

**Gender-Based Violence and  
Trauma-Informed Approaches to  
Workplace Sexual Harassment Claims**

Presented by Tracy Porteous, Executive Director  
Ending Violence Association of BC

**SHARP**  
WORKPLACES | Sexual Harassment Advice,  
Response, and Prevention for  
Workplaces

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**We Thank and Honour the First People of This Land**

SHARP Workplaces offices are located on the traditional, unceded, and ancestral territories of the hə́nq̓əmiḥə́m (Hulqumínum) speaking x̣ẉməθḳẉəỵəm (Musqueam) and sə́liłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and the Sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh sníchim (Squamish Snichim) speaking Sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) Nation.

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**Outline**

- Social Context of Workplace Sexual Harassment
- Impacts of this Kind of Trauma
- Barriers to Disclosing
- Trauma Informed Approaches

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### A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

- Use of gendered language
- Person who was harmed (complainant/victim/survivor)
- Person who caused harm (responder/perpetrator)

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### Trigger Warning



Discussing topics like sexual harm/violence.  
Please reach out for support with someone you trust if this presentation brings up difficult feelings

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### SOCIAL CONTEXT



#MeToo



- Greater understanding of how **widespread** and **common** workplace gender-based violence, harassment, and bullying (GBVHB) are
- 61% of Canadians report following news related to #MeToo
- Over half of Canadians think about gender relations in the workplace differently following #MeToo

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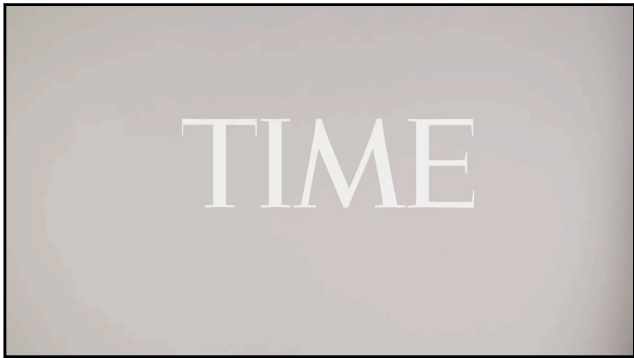
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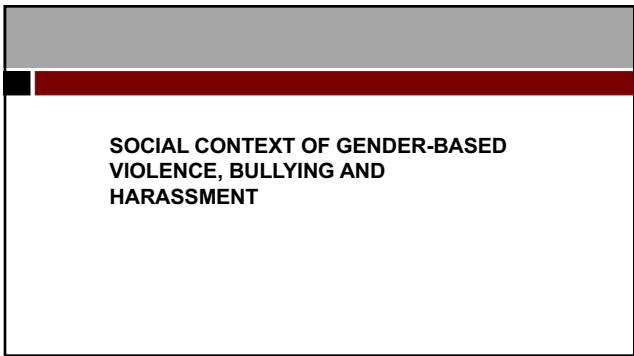
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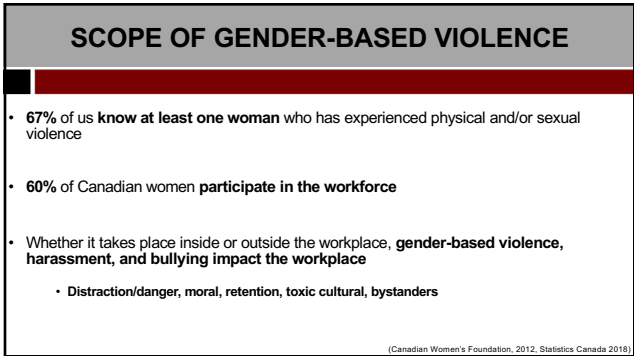
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**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE**

- **More than half** of survey respondents who experienced harassment or violence (non-sexual and sexual) experienced it from someone in a **position of authority**
- **44%** of survey respondents who experienced workplace harassment or violence (non-sexual and sexual) experienced it from a **co-worker**

(Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017)

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**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE**

- **Men** experience more **workplace harassment**, while **women** experience more **workplace sexual harassment** and **workplace sexual violence**.
- **People of colour** and **people with disabilities** are more likely to experience **workplace harassment** than other groups.

(Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017)

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**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE**



of women have been **sexually harassed** in the workplace



of women have taken steps to **avoid unwanted sexual advances** at work

(Angus Reid, 2018)

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**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE**

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- Approximately **47% of LGB, Q, 2S employees** have experienced harassment and/or violence in the workplace **related to their sexual orientation**
  
- Approximately **80%-90% of trans- and gender non binary employees** have experienced harassment and/or violence in the workplace **related to their gender identity and expression**

(Catalyst, 2015 as cited in Bucik, 2016; James et al., 2016)

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**INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AT WORK**

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- **30%** of all police-reported violent crime in Canada is intimate partner violence
  
- In Canada, more than **50%** of intimate partner violence victims/survivors shared that the **violence extended to or near their workplace**
  
- **82%** reported that the **violence negatively affected their work performance**

(Statistics Canada, 2018 & Chief Public Health Officer Report, 2016)

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**INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AT WORK**

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- **38%** said the **violence impacted their ability to get to work.**
  
- **8.5%** lost a job because of intimate partner violence

(Statistics Canada, 2018 & Chief Public Health Officer Report, 2016)

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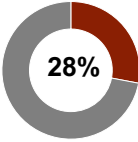
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**SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE WORKPLACE**



28% of women have been subject to non-consensual sexual touching in the workplace, in **other words, sexual assault**

(Angus Reid, 2018)

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**Trauma**

An event that “is **extremely upsetting**, at least temporarily **overwhelms the individual’s internal resources**, and **produces lasting psychological symptoms**”

(Briere & Scott, 2015, p. 10)

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**Trauma-Informed Approaches**

1. Understand the pervasiveness of trauma
2. Promote environments of healing and recovery
3. Consciously seek to do no harm and provide services which will not inadvertently re-traumatize

(University of Buffalo: Buffalo Centre for Social Research, 2021)

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### Trauma-Informed Approach




Provide **choice** whenever possible



Explain the **reason** for a process or procedure



Ascertain and **reduce exposure** to triggers



**Adapt** processes and procedures as necessary

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### Intersectionality

Intersectional analysis is crucial in our efforts to create safer workplaces and communities

- Takes a **holistic approach** to human experience
- Explores **new approaches**
- Enhances **empathy**
- Encourages **inclusivity**

(Women and Gender Equality, 2019)

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### GBV-RELATED TRAUMA



**Fight**



**Flight**



**Freeze**

(©BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority)

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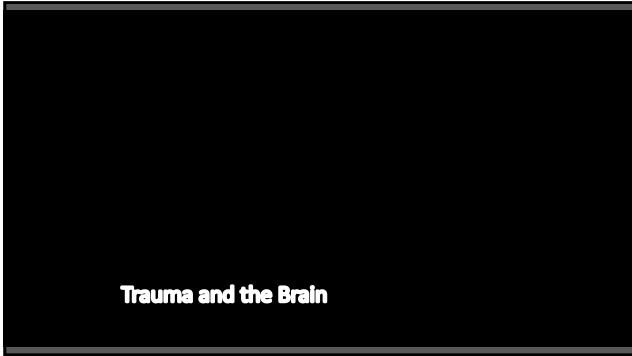
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**Impacts of Trauma**

<p>Severity of what happened doesn't determine severity of impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Impacts are individual</li> <li>▪ Anyone can be traumatized by an experience, but not everyone is traumatized</li> <li>▪ Do not presume the impact of the harm</li> <li>▪ Death by 1000 slashes</li> </ul>	<p>A person who has been harmed may experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Humiliation/Shame</b></li> <li>▪ Constant fear</li> <li>▪ Shame</li> <li>▪ Hopelessness</li> <li>▪ Emotional overwhelm</li> </ul>
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**Shame**

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**Humiliation and Shame**

**Humiliation** is traumatic and often associated with exercising power – results in a loss of the ability to trust others.

It is argued that these consequences are serious and long-lasting.

**Shame** is a state of mind where as **humiliation** as an act perpetrated against a person or group.

Recovery is made more likely if one's **therapist** acknowledges the specificity of humiliation, the impossibility of reversing a humiliating act and the importance of focussing on the consequences of humiliation.

Losing Trust in the World: Humiliation and its Consequences, P. Leask, 2013, US National Library of Medicine

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**Please Think About**

Your last sexual experience

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**Poll**

How many people feel:

- reluctant to share
- embarrassed to talk about this
- feel its none of my business
- feel angry that I even asked

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**Impacts of Trauma**

Financial

Spiritual

Behavioral

Emotional & Psychological

Interpersonal

Physical

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**Trauma, Race, and Workplace Sexual Harassment**

1. Perspectives of Women of Colour
2. The Harasser
3. The Legal System

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### Reporting

Women of Colour are 10 x less likely than white women to report sexual harassment to a supervisor.

This cited study found that courts place the burden on people being harassed to report their complaints to their employer through internal channels.

- Study found that Women of Colour disproportionately do not use these mechanisms, for numerous reasons, which means they are more vulnerable to their employers possessing a defense when they take their complaint to the courts.
- The study also found that Women of Colour were more likely to bypass internal complaints procedures and go directly to a lawyer, in light of workplace barriers identified

Tanya Katerndahl, "A Colour Race Framework: Empirical Research Project: Sexual Harassment & (and) the Internal Complaints Black Box" (2006) 29-3 UC Davis L Rev 1225.

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### Barriers to Reporting



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### Disclosing and Reporting



**Disclosing** is telling someone about what happened (e.g., friend, family member, support worker)



**Reporting** is making an official or formal report to authorities (e.g., police, workplace)

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**Disclosing and Reporting**



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**Barriers to Disclosing & Reporting**

- Inadequate institutional responses, or prior poor experiences
- Known perpetrator
- Fear for safety
- Fear of being 'outed'

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**Barriers to Disclosing & Reporting**

- Fear of losing their job
- Fear of story being a reflection of an entire community
- Community stigma/perpetrator part of community
- Fear of not being believed, or being blamed

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**Barriers to Disclosing in the Workplace**

- Language barriers
- Concern about legal status
- Social isolation
- Stigma against workers who are 2SLGBTQ
- Lack of available and/or culturally safe resources

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**Barriers to Disclosing**

People who have been harmed in the workplace face **similar barriers** to coming forward, in addition to **unique workplace considerations**

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**Barriers to Reporting in the Workplace**

41% of people who reported experiencing workplace harassment, sexual harassment or violence said **"no attempt was made to resolve the issue"**

Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017)

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**Being Trauma-Informed**

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1. Trauma-Informed
2. Strengths Based
3. Survivor-Centered
4. Pro Agency
5. Holistic
6. Culturally Sensitive
7. Collaborative

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**Trauma-Informed**

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- Recognizes the historical, political, societal and cultural context in which sexual harm takes place – **not isolated**
- Recognizes how our beliefs and values have been shaped by the context in which we live – **victim blaming**
- Recognizes our own victimization and how this may impact here – **our own trauma**
- Includes an understanding of the trauma resulting from sexual harm and the important aspects of trauma recovery – **serious and life altering – 1000 slashes**

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**Trauma-Informed**

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- Slow down the process, **you can't be busy when you meet**
- Your tone, **quiet is better**
- Verbal and non verbal communication, **don't cross arms and legs**
- Creating opportunities **for client** micro and macro decision making
- You don't lead, client/survivor leads

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**Strengths-Based**



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**Strengths-Based**

- Recognizes the strengths of the survivor, **previous survival skills**
- Uses these strengths to aid in process
- Is survivor the lead, **control is everything**
- Avoids victim blaming language, **at all times**
- Creates hope by focusing on what is or has been successful for the survivor in the past

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**Survivor/Client Centered**



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**Survivor/Client Centered**

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- Recognizes the survivor as the expert – **even with survivors with long trauma histories**
- **Non-directive**, even if risk/concerns still exist, however you may need to step in, in rare situations
- You create a comfortable, non-judgmental environment by demonstrating genuineness, empathy and unconditional positive regard
- Focus on helping survivors find their own solutions as well

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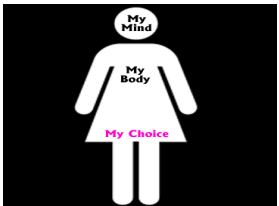

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**Pro-Agency**

INFORMED	DECISION-MAKING
	

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**Pro-Agency**

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- Respects survivors right to decide for themselves
- Trusts survivors ability to make decisions
- Emphasis on providing information, from a variety of viewpoints so that the survivor can make informed choices
- Respects survivors choices
- Encourages survivors to take as much control over their lives as possible

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**Holistic Perspective**



A Venn diagram with three overlapping circles: a blue circle at the top labeled 'Spirit', a green circle at the bottom left labeled 'Mind', and a red circle at the bottom right labeled 'Body'. The central area where all three circles overlap is yellow and contains the text 'Wellness Wholeness'.

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**Holistic Perspective**

- Takes the whole person into account
- Upholds that all aspects of a survivor's needs, psychological, physical, emotional, spiritual and social be taken into account when working with them

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**Cultural Sensitivity**



An illustration showing a globe in the center, surrounded by several hands of different colors (blue, yellow, red, purple, green, orange) reaching out to hold it.

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### Cultural Sensitivity

- Begins with the understanding that there are differences among cultures
- Places value on diversity – ask about strength and concerns
- Recognizes that cultural differences as well as similarities exist, but doesn't assign value (i.e. better or worse, right or wrong) to those differences
- Requires all of us to look at our own biases
- Doesn't allow cultural differences to become the basis for criticism and judgments

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### Cultural Sensitivity

- Views all people as unique and respects that their experiences, beliefs, values and language affect their perceptions and meanings that are attached to their experiences
- Recognizes the importance of understanding the historical and geographical experiences of culture
- Recognizes language barriers, good enough English

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### Collaborative

Together  
Everyone  
Achieves  
More



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**Collaborative**

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- Requires clear established and maintained procedures/protocols that respond to the physical, emotional, medical and legal needs of survivors/clients and spells out the various roles
- We want to empower survivors to actively participate in their own care and resolution
- Recognizes the importance of the client/survivor receiving support throughout every aspect of the process

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**Collaborative**

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- Needs of survivors are best served when direct service is provided by a skilled and **coordinated team** of individuals in a comprehensive way, **you can't do this alone**
- Coordinated community responses and effective partnerships between various organizations meeting the emotional, physical, medical and legal needs of the survivors are essential
- Requires respecting the different roles we each play
- Provides setting to talk about what is working and what isn't

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**SUPPORTS AVAILABLE**

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- **VictimLinkBC**  
Call 1.800.563.0808  
Text 604.836.6381
- **Ending Violence Association of BC**  
[www.endingviolence.org/needhelp](http://www.endingviolence.org/needhelp)
- **WorkSafeBC Crisis Support Line**  
Call 1.800.624.2928 (toll free)

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**Last Word**

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**Receiving a Disclosure**

- L** ▪ Listen
- I** ▪ Inquire
- V** ▪ Validate
- E** ▪ Enhance Safety
- S** ▪ Support

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**LISTEN**

- Listen actively both verbally and non-verbally
- Be patient; let the survivor set the pace
- Mirror language
- Avoid asking unnecessary questions/press for details
- Respect the survivor's personal space
- Avoid overreacting

"I'm here to listen."

"What I hear you saying is..."

"Thank you for sharing with me what you have gone through."

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**INQUIRE**

- Phrase your questions as invitations to speak "What would you like to talk about?"
- Ask open-ended questions "How do you feel about that?"
- Repeat or restate "Could you tell me more about that?"
- Reflect feelings "It sounds as if you are feeling angry about that..."
- Explore as needed "You seem to be saying that..."
- Ask for clarification
- Help identify and express needs and concerns
- Summarize

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**VALIDATE**

- Assure the survivor it was not their fault "It's not your fault. You are not to blame."
- Validate experiences "It's okay to feel what you're feeling. This is totally normal and valid."
- Normalize responses "You are not alone and support is available if you want."
- Reassure the survivor that you'll help them get the support and with next steps

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**ENHANCE SAFETY**

- Assess your client's safety in the workplace and community "Would you like to discuss a safety plan?"
- If a client is worried about their safety, take them seriously "I'm concerned about your safety. Let's discuss what to do so you won't be harmed."
- Make a safety plan
- Ensure confidentiality

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**SUPPORT**

- Focus on immediate needs such as safety or workplace accommodations
- Recognize their resiliency in sharing
- Identify existing supports
- Help them regain control
- Refer to resources for specialized support

“What would help you feel safer right now at work?”

“I would be happy to help you get connected to talk to someone.”

“There are services that can provide more information and ongoing support.”

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**Trauma-Informed Approach**

**Trauma-informed:** An approach that recognizes that experiencing gender-based violence, sexual harassment or assault can often be traumatic and have lasting impacts.

(Status of Women Canada Report, 2018)

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