

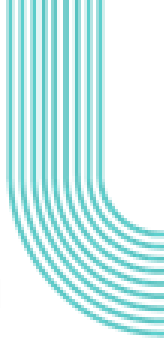
Workplace Gender-Based Violence

Impacts, Inequities, and Frontline Practice



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Overview

Gender-based violence (GBV) in the workforce includes **violent or harmful behaviors rooted in gender bias, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia**. It appears through policies, interactions, and workplace cultures that marginalize or exclude people based on gender or sexuality.

GBV affects psychological safety, limits access to opportunities and disproportionately harms 2SLGBTQIA+ workers.

In this guide we will review the impacts of GBV in the workplace, **why does GBV disproportionately affect 2SLGBTQIA+ people**, and **what frontline staff can do about it**.



At **Achēv**, we believe that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to build a better life and a successful future. For more than 30 years, we have dedicated ourselves to helping diverse Canadians and newcomers achieve their full potential.

Today, Achēv is **one of the largest providers of employment, settlement, language, women, youth and technology solutions services** in the GTA, throughout Canada and abroad, that is committed to creating faster paths to prosperity for clients. Our dedicated team of nearly 400 staff delivers a wide range of innovative, high-quality and personalized programs and services that empower our clients to prosper and communities to thrive.

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Achēv Stronger Together

Addresses gender-based violence (GBV) through confidential, trauma-informed **one-to-one counselling, peer support groups, and customized staff training or community workshops.**

The program promotes psychosocial education, early intervention, and survivor empowerment to strengthen frontline response and foster lasting change across the GTA.

Funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, in partnership with SAFE (Survivor Advocates for Empowerment) and Pride at Work Canada, and evaluated by Cathexis Consulting.

Pride at Work Canada

A national non-profit organization dedicated to **promoting 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion and equity in Canadian workplaces**. Pride at Work Canada empowers employers to create safe, inclusive, and equitable work environments for all employees, regardless of gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

The organization achieves this through training, networking, educational programs, and thought leadership, helping businesses implement inclusive policies and practices that support 2SLGBTQIA+ employees in reaching their full potential.

This resource was developed under the Achēv's Stronger Together project with collaboration from Pride at Work Canada.

Learn more about Pride at Work Canada:

<https://prideatwork.ca/>



Glossary

Misogyny	A form of contempt or hatred for women that can show up in both subtle and obvious ways.
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Refers to violence or harmful acts directed at a person based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender.
Ally / Allies	A person who works to end a form of oppression that gives them privilege(s). Allies listen to, and are guided by, communities and individuals affected by oppression.
Gender Norms	The gender binary shapes what society considers “normal” behaviour, appearance, and roles for women and men, reinforcing power imbalances and gender inequality at home, work, and in communities.
Homophobia	Fear, hatred, or aversion toward lesbian, gay, or bisexual people, reflecting a hostile psychological state that can lead to discrimination, harassment, or violence.
Heterosexual	A person who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of a different gender than themselves.
Cisgender	A person who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth.
Transphobia	The fear, hatred, or aversion of people whose gender identities differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.
2SLGBTQIA+	Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the plus which recognizes the many identities people have.

Gender-Based Violence in the Workforce



Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to **violence or harmful acts directed at a person based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender.** Gender-based violence is rooted in misogyny, homophobia and transphobia; its roots are found in patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Its roots lie in patriarchy and bias against perceived gender norms or expectations.

In **workplace settings**, gender-based violence is not limited to physical harm. It is often enacted through everyday interactions, embedded in workplace culture, and reinforced through organizational systems and practices.

Common Forms of Workplace GBV

- Sexual harassment and violence
- Invasive questions about a person's sexuality or gender
- Targeting someone's identity or sexuality through "jokes"
- Policies and practices that fail to protect gender diversity
- Victim-blaming and lack of accountability

Examples of Misconduct

Frontline workers may encounter:

- Misgendering (using the wrong pronoun) or deadnaming (using a previous name instead of a chosen name)
- Slurs or sexualized comments
- Outing someone without their consent
- Invasive questions about bodies, hormones, or surgery
- Microaggressions disguised as humour ("It's just a joke")

If someone feels unsafe, targeted, or excluded because of their gender or sexuality, it is gender-based violence.



Disproportionate Impact of GBV on 2SLGBTQIA+ People

Gender-based violence does not occur in isolation. Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual people (2SLGBTQIA+) experience higher rates of GBV across multiple settings, including **workplaces, public spaces, housing, and health care**, as well as within **families and communities**. These experiences often overlap and reinforce one another.



Visibility Increases Risk

Workers who are **openly 2SLGBTQIA+**, especially those who are **gender non-conforming**, are more likely to experience **harassment and exclusion**. Visibility can increase exposure to harm in public-facing, institutional, and community settings.

GBV also disproportionately affects individuals who experience **intersecting forms of discrimination, including racism, ableism, and xenophobia**.

Systemic and Cultural Barriers

Many systems are built around cisgender and heterosexual norms, which can create barriers such as:

- Policies that do not recognize gender diversity
- Limited access to gender-affirming care and inclusive benefits
- Lack of recognition of sexual diversity and diverse family structures
- Services that are not culturally competent or 2SLGBTQIA+-inclusive
- Overrepresentation of marginalized workers in roles or sectors with fewer protections and greater exposure to client-facing risks

Even when protections exist on paper, they may not reflect lived realities or be applied equitably.

Fear and Silencing

Fear plays a significant role in whether harm is disclosed or addressed. Individuals may fear:

- Retaliation or loss of income (fear of losing one's employment)
- Being outed without consent to family, friends, coworkers
- Being disbelieved or minimized
- Further discrimination through reporting processes

These fears reflect systemic and cultural barriers that prevent harm from being safely disclosed or addressed.

Broader Impacts

The cumulative impact of GBV includes:

- Direct experiences of violence and ongoing harm
- Reduced psychological safety and largely affects mental health
- Chronic stress and anxiety
- Disengagement from workplaces and services

Gender-based violence is not only about individual behavior: it is shaped by systems, culture, and power. Addressing GBV requires attention to both personal interactions and the environments that allow harm to persist.





Frontline Workers In-Practice



Frontline staff play a key role in promoting **belief, safety, and support**. As the **first point of contact**, their approach **shapes how individuals experience sharing information about harm**.

Believe Them

- Listen without questioning or dismissing their experience
- Respect their identity, name, and pronouns (no proof or explanation required)

Listen Actively

- Do not interrupt
- Focus on support, not curiosity-driven questions
- Avoid asking about coming-out experiences, bodies, or medical history

Avoid Assumptions

- Do not assume gender, sexuality, relationships, or family support
- Do not assume the person who caused harm is cisgender or heterosexual

Validate

- Acknowledge feelings and experiences
- Recognize harm without minimizing

Avoid Re-Traumatization

- Do not misgender or deadname
- Avoid phrases such as “when you were a boy/girl”
- Do not pressure disclosure or coming out

Respect Confidentiality

- Ask what name and pronouns should be used
- Clarify what name should appear in files or reports
- Confirm who it is safe to share information with

Empower Choice

- Follow the individual’s lead on reporting and next steps
- Offer options rather than directing decisions

Supporting Safely & Being an Ally



Frontline staff can influence whether 2SLGBTQIA+ people feel **believed**, **safe**, and **supported** not only in the workplace, but **across programs, community settings, and public systems.**

Experiences of safety are shaped by power, identity, and access. 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals may face added barriers when seeking support, including fear of discrimination or concerns about confidentiality.

Safe Support Practices

Frontline staff can:

- Help document incidents
- Share GBV and 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming resources
- Support safety and well-being when someone feels unsafe
- Be aware of available support resources and seek guidance from trained colleagues or professionals when needed
- Remain aware of your own responses and seek support when situations involve tension or potential harm
- Discuss safe options for reporting harm or raising concerns
- Identify who can provide support if needed
- Prioritize the individual's context and choices, allowing them to guide decisions about reporting or next steps

Safety includes emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Systems and processes only protect people when they are accessible, inclusive, and enforced.

Inclusive language should be standard practice in all interactions.

Being an Ally in Your Role

Advocate

- Provide feedback when procedures, policies, or community practices unintentionally exclude or harm 2SLGBTQIA+ people
- Amplify and support the voices, ideas, and contributions of 2SLGBTQIA+ colleagues or community members
- Challenge language, behaviors, or decisions that reinforce stereotypes, microaggressions, or exclusion
- Promote inclusive practices, benefits, programs, and communications that reflect 2SLGBTQIA+ needs

Model Inclusive Practice

- Use inclusive, non-gendered language in all communications
- Avoid processes or checklists that force people to disclose their identity or fit into rigid gender categories
- Demonstrate inclusive behavior consistently to set a standard for others
- Support professional growth by encouraging access to mentorship, training, and development opportunities

Make Safety Visible

- Offer pronoun options or badges and display inclusive signage
- Showcase 2SLGBTQIA+ symbols (flags, stickers, etc.) intentionally alongside respectful behavior
- Promote or share inclusive events and resources to raise awareness

You do not need to “fix” systemic harm, but your actions can help create environments where people feel seen, respected, and protected.





Key Takeaways

In this guide, we reviewed how gender-based violence affects workers and the crucial role frontline staff play in safety, respect, and inclusion.

Creating affirming workplaces requires **consistent practice, inclusive systems, and supportive responses**. When workers feel believed and respected, workplaces become safer and more equitable for everyone.



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90 Burnhamthorpe Rd. W Suite 210
Mississauga, ON L5B 3C3
905 949-0049 | www.achev.ca/strongertogether
strongertogether@achev.ca