To carry out SOLVE at the national level, the ILO seeks to collaborate with a designated national institution that has the capacity to deal with psychosocial problems at work as well as the organizational structure to support SOLVE-related educational activities. National facilitating agencies currently include the University of Namibia, The Malaysian National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the (US) National Safety Council and the T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation in India. An educational programme designed to equip national facilitators with the capacity to organize and implement SOLVE will be held at the ILO International Training Centre in Turin, Italy in April 2002.

Violence is a problem that cannot stand alone. Along with other psychosocial issues the ILO addresses violence through prevention and the development of a course of action that leads from concept to policy to action. The goal of the ILO’s activity is to have safe, healthy and decent work by reducing absenteeism, turnover and losses while improving profitability, safety, health and well-being.

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Violence against women: National platform for action

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MALAWI

The Malawi National Platform for Action (NPFA) is a declaration of the commitment of the Government of Malawi to improving the status of women with the long-term objective of achieving equality and equity between women and men in the 21st century. This involves input from politicians, policy makers, chiefs, traditional leaders and men and women from the grassroots level. This programme mainly focuses on four priority areas, namely: Poverty Alleviation and Empowerment, Violence against Women, the Girl Child, and Peace.

Responsibility for implementing, monitoring and following up the Platform for Action is vested in the government in partnership with agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. All the stakeholders have a role to play in drawing up plans for operation and resource mobilization in order to ensure the effective implementation and the advancement of women.

The National Platform for Action in Malawi defines violence against women as ‘any act of gender based violence that results in sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’. Violence in Malawi, as in most countries, is prevalent at workplaces and in public institutions such as educational establishments, hospitals, prisons and police cells, as well as in the domestic arena. In these places, forms of violence such as assault and harassment, mental and physical abuse, do indeed exist.

The Malawi Constitution specifically acknowledges that violence against women is a problem and that there is a need for it to be eradicated in society. Thus Section 24, Subsection 2 (a) stipulates that ‘legislation shall be passed to eliminate customs and practices that discriminate against women, particularly practices such as sexual abuse, harassment and violence’.

Their male colleagues and bosses subject women to various forms of abuse which are perpetrated because of fear of the unknown. In a study on women in government, parastatals and private organizations, it was found that semi-skilled and junior-ranking women are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment that takes the form of intimidation and the denial of opportunities, including training, for professional advancement. The limited number of women in workplaces makes them more vulnerable to abuse and reinforces the general view that their rightful place is in the home. Even if they are in senior positions, women are always underrated, insulted and looked down upon.

People in authority – such as prison warders, health personnel and welfare officers – also perpetrate violence against women at workplaces.

Violence in the home takes the form of wife battering, molestation of girl children, psychological sexual abuse, the withholding of necessities such as food and finances, abusive language, marital rape and child labour. Wife battering takes the form of actual physical beating, and sexual abuse manifests itself in intimidation. The media also promote domestic violence through their programmes and their sensationalization of offences committed by women.

Most women work for long hours, as they have to combine household work and office work without due regard to their need for time in which to attend to other personal needs.

The sad part of most of the violence is that it goes unreported. This is so because of the culprit’s inability to sense the violence or recognize it. A good example is a case where a job is offered in exchange for sexual abuse. In many cases of this sort, some women have realized their misfortune after already of-
ferring themselves to be abused, only to continue doing so. There have also been cases of women becoming pregnant as a result of sexual abuse perpetrated by their bosses. Casual jokes have always gone unnoticed as violence, and some women have unfortunately accepted such jokes as normal and inoffensive.

In Malawi, violence against women at work is a complex problem whose solution requires multiple strategies. Its total eradication would also require concerted efforts and mobilization of resources. The Government has therefore come up with the following strategic objectives to combat violence, and most of the objectives have been acted on already:

**Strategic objective 1**

To prevent and eliminate violence against women in public places, institutions and the domestic arena

1. Sensitize the public through meetings, the press and the radio with regard to all types of violence against women and the effects of violence on the victims.
2. Enact and reinforce laws which inhibit alcohol and substance abuse in public places.
3. Establish and publicize support mechanisms for victims of violence and provide counselling and support services.
4. Create institutional mechanisms that enable women to report acts of violence in a safe and confidential environment.
5. Enact laws to make domestic violence, including wife battering, a criminal offence.
6. Review the laws on molestation and rape so as to provide for a reasonable minimum period of imprisonment.
7. Enact new laws and reinforce existing ones that punish police, security forces, prison warders, doctors or any other agency of the state that engage in acts of violence against women in the course of the performance of their duties.
8. Encourage the establishment of media-watch groups to monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women’s needs are correctly reflected and that acts of violence against women are fairly reported.
9. Review the laws relating to harassment and make sexual harassment a punishable offence.
10. Conduct assertive training for girls in and outside institutions of learning and for women in the workplace.
11. Review cultural and traditional practices that violate women’s rights.

**Strategic objective 2**

To determine the extent and nature of violence against women

1. Conduct research on violence against women in public places, institutions and the home.
2. Develop and maintain a database on violence against women.
3. Conduct research on conditions of service and other administrative arrangements relating to women in the workplace, and disseminate the findings to the relevant institutions and to all levels of society.
4. Put in place a strong mechanism for enforcement and the prosecution of offenders.
5. Prescribe the minimum age for employment.

The National Platform for Action designed in this way came into effect in 1997 and will be in the process of implementation by the end of 2002.

**References**


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“Business and public service organizations cannot afford to ignore the effects of trauma, violence, and crime on their employees. The costs are too great. Morale, attendance, sick-leave costs, personnel turnover, management-employee relationships, productivity, service delivery, profits, are all affected.”

**Warnings**

Warnings of the type above have contributed to making many employers, human resource departments and employee assistance organizations more aware of the effects of traumatic violence in the workplace. Personnel have been trained in trauma awareness, debriefings are offered and short-term therapy is sometimes provided. Larger employers have built in-house capacity to provide assistance or contracted with employee assistance programmes. These are helpful and healing initiatives. But they may not be enough.

Two cases from the files of the Trauma Clinic’s victim empowerment programmes are outlined below. They illustrate different ways in which recovery from a traumatic incident can be frustrated by a cycle of events that swamps apparently well-designed support programmes. In a context where the threat of violence is inescapable, or violent events are repeated time and again, the traumatic process takes on a life of its own. Interventions may need a longer gestation, reaching deeper into personal life-histories, and seeking change in other areas of life and work.

The standard interventions – debriefing, short-term therapy, trauma awareness training – all have their place. But we need to extend our understanding of the traumatic process further and explore ways of supporting recovery from traumatic events through addressing complementary risks or sources of violent threat.

**Thabo**

A national bottling company referred Thabo to the Clinic for briefing because its own internally trained counsellors were worried about him – to their credit acknowledging their own limitations and recognizing the severity of his presentation. The company was prepared – in