WOMEN IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

International Labour Office
Geneva

Promoting employment by preventing violence against women transport workers

Decent Work in Transport

Transport jobs can be well paid, rewarding and offer long-term career opportunities. Unfortunately, and unacceptably, few women are employed in these jobs and some positions fall below the standard of decent work. One of the barriers to a career in transport is workplace violence.

Why action is needed

- Jobs in the transport sector are highly gendered and unequal, as is access to transport services. As a result, women's voices are all too often neglected when it comes to transport planning and the pursuit of decent work.

- Transport is still regarded as 'no place for women' in many countries/sectors around the world. Women in the transport sector often find themselves stuck in low(er) paid/low(er) status jobs with few, if any, opportunities for career development.

- Violence against transport workers is one of the most important factors limiting the attraction of transport jobs for women and breaking the retention of those who are employed in the transport sector.

ILO policy framework on gender-based violence

Since the 1920s, the ILO has addressed the issue of violence in the workplace, and for decades it has advised on policies and programmes to eliminate sex discrimination in work. The ILO policy framework on gender-based violence is guided by the *Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work* (1998) as well as the *Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization* (2008).

Facts and figures

- Detailed and accurate statistics on the employment of women in the transport sector are hard to come by, especially for specific transport modes. Where such data is available, it indicates very low participation by women, for example the population of women seafarers is estimated to be only 1-2% of the world's total seafaring labour force.

- The ILOSTAT database includes data for 'transport, storage and communications', but information by sex is often not available from particular countries.

- The difficulty of improving the gender balance is especially well illustrated in the European Union (EU), despite continuous attempts over many years to promote equality of opportunity between women and men. In the EU-27, just 21 per cent of the labour force in transport services was female in 2006, compared to just over 44 per cent in all services.

What constitutes violence at work?

Violence can be defined as a form of negative behaviour or action in the relations between two or more people. It is characterised by aggressiveness which is sometimes repeated and sometimes unexpected. It includes incidents where employees are abused, threatened, assaulted or subject to other offensive acts or behaviours in circumstances related to their work. Violence manifests itself both in the form of physical and psychological violence. It ranges from physical attacks to verbal insults, bullying, mobbing, and harassment, including sexual and racial harassment.

External violence – workplace violence committed by external intruders who have no legitimate relationship with the workplace and who have undertaken criminal acts such as vandalism, robbery, sabotage or terrorism;

Service-related violence – aggressive acts by customers or clients of a service or a business;

Internal violence – aggressive acts by current or former employees or other persons with an employment-based relationship with an organisation (this includes workplace bullying and harassment); and

Organisational violence – involves organisations placing their workers in dangerous or violent situations or allowing a climate of bullying or harassment to thrive in the workplace.

Workplace violence

Violence against women, more than any other form of sex discrimination in the workplace, violates fundamental human rights.

It is well established that certain occupations and individuals are more 'at risk' from violence at work. For example, workers who handle cash (e.g. taxi drivers), those who deal with frustrated customers (e.g. delayed passengers) or inebriated customers (e.g. passengers who drink alcohol on flights or rail journeys), and those who work alone, at night, or in geographically isolated places will all find themselves 'at risk'. Predictable, preventable, and frequent, violence against transport workers is a growing problem.

The Career Cycle Approach

To facilitate further analysis of the policy options to enhance the opportunities and mitigate the barriers facing women in the transport sector, the ILO has developed a career cycle approach based on the common features of work in the transport sector and the issues that most concern transport workers as depicted in Figure 1. The analysis focuses on the working conditions and the human resources policies of transport companies designed to mainstream gender, the opportunities for success and advancement, and the barriers faced by women in terms of education and training, and the level of social support available to women who work in the transport sector.
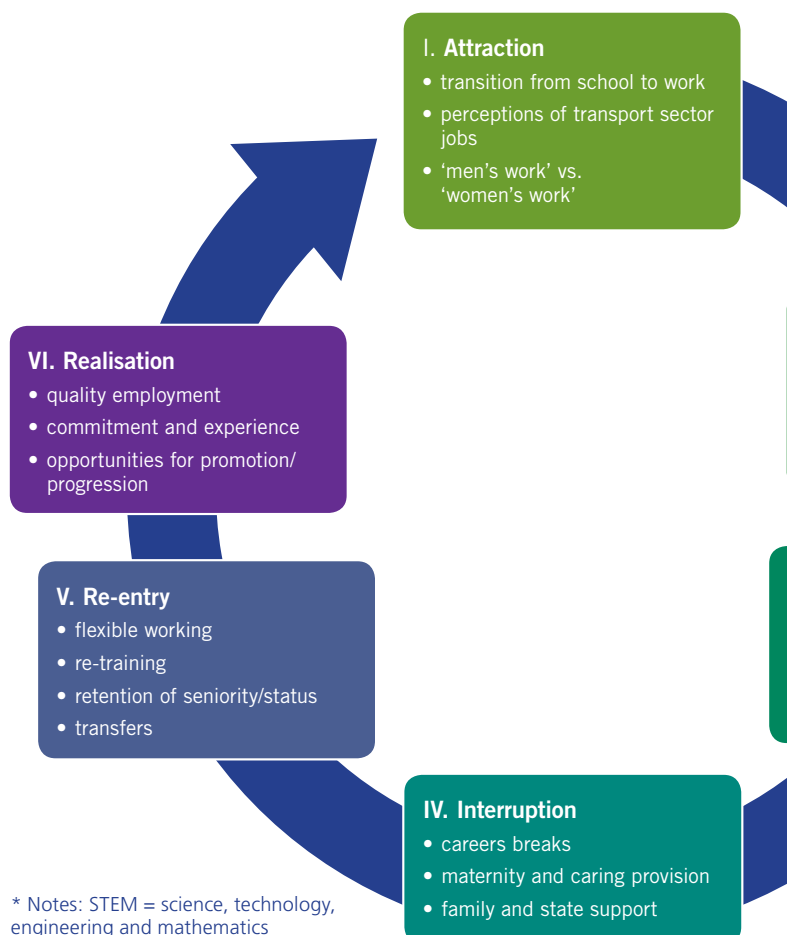
Violence at work might deter young women from even considering a career in the transport sector (the 'attraction' stage I depicted in Figure 1). More importantly, when women suffer violence at work the unacceptable outcome is likely that the victim would quit her job rather than the perpetrator(s) being dealt with, regardless of whether they are co-workers, customers or outsiders.

Violence at work impact on the career cycle

Workplace violence represents a significant barrier to women accessing jobs and progressing to successful careers. Each stage of the career cycle depicted in Figure 1 highlights key factors that impact on decision-making, experiences and outcomes. These stages are interdependent and can be mutually reinforcing, in either a positive or negative manner.

For example, working around the cycle from initial attraction (stage I), transport jobs are unlikely to be 'advertised' to young girls at school as a potential career choice because of gender stereotypes. As a result, women are less likely to study the 'STEM subjects', which limits initial attraction, selection (stage II) and career progression. Thus, women may be confined to low status/low skilled jobs in the transport sector, with few women role models in higher level/managerial roles to train and/or mentor young women as they develop their careers.

Figure 1.
Women's Career Cycle in the Transport Sector

I. Attraction
- transition from school to work
- perceptions of transport sector jobs
- 'men's work' vs. 'women's work'

VI. Realisation
- quality employment
- commitment and experience
- opportunities for promotion/progression

V. Re-entry
- flexible working
- re-training
- retention of seniority/status
- transfers

IV. Interruption
- careers breaks
- maternity and caring provision
- family and state support

* Notes: STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics

With few women in a particular transport organisation, or at least in particular technical roles, then the organisation is less likely to offer flexible working arrangements or (re)design equipment, tools, personal protective equipment (stage III) to accommodate women's needs. This, in turn, reinforces the lack of attention to interruption (stage IV) and re-entry (stage V). Thus, there could be several barriers to retention of women, including the absence of 'family friendly' HR policies, flexible working time arrangements, or career break policies.

Damaging lives and disrupting careers

Gender-based violence not only causes pain and suffering to women but also devastates families, undermines workplace productivity, diminishes national competitiveness, and stalls development.

In the transport sector, workplace violence is widely acknowledged as one of the most important 'push' factors that lead to involuntary quits and poor retention (stage III in Figure 1). The 'cause-effect' relationship (or 'problem tree') depicting poor retention in the transport sector is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Cause-Effect Relationship of Poor Retention of Women in the Transport Sector
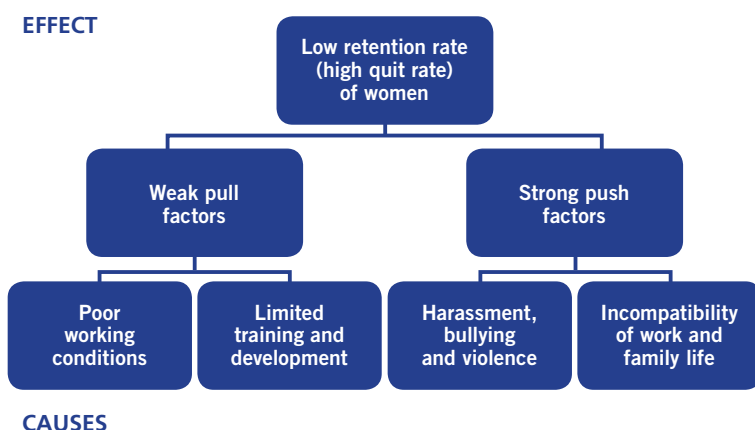
EFFECT

CAUSES

Many of the causes of poor retention depicted in Figure 2, such as poor working conditions, are 'gender-intensified' inasmuch as they affect both sexes but bear down most on women (e.g. prolonged periods at sea away from home or overnight stopovers on long road haulage journeys, when drivers often sleep in their cabs, which can be more problematic for women with family or other caring responsibilities). While the devastating effects of violence towards women are evidenced across all transport sectors and countries throughout the world, the root causes and perpetrators will differ and will require sector-specific and country-specific policies to address this problem.

Social dialogue to address violence at work

Social dialogue is one of the most effective ways to achieve recognition of the importance of protecting women from violence at work. Including women in social dialogue was highlighted by the 2009 International Labour Conference (ILC) as a crucial step in eliminating sex discrimination. The ILC stressed that tripartite dialogue – such as in social and economic councils, national employment policy bodies and tripartite gender equality commissions – "has been successful in achieving a more effective implementation of gender equality measures. Such tripartite bodies should be created or strengthened to institutionalize social dialogue on gender issues, and negotiators – with more women needed – from the three groups should be trained in gender equality".

Women are often under-represented on national tripartite bodies, organisation-based representative bodies (e.g. safety and health committees) and independent representative organisations such as trade unions or professional associations (e.g. airline pilot associations).Collective bargaining at its various levels is a central tool to achieve gender equality and addressing the problem of workplace violence.

II. Selection
• STEM* qualifications
• stereotyping
• job/person criteria
• affirmative action

III. Retention
• human resource development
• working conditions
• working time
• work-life balance

Code of practice to combat workplace violence in transport

The *ILO's Code of Practice on Workplace Violence in Services Sectors* could serve as a reference tool for stimulating the development of similar instruments at the regional, national, sectoral, enterprise, organization and workplace levels, specifically targeted at and adapted to different cultures, situations and needs. The code covers: policies; hazard identification; risk assessment; prevention and control; training; management and mitigation of the impact; care and support of workers affected; monitoring and evaluation.

This code could be locally adapted by governments and the social partners and should be used to:

- develop practical responses at the workplace, enterprise, organization, sectoral, and national levels;

- promote processes of dialogue, consultation, negotiation and all forms of cooperation among governments, employers, workers and their representatives, as well as other concerned stakeholders as appropriate;

- give guidance in developing national laws, policies and programmes of action;

- provide a basis for workplace, enterprise, organization and sectoral agreements; and in workplace policies and plans of action.

Policy on workplace violence

A policy on workplace violence against women should address at least the following:

- the definition of workplace violence, that can include: external, service-related, internal and organisational violence;

- a statement that no workplace violence would be tolerated, whether from within the workforce or from clients and customers;

- an engagement in support of any action targeted at creating an environment free from workplace violence and its direct adverse consequences;

- the provision of a fair complaints system that is free from retaliation and that protects against abusive or frivolous complaints;

- information, education, training and any other relevant programmes;

- measures to prevent, control and, as appropriate, eliminate workplace violence; measures relating to intervention and management of violent incidents;

- a commitment to effective communication of the policy; and

- confidentiality.

Responsibility for the policy should be clearly assigned. The policy should in particular include:

- a statement that supervisors and managers have a duty to implement the policy and to demonstrate leadership by example;

- an engagement to provide managers with the ability and the means necessary to carry out the policy at all levels within the organization;

- an assignment of responsibility to individuals or teams with appropriate training and skills for the implementation of the policy;

- an engagement that workers refrain from any acts of workplace violence;

- a statement that workers support and encourage employers in creating and implementing personnel policies and practices that discourage workplace violence.

The policy should be communicated to all those concerned and should be accompanied by initiatives to raise awareness among employers, workers, the general public, clients and customers.

Training to address workplace violence in the transport sector could include:

- improving the ability to identify potentially violent situations;

- improving the capacity of event appraisal, active coping and problem-solving;

- instilling interpersonal and communication skills that could prevent and defuse a potentially violent situation;

- enhancing positive attitudes towards creating a supportive environment;

- assertiveness training, as required, according to risk assessment;

- self-defence training, as required, according to risk assessment.