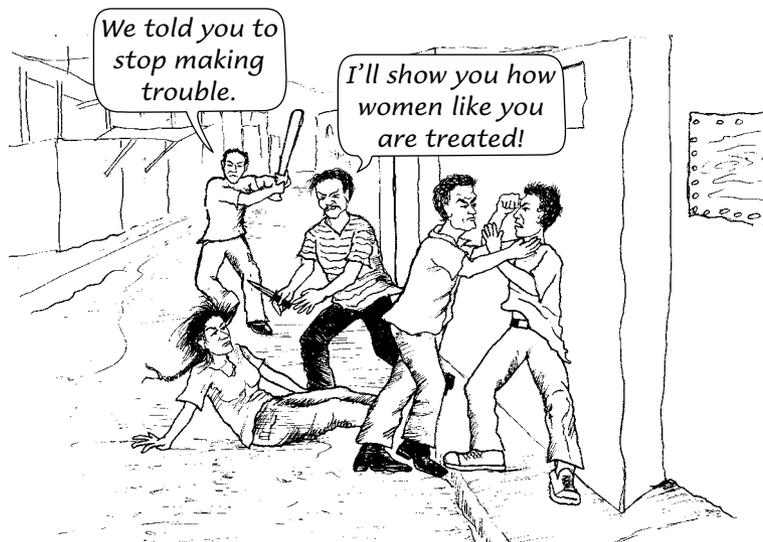


# Violence

# 22



Violence, both as a threat and as an act, harms the physical and mental well-being of workers, their families, friends, co-workers, and communities. Bosses sometimes use threats and physical, verbal, and psychological violence to keep factory workers fearful and docile, and to stop workers from demanding change. Workers may also face violence from other workers or community members who use violence to impose power over others. Whether attacks come from other workers, supervisors, paid thugs, or the police or military, stopping violence is rarely achieved by one worker alone. Organization is the one essential element of every successful struggle against workplace violence. When workers are unified they can:

- improve interactions among workers and supervisors in the factory, minimize yelling and public humiliation as management practices, and end hitting and physical violence as ways to control workers.
- demand that employers respect workers' rights to organize unions and to improve working conditions, pay, and benefits.
- form committees to train workers in self-defense, to travel home from work in groups, and to document violence and demand justice.
- stop the boss and other workers from sexually harassing or attacking women and men employees.
- create a workplace free from violence, where finding solutions to disagreements is done respectfully, involving workers and management equally.

## Violence in the factory

There are many forms of violence. Sometimes we do not recognize them as violence because we are used to them and they feel normal. But the bad effects violence can have on our mental and physical health are not something that we should get used to. We do not think that injuries from dangerous machines are normal. Likewise, why should we think violent behaviors are ok?

### Everyday abuse

Constant yelling, name calling, rude comments, and insults are forms of emotional and psychological violence. Sometimes workers do not even recognize this abuse because it is so common. Constant abuse damages self-esteem and trains us to accept bad working conditions and other types of violence as well.



An abusive supervisor is a workplace danger.

### Physical violence

Physical violence is the most visible kind of violence. Workers are beaten, cut, slapped, shoved, pinched, hit, and burned. (To treat these injuries, see First Aid on pages 203 to 204.) Some employers hit in places where bruises cannot be seen, so the worker cannot report and prove it. When workers live with the constant fear of being struck by their supervisors, it also creates stress and other mental health problems (see chapter 27).

### Murder

In too many countries, factory owners pay thugs (sometimes other workers or corrupt union officials) to murder workers, organizers, and union leaders to stop them from demanding better wages or conditions. Sometimes they count on the police or military to carry out this work for them. To create more fear and gain more control, they also threaten and kill workers' families.

## Activity

## Facing fear together

Bosses use violence to instill fear in workers and shut up union leaders. Many workers are reluctant to talk about their fear of violence and instead let the violence do just what it was meant to: prevent people from participating in organizing. For a group to withstand violence, it is important to talk about people's fears and come up with ways to support each other. When you call a meeting to discuss fear of violence:



### 1. Remind people of their reasons for organizing.

- **Issues:** Restate why the issues are important to each and every worker and what your organizing will achieve.
- **Strength in unity:** The fears each person faces appear smaller and less overwhelming when people feel part of a larger, supportive group.



Some male workers might not want to admit to a large group they are afraid, since men are raised not to show fear.

2. **Give workers space to talk about their fears.** Encourage people to talk freely. Sometimes social or political reasons prevent people from being open about their fears. Be compassionate and find creative ways to encourage people to participate. The goal is not to get rid of fear, but to learn how to face fear and not let it stop your organizing efforts.
3. **Identify fears shared by the whole group.** Make a list of the fears people raise, and ask which fears are the most serious or widespread.
4. **Make a plan for dealing with these specific fears and threats of violence.** By talking about the most common fears of violence, workers can begin to make plans for dealing with them. You can talk about ways to reduce risks, prevent leaders and organizers from being identified, increase support from other workers and organizations, and campaign against violence.

If the climate at your factory becomes extremely violent, the group might consider temporarily hiding their organizing efforts. This may not stop the violence, but it can give workers a chance to regroup and decide how to continue the struggle in ways that feel safer.

## Sexual violence

Although it would seem that sexual violence is caused by men's sexual desire, it really has more to do with power over others than it does with sex. Women are often blamed for the sexual violence they suffer. But as with other kinds of violence, the person who chooses to use violence is the person who is guilty.

Just as violence usually includes a mix of behaviors, from yelling and humiliation to beatings and murder, sexual violence can include behaviors from unwanted attention and touching to rape and murder.

## Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a big problem in many factories where most supervisors and managers are men and most workers are young women. In the community, women workers are also harassed by other workers, neighbors, and strangers. Often the harassment happens around the factory, particularly at the start and end of shifts or at lunch time.

People do not always agree about what sexual harassment is. One woman may be offended by a joke that makes another woman laugh. Some women feel harassed when strangers make comments about them on the street. Other women do not mind very much. Each person knows when she feels harassed, and how she feels is what matters.



Sexual harassment is any kind of unwanted, unreasonable, or offensive sexual attention. Sexual harassment can be:

- **touching:** patting, stroking, grabbing, pinching, hugging, or leaning against another person's body
- **words or sounds:** comments, whistling, or noises that suggest sex
- **body language:** standing too close, pointing, facial expressions, or gestures with any part of the body intended to suggest sex
- **pictures:** making someone look at sexual photographs, drawings, or videos, or having these images in public spaces, or photographing or filming someone during sexual acts
- **writing:** sexual graffiti on walls and other public places, or sending someone notes, letters, or poems that suggest sex

In factories, the person who is harassing might demand sex in exchange for a job or a promotion. Harassers are often supervisors or other bosses who can fire a worker or make her job harder if she objects to being touched or refuses to have sex. Men harass women because they know they have more power than women. But men also harass each other, using jokes, insults, and threats intended to place another man in a woman's role, so he will be considered to be less than a man.



Men might suffer sexual harassment at work, too.

**Some people say, "Sexual harassment is no problem."**



*It is natural for men to admire women's bodies. These young women who work in factories like the attention and have many boyfriends.*

**We say, "Sexual harassment is wrong!"**

*Would you want your daughter or sister or mother treated like that?*



*If a man tries to become sexual with a woman, she must have done something to tempt him.*

*Harassment has nothing to do with what women do, say, or look like. It is never justified.*



*A woman's world is inside the home of her family and husband. Women should serve their husbands and children. If a woman leaves the protection of her family to go into a man's world, she should expect trouble.*

*We work to support our families. If we did not work we would not have enough money to survive. We should not be treated badly for trying to survive.*



### **Factory responds to sexual harassment**

Apolinar had been harassing me at work for a few months. At first it was easy to ignore what he said to me, but after he became my supervisor he said we were going to marry and I would have his children. I was very clear that I was not interested, but he kept insisting that soon we would be together and he kept asking me out.

One day he tried to move me to an isolated job. When I refused, he got really angry and started yelling at me. I reported him to his boss, who said I had misunderstood Apolinar. Realizing he wasn't going to help me, I went to the personnel manager. First he said, "You must stand up to him." Then he blamed me, saying he had seen me encourage Apolinar.

Since nobody at the factory would help me, I went to CEREAL, an organization that helps workers in Guadalajara, Mexico. They called the factory, but the managers did nothing to stop the harassment. So I resigned. When the people from CEREAL heard that I quit, they contacted the factory management again and this time they did something. They fired Apolinar and offered me a job at another plant.

### He did it!

I have worked in a toy factory for 5 years. My supervisor would lean over me and touch my back and arms. I hated it but I was working and could not escape. It made very angry and uncomfortable. One day, when he came over to me, I reached my arm around him like I was patting him on the back. He did not realize I had put a sign on his back that said “Harasser!” I was so afraid he would get angry and fire me. But, when all the other workers and supervisors saw the sign and laughed at him, he got very embarrassed and stopped bothering me at my station!



#### If you are being harassed at work:

- Let the harasser know clearly and directly that you do not want his attention. If you are being harassed in public, respond by speaking loudly to the harasser.
- Ask co-workers to help you post signs in bathrooms naming the harasser.
- Keep a record of when and where you were harassed, and what happened. Write what the harasser said, what you said, how you felt, and what any witnesses did or saw. Keep things the harasser gives you as proof.
- Report the harassment to your boss, supervisor, union representative, worker or women’s group. Many countries, factories, and companies have laws and policies against sexual harassment but as with other labor rights, you often have to organize with others to have them enforced.

#### Activity

### Role playing builds confidence

It can be difficult to confront a harasser and tell him to stop. You can feel more confident by practicing what to say with other people. A conversation with one person playing the role of another person is called “role play.” You may also want to role play how to tell your husband or family about the harassment, or how to report it to your boss or the police.



## Rape

Many policies in the factory put women at risk of being raped. Working alone in isolated parts of the factory, night shifts or leaving work late, lack of safe transportation to and from the factory, and an overall acceptance of domination and violence put women in danger. Rape is one of the worst kinds of sexual violence, because it affects women physically, sexually, emotionally, and psychologically, and it also affects their families and communities. Rape happens when men want to have power over women — it does not matter what women wear, how they act, or what they do. Rape is never the woman's fault.

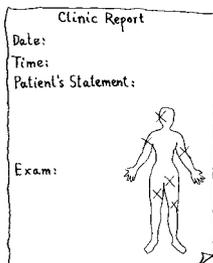
If you know someone who has been raped:

- **Reassure her** that it was not her fault.
- **Be supportive.** Listen to her feelings, help her decide what she needs, and reassure her that she can go on with her life.
- **Respect her wishes for privacy and safety.** Do not tell anyone unless she wants you to.
- **Go with her** to see a health worker, to report the rape to the police, to talk with someone who is trained to listen and support her, to see a lawyer, and to go to court if she wants to do those things.
- **Do not protect the rapist** if you know him. He might do this again.



## Health exam after rape

Someone who has been raped should see a health worker as soon as she can after the rape to get medical help and to record as much evidence as she can, especially if she is going to report the rape to the police. It is important that the health worker marks down everywhere that she is hurt. It may be helpful to document evidence of forced sex with photographs of bruises and other injuries.



A drawing of a body like this one can be helpful for the health worker to note injuries she sees during the exam. Both the health worker and the person who was attacked should keep a copy.

## First aid after rape

Get medical and emotional help if you are raped or assaulted.

First, talk with an understanding friend, someone you trust. Ask her to go with you to get medical care. Even if your injuries are not serious, a medical exam can document them, which may be useful later.



**First  
Aid**

A health worker or doctor who understands the trauma of assault and rape can be will make the visit easier. Later you may want to talk with a counselor or support group of women who have been sexually assaulted or raped.

### Tears and cuts

Sometimes rape damages the genitals by causing tears and cuts. These usually cause pain, but will go away in time. If there is lots of bleeding, you may need to see a health worker trained to stitch tears. For small cuts and tears:

- Soak your genitals 3 times each day in warm water that has been boiled and cooled. Putting chamomile leaves in the water can help soothe torn skin and help with healing. Or you can put gel from an aloe plant on the cuts and tears.
- Pour clean water over your genitals while passing urine so it will not burn. Drinking lots of water makes the urine weaker so it will burn less.
- Watch for signs of infection: heat, yellow liquid (pus) from the torn area, bad smell, and pain that gets worse.



### Preventing pregnancy

You can prevent a pregnancy after rape if you act quickly. Use emergency family planning (see page 387) as soon as possible, no later than 5 days (120 hours) after sex. The sooner you use it, the better it works.

In some countries, abortion is safe and legal if a girl or woman has been raped. Ask a health worker or women's organization for more information.

*(continued)*



## First Aid

(continued)

### Bladder Infection

After violent sex it is common for women to have a bladder infection. Treat a bladder infection as soon as you notice it so you do not also get a kidney infection. (See page 416 for more information.) See a health worker right away if you:

- need to pass urine very often
- have pain, especially in the lower belly, or a burning feeling while passing urine
- your urine smells bad, looks cloudy, or has blood or pus in it

### Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Sexually transmitted infections pass from person to person during unprotected sex. After violent sex, the skin in the vagina or the anus may be torn, allowing an infection into the body. Since you cannot know if the person who raped you was infected with an STI, you should take medicine for gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis right away. These infections often show no signs of illness, but cause serious health problems if they are not treated. (See *Where Women Have No Doctor*, chapter 16.)

### HIV

If rape exposes you to HIV, a health worker can help you prevent HIV infection by prescribing 1 month of treatment with antiretroviral medicines (ART). Start treatment as soon as possible. Because HIV does not show up in tests for about 3 months, you should wait to take an HIV test. Even though you used the ART, the test is important to make sure you were not infected. During this time, use a condom if you have sex so you will not pass HIV to someone else in case you are infected.

### Hepatitis B and C

Hepatitis B and C are viral infections that harm the liver. Both infections can pass from one person to another during sex. You can have one of these viruses and not get sick, but some people with hepatitis B or C become very ill with serious liver problems. Get tested right away, and come back for a retest after 6 weeks. Use a condom if you have sex during the time between when the rape happened and when you get the second test.



## The right to live free of violence and sexual harassment



Violence and sexual harassment undermine individual and collective freedom and dignity. Also see The right to equality on page 309.

The **UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights** says:

- Every person has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.
- No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Governments are responsible for ensuring that workers are protected against all forms of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, and emotional violence.

Sexual harassment is recognized around the world as a form of violence that hurts women and denies their right to live a healthy, dignified, violence-free life.

The UN includes “sexual harassment and intimidation at work” in the definition of violence against women. The Conventions that protect women against violence (see [treaties.un.org](http://treaties.un.org)) can be used to organize to stop sexual harassment at work.

The ILO says sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that undermines the integrity, dignity, and well-being of workers from many different communities, including women, youth, LGBT, and ethnic minorities. Sexual harassment also violates workers’ right to a safe, healthy workplace.

The **Inter-American Convention on Violence against Women (A61)** says:

- Women have the right to a workplace free from violence.
- Governments must penalize harassers and help victims of sexual harassment.

Unions that belong to the the **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)** have an Action Program to combat sexual harassment in the workplace. All their member unions have agreed to:

- include language against sexual harassment in their contracts.
- create rules about how to handle complaints and investigations.
- ensure regulations against sexual harassment are included in collective agreements.
- develop and provide trainings about sexual harassment to all members.

The roles of the UN, ILO, and other international organizations that promote workers’ rights are explained in Appendix A.

### Casa Amiga fights to protect women in Ciudad Juarez

In Ciudad Juarez, a Mexican city with many garment factories on the USA–Mexico border, around 400 young women have been raped and murdered in the last two decades. The police have investigated very few of these killings. For all these crimes, only 3 men were ever arrested; 1 died in the hands of the police and the other 2 were tortured to get them to confess.

Esther Cano Chavez, founder of Casa Amiga Crisis Center, believed the murders and the lack of government effort to solve them or protect women was predictable. “As women start to take factory jobs and become independent, men use violence to punish them for breaking social rules. Women organizers are particularly targeted.” Although Esther died of cancer in 2009, Casa Amiga continues to offer hope for the future by helping and supporting women victims of violence.

Casa Amiga offers a 24-hour rape and sexual abuse hotline, medical services, legal advice, and psychological counseling. They also work to prevent violence in the home and to challenge inequality and discrimination. Casa Amiga campaigns for safer streets, safe public transportation, and police patrols of areas where women have been abducted. They also organize self-defense classes for women workers.

## Protect yourself and others

Do not be caught alone. Many times, thugs target workers when they are alone. Walk with others to and from the factory or bus station. If it is possible, have someone meet you at your bus stop. If you know of any worker who is being harassed or who you think might be hurt, find ways of accompanying him or her so that he or she is not alone.

If a worker is threatened by the boss, a supervisor, or another worker, do not leave her alone with the person who threatened her. Organize other workers to stay close to her at the factory and going to and from work. A worker alone is more likely to be attacked than a group of workers together.

To help yourself or others, learn where first aid and medical services can be found. For first aid information on treating injuries when you cannot reach a health worker, see pages 203 to 204. Also see *Where There Is No Doctor*, chapter 10: First Aid, for more information.

## Record and report violence

Write down as much information about each violent incident as possible. Make a detailed description of what happened. Include:

- When (date and time) did it happen ?
- Where did it happen?
- Who did what?
- Who witnessed it?
- Did you report it? To whom? What did they do?

If possible, take a photo or video of the incident. This record will be helpful whether you keep it or use it to make a report to the boss, the police, or any agency that can help you.

**If you know of other workers being attacked, help them record attacks.** Use a survey, workplace map, or community map to help you find out which workers are being threatened or attacked, where the attacks occur, when they occur, who committed the violence, and what kind of violence was used. This can give you better information to report or to use in planning how to prevent and resist violence against workers.



Collect information for a community map.

**Respect workers' decisions.** If a worker does not want to report the abuse for fear of retaliation or further violence, respect her decision. But ask her if she would allow the incident to be recorded without her name or other identifying information. This information can be helpful in mapping where, how often, and in what situations violence happens.

**Get the local police to start a women's desk, staffed day and night by women police officers trained to take action on sexual violence cases.**

**Protest assaults against workers, demand appropriate compensation, bring abusers to justice, and prevent future violence. Build alliances between your union, women's organizations, community groups, and churches.**



## Activity

## Learn self-defense

Practicing self-defense in a group can help you learn ways to defend yourselves if you are attacked. Invite someone from a local martial arts school to offer a workshop. The most important thing to learn is how to stop someone long enough for you to get away. If you continue with martial arts after that, you will be surprised at how quickly your skills increase. Self-defense groups are a good way of reaching out to more people and helping them gain self-confidence, as well as reducing the chances of being assaulted.

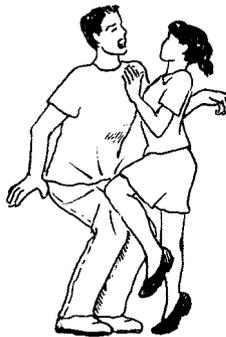
If you are assaulted, hit the attacker as hard as you can. Do not be afraid to hurt him — he is not afraid to hurt you.



**Hit him hard in the stomach with your elbow, and run.**



**Step down hard on his foot with your heel, and run.**



**Lift your knee, and push it as hard and fast as you can in the groin.**



**Make your hands into fists and hit him as hard as you can on the nose.**

## Making harassment a work issue

When women workers in your factory are being harassed by other workers or men in the community it might be harder for them to seek support from workers or worker organizations. Your group can take a stand against harassment even if nobody has reported a case to you.

Talking about harassment makes many people uncomfortable, especially in groups that include both men and women. Hold separate meetings to help women open up about their experiences. Ask the other participants to think of ways to support women who are dealing with harassment and violence individually, but to also make a plan to work collaboratively to reduce and stop violence and harassment at work and in the community.



### Telling everybody

There was a problem in our factory. Some men regularly made sexual remarks and jokes around the women workers. It was not just 1 or 2 men — it was a problem in most departments. Since the men are our co-workers, we wanted to take care of it ourselves, not get them in trouble with the boss.

We knew the men would not come to a meeting to discuss this. So we decided to bring it up at the next union meeting without putting it on the agenda. Because sexual harassment affects workers in so many ways, we knew we could find a way to raise it during debate on another issue.

I started with a story about how the jokes made me upset and sad. Two other women also had their stories ready. We did not accuse any worker by name. We focused on how the harassment affected us personally, and how disrespect divides workers and weakens the union.

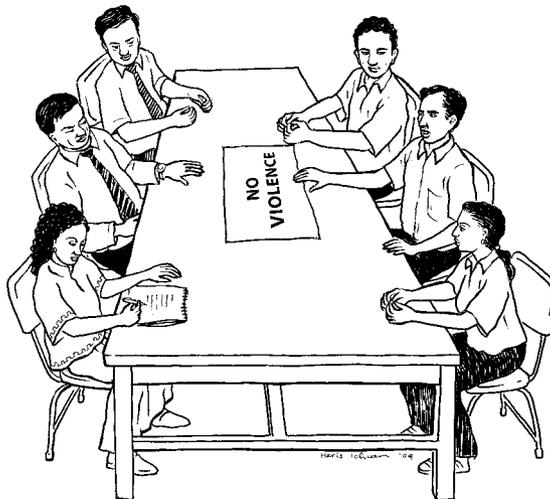
After we told our stories, both men and women talked about harassment without feeling so guilty or defensive. Some of the men also confessed that the sexual jokes made them uncomfortable. Many of us now feel we can bring issues of sexual harassment to the group and the union will support us if we file a claim. Knowing other workers support us and understand the issues is important to us.

## Organize for a “no violence” policy

Some factories have policies that ban violence in the workplace but do not enforce them. Companies that purchase from your factory may have codes of conduct that ban or penalize violence in the workplace. Try to find out what the policy is or involve the companies in setting up a no violence policy in your factory. A no violence policy should include:

- **clear definitions** of the threats and forms of violence that will not be tolerated.
- **an education program** for managers and workers explaining the policy. All new workers and managers should be told about the policy.
- **signs and posters** about the no violence policy that describe how employers will respond to complaints.
- **a complaint system** that is confidential for workers to report concerns, threats, and violence.
- **a fair and timely process for responding to complaints**, addressing unsafe areas of the factory, and preventing future intimidation and violence.
- **safety from retaliation** against workers who report unsafe areas or complain of fear, threats, or violence.

Just having a policy does not mean that violence will not happen. Working with other workers, labor groups, and government agencies can help you figure out the best ways to enforce a no violence policy.



## Find support in your stand against violence

Groups that organize against violence in the home and the community can help workers and unions build anti-violence campaigns in the workplace.

Other groups provide legal, social, and emotional support to victims of violence and their families. Ask them to help you and your co-workers. They may also have experience with medical and psychological recovery, dealing with authorities, and preparing to return to work. In addition to offering individuals emotional support, they may have ideas about how to build ongoing support groups to deal with violence at work and in the community.

### We can overcome violence

My name is Chernklang Kreetha. I grew up in a rural area in Thailand but moved to Taiwan to find a job in a factory. The work conditions at that factory were not very good. After almost 3 years of working there, I got together with other workers in the factory to demand that the boss pay us for all the unpaid overtime, un-refunded taxes, illegal deductions from our wages, and forced savings that he kept. We thought we were going to win.



But a few days later, when we were leaving the factory for dinner, we were attacked by 8 thugs with clubs. The other workers managed to escape but I was trapped and beaten badly. They left me unconscious, lying in the street in front of the factory.

The other workers were shocked and scared, but more than anything, they were outraged that our boss would treat us like this. So the next day, they walked out of the factory, carrying signs that said “No to Violence,” and “We want our rights now!” in Chinese, English, and Thai.

We knew this would upset the boss more and he would try to hurt us again. So we asked for help at the Hope Workers’ Center. The Center protects and supports migrant workers in Taiwan. They housed us for a while to protect us and helped us organize to demand our rights.

After a lot of pressure, the company let us return to work and when we finished our 3-year contract, they gave us our back pay, taxes, and all the savings they had taken from us.

I did not think I had the courage to risk my life to get the rights I deserved, but the support from my co-workers, the community, and the Center helped me see that I was not alone and that we could win.