

The Cost of Gender-Based Violence & Harassment (GBVH) to Kenya's Private Sector

Research Report 2025

"At the heart of every statistic in this report is a person who walked into work today not feeling safe."

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Executive Summary

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) continues to impose significant human and economic costs on Kenya's private sector. This research, commissioned by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), offers the first evidence-based estimate of the financial and productivity impact of GBVH in Kenyan workplaces.

This study focuses primarily on gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) experienced within Kenya's private sector and recognises the broader international definition of violence and harassment, as set out under ILO Convention 190. It also captured related behaviours—including workplace bullying, non-gender-based harassment, physical violence, and technology-facilitated harassment. These related behaviours were included to capture the full organisational environment in which GBVH may occur and influence risk. While they informed contextual analysis and interpretation, the cost model itself is based solely on GBVH-specific experiences in line with the study design and international frameworks.

The findings confirm that GBVH is not only a human rights concern—it represents a material business and economic risk affecting productivity, profitability, workforce wellbeing, and national competitiveness.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this study was to quantify the economic and productivity cost of GBVH to Kenya's private sector, determine prevalence, and identify risk patterns across organisational and demographic groups. The study also reviewed existing workplace response mechanisms, assessed the enabling policy and regulatory landscape, and identified priority actions for businesses, government, and development partners to reduce GBVH and strengthen prevention, accountability, and support systems.

Methodology

A mixed-methods design was used, combining quantitative and qualitative research. Data was collected from 3,523 employees across 26 companies, supported by 26 key informant interviews and two focus group discussions. The employee survey, policy reviews, and statistical analysis (including propensity score matching) enabled financial cost estimation. Ethical clearance and confidentiality standards were upheld throughout.

Key Findings

- **Prevalence:** 33.2% of employees experienced at least one form of GBVH, and 53.6% had observed it in their workplace. The most reported forms were verbal harassment (19%) and threats to job security (17%).
- **Perpetration:** 35% of respondents acknowledged engaging in behaviour constituting GBVH—highlighting its cultural normalisation in workplaces.
- **Risk Factors:** Women, junior/support staff, employees on short-term contracts, and those working in construction and financial services faced the highest vulnerability. Over half (57%) of cases involved persons in authority.

- **Underreporting:** 86% of incidents went unreported due to fear of retaliation, stigma, and lack of trust in reporting pathways.
- **Policy Gaps:** Most companies lacked standalone GBVH policies, and existing mechanisms were inconsistently communicated, applied, or trusted.

Economic Impact

Employees who experienced GBVH lost an average of 24.3 working days annually, valued at KES 92,185 (USD 683.76) per employee. Across Kenya's private sector, the total annual cost of GBVH is estimated at:

KES 95.5 billion (USD 0.71 billion) — equivalent to approximately 1% of GDP.

This includes:

- **KES 67.0 billion** in productivity losses
- **KES 28.5 billion** in direct HR-related costs

These losses manifest through absenteeism, presenteeism, turnover, decreased morale, and rising ESG and legal compliance risks.

Implications

Addressing GBVH is both a moral obligation and a strategic business priority. The cost of inaction outweighs the investment needed for prevention, training, accountability, and response systems. Safe workplaces strengthen employee wellbeing, operational efficiency, and corporate reputation - enhancing Kenya's progress toward gender equality, ESG alignment, and sustainable economic growth.

Recommendations

The study points towards:

- Adoption of standalone GBVH policies with survivor-centred reporting channels
- Training and awareness across all workforce levels
- Leadership accountability linked to governance and culture metrics
- Strengthened data, reporting systems, and monitoring frameworks
- Cross-sector coordination aligned with ILO C190, the GBV Roadmap (2020–2026), and evolving ESG standards

Conclusion

GBVH is a preventable barrier to productivity, dignity, and economic advancement. Companies that act now can reduce operational risk while improving retention, trust, and long-term performance. By prioritising respectful and safe workplaces, Kenya's private sector has an opportunity to lead the continent in responsible business — demonstrating that protecting people and improving profit are not competing interests but mutually reinforcing commitments.