeling distracted, tired, or unwell at work, it was estimated that they lost 20 percent of their eight-hour work day, or 1.6 hours.

- For employees who reported being late for work, lost productivity was calculated on the basis of one hour per time. For this, and for employees who reported being absent from work, the frequencies for the four-week period (as per the survey question) were used to calculate an annual figure.

- All these calculations were applied to all employees based on the experience of the sample. The same prevalence and impact across the workforce was assumed. While this is not a statistically accurate approach, as the sample was not randomly selected, it does illustrate the cost that businesses incur due to workplace violence and harassment.

Shutterstock: fizkes

Figure 3.14: *Survey participants' knowledge and perception of help-seeking*

Would know how to get help for self if bullied or sexually harassed	86%
Would know how to get help for others if bullied or sexually harassed	81%
Would feel comfortable discussing a problem affecting their work with a manager or human resources officer	76%

3.4 Employees say they know how to get help for workplace violence and harassment, but it is not clear whether they do so, in practice

Of the nine companies that participated in this research, five have specific anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, which include procedures for staff to raise grievances with the company. The other four participating companies either do not have relevant policies, or have included reference to issues such as bullying in their code of conduct.

Although not all nine participating companies have implemented formal ways to respond to workplace violence and harassment, most survey participants said that they know how to get help for themselves and their colleagues (see Figure 3.14).[61] These high results may be due to participants' concern that their answer, and especially if negative, could jeopardize their employment.

As the survey did not include questions about whether participants had ever made a report or sought help for bullying or sexual harassment in the workplace, there are no data on whether participants' help-seeking knowledge is actionable. However, comments from employees and managers interviewed in the preliminary research for this study suggest that in some instances employees may be reluctant to come forward to complain about colleagues' and supervisors' behavior due to lack of trust, or fear of reprisal. These barriers warrant further investigation in future research.

"

"Most people are not complaining [about workplace violence and harassment]. They don't have any trust or don't know what will happen to them after informing [the company]"

Employee[62]

"

"It's basically considered that there could be a negative impact on your career, in your personal life because of reporting it [workplace violence and harassment]. It's kind of a taboo topic for most of them, to speak out with regard to the harassment."

Manager[64]

"

"The majority of staff are comfortable to discuss these issues [about workplace violence and harassment], and our HR [human resources] systems establish a strong prevention and response system to address sexual harassment and bullying. But still people are not ready to complain; they are not sharing the issues with us. Also, they have a fear of further victimization by others. That feeling also blocks them from talking about this issue, openly."

Manager[63]

4. Conclusion and recommendations

How responses to workplace violence and harassment could be strengthened

4.1 Conclusion

Just over 60 percent of the people who participated in the survey for this study have directly experienced workplace violence and harassment. For some forms of workplace violence and harassment such as sexual harassment and online violence, the prevalence is likely to be higher than what was reported in the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey. Employees of all genders and ages said that they have experienced behaviors such as being yelled at, subjected to hurtful and sexual jokes, and had gossip and rumors spread about them. It is perhaps no surprise that nearly one in five participants (19 percent) said that they felt unsafe at work in the four weeks prior to the survey. Therefore, comprehensive company responses to dealing with workplace violence and harassment are very much needed.

Using the survey results as the basis, across the participating companies, an estimated 5.96 days of working time, per year, per employee are lost due to workplace violence and harassment. For the nine companies. this adds up to at least $1.7 million in wages lost. This estimate does not factor in businesses' costs such as overtime, recruitment costs, and productivity delays.

Although the situation is of concern, there are good practices that companies in Sri Lanka can draw on to support staff if they are affected by workplace violence and harassment. By implementing relevant policies, procedures, and training, companies may potentially improve workplace productivity. To promote efforts at the company level, it is essential that the Government of Sri Lanka ratifies International Labour Organization Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Companies should adopt policies and implement good practices to proactively address workplace violence and harassment

This study shows that the prevalence of workplace bullying and harassment is high within participating companies, which compromises their ability to provide a safe work environment for their employees.

Therefore, in line with the International Labour Organization Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, companies can draw on promising practices to prevent and address workplace violence and harassment.[65] The Convention sets out definitions for violence and harassment, and provides a common framework for preventing, addressing, and eliminating these behaviors.

4.2.1.1 Adopt policies and implement good practices to proactively address workplace violence and harassment, including:

a. Introducing policies and procedures, including an anti-workplace violence and harassment policy that supports employees who are victims, and holds employees accountable if they perpetrate workplace violence and harassment.

b. Leaders modeling respectful behavior and encouraging their employees to disclose workplace violence and harassment.

c. Providing a trained and supported team of employees (called a contact team) that refers colleagues who are impacted by workplace violence and harassment to relevant services, and helps to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace to improve employees' wellbeing and safety at work.

d. Raising employees' and managers' awareness through training, information, and internal campaigns that challenge their acceptance of workplace bullying and harassment, and of victim blaming. The training and campaigns should also encourage employees to disclose workplace violence and harassment and seek support.

e. Providing training that will help companies to counter and respond to workplace violence and harassment. This training should include information on what constitutes workplace violence and harassment, policies and practices for preventing and responding to workplace violence and harassment, and guidance on how to deliver training and information campaigns for managers and employees.

f. Monitoring and evaluation of disclosures and responses, and reviewing and updating policies and procedures, periodically.

4.2.1.2 Manage the risks of online violence related to the workplace by:

a. Strengthening the company's code of conduct to ensure appropriate use of the company's online resources.

b. Providing training for managers and employees about the nature of online violence, online safety (such as privacy settings), relevant policies and procedures for reporting incidents, and the support services that are available.

4.2.1.3 Encourage staff to use available support in the community such as CCCline or WIN (Women in Need), and by:

a. Building/strengthening relationships with support services and encouraging employees to use these. This may involve company outreach to services and inviting service representatives to make presentations in staff meetings.

b. Regularly scheduling sessions in the company training calendar to raise employees' awareness about company policies, procedures, and services related to workplace violence and harassment, as well as the services that are available in the community.

c. Including messages in internal company communications (such as the intranet, leadership and human resources messages, and signs in canteens and bathrooms) to encourage all genders and ages to seek help if they experience workplace violence and harassment.

d. Emphasizing to employees that if they experience workplace violence and harassment, they will get help from services, without cost to themselves, and that their case will be treated confidentially.

4.2.1.4 Improve workplace diversity and inclusion and reduce incidents of workplace violence and harassment by:

a. Updating company policies to ensure they are inclusive with regard to gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and disability.

b. Conducting awareness-raising sessions for company managers and employees on diversity and inclusion, and the vulnerability of employees to workplace violence and harassment based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and disability.

c. Ensuring that company communications,

including visual materials, are inclusive and representative of society's diversity.

d. Seeking information from EQUAL GROUND about the inclusion of LGBTQI employees, and from Enable Lanka, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, or The Valuable 500 about the inclusion of employees with a disability.

4.2.2 Promising company practices

Company A[66]

Company A in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is seeing good results from its work to address the impact of family (domestic) and sexual violence on employees, and improve the workplace gender balance. Compared to employees in two other companies IFC surveyed in PNG, staff in Company A were less likely to accept violence, and were more likely to acknowledge the pervasiveness of violence, as well as its impact.

Company A activities:
• Subscribes to a local support service
• Has established and trained a contact team[67]
• Accessed education sessions for staff about family and sexual violence, and relevant laws and services
• Developed a family and sexual violence policy with technical support
• Participated in a management briefing about how to respond when staff experience family and sexual violence
• Uses internal communications to regularly raise staff awareness about family and sexual violence
• Uses communications campaigns to raise public awareness about the impact of family and sexual violence
• Provides ongoing support for the implementation of family and sexual violence policies and operation of the contact team

More information is available in IFC's study on Papua New Guinea.[68]

Solomon Airlines

Following Solomon Airlines' work to build a respectful and supportive workplace, staff reported feeling safer at work and more comfortable discussing workplace problems with a manager.

Solomon Airlines activities:
• Developed and implemented Solomon Airlines Violence policy to create a violence-free culture and workplace for its employees. The policy aims to promote healthy relationships for employees and their families by reducing the risk of violence in the workplace, including violence between staff

and passengers, managers and staff, and violence in non-workplace contexts
- Introduced a grievance procedure to deal with employees' complaints related to bullying and sexual harassment
- Trained a contact team to assist staff in accessing reasonable workplace support such as a special paid 10-day leave to help staff to deal with issues arising from violence

More information is available in IFC's case study on Solomon Airlines. [69]

Wormald

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Wormald in Fiji has seen its attrition rate fall from 75 percent in 2018, to 44 percent in 2020. This result can be attributed to the company's efforts to strengthen its culture of respect and resilience.

Wormald's activities:
- Allowing staff to request preferred shifts to accommodate their additional care responsibilities during the pandemic
- Implementing flexible work arrangements
- Offering staff financial counseling for problems arising from the pandemic
- Giving staff affected by the cyclone (December 2021) emergency cash payments
- Reviewing and implementing anti-harassment and bullying policies
- Social media messaging to promote the company's workplace policies and focus on respect

More information is available in IFC's case study on Wormald. [70]

Annex 1:

Research methodology

This study of companies in Sri Lanka was conducted in four stages:

1. Preliminary online interviews with 43 employees from three companies in the retail, automotive, and banking and finance sectors (July and August 2020).
2. A survey of 1,653 employees from nine companies, primarily in the manufacturing, banking and finance, and fast-moving consumer goods sectors (October and November 2021).
3. Online interviews with 10 human resources managers from the nine companies (February 2022).
4. A roundtable discussion with business stakeholders, and trade union and employee rights activists to validate the research findings (March 2022). Where relevant, comments provided during the roundtable were included in this report to assist in the interpretation of the findings.

Relevant policy documents, news articles, and research literature were reviewed to support analysis of the findings from the surveys, interviews, and round table discussion.

Research tools

Respectful Workplace Survey

Employees from nine companies in Sri Lanka were invited to complete the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey. The survey was provided in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, and it could be completed either online or through a telephone interview. The survey asked participants about:

- Experience working for the company
- Workplace behaviors
- Family problems affecting work
- Impact of workplace violence and harassment
- Getting help in the workplace
- Workplace engagement
- Demographic information

As some survey participants might not be familiar with the meaning of terms such as bullying, sexual harassment, and online violence, the survey provided descriptions of these behaviors. For example: instead of 'I am subject to sexual harassment at this workplace (response options: never, rarely, sometimes, very often, always)', the survey asked about various behaviors that constitute sexual harassment such as: 'I am told or sent sexually suggestive jokes that I did not want to hear or see by colleagues or supervisors at this workplace (response options: never, rarely, sometimes, very often, always)'.

Key informant interviews

The interviews with human resources managers from the participating companies were recorded and transcribed using virtual meeting software. The interviews were then analyzed thematically to obtain qualitative data about workplace violence and harassment.

Ethical considerations

To minimize distress and ensure the safety of all participants, this study followed World Health Organization guidance[71] on how to conduct research on violence against women. These measures included ensuring:

- Voluntary participation—all employees of the participating companies were invited, but not compelled, to complete the survey.
- No identifying information was collected through the survey. Interview quotes in this report have been edited to remove any identifying information.
- Survey participants were encouraged to complete the survey during work hours.
- Information on support services was provided in the survey.

NielsenIQ staff were trained to conduct phone surveys (in Sinhala, Tamil, or English) with those survey participants who did not have computer access and/or the literacy skills to complete the online survey.

Study limitations

Lost time and wages calculation

The estimate for the cost to business presented in this report, aims to provide an approximate

monetary value of the time lost due to the impact of workplace violence and harassment.

This calculation does not include costs to cover the time lost due to workplace violence and harassment such as payment for overtime, turnover costs, recruitment costs, or productivity delays. To calculate wages lost due to workplace violence and harassment, other IFC surveys have included a question about the time employees spend supporting colleagues who are dealing with workplace violence and harassment or domestic violence. On average, 3.9 days are lost by employees who support their colleagues;[72] however, the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey did not include this question.

Applying lost time and wages to all employees

In calculating the lost time and wages due to workplace violence and harassment, the results have been applied to all employees, based on the experiences of the sample. While this was not a statistically accurate approach, it does illustrate the cost of workplace violence and harassment to businesses.

COVID-19 and underreporting

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated restrictions on people's movement, had a major impact on how this study was carried out. All research activities, including engagement with companies, training of survey interviewers, distribution of the survey, and interviews with human resources staff, had to be completed remotely. This differs from IFC's similar studies with companies in Fiji, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands, which were conducted before the pandemic began, using a combination of in-person and online approaches, which is considered good practice in conducting research about workplace violence and harassment.

Conducting the Respectful Workplaces Sri Lanka Survey, remotely, likely resulted in participants underreporting the incidence of workplace violence and harassment. The participants who answered the online survey, on their own, disclosed a greater incidence of violence than the participants who were interviewed by telephone (See Figure A.1.1). Also, 60 percent of women completed the survey by telephone with an interviewer, while 40 percent of women completed it online. Conversely, 30 percent of men completed the survey by telephone with an interviewer, and 70 percent of men completed it online (see Figure A.1.2). This is likely to have resulted in women underreporting their experience of workplace violence and harassment in comparison to men (See Figure A.1.3). International experts indicate that in asking sensitive questions about violence, online methods are the most reliable, face-to-face methods are second, and phone interviews are third.[73] The anonymity provided when participants complete a survey, themselves, results in a greater percentage of them reporting experience with violence.[74]

Figure A.1.1: *Comparison of reports of workplace violence and harassment by survey method*

Legend: ■ Phone (dark blue) ■ Online (orange)

	Phone	Online
Any form of violence or harassment	51%	69%
Bullying	49%	67%
Sexual harassment	5%	16%
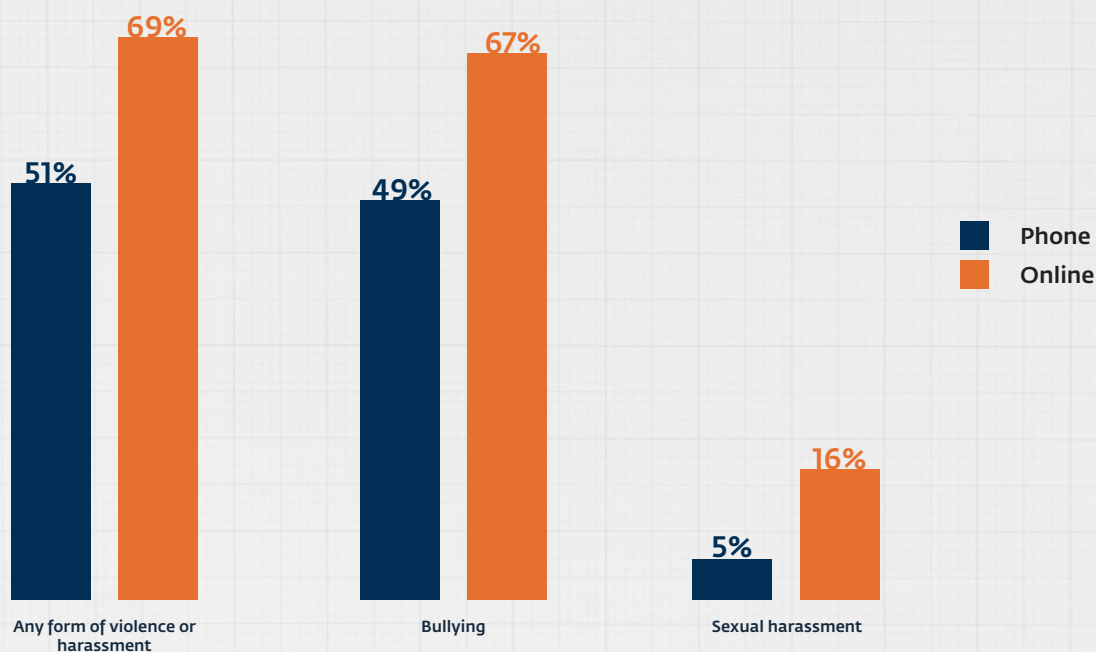
Figure A.1.2: *How the survey was completed: all participants, and by gender*

56%
927

40%
316

70%
587

44%
726

60%
470

30%
250

How the survey was
completed

How women completed
the survey

How men completed
the survey

■ Online   ■ Phone
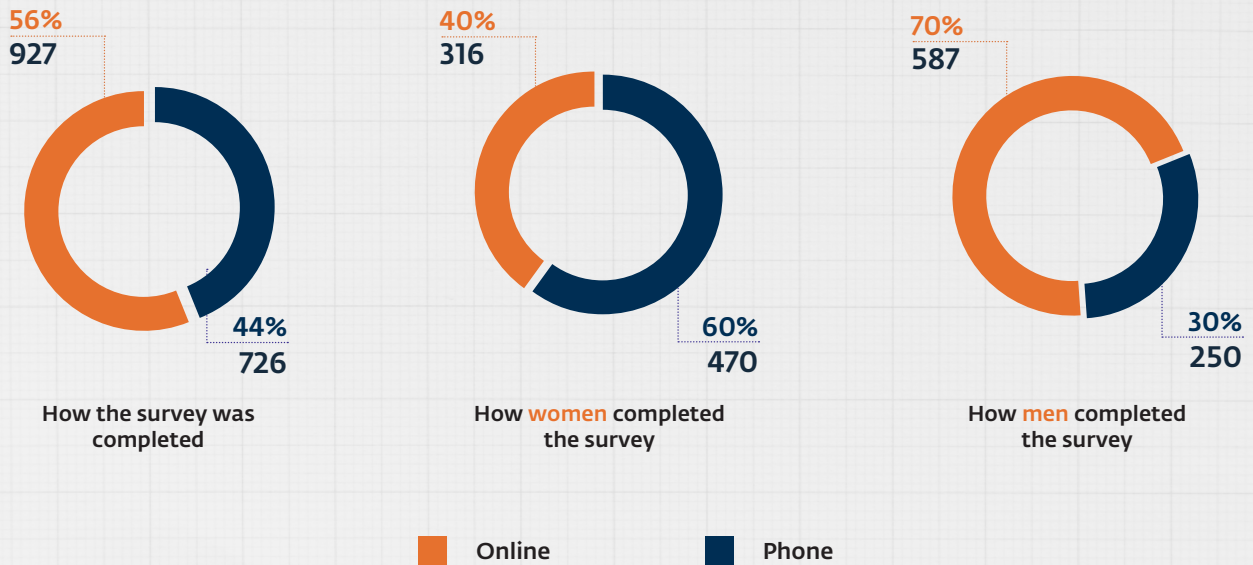
Figure A.1.3: *Proportion of participants who experienced workplace violence and harassment (by gender and survey method)*

■ Female Online   ■ Female Phone
■ Male Online   ■ Male Phone

68% 68%
52% 49%

66% 67%
51% 46%

18%
13%
5% 7%

5% 5%
3% 4%

3% 5%
2% 2%

Any form of
workplace violence or
harrasment

Bullying

Sexual Harrrasment

Affected by domestic
violence

Online violence
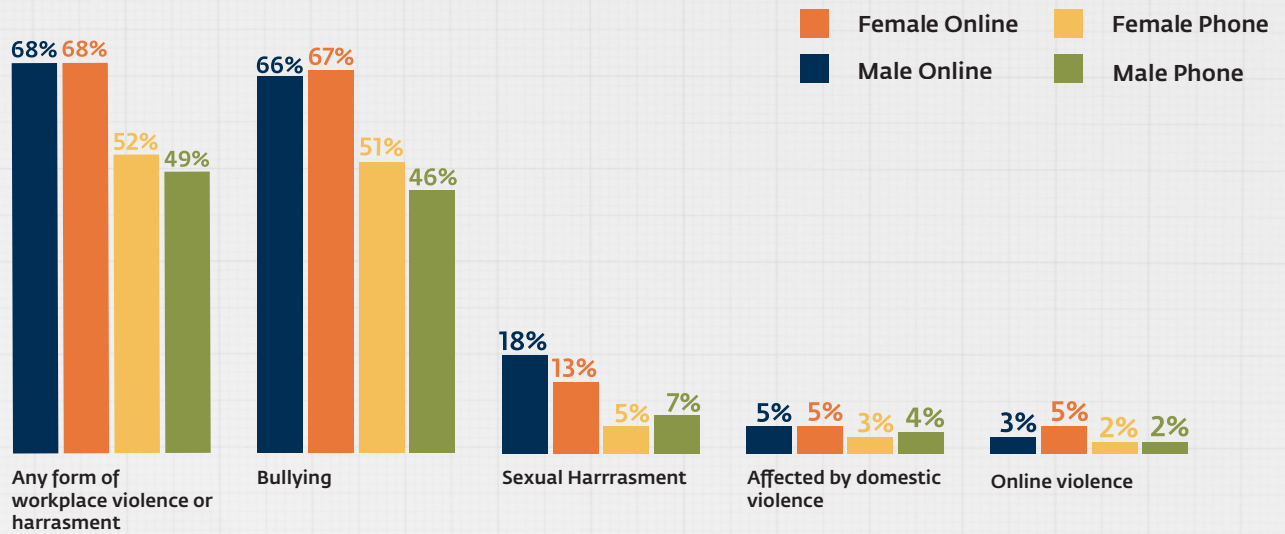
Annex 2:

Detailed estimates of what workplace violence and harassment costs companies

The calculations in this annex are based on an 8-hour day, 40-hour work week, and a 48-week work year.

1. Days lost: Employees feeling tired, distracted, or unwell owing to workplace violence and harassment

   The calculations in this table are based on responses to the question: 'In the past four weeks, I felt distracted, tired or unwell at work because of the issues mentioned in this survey (includes issues when travelling to and from work, bullying, harassment, online violence, and problems at home):'

Table A.2.1: *Calculations: tired, distracted, or unwell because of workplace violence and harassment*

	Tired, distracted, or unwell in the past 4 weeks – Q37					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
No. participants	1,308	172	125	37	7	1,649
Productivity loss estimate/day	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	
(No. of participants) x (productivity loss estimate/day)	0	8.6	12.5	5.55	1.4	28.05
Days lost in the past 4 weeks due to being tired, distracted, or unwell (total days lost in the past 4 weeks x 20 (20 workdays per 4 weeks)						561
Days lost in 1 year due to being tired, distracted, or unwell (total days lost in the past 4 weeks x 12 (12 x 4 work weeks per year)						6,732
Average number of days lost in 1 year, per employee, due to feeling tired, distracted, or unwell –Survey sample (days lost in year/1,653 (no. of survey participants)						4.07

2. Days lost: Late for work owing to workplace violence and harassment

The calculations in this table are based on responses to the question: 'I have been late for work, left work early or taken breaks, and been unable to make up time because of the issues mentioned in this survey (enter number of times)'

Table A.2.2: *Calculations: late for work because of workplace violence and harassment*

	Occasions late in the past 4 weeks – Q39					
	1	2	3	4	5	>5
No. participants	21	14	15	10	5	6
Hours lost – late for work: No. of occasions late x no. participants reporting this (estimate of 1 hour lost/time late)	21	28	45	40	25	36
Days lost in the past 4 weeks (total hours lost/8-hour workday)	0	0	0	0	0	24
Days lost in 1 year due to occasions late (total days lost in the past 4 weeks x 12) (12 x 4 work weeks per year)	0	0	0	0	0	292.50
Average number of days lost per year in 1 year per employee among survey sample (Days lost in year/1,653 (no. of survey participants)	0	0	0	0	0	0.18

3. Days lost: missed work owing to workplace violence and harassment

The calculations in this table are based on responses to the question: 'In the past four weeks, I have taken days off work because of the issues mentioned in this survey: (enter number of days)'

Table A.2.3: *Calculations: missed work because of workplace violence and harassment*

	Days missed in the past 4 weeks – Q40						
No. participants	1	2	3	4	5	≥5	Total
No. days missed	27	18	4	7	5	18	79
Days lost in the past 4 weeks by respondents to this question	27	36	12	28	25	108	236
Days lost in the 4-week period by those affected by a form of workplace violence and harassment (1,004 staff)	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.24
Days lost in a 4-week period by all affected survey participants (1,653 staff)	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0.14
Average number of days lost in 1 year per person in the survey sample (total days lost in the past 4 weeks x 12) (12 x 4 work weeks per year)	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	1.71

4. Impact of workplace violence and harassment – wage loss calculations

The participating companies have provided average monthly wage data. The wage data have been applied to the estimate of days lost due to the impact of workplace violence and harassment (see Tables A.2.1–A.2.3) to calculate a cost in wages. The cost in wages is a conservative calculation as it excludes companies' costs such as payment for overtime, recruitment costs, and/or productivity delays. See Table A.2.4.

Table A.2.4: *Calculations: estimate for companies' lost wages*

Average monthly wage of participating companies per employee (SL Rs)	Average daily wage of participating companies per employee (SL Rs)	Wages lost by participating companies due to workplace violence and harassment: per employee – average daily income x days lost (5.96) (SL Rs)	Wages lost by participating companies due to workplace violence and harassment: for all employees (n = 20,904) (SL Rs)	Wages lost by participating companies due to workplace violence and harassment: for all employees (n = 20,904) ($)
SL Rs 56,367	SL Rs 2,818	SL Rs 18,070.05	SL Rs 351,299,626.20	$1,732,622.59

Endnotes

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12. ILO (International Labour Organization). 2019a. *Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, Convention No. 190*. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

13. All dollars ($) in this report are United States dollars.

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18. Conducting the survey remotely appears to have resulted in participants underreporting their experiences with workplace violence and harassment. See Annex 1: Research methodology.

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30. For reasons of confidentiality, the companies that participated in this study have not been identified in this report.

31. Results are at a 95 percent confidence interval, with a margin of error of 2.27 percent.

32. Thirty survey respondents did not disclose their gender in response to the question 'What is your gender?'. Four answer options were provided: Female, Male, Other, and Prefer not to Say. Of the participants who did not disclose their gender, 1 identified as Other, and 29 answered 'Prefer not to Say'. The results for participants in this group have not been presented, separately, but have been included in the totals, except when the results are gender specific.

33. Two percent of survey participants did not disclose their age.

34. In the survey, workplace violence and harassment referred to: bullying, sexual harassment, online violence, and domestic violence. Participants who answered 'Always, Very often, Sometimes, Rarely' to any of the questions in the survey that asked about experiencing a form of workplace violence or harassment were classified as having experienced a form of violence or harassment.

35. This finding is considerably higher than the prevalence of bullying among survey participants in the Respectful Workplaces Myanmar research, which found that 40 percent of employees had been bullied. See IFC (International Finance Corporation). 2019a. *Respectful Workplaces: Exploring the Costs of Bullying and Sexual Harassment to Businesses in Myanmar.* Washington, DC: IFC.
https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/d54116ba-c277-47fa-aa53-f6a3f2fecof4/IFC_RespectfulWorkplaces_ENG_full_report.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mCjOJxb

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39. The prevalence rate comprises women aged 18–74, with internet access, who reported having personally experienced violence online; women who reported knowing someone in their personal or professional network who had been targeted; women who reported observing violence happening online to someone else (including outside their networks). See Economist Intelligence Unit. 2021. "Measuring the Prevalence of Online Violence Against Women." London: Economist Intelligence Unit.
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43. This report was prepared at a time when Sri Lanka was going through an economic crisis. The population was suffering from a scarcity of essential items such as food, medicine, and fuel, as well as electricity. See R. Ramakumar. 2022. "What's Happening in Sri Lanka and How Did the Economic Crisis Start?" *The C'onversation.* April 13, 2022.
https://theconversation.com/whats-happening-in-sri-lanka-and-how-did-the-economic-crisis-start-181060.
At times of crisis, threats of gender-based violence tend to soar. See UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). n.d. "Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies." New York: UNICEF.
https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies

44. See IFC (International Finance Corporation). n.d. "IFC Respectful Workplaces Program." https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/priorities/employment/respectful+workplaces+program

45. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 15 percent of the global population has a disability. See: WHO (World Health Organization). n.d. "Disability and Health Fact Sheet." Geneva: WHO. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health. The proportion of survey participants who disclosed having a disability is well below the global estimate.

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59. IFC (International Finance Corporation). 2022. Proceedings of the Roundtable Discussion: Addressing Violence and Harassment in Sri Lanka's Private Sector. Unpublished. Washington, DC: IFC.

60. This section is based on the method used in IFC's studies in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands, and the calculations used are provided in Annex 2. Estimates are based on an 8-hour day, a 40-hour work week, and a 48-week work year.

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66, The company names were not identified in this report. IFC (International Finance Corporation). 2021a. *Workplace Responses to Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: Measuring the Business Case.* Washington DC: IFC. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region__ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/east+asia+and+the+pacific/resources/png-fsv-report-final

67. A trained, supported team of employees that refers colleagues who are impacted by workplace violence and harassment to relevant services, and helps to make reasonable adjustments to improve employees' wellbeing and safety at work.

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72. IFC research found days were lost for employees who supported colleagues who were suffering from the effects of workplace violence and harassment and/or domestic violence as follows: Fiji: 4.1 days, Papua New Guinea: 2.19 days, and Solomon Islands: 5.6 days. Refer to the following three documents:

   IFC (International Finance Corporation). 2019b. *The Business Case for Workplace Responses to Domestic and Sexual Violence in Fiji.* Washington, DC: IFC. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/de991ebc-a7f0-4118-9d13-daa8fcfead9d/IFC_Fiji_DSV_Report.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mMYY8KA

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The IFC-DFAT Women in Work program in Sri Lanka, partnering with leading private sector companies, aims to demonstrate that corporate performance can improve from closing gaps between women and men in the private sector.