

Healthy workplaces are equitable workplaces

The workplace role in improving women's health

Violence against women as a health issue

Violence against women is a serious but preventable health issue. It is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for Victorian women aged between 15 and 44, outstripping many other well known risk factors such as smoking, obesity and high blood pressure¹.



1 in 3 women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime²

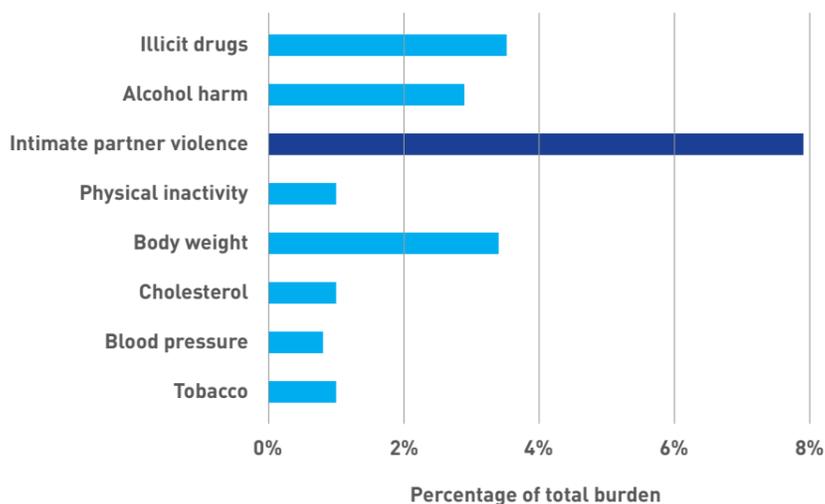


1 in 5 women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime³



Among the women who have previously experienced or are currently experiencing male violence, 55 to 70% are currently employed.⁴

Top eight risk factors contributing to the disease burden in women aged 15–44 years, Victoria, Australia



Images: YMCA Victoria



The role of workplaces in preventing violence against women by promoting gender equality and respectful relationships

Violence against women is serious but preventable, and organisations have a critical role to play.

VicHealth's evidence review on violence prevention programs in the workplace⁶ shows that effective interventions must address the underlying causes that lead to violence and should focus not only on employees, but on the broader workplace culture. In addition, our evidence review shows that workplace interventions should:

- promote respectful relationships and gender equality
- target the causes of violence at three levels: individual/relationship, community/organisational and societal
- integrate primary, secondary and tertiary approaches
- ensure effective leadership
- be planned well and ensure participation
- work in partnership
- be integrated into policies and procedures
- promote knowledge sharing and sustainable activities
- train staff and raise awareness.

Benefits for employers

There are a range of benefits for workplaces that create an organisational culture and working conditions that are supportive of gender equality and respectful relationships between women and men, including:

- proactively meeting legal obligations
- decreased staff turnover and increased productivity
- reduced absenteeism and presenteeism
- improved health and wellbeing of employees
- increased staff retention
- reduced operating costs
- improved staff morale, job satisfaction and employee loyalty
- a positive image and reputation.

Because workplaces play a critical role in influencing the health of society, the **Y Respect Gender Project** will use their workplace as a setting for health promotion to focus on building equal and respectful relationships between men and women and creating a gender equitable organisation.

The Y Respect Gender Project has been designed by staff from the YMCA Victoria. The project has five key objectives over three years:



1. Facilitate positive personal behaviour change through awareness raising activities, building our skills, and living our values.

Have a regular theme of gender equality at statewide conferences for senior leadership staff

2. Embed gender equality and respectful relationships principles in program and service delivery.

Start to identify, through focus groups, gender audits and surveys, the barriers to equal representation of women in senior management positions and positions of influence

3. Actively involve existing leadership into project implementation.

4. Increase representation of women in senior management and leadership positions.

5. Develop YMCA Victoria's reputation as advocate for equal and respectful relationships and share our learning with others.

Review existing marketing materials and the workplace image bank for unintended stereotyping/gendered assumptions

References

1. VicHealth 2004, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.
2. National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009, *The costs of violence against women and their children*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
3. *Ibid.*
4. ABS 2006, *Personal safety survey*, Cat. no. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.
5. *Ibid.* (INCRVAW)
6. VicHealth 2012, *Preventing violence against women in the workplace (An evidence review: summary report)*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

