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**WORKPLACE EQUALITY CAN HELP PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Addressing gender inequality in workplaces is an important way for employers to help tackle the scourge of violence against women, Victoria’s Gender Equality Commissioner Dr Niki Vincent argues.

Dr Vincent said most adults spend a lot of time in the workplace, so workplaces can have a strong influence on their employees’ views about gender equality and violence against women.

“Attitudes that deny that gender inequality exists, and support rigid gender norms are the strongest predictors of attitudes that support or condone violence against women and the actual perpetration of violence against women‘’. Dr Vincent said.

“International research has shown that there is a strong and consistent association between gender inequality and levels of violence against women. Gender inequality is characterised by an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunity, and unequal valuing of, women, men, and people of other genders.’’

“We see this inequality right across Australia’s legal and political systems, in many workplaces, the media, families, and in community and sporting groups where men - particularly straight, white, able-bodied men - still hold the majority of power and influence. There are still strong gender stereotypes and norms in Australia about the roles men and women should play, the work they are best suited for, and they ways in which they should think and act and so on.”

“In Australian workplaces this manifests as gender pay gaps favouring men, the prevalence of sexual harassment, a lack of women in executive leadership and board roles, and industrial and occupational gender segregation.’’

Dr Vincent said workplaces can play a key role in changing gender inequality and the horrific scourge of violence against women.

“Workplace gender equality initiatives are an important foundation for the prevention of violence against women because they help address the social norms that give rise to this violence,’’ she said.

“Important ways that employers can impact gender inequality in their organisations include working to eliminate sexual harassment and gender pay gaps at all levels, building more diverse gender representation in management and leadership, encouraging more men to take up parental leave, addressing any inequality in recruitment, training, and promotions, and making a strong effort to attract people of different genders into traditionally gendered roles and industries. Of course, it’s also very important to ensure other forms of diversity are considered in all of the above. “

“This is what Victoria’s groundbreaking Gender Equality Act 2020 requires all the organisations covered by the legislation to put in place. They must audit themselves rigorously, develop measures to address any inequality they find, put a gender lens over all their public policies, programs and services and publicly report on their progress towards equality every two years.”

Dr Vincent said that while some resistance to gender equality in workplaces could be expected as part of the change process, employers need to ensure that is tackled in prompt and effective ways.

“Workplace resistance can show up as opposition to gender equality measures, negative judgements about women’s’ competence, or undermining of their work or progress. Backlash is a more aggressive form of resistance. This can involve sexist, or sexually objectifying comments and actions, and verbal or online attacks or threats.”

“Resistance at a leadership level can manifest as a failure to take long-term strategic action to address gender inequality and violence against women, to resource such initiatives appropriately, or as the watering down of initiatives over time.‘’

Organisations that want to find out more about what they can do to address gender inequality and violence against women can visit: [Leading practice resources | genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/leading-practice-resources) and <https://www.ourwatchinstitute.org.au/>