

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

A TOOLKIT FOR UK UNIONS



TABLE OF CONTENT

1 Applying a trauma-informed approach to cases of SHW

16 Self-Care

18 Training women union members

26 Building a peer-to-peer support group for healing from SHW





APPLYING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO CASES OF SHW

Victims/survivors of sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW) may suffer from **post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS)** and have their psychological and physical well-being harmed (12).

PTSS is characterised by perceived threat to physical integrity and reactions of intense fear and helplessness. SHW victims/survivors very often show these reactions due to the relevance of financial threats or worries, violation of physical boundaries, and realistic concerns regarding the unpredictability of the harasser's future behaviour.

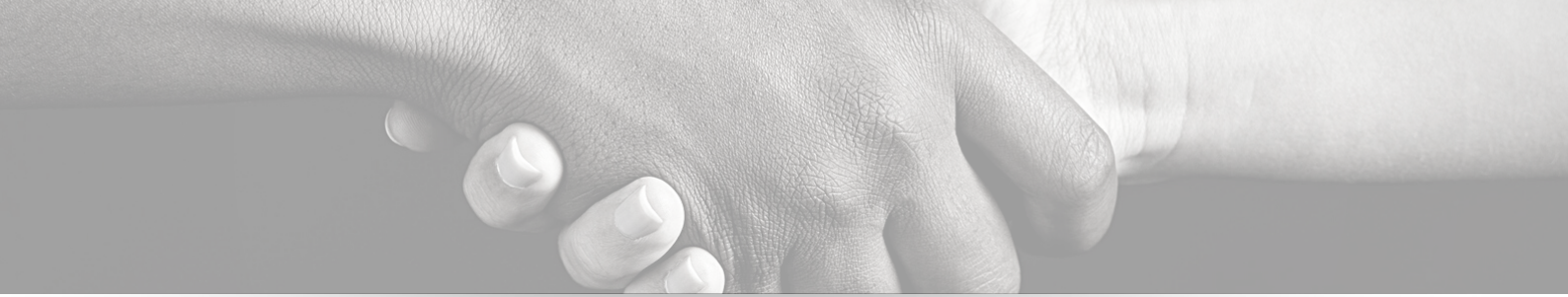
Effects on them can have been caused by events surrounding the SHW too, like stress related to gossip, retaliation, and financial losses.

Each victim/survivor will have a different story and can be impacted in different ways.



To support them in a trauma-informed approach, rather than consider the SHW incident itself, we must address their evaluation of the situation, which is impacted by:

- SHW frequency, duration, and intensity
- Organisational tolerance and permissive management, like employer's refusal to take complaints seriously, retaliation for reporting, and lack of sanctions for the harasser
- Previous victimisation, personal resources, attributions, and attitudes



Some impacts on victims/survivors of SHW can be:

- **Cognitive:** diminished concentration, self-blame, fragmented memory and recall problems, flashbacks, nightmares, phobias
- **Physical:** problems eating and sleeping, gastrointestinal problems, impaired immune system, chronic fatigue syndrome, asthma, migraines
- **Emotional:** mood swings, hopelessness, fear, anger, hypersensitivity, preoccupation with danger
- **Behavioural:** self-harming, thinking about or attempting suicide, risky sexual behaviour, impulsive and aggressive behaviour, irritability, impatience
- **Interpersonal:** withdrawn, difficulties with trust, problems relating to others, lack of interpersonal boundaries, isolation and sense of alienation, intolerance
- **Spiritual:** existential crisis, loss of faith, development of false self, feeling like they don't belong and loss of sense of wholeness
- **Professional:** decreased productivity, loss of work, decreased income

Some responses to traumatic experience are:

- **Freeze:** feeling paralysed or unable to move
- **Fight:** fighting, struggling or protesting
- **Flop:** doing what you are told without being able to protest
- **Flight:** hiding or moving away from the threatening situation
- **Fawn:** trying to please someone who harms you to reduce the negative effects



SUPPORTING A VICTIM/SURVIVOR

STEP 1. WELCOME HER

CREATE A SAFE SPACE

- Use a kind tone and soft body language
- Remain calm, approachable, and sensitive
- Use inclusive language
- Take her to a private room if that feels safe for her
- Offer her a hot drink



EXPLAIN CONFIDENTIALITY

- Tell her that the conversation is confidential
- Warn her that confidentiality has limitations depending on the case

SET THE GROUNDS OF THE CONVERSATION

- Tell her about the duration of the appointment
- Tell her the limitations of the union services
- Tell her you and the union will not make decisions for her
- Explain that your role is a professional one, meaning that you have responsibilities and some tasks to complete
- Explain you have the task of making a written record of exactly what has been said
- Let her know that you will do everything you can and are allowed to do to help her

STEP 2. YOUR DOs AND DON'Ts WHILE SHE SHARES HER EXPERIENCE



DO

Listen first

- Listen without interrupting
- Be empathetic and understanding
- Be sensitive to the intimate nature of the subject
- Believe her
- Take her seriously

Talk later

- Say "I believe you"
- Say "this is not your fault"
- Use simple language
- Acknowledge that you understand her feelings and reactions and how difficult this may be
- Reassure her that she has done the right thing in seeking support
- Acknowledge the impact on her and her life
- Ask straightforward questions
- Ask her about what further action she wants to take

Act

- Take action if she wants

DON'T

Don't Judge

- Don't question her story
- Don't be indifferent to her perceptions and reactions
- Don't minimise the symptoms or feelings she is having

Don't Doubt

- Don't ask "What were you wearing?"
- Don't ask "Why didn't you come to us earlier?"

Don't Investigate

- Don't ask her what caused the abuse
- Don't ask for details or use leading questions

Don't Wonder

- Don't make conjectures of what she may have done
- Don't promise things outside of your capability or role

Don't Question her Decisions

- Don't assume what could be the best for her
- Don't pressure her to make a decision
- Don't make decisions for her





If the victim/survivor decides to go further with her disclosure:

DO

- Liaise with other agencies within the union
- Seek advice within the union if you are unsure of how to proceed
- Refer her to specialist services if her needs exceed the union's resources
- Create a safety plan
- Prioritise her immediate safety
- Call 999 if she is at risk

DON'T

- Don't delay in acting if she decides she wants to go further with the report
- Don't discuss the disclosure with people who do not need to know



Doing any of the DON'Ts above can harm and victimise.

Victimisation occurs when somebody is treated unfairly because she made or supported a report about a behaviour against a protected characteristic, which can be age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
(13) (14)



STEP 3. GIVE HER PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Be aware that counselling and advising require certain types of accreditations, and you will only be allowed to do so if you have one. Counsellors or psychotherapists, for example, must have professional qualifications and membership of or accreditation by a professional association, like the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

If you do not have any valid accreditation for practising professional counselling and advising in the UK, you must inform the victim/survivor about her rights and the procedures she can follow providing her with practical information. Tell her:

HER EMPLOYER MUST

- Take her report seriously, even if the incident happened a long time before the disclosure
- Handle it fairly and sensitively



GATHERING EVIDENCE

Suggest she makes a note of what has happened and continues to make notes each time something happens that makes her uncomfortable. This can also help if she finds talking about the experience is distressing. She should include in that note:

- Dates
- Times
- Places
- Names, including of any witnesses
- Behaviours
- Facts





She should also save and keep:

- Any online messages and content sent by the harasser
- Any letters sent by the harasser
- Videos or audio sent by the harasser
- Any other evidence of the harasser's behaviour
- Payslips that might contain pay changes that relate to the uncomfortable relationship



Please note that a recording might not be accepted as evidence if, for example, the employer has a policy that states that staff must not make recordings at work without permission and that making secret recording is a disciplinary issue; or if a secret recording breaks data protection laws.

GETTING ADVICE

She should get advice and support before deciding whether to formalise a sexual harassment report. She needs to know that:

- She is doing the right thing by seeking advice from a union representative since many employers do not have adequate policies in place
- She should consider looking for someone in her workplace who has been trained to advise people who are considering making an SHW report
- She can call a specialist helpline





REPORTING

You should advise her to follow her company's process for resolving conflicts. However, as these processes normally include speaking directly with the harasser or just reporting to the police, this might not always be safe or adequate. She should follow the company's anti-sexual harassment policy (ASHP) or bullying and harassment policy on how to report.



- The ASHP should be somewhere everybody can easily access
- The ASHP should state to whom reports must be sent

If this is not possible, either because the company does not have a policy or it is not safe, she should report the situation straight to her employer or someone senior at work as soon as possible.

If this does not seem appropriate or does not resolve the issue, she can raise a formal grievance or take more direct action with the support of the union. As she is a union member, tell her that you can give her support with either of these options.

GOING TO A HEARING

If her grievance leads to a hearing, her employer:

- Must allow her to be accompanied by a Union representative, or by someone with whom she works
- Must let her bring a second person if she is a vulnerable person who needs specialist support
- Can stop her from bringing a friend or family member



NOT RESOLVED?

She should contact the union legal department for support and advice.

She may be able to make a claim to the employment tribunal if the incident is ongoing or happened within the past three months.



Whether or not she is pursuing a claim through the employment tribunal, it is always worth considering other options for resolving the issue, like applying pressure on the company through collective actions such as petitions, protests, strikes etc.



Legal routes can be slow and unsuccessful, but collective actions can be much more powerful and effective, especially if:

- Her employer is not dealing with her complaint because the person she has complained about is powerful or influential
- It is more than three months since the incident, meaning that the employment tribunal will not accept a claim
- The complaint is particularly serious and urgent, and is not being dealt with



UNITED FOR WOMEN

Your union should have a set of projects and services for women members. They should be aware of these initiatives and be easily able to reach them when they need union's support.

WAS IT A CRIME?

If a victim/survivor had been sexually assaulted or raped at work, this is a crime.

There are specialist helplines that provide support and advice for this. However, keep in mind there may be barriers in accessing them, such as language, trust issues etc.



If she decides to report to her employer, they should talk to her about reporting it to the police and support her if she chooses to do so. Before doing this, her employer should get advice from a specialist helpline.



Her employer should not put any pressure on her to make any decision.

However, they might decide they have to tell the police in some circumstances. This might include if she or they think there is likely to be:

- An ongoing risk to her safety or the safety of others
- An increased risk to her safety because she is a vulnerable person, for example, she has a mental health condition
- Her employer should talk to her first before reporting it to the police and inform her after they do so

Her employer does not have to wait for any criminal or judicial process to finish before they:

- Investigate her complaint
- Carry out a workplace disciplinary procedure

The law protects victims from being:

- Victimised because they have made a sexual harassment complaint
- Treated less favourably at work because they have been sexually harassed or have rejected someone trying to sexually harass them



STEP 4. REFERRING A CASE

After welcoming a victim/survivor, listening to her, and telling her she was right to disclose her experience, you should inform her of her rights.

As a representative, if someone reports a case of sexual harassment or abuse to you, you can seek support from someone else in the union such as the ones managing projects for women or the legal department.

Seek further support if:

- The member wants support in taking collective action against the issue
- Deadlines and workload constrain you
You identify a need that can be covered by another union officer or representative
- The member would benefit from and is interested in participating of the union's peer-to-peer support group and projects for women
- The member wants to take the employer to court



You should refer her to another organisation if the union is not able to manage her case. This can happen if:

- There is a conflict of interest according to the union's policy
- The inquiry comes from a non-member
- She has acted inappropriately or has been disrespectful according to the Complaints Policy and Procedure
- The union has exhausted all available avenues and additional support may be provided by another organisation
- Her needs exceed the union's resources and expertise
- She needs culturally appropriate and holistic support



REFERRAL PATHWAY

When referring a case externally, you should try to:



Make clear to her

- The need for referral and which organisation is best suited to her needs
- The possible consequences of referral, such as court appearances
- The appointment's details, including the name of the person that will see her when she has been given an appointment
- The name, telephone number, and address of the organisation. Add any additional information that she may require access to the service, such as opening times
- The type of help or support she will receive from the organisation she is being referred to
- Other details of the referral
- Her rights
- That she must follow the referral procedures of the receiving organisation
- That she can return to you for further assistance if the service she receives at the referred organisation was not what was expected, or she had a problem with the organisation



Select an organisation considering

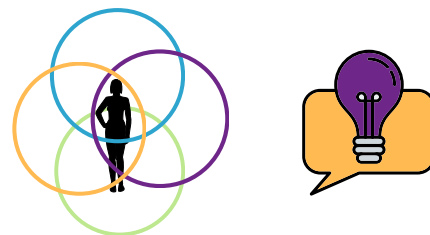
- Her and the organisation's locations
- Accessibility to public transport
- The kind of support that she needs
- Costs
- Language and cultural aspects



Ensure the organisation will provide the support she needs

- Contact the organisation to which she is being referred
- Discuss her needs and the level of help required
- Ensure that costs and access are clarified beforehand with the organisation
- Fill out any relevant form and send a copy to the organisation
- Create a referral record including the reasons for referral and the details of the organisation she was referred to

Follow-up referrals



- Record the outcome of the referral case
- Ensure that the union is referring members to competent organisations
- Keep yourself informed of the progress and outcome of each case
- Update the referral records as soon as you have new information



NETWORKS FOR WOMEN

Your union should have a list of trusted organisations and agencies that have been used before and that have a proven track record of providing a quality service.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Overview

This activity will give you a better understanding of how to conduct a trauma-informed approach to union members disclosing SHW cases.

Time: 1,5 hour



You have already welcomed Victoria and know her story:

Victoria

is from Bolivia. She does not speak English very well, but she got a job as a cleaner in a private house. She tells you that her employer, Mark, stares at her and talks about her body and appearance which makes her feel intimidated. He has asked her out once and she declined, showing him her wedding ring. Recently, he asked her out again. This situation is making her very anxious but she does not want to confront him because she fears she could lose her job and she relies on her salary. She has been in this situation for four months.

- 1 Discuss her case with your group and write out on sticky notes your insights about the intersectional discrimination she is subjected to.
- 2 Take a large piece of paper and divide it into eight sections:
- 3 In the first section, write a list of the symptoms of distress victims/survivors in Victoria's situation may experience. How might she have assessed the situation? What impact could this SHW have on her and her life that she might be afraid of or already be experiencing?.
- 4 In a second section, address how SHW added to intersectional discrimination can impact on her symptoms and appraisals.



- 5 In another section, list what steps you would take to make her feel safe when disclosing her case to you.
- 6 In the fourth section consider how you should act and speak to avoid victimisation or causing further suffering for her.
- 7 Go further and, in another section, list what sort of information you are able to give her to support her.
- 8 Tell her what her rights are in the next section.
- 9 If she told you she wants to take her case further, list in a final section how you will conduct her case or if you will refer her to another organisation.
- 10 As a group, revisit her case and think of ways you can reduce any risk of judgement, victimisation or harm to Victoria. Remember your goal is to prevent them from happening at all.
- 11 Repeat the activity for each step you want to explore, bearing in mind that an SHW disclosure must be considered through a trauma informed approach.



SELF-CARE

Some cases can be difficult to hear and tough to deal with. While you may want to help the victim/survivor, the disclosure can also be difficult for you.

You may take on some of their emotional pain as a witness of their burden, and you may even be dealing with your own trauma. All this can make you experience feelings like anxiety, anger, sadness, mistrust, confusion etc. These are all common reactions.

Look after yourself. It will be more complicated for you and less helpful to the victim/survivor if you are struggling with her case.

You are working to thrive together.

Pay attention to yourself

- Do not minimise your emotions and reactions
- Do not judge yourself, recognise your strengths and identify any difficulties instead
- Focus on your achievements and the aspects of your work which satisfy you the most
- Take a break after the appointment: go for a walk, have a cup of tea, listen to music
- Try to process the experience by talking about it with people you trust or writing down case notes, being careful to not identify anybody
- Use the resources the union offers to help you
- If you find yourself unable to cope, seek advice from a specialist organisation, speak to a professional, or consult your GP



Some grounding techniques can help you and they also can be applied to support the member. The NHS suggests this calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety, and panic (15).

Make yourself comfortable

- You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair, or lying on a bed or yoga mat on the floor
- Make yourself as comfortable as you can
- If you are lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up
- Let your legs be straight or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor
- If you are sitting, place your arms on the chair arms
- If you are sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground
- Whatever position you are in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart

Focus on your breathing

- Let your breath flow deep down into your belly without forcing it
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Breathe in gently and regularly
- Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5
- Without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes





TRAINING WOMEN UNION MEMBERS

A training programme is a series of activities and events planned to facilitate participants to learn the skills that they need for a particular job or activity.

In this section, we share some tips on how to plan and train union women members on sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW) considering your audience's characteristics and needs.

YOUR AUDIENCE

Your audience will be union women officers, representatives, and members. It is likely that you already know them well.

However, it is necessary to identify their learning needs and any constraints in their daily lives, as well as any necessary support for them to access and engage in the sessions.

You should consider:

- Their first language
- Their level of education and if this varies across the group
- Their work commitments
- Their caring responsibilities
- Their abilities or specific needs
- Their lived experience of SHW



It is also likely that most of your attendees have never heard of or have little knowledge about SHW, VAWG, intersectional discrimination, and trauma-approach. Some may become aware during your sessions that they have been sexually harassed in the past.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

What do you expect attendees to know about SHW by the end of the programme? Define your main goal and then list others by importance.

Some ideas are:

- Understand SHW as a gender-based violence
- Know what SHW and harassment behaviours are
- Understand intersectional discrimination and who is more at risk of SHW
- Understand that SHW can cause trauma
- Learn about prevention strategies
- Learn about how to report cases of SHW
- Learn about the role of unions, employers, employees, workers, and members on tackling SHW
- Learn how to advocate for culture change in the workplace

YOUR TRAINING METHOD

Find below the main methods you can use. You should combine them.

Technology-based learning

Technology-based learning can be hosted completely online. This method removes the need to commute, allowing a larger number of members to participate at once, and can be delivered in a shorter time.

However, you will need to adapt the training to take into consideration:



- Participants who do not have computers or good internet connection
- Participants' limited digital skills and technological resources to perform online activities
- Some participants will be juggling the training with caring responsibilities
- Less interaction and human connection
- Victims/survivors of gender-based violence can be left unnoticed

Instructor-led training

This is classroom-style training where an instructor leads face-to-face training. It allows attendees to immerse themselves, interact more easily and build relationships with trainers and each other. It is more likely to give them a sense of belonging and encourage them to open up.



However, you should consider:

- Commuting and its costs, including public transportation services' disruptions
- That more hours are dedicated to the training, meaning that some of the attendees will have to give up work, losing out on earning money
- Offering childcare to their kids
- Sorting an appropriate venue and some infrastructure
- Some costs with refreshments

Sub-Methods

The sub-methods below can help you to keep trainees engaged and practicing their new knowledge. You should also mix visual, auditory and action learning styles during your sessions.

- Interactive activities
- Case studies analyses
- Roleplaying
- Films and videos
- Group Work



THE MODULES

Your training plan must be divided into modules. Those modules should be:

- Focused on the training goals
- Based on the training methods
- Adapted to the audience's characteristics, needs, size, and schedules
- Flexible, open to adaptations and updates
- Aware of constraints

Establish the time you want to spend with each module's topic based on your chosen method and audience availability and ability.

Online sessions should not be longer than two hours and in-person workshops for bigger groups no longer than three hours.

Then, define all session topics that will compose each of the modules. This is an example of a module and its topics and sessions:

Module	Module Topic	Session
1	Understanding SHW	1.1 VAWG and SHW
		1.2 Intersectional discrimination
2	Trauma-informed Approach	2.1 How to welcome victims/survivors
		2.2 Give victims/survivors practical information
3	Prevention	3.1 Collective action: What unions can do
		3.2 What has your union done?



PRESENT YOUR TRAINING



Consider the tips below when preparing each session:

- Make your PowerPoint presentation simple, with few or no animations, three to five bullets per slide, font size of no less than 30 points. For an hour-long presentation, about 20 to 30 slides are best.
- Plan and design the delivery of your sessions in the language spoken by the majority of the participants
- Be aware that interpretation will be necessary if you have attendees that speak different languages
- Gently nudge quiet participants to engage in the activities. Some of them may be victims or may have just realised they are survivors of SHW



ASSESS KNOWLEDGE

Listen to the women's experiences and opinions and make any necessary corrections and improvements to future sessions and training programmes.

You can ask their thoughts at the end of each session and use them to improve your next sessions.

Study the assessments and plan a comprehensive evaluation for the end of the programme. Dispose of them confidentially after you finish your project.



DISCLAIMER

- You will be training members on an issue many women are facing.
- Members of the audience may disclose their own experiences, present or past, or realise during the session that somebody they know is experiencing SHW
- Some women may confidently share it with the group, while others may be triggered and show emotional reactions.
- Take time to address a trigger warning
- Allow them to speak about their experiences since these are often opportunities for women to feel comfortable disclosing their cases among peers
- Explain what projects your union has implemented to support, encourage active participation, and empower women members
- Tell them where they can find help if they have been impacted by the training
- Pause or stop the session if anybody shows strong reactions





GROUP ACTIVITY

Overview

These activities will help you to start thinking about your training programme.

Time: 1.5 hour



Consider these questions, discuss them in your group and write down your answers:

- 1 You will train new union members on how to tackle SHW. You decide to do a gender-mixed session aiming to reach a larger audience. Is this a good idea?
- 2 You have been assigned to train union women members on SHW. What is the main learning objective of your training programme?
- 3 Your attendees will be Latin American women who work in cleaning and hospitality. What method(s) should you use in your training?
- 4 You have already planned your training modules and sessions when you find out that the attendees only speak Spanish. What changes do you need to make?
- 5 You identified that most of your attendees have kids. What must you consider when planning your training sessions?
- 6 You need to prepare an activity to help your audience to learn about how they should approach victims/survivors of SHW in workplace cases. What could be a good option?



Here are some answers to those questions:

1 It is not convenient and will not help you to reach learning objectives. While it sounds like a good idea to reach large audiences, spread awareness, and quicker change culture, mixing women and men in sessions that deal with different gender perspectives and gender-based violence, sensitive, emotional, and private issues, may make women feel vulnerable, exposed and awkward.

2 A training programme can have different learning objectives. Your planning could aim at making women aware of SHW from a VAWG and intersectionality approach, for example. Aligned with your team, you will decide what is more important for the members to learn. Do they need to learn how to help victims/survivors? Do they need to learn how to pressure employers for prevention policies? Do they need to learn how to pressure employers to better respond to reports? Build side objectives around the main one.

3 You can plan a mix-methods training. While technology-based sessions can help you to advance with lessons, an in-person workshop allows you all to meet, build relationships, and immerse yourselves in learning. Be sure your trainees can both have access to a device and participate in an in-person activity, which should consider their availabilities.

4 You should adapt them to Spanish speakers. Arrange translation for your material and interpretation for the sessions. You will need to adapt all your communication to their language.

5 For in-person activities, you should provide them childcare. For online sessions, warn them about the sensitive issues you all will be talking about and that kids should be kept out of the room.

6 A roleplaying activity in which participants see themselves in different positions and have to find different alternatives to support victims/survivors of SHW.



BUILDING A PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR HEALING FROM SHW

Peer support programmes are created and owned by people who engage in helping and supporting each other through building relationships and sharing their experiences.

They can help groups of people who have common experiences, such as a specific health or mental health condition or from a certain ethnic group, for instance.

Knowledge exchange, emotional support, social interaction, or practical help are examples of actions held by peers. Everyone's experiences are treated as equally important, and no one is more of an expert than anyone else.

Peer support groups can develop in any setting, as a structured activity or far more informally, like cooking together meetings. It can be provided face-to-face, on the phone, or online. It may be held weekly, monthly, ongoing, or for a limited time.

The aspects of the common experience listed below are very helpful for establishing relationships in any women specific peer support group.

This chapter purpose is to help unions to create their peer-to-peer support programmes for victims/survivors of sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW) considering those aspects:

- Gender
- Shared cultural background
- Migration history
- Intersectional discrimination





PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR UNION MEMBERS

As a union representative, you should create a peer-to-peer support group for women members who have experienced SHW currently or in the past. It will be:

- Gender-responsive
- Aware of intersectionality
- Under a trauma-informed approach



A peer-to-peer support group is intended to help participants to understand that their feelings and symptoms are responses to a gender-based violence by meeting other women going through the same experience.

As equality is a core value of peer support, it can be empowering for women who have also experienced intersectional discrimination in their lives. Intersections of identity, such as ethnicity and sexuality, bring people together in peer support.

The group will help them to deal with their impaired psychological and physical well-being, including anxiety and possible trauma. The aim is to support them in restoring their self-esteem and confidence.

This approach considers a woman's disclosure and her wider life experiences, in particular trauma caused by the SHW, rather than any medical diagnosis. It may also consider their race, ethnicity, age, insecure immigration status, financial struggles, language limitations, and ability.

We follow here The Side by Side Research's findings on how successful peer-to-peer support programmes have been built by communities in the UK (16).

PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT GROUPS VALUES

Six main set of values must guide peer-to-peer support groups. They are interconnected and build on one another. Let's learn about each one along developing the union's peer-to-peer support group on SHW's values.

COMMONALITY

Peers must have common experiences of social and emotional distress. Specific aspects of personal experience or identity shaped by gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability, and migration are critical to people recognising each other as peers.

Group Activity

What will your group members have in common?

- 1 Draw two circles and a box.
- 2 Think about the characteristics that they have in common. Add them to the Members circle.
- 3 Think about characteristics that you cannot include in your group. Add these to the Not Appropriate For circle.
- 4 Characteristics that are not essential to join your group and barriers people may have to take part in can be put in the Important to Consider box.

Suggestion of commonality values

- Women
- Latin American
- Victims of SHW
- At any age
- Union members from all branches





SAFETY

Creating peer-to-peer support groups involves developing structures to provide physically and emotionally safe spaces and the trust that allows peers to be able to express themselves without fear of judgement.

In some forms of peer support, the responsibility for creating safety may rest with online moderators, group facilitators, or supervisors. In other forms, peers collectively take responsibility for creating safety.

Safety building is essential and includes:

- creating guidelines or ground rules to address confidentiality and how peers can behave respectfully towards each other
- role modelling the way peers can share, and clarity over how peers may discuss topics
- reviewing meeting locations for privacy and accessibility

Online meetings also require safety procedures. Be sure to:

- create online rooms protected by passwords
- carefully share passwords only with the members
- tell members to keep the meetings and passwords protected
- advise members to keep kids out of the room during the meetings

Group Activity

1 Draw a map of the venue and mark the following on your map:

- Where in the building the group will meet
- Spaces in the building that are in use when your group meets, including by men
- Any available quiet spaces
- Bathrooms



- Facilities such as a kitchen, or tea and coffee making facilities
- Fire exits, fire extinguishers and first aid kits
- Where are the accessible facilities

2 Check the boxes below to see whether the venue has these features. Are there any other considerations you need to make for your group?

Feature	Yes	No	Considerations
Venue – being safe			
Is the venue easy to get to and find?			
Can we get there using public transport?			
Do other people use the venue?			
Will people feel comfortable with other people in the venue?			
Is it private enough?			
Is it large enough?			
Is it free or affordable?			
Is the venue accessible for people with disabilities?			
Is the venue staffed by people who could assist if there is a difficulty?			
Venue – feeling safe			
Does the venue feel welcoming?			
Do peers have any individual problems or issues with the venue?			
Is there access to a kitchen or refreshments?			
Is there space for people to take time out if they are finding things tough?			



CHOICE AND CONTROL

It is up to the individual peer to decide how she will participate in the peer support environment. Peers can withdraw from peer support for a period and return to it later without being penalised.

This includes control over:

- When she attends or take part in peer support
- What she chooses to share
- What support she wants to try
- What role she takes in a group or interaction
- How long she accesses peer support



Group Activity

For people to feel comfortable and safe, it is helpful to develop an agreement together.

1 Ask the following questions to prompt ideas about how people can feel like they have choice and control. Ask them to write their suggestions on sticky notes:

- How can we make sure people feel comfortable dipping in and out of our group?
- Is what we discuss confidential, and what does that mean?
- What could we use to allow people to feedback without having to speak to the whole group?

2 Once you have collected all the suggestions, read the list back to the group and agree which should become rules.

3 Put the agreement on the wall and tell the group that these are now the rules of your safe space.



4 Review and refresh the rules regularly to make sure they stay up to date. Go through the rules with new members so that they are familiar with them and can contribute to them or raise any concerns.

Suggestion of group agreement

We, women that have survived sexual harassment in the workplace, members of this group, agree that:

We keep confidentiality
We listen and speak
We are respectful and kind to each other
We validate and encourage each other
We do not judge each other
We do not interrupt each other
We do not have parallel conversations

TWO-WAY INTERACTIONS

The interactions between peers are of reciprocity or mutual support with both giving and receiving support. At different points in time, peers may give or receive more support depending on their circumstances.

Group Activity

Get to know each other better and explore what group members would like to offer or share.

1 Tell people to ask others about their strengths, skills, and interests. This activity can be done in a group or in pairs.



2 Ask them to draw or write notes on a piece of paper.

3 If people are comfortable doing so, you could share these with the group.

4 Also talk about what each one could do to show that they care, or how they would like to be treated in certain situations.

Suggestion of two-way interactions values

- Listening
- Speaking
- Being patient
- Validating
- Encouragement
- Sharing some food and coffee
- No interruption
- No parallel conversations

HUMAN CONNECTION

Peers actively acknowledge that they have a connection with each other based on having experiences in common and they may have a better understanding of one another than other people in their lives.

Peers act with intentional kindness towards each other. They understand, emotionally support, and care for each other. Through the connection, they may come to feel less isolated and feel that they are part of a supportive community.

Group Activity

Explore what behaviours or actions your group feel are appropriate in peer support, in a friendship, or never.



- 1 Discuss different behaviours or actions. Write on sticky notes in which circumstances these are appropriate. In peer support, in friendships outside of peer support, or never?
- 2 Draw your own interlinking circles to place the behaviours and actions into the three different categories.
- 3 By the end of the activity, you should have clear which behaviours and actions will be appropriate in your peer support setting and how to support human connection in your group.

Suggestion of human connection values

- Respect
- Serenity
- Smiling
- Kindness
- Caring of each other
- Timekeeping
- Confidentiality
- Avoiding advising
- No judgement
- Commitment

FREEDOM TO BE ONESELF

The ability to express themselves freely without fear of judgement is necessary for peers to be able to share difficult issues and experiences and to feel comfortable in doing so. Peer support allows them to feel their normality in contrast with having been discriminated against and harassed.



It is important that the group keep intersectionality in mind and be aware that SHW is a form of discrimination.

Group Activity

- 1 Discuss what barriers there will be for people attending your group, and how they might be overcome.
- 2 Write barriers on sticky notes. These could be your personal barriers or barriers that you think other people may experience.
- 3 Share these barriers by sticking them on a wall in a line.
- 4 Work as a group to identify ways in which these barriers could be overcome. Write these ideas on sticky notes and stick them next to the barrier.

Suggestion of solutions for barriers

- Create different groups in different languages
- Set the best day/time for the biggest number of women interested
- Offer childcare
- Have some food available
- Save budget for helping with their travels
- Call members to have their feedback and encourage them as well
- Perform games with questions to encourage participants





PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT GROUPS DECISIONS

Five broad categories of decisions will shape what your peer support project will look like.

LEVEL OF FACILITATION

The need for a facilitator depends on the type of peer support being delivered. More structured forms of peer support, such as projects that include educational courses, have a greater need for a facilitator to maintain that structure.

In projects that use facilitation, the facilitator role consists of some or all the following aspects:

- Practical running of the project
- Facilitating activities and discussions
- Safeguarding and resolving disagreements
- Information sharing and signposting

Group Activity

This activity is for the woman who has decided to have specific facilitator role in their peer support. The aim of this activity is to explore what types of facilitation are needed.

- 1 Draw three circles on a large piece of paper and label them Not Important, Less Important, and Important.
- 2 Discuss the qualities that your group will need from facilitation.
- 3 Write the qualities directly on the circles or on sticky notes and then stick them on the appropriate circles.



Suggestion of how facilitators should be

- Aware of confidentiality
- Aware of safety
- Empathetic
- Non-judgmental
- Punctual
- Organised
- Respectful
- Friendly
- A listener

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP

Defining a leadership type involves making three decisions:

- peer leadership or non-peer leadership?
- leadership training or not?
- paid or voluntary leadership positions?

Group Activity

Think a little further about the leadership your project will require.

1 Take the diagram from the last activity as your previous answers will help you with the four following questions. Discuss each question below, writing down your thoughts if you wish to.

2 Designated leader or collective leadership? Do you feel the qualities you have identified can be found in one person, or would it be more useful to share out the roles needed? Are there roles that you could give to people who wish to develop their confidence and skills?



3 Peer or non-peer leadership? Is it essential for the person or people in the leadership roles to also have shared experience of SHW. If so, why?

4 Training or no training? What training might the people in leadership roles require?

5 Paid or voluntary? Which roles should be paid and which voluntary? Why?

Suggestion for leadership

- Two women facilitators for a group: one for leading the group and one for supporting the organisation of the group's activities
- It would be beneficial if the woman leading the group was someone who has experienced SHW
- These leadership positions should be voluntary
- Facilitators should be recruited among members who already have some knowledge on SHW
- The union should offer short training for the people who take leadership roles, with the support of partner organisations if it is needed
- The union should offer individual support to the facilitators, as well as assisting them with the necessary material conditions.

THE FOCUS OF SESSIONS

Meetings can be social, educational, or based on activities. Some of them have an emphasis on experience sharing, often in the form of workshops or training. Others are based around an activity such as gardening or cooking, or informal socialising. Some are hybrid.



Group Activity

Come up with some activities for your peer support group. You can do this activity individually and then feedback together, or you can complete it together as a group.

1 Thinking about what you do in a typical week, write down the things you enjoy doing, the things you don't enjoy doing and anything that you'd like to do more of or you don't currently get to do.

2 As a group, consider whether you might bring the activities that you like or that are missing into your peer support in the future

Suggestion of sessions focus

- Focus on sharing experiences of social and emotional distress
- Cycles of 10 to 12 sessions
- Creating the bond on the first session and following a path of themes
- Alternate the themes of the sessions, e.g. one session about patriarchy, another session about cycles of abuse, a third session about coping mechanisms for self esteem and self care, following up on the feedback
- Give the control to the participants, they should suggest the journey

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP

Decisions on how to define membership of a peer support project are closely linked to who is considered a peer within the context of a particular project.

Membership decisions tend to be made based on the following criteria:



- Type of mental health issues – open to anyone experiencing social and emotional distress or dedicated to specific diagnoses
- Inclusion of carers – accepts carers as project members
- Identity characteristics – membership based on identity characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability
- Stage of recovery – accepts members that had reached a certain stage of recovery, particularly if they feel this is needed to ensure the safety of peers or due to the nature of the project
- Training – requires peers to undergo training prior to joining peer support.

Group Activity

Think through who will take part in your peer support, who it is not appropriate for and whether there are any people who may need extra support to take part.

1 Discuss how the group would like membership to work.

2 Record the outcome of the discussion in the way that works best for the group. Ensure that you are all clear on why specific people are or are not able to take part in the peer support.

Suggestion of membership

- This peer support is designed to serve women union members from all branches
- These women are victims/survivors of SHW and at any age



- The union should refer those who do not fit these criteria to a more appropriate organisation
- This peer support is inclusive, bringing together LGBT+ refugee, migrant and disabled women
- This peer support does not require training for peers to engage in it fully

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

Your peer-to-peer programme will need organisational support such as:

- Infrastructural: includes practical support that helps establish peer support and encourages it to thrive in practice
- Safety structures: being part of a wider organisational structure provides peer support projects with clear lines of accountability and procedures when peer leaders or other peers have concerns regarding safety or want to signpost someone to additional support
- Training and supervision for peers taking on leadership roles

Group Activity

- 1 Map the individuals, groups and organisations that have been helpful to your projects and can be helpful to your peer-to-peer support group.
- 2 Discuss how each of them could support your group. Use sticky notes, or write directly onto the circles.
- 3 Once you have identified these resources and partners, consider:



- Which ones have been the most helpful?
- Which may be missing from the list?
- Which do you want to have a discussion with?

Suggestions of partners to consider

- Your council
- Your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)
- Your local MP
- Your funder
- Your community library
- Coffee shops nearby
- Other local community and voluntary sector groups and organisations
- National organisations and websites that provide information and advice



REFERENCES

- (12) Avina, C. and O'Donohue, W. (2002). Sexual harassment and PTSD: Is sexual harassment diagnosable trauma?. *J. Traum. Stress*, 15: 69-75. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014387429057>
- (13) UK Public General Acts. (2010 c. 15). Part 2. Chapter 2. Other prohibited conduct. Section 26. Harassment. Equality Act 2010. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/26>
- (14) ACAS. (2022). If you're treated unfairly at work. Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. <https://www.acas.org.uk/if-youre-treated-unfairly-at-work/being-victimised>
- (15) NHS. (2022). Breathing exercises for stress. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/>
- (16) Side by Side Research Consortium. (2017). *Developing peer support in the community: a toolkit*. London: Mind.



Sexual Harassment in the
Workplace -
A toolkit for UK unions
LAWRS
London, 2022
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7390881

**Thank you for
using this guide.**

www.lawrs.org.uk
lawrs@lawrs.org.uk
0207 336 0888 / 0844 264 0682

Author: Carla Mendonça
Editor: Gisela Valle
Design by LAWRS Communication
Team

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to the following
collaborators that made the
development of this toolkit possible:

Dolores Modern (LAWRS)
Elizabeth Jiménez-Yáñez (LAWRS)
Laura Wormington (IWGB)
Isabela Miranda Gomes (LAWRS)
Maria Isabel Henao Trip (LAWRS)
Priscila Brandão (LAWRS)
Ceana Mackenzie-Brodie

