CMG Associates

Ending Violence Against Women: What the Workplace Can Do

Each year on November 25, the United Nations marks the **International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women**. The date also launches the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Worldwide, about 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most often from someone they know. What's less often discussed is how much of this violence follows women to work.

The quiet workplace cost

Violence against women rarely stays at home. Abusers call, show up at offices, monitor work email, and sometimes use workplace schedules to escalate control. Survivors miss work for court dates, medical visits, and safety planning. This is why the workplace is one of the most important places where support can show up.

What this looks like at work

If you have noticed any of the following patterns in a colleague over time, it may be worth paying attention:

- Unexplained absences, injuries, or frequent "accidents"
- A partner who calls or texts constantly during the workday, or shows up unannounced
- Withdrawal from team activities, lunches, or informal conversations
- Visible anxiety during or after personal calls
- Sudden changes in appearance, work performance, or energy
- Difficulty accessing their own money, car, or phone

Myth vs. Fact

Some common beliefs can keep us from noticing what's happening:

- **"It's a private matter."** Not when it follows someone to work. Calls, stalking, and missed work make it a workplace issue.
- **"If it were happening, I'd know."** Many survivors hide it well, for good reason. Most colleagues never find out unless someone makes it safe to say.
- **"They'd just leave."** Leaving is often the most dangerous time. It usually takes several attempts and a lot of planning.

How to support a colleague

If someone opens up to you, a few principles make all the difference.

- **Listen without judgment.** Believe what they share. Don't press for details or push them toward decisions they are not ready to make.
- **Respect their timing.** Leaving can be the most dangerous time for a survivor, so let them set the pace. Walk alongside them rather than pulling them forward.
- **Offer specific help.** "Can I be your emergency contact?" or "Can I hold copies of your important documents at my place?" are concrete offers and easier to accept.
- **Protect their privacy.** Don't share what you have been told with others at work. Confidentiality is part of a survivor's safety plan.
- **Connect them to trained support.** You don't need to have all the answers. CMG has specialists who can help with safety planning and resources.

What workplaces can do

Individual support matters. So does the system a workplace builds around it.

- **Make policies visible.** Many companies offer paid safe leave, workplace safety planning, and confidential pathways for survivors. Make sure associates know these options exist and how to use them.
- **Train managers.** Managers are often the first to notice something is wrong, or to be told. Training on how to listen, respond, and refer can change outcomes.
- **Audit the digital footprint.** Shared calendars and visible home addresses in HR systems can inadvertently expose a survivor. Thoughtful defaults protect everyone.
- **Partner with experts.** CMG, local shelters, and support organizations can advise on policy and response.
- **Say the words.** Culture is shaped by what gets named. Sharing resources and talking openly about this issue signal that support is available.

A closing thought

The workplace is one of the most powerful places where change can take root. If someone you work with opens up to you about what they are going through, you don't need to have all the answers. Listen, believe them, and point them toward help.