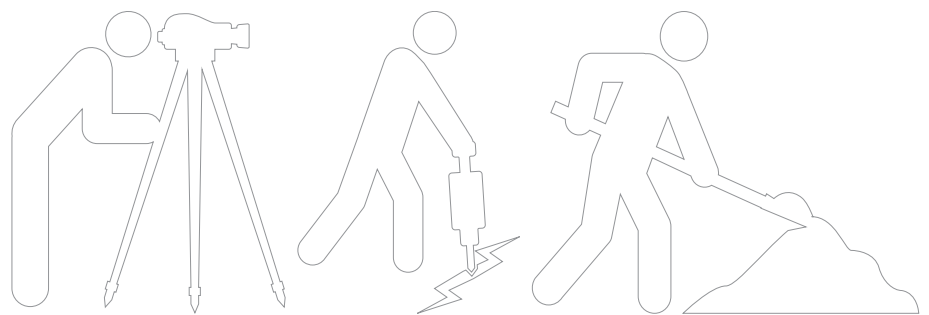




Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Mines and Petroleum**  
Resources Safety

WORKSHOP PLANNER SERIES

# Gender and safety in mining



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## Using this workshop planner series

For any organisation interested in developing a resilient safety and health culture, management commitment is critical and, to be credible, must be demonstrated. It is also important that the organisation has a clear picture of what sort of culture it wants to nurture.

This workshop planner series is designed for use by senior managers, including the board of directors. It should initially be used to identify gender-related issues that may affect an organisation's health and safety performance. This information is then drawn upon to develop a strategy to address the workplace issues, which could range from the boardroom to shopfloor.

It is recognised that parts of the series could be adapted for wider workforce consultation within the strategy, but this is not their intended application. The series should be viewed as a management tool to raise awareness of issues relating to gender that affect safety on mine sites, and specifically identify areas of concern for the organisation's leadership.

Cultural change should be driven from the top and must engage the workforce to ensure its effectiveness. This workshop planner series is a good starting point to initiate discussions about gender and safety. If senior managers and directors do not feel comfortable with the topics or have limited experience in such a role, assistance from an experienced facilitator, particularly somebody with expertise in gender issues in the workplace, may help.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Overview

This *Workshop Planner Series on Gender and Safety in Mining* (Workshop Planner Series) responds to a number of cultural and human behavioural issues relating to gender that affect safety on mine sites. The series has been developed in response to participant feedback in workshops involving resource sector employees throughout Western Australia. These workshops were conducted as part of the 2010 Mines and Exploration Safety Roadshows hosted by the Resources Safety Division of the Department of Mines and Petroleum. The roadshow workshops explored the notion of “toughness in mining”.

A full report from the 2010 roadshow workshops is available on the Resources Safety website. As indicated in its response to the report, Resources Safety sees its role, as the regulator, is to raise awareness of the issues. Positive cultural change in an organisation must come from within the organisation, and requires management commitment and leadership.

## Intent

The Workshop Planner Series is designed to encourage senior management and professionals in an organisation to engage in discussions about a range of gender-related topics that affect workplace safety.

The series offers challenging and unique ways of raising awareness of, and perhaps addressing, gendered behaviours that can adversely affect safety outcomes in workplaces, but which management and professionals may not have the skills to address.

The intent of the Workshop Planner Series is not to help an organisation resolve specific gender-related issues in the workplace. The planners do not offer quick fix solutions to immediate problems or crises. The content should also not be used to develop formal training courses for employees.

Rather, the Workshop Planner Series is aimed at encouraging high-level discussion and debate about the role of gendered behaviours in determining safety outcomes in the workplace. After running a workshop, an organisation should be better equipped to make decisions about what management and key personnel can and should do to mitigate gendered behaviours that have a negative effect on safety performance and the workplace culture.

## Link between gender and safety

In the available research, we see a link between gender and safety. Expectations of how we should behave as men and women often encourage us to take risks. This link has been recognised and responded to in areas such as driving, professional sport, schooling and social activities (e.g. drinking, gambling). Gender plays such an important part in our lives. It is one of the key motivators for why we think and behave the way we do. Gender can often determine the experiences and opportunities we have available to us. It can also determine the choices we make.

When individuals disregard workplace procedures, or when they make a decision that is clearly in violation of what written policies tell them they should do, it is easy to lay blame. It is easy to see the individual as solely responsible for not having complied. When we look at the relationship between gender and safety, we try to understand how expectations of gender may, at times, be a more powerful motivator for human behaviours than any approved policy, procedure or process.

When a safety incident occurs because of “human error”, practices of gender can often be part of the cause. People may be behaving in ways which they and their colleagues feel are perfectly natural. In the wider culture we have expectations of how men and women should behave. However, these expected behaviours are not always safe behaviours. To the contrary, expectations of gender – of what it

means to be a “real man” or a “real woman” – often encourage people to take risks.

A lot has been written about the concept of a “safety culture” in the workplace. In developing an effective safety culture, there is widespread agreement that:

- safety concerns everyone and
- a focus on human factors and wider social and cultural issues is important.

A robust and sustainable safety culture therefore requires the involvement and commitment of management and senior personnel. It requires that attention is given to human behaviours that exist outside policies, procedures, rules, directives and compliance. Gender is an important part of a workplace's safety culture as it influences attitudes and responses to safety.

If there are examples of negative attitudes towards women, sexual harassment, homophobia or aggression occurring in your workplace, these will be affecting the safety and wellbeing of your people and placing stress on everyone involved. Your workplace culture may be encouraging displays of gender that encourage risk-taking. It may even be supporting or demanding such behaviours, either overtly or inadvertently. The first step in being able to respond to these issues is to raise awareness and to open the debate.

## Addressing cultural change

By working through the topics in the Workshop Planner Series, senior management is seeking to understand how well the organisation and its people currently recognise the important role that gender plays in safety. From there, you can make decisions about how to build on your strengths and improve on your weaknesses in this area, to ensure that perceptions and practices of gender do not encourage people to take risks at work.

Seeking to develop a better understanding of the relationship between gender and safety is not easy. Implementing actions that can ensure your leadership, safety personnel, key professionals and workforce can respond will take time and energy. The focus on gender and safety in the workplace is a long-term cultural change issue.

## Selection of workshop topics

The gender topics included in this Workshop Planner Series have been identified as significant topics of concern for safety in the workplace:

- Topic 1 – Gendered behaviours and workplace safety
- Topic 2 – Women and safety
- Topic 3 – Sexual harassment and safety
- Topic 4 – Homophobia and safety
- Topic 5 – Aggression and safety

These topics were raised in discussions with resource sector employees who attended the 2010 roadshow workshops. They are also identified in research as important gender practices and habits that affect the safety and well-being of people in the workplace. Resources Safety has sought external advice from experts in the field of gender and safety to help develop the content for these planners.

## Content of workshop planners

There is a dedicated workshop planner for each of the five topics. Each workshop planner contains discussion points, activities and action ideas. The content is designed to help an organisation develop and run a workshop to discuss and explore the topic at a high level.

The discussion points can be used as direct questions to generate debate about the issue and its potential influence on the organisation's safety performance. The activities are more interactive to encourage participants to go beyond discussion and see what else they can discover about the topic. The action ideas encourage participants to think beyond the workshop and come up with strategies to ensure the organisation continues to learn about and respond to the topic.

Each workshop planner provides background information on the topic and a short list of additional reading. The workshop organiser may wish to use this background information and access the additional reading to gain further knowledge about the topic before running the workshop. The reading lists are not exhaustive but provide a sample of information available.

## Preparing and running a workshop

You are advised to run a workshop focusing on Topic 1 first. The other four topics are closely related to this first topic, and an understanding of the link between gendered behaviours and workplace safety will help in later discussions on women and safety, sexual harassment and safety, homophobia and safety, and aggression and safety.

You should aim to put aside up to two hours to run a single workshop. The actual time required will depend on the discussion points and activities you decide to include in the workshop.

A maximum of ten participants should be invited to attend. This will allow enough time for people to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

The Workshop Planner Series is targeted at senior management, organisational development and training personnel, and appropriate professionals, such as occupational health and safety (OHS) and human resources (HR). Only people in these roles should be invited to attend the workshops. It is important in the early stages of discussions around these topics to understand the opinions and skills of those in leadership positions. The activities and discussion points included in the planners are not intended for use in general crew toolbox talks or meetings, although the specific materials used to target operations crews and junior employees may be developed as a result of running the initial workshop.

Once you have decided to run a workshop, assign the following roles and responsibilities:

- somebody to prepare all the materials required for the workshop, including a decision on which discussion points and activities to include
- a facilitator to help keep the discussions on track

- a time-keeper
- a scribe to make extensive notes on participants' comments.

There is no expectation that anybody in a workshop group should be an "expert" on the gender-related issue or the way that gender affects an organisation's workplace culture. The workshop should be set up to allow people to share and discuss whatever knowledge and opinions they have on the topic, without any expectation that anybody will be able to give advice on how to solve issues. It is up to individual organisations to determine if they require additional external expertise to provide further and more detailed assistance while running the workshop.

## Workshop materials

At a minimum, you will need the following materials to run a workshop:

- flipcharts
- post-it notes
- pens and paper.

You may wish to develop your own PowerPoint presentation to help guide the discussions and activities.

## Feedback

We recognise that we are seeking to address very new issues. We are keen to hear about the experiences of organisations that have run the workshops. This will help us make decisions about how to amend the material we have provided to date, and develop additional resources if required.

After completing a workshop, please send comments to the Manager Safety Communications at [RSDComms@dmp.wa.gov.au](mailto:RSDComms@dmp.wa.gov.au)

# 1

## GENDERED BEHAVIOURS AND WORKPLACE SAFETY

### Research resources

The following resources will help you to understand the link between gender and safety in more detail.

BEAGEN, B. & SAUNDERS, S., 2005, Occupations of masculinity: Producing gender through what men do and don't do: *Journal of Occupational Science*, Vol. 12, No. 3: 161-169.

HARRIS, C., JENKINS, M., & GLASER, D., 2006, Gender differences in risk assessment: Why do women take fewer risks than men?: *Judgment and Decision Making*, Vol. 1, No. 1: 48-63.

LAPLONGE, D., 2011, Roadshow report: Toughness in the workplace (prepared for Resources Safety Division, Department of Mines and Petroleum): Factive, Perth.

MUMBY, D., 1998, Organizing men: Power, discourse and the social construction of masculinity(s) in the workplace: *Communication Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 2: 164-183.

PAWLOWSKI, B., ATWAL, R., & DUNBAR, R., 2008, Sex differences in everyday risk-taking behavior in humans: *Evolutionary Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 1: 29-42.

### Background information

In the research, there is a recognised and clear link between gender and safety – the way we understand and perform our gender affects our safety. This link has been explored in a range of occupations, including nursing, fire-fighting, the military, space exploration, professional sport and teaching. It is only recently that we have started to think about the link between gender and safety for people working in mining.

“Gendered behaviours” is a term used to describe the behaviours that are affected, influenced or determined by gender. It is important to understand that when we talk about “gender”, we are talking about both men and women. Importantly, we are also talking about the way men and women are expected to behave.

Various reasons have been suggested to explain why gender affects our behaviours. Some think it is related to the brain or genetics. Others refer to testosterone or biological factors. Still others make the link between what the culture expects of us and the way we then behave as men and women.

The research looking at the link between gender and safety takes a wide range of perspectives. Regardless of the approach taken, the conclusion is always the same – men, more so than women, engage in at-risk behaviour because of their gender. Men, in particular, are often expected or encouraged to behave in certain ways that might be considered naturally masculine, but which can actually put themselves and others at risk.

In discussions about why men act the way they do, it is usual to hear people use words like “testosterone” or “genetics”. Sometimes we refer to the man’s supposed natural position as the protector, hunter, or father. Research shows, however, that the biggest motivator for men today to act tough is the fear of being seen as not tough. Men who act in ways we might see as “soft” tend to get ridiculed. So men act tough because this is a way of not being labelled a “girl”.

Men may feel they need to drink more alcohol, drive faster, ignore health issues, refuse to back down in an aggressive situation, all because of the belief that men should act tough. On mine sites, this can translate into men thinking they can “beat” large and heavy pieces of machinery, refusing to wear protective equipment because it makes them look like a “wuss”, or carrying heavy pieces of equipment to show how tough and strong they are.

You are probably accustomed to seeing gendered behaviours in practice every day. Because gendered behaviours are usually considered to be normal, however, we often pay little or no attention to them. We only notice them when they don’t fit with the norm.

Workplaces are recognised to be gendered. By this, we mean that they are not just spaces in which gendered people interact – they are also spaces in which gender is (re)produced. Imagine what it is like for a young boy or girl. They learn gender

in school, with their peers and at home. The workplace offers a similar environment for adult men and women. There are certain gendered behaviours that your workplace will be encouraging and certain behaviours it will be discouraging.

“Hyper-masculinity” refers to what some might consider to be an excessive display of masculinity. Hyper-masculine behaviours include aggression, bullying, intimidation, violence and verbal harassment. In large groups of men, in particular, there may be a desire or compulsion to engage in “hyper-masculine” behaviours to show-off, dominate others, control a space or show strength. In certain contexts, particularly where a workplace or social setting is heavily masculinised, we can also see examples of women acting out in hyper-masculine ways.

Despite the recognised link between gender and safety, very few safety personnel are trained in how to integrate this link into their daily work. Very few mining companies consider gender to be an important part of their safety management system. Gender is usually only considered to be an issue that relates to women and the ability of women to have access to career opportunities. In areas where we have seen a focus on the link between gender and safety (e.g. road safety, street gangs, sport), we have seen reductions in at-risk behaviours. And yet it is rare that we find any discussion about gender when it comes to mine safety. Resources Safety’s roadshows in 2010 were the first concerted effort to explore the issue of “toughness in mining” across the Western Australian mining industry.

The emergence of research to address the link between gender and safety in the mining and resources sector is now seeing the development of some unique approaches to addressing at-risk gendered behaviours. The aim of this first workshop in the Workshop Planner Series is to encourage you to start to think about the link between gender and safety in your workplace, and decide on how best to respond.

## Activity 1 Understanding gendered behaviours (30 minutes)

### Aim

It is important to get a sense of what people in the group understand by the term “gendered behaviours”. You should seek to have an open and honest conversation, with no judgement as to what people know or do not know. Some participants may have very little understanding. Others may have an idea but are not quite sure. The idea is for you to see how the key people in your organisation understand gendered behaviours and how these affect safety. This will help you identify the gaps in your organisation’s understanding and allow you to make decisions about how these gaps can best be closed.

### Discussion points

- What do you think is meant by the term “gendered behaviours”?
- Do you think gendered behaviours are natural? If yes, why do you think this is so? If no, what are the alternative causes?
- What other factors might be motivating men to act a particular way or women to act a particular way?
- Can you think of examples of women who perform what we might typically see as men’s behaviours, and vice versa? Why do you think this happens?
- Why do you think men like to act tough?
- What is “hyper-masculinity”?

### Activity idea

The purpose of this activity is to start thinking more closely about the specific kinds of gendered behaviours that we might expect of men and women.

Firstly, make a list of all the behaviours you can think of that would be typical of men. What kinds of things do men do? What do they say? How do they act?

Next, make a list of all the behaviours you can think of that would be typical of women. What kinds of things do women do? What do they say? How do they act?

When you have these two lists and they are visible, discuss the following:

- Are there any behaviours that are exclusive to men or women? Why do you think this is the case?
- What are the possible consequences for a man if he behaves in a way that we would only expect of a woman?
- What are the possible consequences for a woman if she behaves in a way that we would only expect of a man?
- Do you feel that gender limits our behaviours or does it provide us with options, or both?

### Action planning

Before you start to think about how your safety personnel and crews might benefit from a better understanding of the link between gender and safety, it would be worth ensuring that senior personnel in your organisation understand this link fully.

- What could you do to further your organisation’s understanding of gendered behaviours?
- Who are the key people in your organisation who would benefit from a better understanding of the relationship between gendered behaviours and the workplace culture?



## Activity 2 Gendered behaviours in the workplace (40 minutes)

### Aim

This activity is a bit of a challenge! You will be asked to do something that you are likely to have had no training in. You are going to see if you can recognise specific gendered behaviours being practised in the workplace. While there may be particular ways of behaving as a man or a woman that are considered to be normal in the wider society, your workplace might have its own unique ways of showing gender. Why is the workplace an important part in determining the way we act as men and women? And what is going on in your workplace?

### Discussion points

- How do you see that gendered behaviours might affect a workplace?
- In what ways could a workplace encourage or discourage certain gendered behaviours?
- Why are gendered behaviours important to a workplace?

### Activity idea

For this activity, you will need to head out into the workplace to interact with your work colleagues. Try to choose as many locations as are convenient and try to interact with a wide range of work colleagues.

When you are out in the workplace, observe and talk to your work colleagues. You don't have to let them know what you are doing, but you may if you wish. The idea is just to observe and chat to your colleagues, but you are now trying to see them as "gendered beings". This means, you are trying to notice things they do or say that clearly identify them as a man or woman. Look at their bodies. Listen to their language. Notice how they work and how they interact with you. What kinds of things do they talk about? How do they greet you? How do they stand, walk and talk?

When you have spent about 15 minutes doing this activity, return to the workshop to debrief and discuss as follows:

- How comfortable did you feel doing this exercise? What did you find hard?
- What did you see? Make a list of all the gendered behaviours you think you viewed. You don't have to know for certain if what you saw was a gendered behaviour. If you think it was, note it down.
- Did you notice any behaviours you would clearly interpret as masculine or feminine? Mark "M" or "F" against these behaviours. Why do you label them this way?
- Why do you think these gendered behaviours are occurring in your workplace?
- What might the impact of these behaviours be on others?

You should not expect too much from this activity. People train for years to be able to observe the way gender affects our behaviours. You are merely trying to give yourself the opportunity to start thinking about how we perform gender in a workplace setting. Perhaps now you can also start to see yourself as gendered!

### Action planning

The impact of gender on the workplace culture can affect recruitment, career advancement opportunities, decision-making, budgets, the physical design of buildings and the facilities available within them, social programs and safety.

- How could you think more holistically about the impacts of gender on your workplace culture?
- Who might be able to investigate what it would take to conduct a more in-depth review of gendered behaviours in your workplace?

### Activity 3 Bringing gender into safety (40 minutes)

#### Aim

The aim of this activity is to start thinking in more detail about what the implications might be for safety. If gender is said to affect safety, how? And what can we do in response?

#### Discussion points

- Why do you think the research shows consistently that men take more risks than women?
- Do you think this is inevitable and cannot be changed, or are there ways to address this?
- Can you think of any specific examples of risky behaviours that were once considered to be normal but which are now considered wrong or inappropriate?
- How do you think an observation and awareness skill like the one used in the previous activity could be useful for your safety personnel? What could they do in response to any at-risk gendered behaviours they might see in the workplace?

#### Activity idea

For this activity, you will need to prepare copies of key business documents that outline your safety management system or a key component of your safety processes.

In pairs, review the document(s) you have been given. If the document is large, you can split it and give each pair a couple of pages to review.

Firstly, read through the document and then discuss the following:

- Does this document make any reference to gender?
- If yes, where and what are the implications of this?
- If no, do you see anywhere that a possible reference to gender could be made and why do you think it could go there? What might the implications be?

When you have had time to review the document(s), come back into the main group and see if you can make some comments about your organisation's existing approach to gender within its safety management documents. You have only done a very quick analysis here, so the debate may extend beyond the document to other knowledge you have about your safety systems. The following questions may help drive the debate:

- Are there other key business documents in your organisation that say something about gender?
- Would you say that gender is integrated into your organisation? That is, is it considered important in all aspects of the business? Or is gender simply a side topic for personnel in human resources to deal with?
- Overall, what kind of attitude towards gender within safety do you think is displayed by your organisation?

- What do you think would be the response of your safety personnel if you started to develop their skills in this area? Would they see it as useful or would you need to do some more work to encourage them?
- Do you feel you, as the leaders in your business, would be able to support a more detailed investigation into gender and safety in your organisation, or would you need more convincing?

#### Action planning

When it comes to the link between gender and safety, it is safety personnel and operations crews who will benefit most from an understanding of this link and what to do in response. But this is not an easy task. There is likely to be resistance to any attempt to “interfere” with gendered behaviours. There is also likely to be a low level of skill and understanding to start with, so this may scare employees or make them feel intimidated.

- What resources can you draw on to build a better argument for integrating gender into your organisation's safety practices?
- Who would be best placed to start having a conversation with safety personnel about the link between gender and safety? And how can this be planned to ensure maximum uptake of the idea even if personnel don't fully understand the link right now?
- What external resources might you be able to draw on?

# 2 WOMEN AND SAFETY

## Research resources

The following references provide some useful information on women in the workplace with some focus on the safety of women.

EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK, 2003, Gender issues in safety and health at work: A review: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

LAPLONGE, D., 2011, You can't rely on women to tame men: Factive, Perth.

MAYES, R. & PINI, B., 2010, The 'feminine revolution in mining': A critique." Australian Geographer: Vol. 41, No. 2: 233-245.

MINERALS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA, 2009, Unearthing new resources: Attracting and retaining women in the Australian minerals industry: Australian Government Office for Women, Sydney.

LANEYRIE, F. & MYLETT, T., 2005, Seeing gender and ethnicity at work: AIRAANZ 2005, 19th Conference of The Association of Industrial Relations Academics in Australia and New Zealand: 313-322.

WYNN, E., 2001, Women in the mining industry: AusIMM Youth Conference, Brisbane.

## Background information

The issue of women in mining is a hot topic right now. Many mining companies are looking to employ more women. Some see this as a good response to the skills shortage. Others see it as an issue of equity. Still others believe that women bring unique skills to the workplace.

We don't often think about women in the context of safety. The link between "diversity" and safety is rarely made. We discuss women within the context of human resources (e.g. recruitment, affirmative action, diversity, career development), but we rarely discuss how women respond to safety and what it takes to be a safe woman in mining.

Traditionally, women are not expected to act tough. It is considered acceptable for women to show vulnerability or weakness. When a woman cannot carry a heavy load or is unable to manage a piece of machinery, we may interpret this as evidence of their "natural" femininity. In some cases, therefore, it may be possible for women to perform a job more safely than a man. They may not feel the pressure to have to show they can do everything nor fear asking to stop a job if they feel at risk.

In discussions on women in the workplace, however, there is a tendency to simplify the experiences of women. We often talk about "women" as if they are a single group of people who all think and behave the same. There is a danger that the stories we tell about successful women become the stories we assume are true for all women.

There is somewhat of an urban myth that women who work in mining are safer than men. This myth emerged from a piece of research that identified how women truck drivers produced less wear and tear on the tyres in comparison to men. It is important to recognise that this single piece of research involved a very small sample of women and was conducted on one mine site. We should be wary of assuming from this that all women are "softer" or safer than all men.

The reality is that, just like men, women have a diverse range of experiences. How well they manage to fit in, work successfully and safely, build a career and find enjoyment in their work depends on a range of factors such as the workplace culture, support within the organisation, crew dynamics, personal context and factors, personality, cultural and religious factors, location and learning opportunities.

The mining industry in Australia is still largely a male-dominated industry, with about 85 per cent of the total workforce being men. It is also considered to be a masculine industry where behaviours normally associated with toughness and strength are generally preferred. Women can seek to emulate masculine behaviours to fit in. There may be some pressure coming from within the organisation, within a crew or internally for women working in traditionally male occupations to prove they can do the job equally as well as men. We see evidence of this on mine sites. Available research suggests that women often have to downplay any femininity to

ensure they are taken seriously by their male counterparts.

There are differing opinions as to what it takes for women to make it in mining. Some believe in the “toughen up” approach, whereby women employees, just like their male counterparts, should learn to develop a thick skin and put up with the existing workplace culture. Others promote the need for change in workplace practices and behaviours to ensure all employees are recognised to have different needs and capabilities. The relationship that your female employees have with safety will be greatly affected by the attitudes at all levels within your organisation.

When we think of safety in mining, we typically tend to focus on the operational roles. Where women are working in operational roles, the same risks are evident, although the way women can or do respond to these risks may differ. Importantly, we also need to consider the safety of the many women who work in non-operational areas, such as administrative and support roles.

## **Activity 1** **Women in the workplace** **(30 minutes)**

### **Aim**

In this first activity, you will find out what you understand about the link between women and the workplace in general. It has become quite fashionable to talk about employing more women in the mining industry today. But what does this really mean? What are the implications? And why is this discussion relevant today?

For the purpose of this activity, you should keep the discussions general. In this activity, we are talking about women in any workplace and not in your particular workplace.

Before you run this activity, you should make sure everybody feels they are able to provide honest input to the discussions. The topic of women in the workforce can be quite confronting. People will have different experiences that influence their views on the topic. The facilitator should encourage people to listen to and explore all ideas. The main aim of this activity is to discover what people in your organisation think about the debate surrounding women in the workforce.

### **Discussion points**

- What are the advantages of having women in the workplace?
- Do you believe women have a unique and special set of skills that differs from those of men?
- What are some of the existing attitudes that people have about women in the workplace? Why do you think these attitudes exist?
- What are some of the most common attitudes that people have about women working on mine sites? Are these attitudes changing? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Why do you think we are having a debate about women in the workforce? Why don't we discuss men in the workforce?

### **Activity idea**

Ask everybody in the group to share their personal experiences of having worked alongside women. Who has had a female boss? Who has worked in an all-female environment? When was the first time you can remember seeing or working alongside a woman on a mine site? Discuss some of the positives and some of the challenges.

### **Action planning**

Many organisations have a policy in place that makes some reference to diversity or respect or equality. Some organisations may also have a quota – the percentage of women they want to employ. This may translate into targeted recruitment campaigns to encourage women to apply for jobs. But very rarely do we see any wider understanding of what it means to be a woman working in the organisation. We discuss women as a human resources issue but that is it. Research shows the most successful organisations at attracting and retaining female employees are those that seek to ensure the issue of women is integrated throughout the business.

- Who would benefit most from gaining further knowledge about women in the workplace? What can your organisation do to encourage this study?
- How can you find out what it means to truly integrate gender into your workplace?

## Activity 2 Women in your workplace (50 minutes)

### Aim

It is important to get a realistic picture of how your organisation addresses the issue of women in the workplace. Once you have this, you can see what you are doing well and learn from it. You can also see where the gaps in your knowledge and approach are and identify what you might need to do to respond to these.

### Discussion points

- Does your organisation currently have a documented goal for the employment of women? If yes, what does this document say? What are its aims? If no, why not?
- If you have a documented goal for the employment of women in place, how was this developed? What was the rationale for any decisions about quotas or recruitment practices? Was it a calculated goal or did somebody just decide on a number?
- In regards to the employment of more women in your workforce, do you think it would be better to target particular work roles (e.g., senior management, operation staff)? Or is it better to focus on an overall increase in numbers? What are the benefits of both approaches?
- What are some of the reasons why a woman might choose to work in your organisation?
- What are some of the reasons why a woman might leave your organisation?

### Activity idea

Think of the names of four or five women who have been working in your organisation for more than three years. Interview the women before the workshop session using the questions below. During the interviews, someone should take notes on the responses, which will then be reviewed and discussed in the workshop.

In pairs, discuss one of these women, asking:

- What is her role and what is she responsible for in the organisation?
- What have been her major achievements since joining the organisation?
- How does she approach her work?
- What kind of personality does she have?
- What have been her major barriers since joining the organisation?

After the discussion, share your thoughts with the rest of the group. To do this, you first need to write up a list of headings:

- roles and responsibilities
- achievements
- approach
- personality
- barriers.

As each pair gives feedback on their discussion, make notes under each of these headings.

To review, take a look at the combined responses and discuss:

- What does this tell you about your organisation and its relationship with women?
- What is your organisation doing well in regard to supporting the employment of women?
- Where do you see that your organisation could improve?

### Action planning

There is a lot of talk about women in the mining industry, but this tends to be generalised and there is not always a deep understanding of what needs to be done to address the issue. Organisations that are making efforts to increase the employment of women may also be restricting their efforts to recruitment practices and not necessarily paying attention to how their entire workplace culture is gendered.

- What can you do to further your understanding of how well your organisation actually supports or hinders the employment of women?
- What can you do to investigate the benefits of some kind of “gender auditing” for your organisation?
- How can you better promote the diversity of experiences of women in your workforce?

### Activity 3 Women and safety (40 minutes)

#### Aim

The purpose of this activity is to think about the specific relationship between women and safety. Do women have particular safety needs that are different from those of men? Is the relationship between women and risk-taking different than it is for men?

#### Discussion points

- It is generally considered that men are about three times more likely to engage in at-risk behaviour than women. Do you agree with this? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- How do women generally respond to issues of safety?
- If we assume for a moment that women are generally more cautious than men, what might be the driving factors for this?
- Can you give any specific evidence in your workplace to indicate that women are more or less safe than men?

#### Activity ideas

Make a list of all the roles where women are currently employed in your organisation. Against each role, list all the workplace risks and hazards specific to that role.

When you have compiled the lists, review the kinds of safety risks your female employees face.

After this review, consider:

- Do you see that the women in your organisation may have particular safety needs that are not such an issue in male-dominated areas of your workplace?
- When was the last time your organisation focused on the specific risks that are found in female-dominated areas?
- Do you feel your organisation adequately addresses the safety risks of your female employees?

#### Action planning

The research looking at women and safety tends to focus on their safety needs within traditionally female roles, such as secretarial or administrative work. This is important because, in the mining industry particularly, we tend to ignore any focus on this. Instead, we are more focused on safety in the field or operations areas of our business. So there is a lot of work to do when it comes to addressing the specific safety needs of women in mining.

- Is there anything in your recruitment or induction processes that specifically provides women employees with some advice on what they can expect from working in a traditionally male environment? What could you do to ensure this information is there?
- What can you do to ensure that women who work in operational roles do not feel they need to take risks to be accepted as “one of the boys”?
- What can you do to focus more on the specific workplace hazards of women who work in administrative or support roles?

# 3

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SAFETY

### Research resources

The following references provide some useful information on sexual harassment in the workplace.

DENISSEN, A., 2010, Crossing the line: How women in the building trades interpret and respond to sexual conduct at work: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 39, No. 3: 297-327.

MARTIN, P., 2003, 'Said and done' versus 'saying and doing': Gendering practices, practicing gender at work: *Gender & Society*, Vol. 17, No. 3: 342-366.

QUINN, B., 2002, Sexual harassment and masculinity: The power and meaning of 'girl watching': *Gender & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 3: 386-402.

YONT, K., 1991, Ladies, flirts and tomboys: Strategies for managing sexual harassment in an underground coal mine: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 19, No. 4: 396-422.

### Background information

It is perhaps easier to understand the impact sexual harassment could have on a person's emotional safety. It may make the person who is the recipient of the sexual harassment feel very insecure and uncomfortable. But what about their physical safety? How does sexual harassment put a person at risk? And does the fact that somebody might be participating in sexual harassment also put them at risk?

These are the kinds of questions you should keep in mind during this workshop as you think about what your organisation can do to ensure sexual harassment does not encourage risk-taking behaviour.

Sexual harassment is one of the most common types of complaints made against work colleagues in Australia. About 1 in every 5 complaints made to the Australian Human Rights Commission relates to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment more commonly affects women, with 1 in 5 women reporting having experienced some kind of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, 1 in 20 men also report having experienced workplace sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can be committed by both women and men against both women and men. More commonly, it is found to be men engaging in practices of sexual harassment against women. Between 2003 and 2008, there was a significant increase in the number of people reporting sexual harassment at the manager, executive and professional levels.

There is not a lot of exact research to show the full extent of sexual harassment in the mining industry. Compared to other industries, the mining industry does not rate high in its percentage of employees who claim to have experienced sexual harassment. The most recent figures actually show a decline in the total number of employees who reported having experienced sexual harassment, from 2 per cent in 2003 to 1 per cent in 2008.

In recent years, however, there have been a number of high profile cases in the mining industry showing that sexual harassment continues to exist in the industry. Importantly, some of these cases have shown evidence of sexual harassment by men against men. There is additional research to suggest that women in the mining industry feel that sexual harassment is something they have to put up with.

Sexual harassment can be extremely difficult to deal with, particularly if your workplace culture prefers people who can act tough. People may feel they cannot say or do anything about it, for fear they will be seen as a "wimp". When a person is the recipient of sexual harassment, they may be under a lot of pressure every day at work. Their mind might be focused elsewhere and they may not be fully engaged in the safety aspects of their job. The person who is dishing out the sexual harassment might also be more interested in proving their own toughness than they are about safety – this may be why they are engaging in this behaviour to begin with.

In male-dominated workplaces, we find examples of men sexually harassing men. The sexual harassment of a man against a man can be verbal, physical or emotional. Common forms of sexual harassment by men against men include referring to a man's sexual capability and physical contact with a man's genitalia. Graffiti on toilet walls and jokes made in group settings are also common ways that sexual harassment gets played out.

When an incident of sexual harassment becomes obvious through a complaint, we can deal with it, often through an organisation's human resources department or the law if necessary. But when sexual harassment is hidden and unchallenged, this can affect the emotional and physical wellbeing of many employees.

## **Activity 1** **Understanding sexual harassment** **(30 minutes)**

### **Aim**

The aim of this first activity is to encourage some general discussion about sexual harassment. We want to find out what people understand by the term "sexual harassment". We also want to see what links we can make between sexual harassment and the workplace culture.

### **Discussion points**

- What might be considered to be a clear case of sexual harassment? Give some specific examples.
- What might be some ambiguous cases of sexual harassment where it is unclear if it is actually sexual harassment or not?
- Can you give some examples of things that might have happened in the workplace ten or twenty years ago that would now be considered sexual harassment?
- Can you think of things that still go on today in the workplace that you might consider to be sexual harassment but which many people might not?
- Why do people have different views on what is and what isn't sexual harassment?
- Who do you think benefits most from having a discussion about sexual harassment in your workplace? Why?
- Do you feel that people are sometimes too "sensitive" when it comes to jokes and behaviour that might be considered sexual harassment?

### **Activity idea**

Introduce the following scenarios one at a time:

- A group of male work colleagues plays a practical joke on one of their male crew members. They post a picture of a naked woman on the front of his locker. This is a continuation of the teasing they have been giving him because he doesn't seem to show much interest in engaging in discussions about girls.
- A male manager asks his personal assistant if she would like to go for a drink after work.
- During some general chit-chat just before the start of a meeting, a female employee makes a comment to her colleague about how good-looking she thinks the new crew member is.

For each scenario, discuss:

- Does this constitute sexual harassment?
- Under what circumstances would it not be considered sexual harassment?
- Under what circumstances could it be considered sexual harassment?

### **Action planning**

The first step is to think about what your organisation has in place to respond to allegations of sexual harassment that may arise in the workplace.

- Who can review your policies and procedures around sexual harassment and make recommendations on how these could be improved?
- Who can read through the state and federal legislation with regards to sexual harassment in the workplace and think of some effective and engaging ways to ensure all employees understand the law?



## Activity 2 Sexual harassment in your organisation (30 minutes)

### Aim

The intent of this activity is to have an honest discussion about the way your organisation currently responds to incidents of sexual harassment and see if there is anything you can do to reduce these incidents, if any.

### Discussion points

- Can you ever imagine that sexual harassment would take place in your workplace? If yes, where and why? If no, what is it about your workplace culture that makes you absolutely certain it could not occur?
- It is quite common for some men in male dominated industries to use sexual harassment as a way of showing their disapproval of women entering the workforce. Has this ever occurred in your workplace? Does it continue to occur?
- Can you think of any specific examples of activities by men against men that might be happening in your workplace and which could be interpreted as sexual harassment? Why do these activities take place? Why are they allowed or ignored?

### Activity idea

To run this activity, somebody will need to prepare copies of documentation about a couple of sexual harassment cases that have occurred in your workplace. The names of the employees involved and identifying details should be removed for privacy. If this is problematic or you don't have any examples of incidents that have occurred in your workplace, see if you can build some example scenarios by doing some research about sexual harassment cases in other workplaces.

Split into two groups and provide each group with a copy of the documentation from one of the cases. At this stage, the group only needs to see what the complaint was and not the response that was taken. Ask the group to read through the case study and discuss how they think the issue should have been dealt with.

- What actions should have been taken?
- Why are these actions the most appropriate ones to take?

After spending some time discussing this in groups, each group should feed back their ideas and see if their ideas match the actual response that was taken by the organisation.

- If there is a difference between the response the group thought should be taken and the response that was taken, discuss why this may be so?

After thinking about these two cases, you should also consider the following:

- Do the responses your organisation typically takes to deal with these kinds of issues promote wider workplace cultural change?
- Is your organisation seeking to change attitudes and behaviours so that these kinds of cases do not recur, or is your organisation only responding to cases as they arise?

What you are trying to do here is identify if your organisation has a transformational or a transactional approach to sexual harassment.

### Action planning

You may already have somebody in your workplace who is passionate about responding to sexual harassment. Or you may already have a training session in place that talks about sexual harassment in the context of workplace equity.

- Who is the best person to undertake further research and work in this area to find out if your organisation has the best responses to sexual harassment, and why? Here you should think very carefully about who gets chosen to complete this kind of work. The person in charge may find that they get a lot of resistance from the workforce and this may affect their standing in the organisation.
- Can your organisation's responses to sexual harassment offer more of a proactive or transformational approach? How might you look into this?

### Activity 3 Sexual harassment and safety (50 minutes)

#### Aim

The purpose of this activity is to think about the specific relationship between sexual harassment and safety. Does sexual harassment in the workplace affect safety? If so, what is that effect and what can you do to respond to this?

#### Discussion points

- Are some people more resilient to sexual harassment than others? If yes, who are these people and why do you feel they are more resilient?
- What are the benefits of “toughening up”? How might a person be better off if they have this approach and don’t take things “too seriously”?
- What might be the negative impacts on a person’s safety if they are always expected to “put up and shut up”?
- What might happen to an employee if they spoke out about sexual harassment?

#### Activity ideas

This activity is all about trying to understand the potential impacts of sexual harassment on the emotional and physical safety of employees. We want to look at the impacts on both the person doing the sexual harassment and the person on the receiving end.

Firstly, make a list of the kinds of sexual harassment you could imagine going on in your workplace. You do not have to agree on whether something is always sexual harassment. You also do not have to agree if this is actually happening in your workplace. If a person thinks it could be considered sexual harassment and it could be happening in your workplace, it should go on the list.

Next to this list, hang two sheets of flipchart paper. The first sheet should be labelled “emotional” and the second sheet should be labelled “physical”. Draw a line vertically down the centre of each sheet. On the left hand side of each sheet, write “doer” and on the right hand side write “receiver”.

We now want to consider the possible emotional and physical impacts on both the doer and the receiver of all the examples of sexual harassment you have listed.

Looking at the first example of sexual harassment you came up with:

1. What are the potential emotional impacts on the doer as the result of engaging in this kind of behaviour? How might I feel if I am engaging in this kind of behaviour?
2. What are the potential emotional impacts on the receiver as a result of having to put up with this kind of behaviour? How might I feel if I have to put up with this kind of behaviour?
3. What are the potential physical impacts on the doer as the result of engaging in this kind of behaviour? What actions might I be engaging in to carry out this kind of behaviour?
4. What are the potential physical impacts on the receiver as a result of having to put up with this kind of behaviour? What actions might I be engaging in to respond to or deal with this kind of behaviour?

Repeat these questions for every example of sexual harassment you have listed.

Once all the examples have been considered, discuss the relationship between sexual harassment and safety more closely. To do this, look at all the emotional and physical impacts you have listed and consider the following:

- Is there any evidence to suggest that sexual harassment could ever have a positive impact on an employee’s emotional or physical safety?

- Is there any evidence to suggest that sexual harassment could ever have a negative impact on an employee’s emotional or physical safety?
- Is there any evidence to suggest that sexual harassment could ever have a neutral impact on an employee’s emotional or physical safety?
- Which comes out as the strongest or most likely?

#### Action planning

You have now been able to see the theoretical impact of sexual harassment on employee safety. If you can see that there is potentially a negative impact, what can you do to find out the real impact in your workplace?

- Is there somebody in your organisation who would normally deal with sexual harassment cases? What support could they be given to ensure there is an attempt to address sexual harassment before it gets to the complaint level?
- What can you do to think about ways to address sexual harassment in your workplace that do not apply a discipline and punish approach? Are there ways you can engage your workforce on the topic, rather than simply preaching the law or dictating a set of rules?
- How might you strengthen the link between those who would normally be expected to work on cases of sexual harassment and your safety personnel? Is there anything your safety personnel can contribute to help show employees that sexual harassment might be putting people at risk?

# 4 HOMOPHOBIA AND SAFETY

## Research resources

The following references provide some useful information on the relationship between masculinity and homophobia, with some focus on homophobia in the workplace.

COAD, D., 2002, *Gender Trouble Down Under: Australian Masculinities*: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, Valenciennes.

CONNELL, R., 1995, *Masculinities*: Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.

KIMMEL, M., 1994, *Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame and silence in the construction of gender identity: Theorizing Masculinities*. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (eds), 119-141: Sage Publications, London.

TOMSEN, S., 1998, *He had to be a pofter or something: Violence, male honour and heterosexual panic: Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2: 44-57.

WALKER, L., 1998, *Under the bonnet: Car culture, technological dominance and young men of the working class: Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, Vol. 3, No.2: 23-43.

## Background information

What does homophobia have to do with safety?

Research shows there is a clear link between the way men may seek to bolster their reputations as “real men” and the use of language and behaviours that degrade homosexuals or make fun of homosexuality. Within groups of men in particular, it is not uncommon to hear comments that make reference to homosexuality even if these are not directly aimed at homosexuals. Such comments are used to encourage men not to be “soft” or “weak”, drawing on cultural assumptions about gay men as being “soft” or “weak”.

In this workshop, you will explore the link between what it means to be a “real man” and the use of homophobic language or behaviours. You will assess if there is evidence of this kind of behaviour occurring in your workplace and consider the potential impacts on the safety of your employees.

Boys, in particular, learn from an early age what it takes to avoid getting bullied and picked on. Paramount to this is an ability to show they are not like a “girl”. Boys who are seen to act like girls can be labelled as “wusses” or “faggots” or a whole range of other terms that make a link between being male and femininity. Among groups of adult men in the workplace and in different social settings, we often find a continuation of this pressure to act like a “real man”. If a man does not act like a real man in front of his peers, he too risks being labelled a “princess” or “sissy” or similar. Often this can be done in a jovial way. Sometimes it can escalate to intimidation and bullying.

What we are considering here when we talk about homophobia, therefore, is not necessarily a direct hatred of gay men. Homophobia may be driven by this, but often it is related to gender and expectations about how men, in particular, should behave. Homophobic attitudes and actions are often considered to be legitimate ways that men can secure their own sense of being a “real man”, particularly when there is a need to prove this to other men in a group.

There are no data to show the extent to which homophobic comments or behaviours might contribute to workplace injuries. This kind of research, while important, has simply not been done. But we do know that men often take risks because they do not want to appear weak, which they align without being a “real man”. To avoid being called anything that might suggest they are a homosexual, they may engage in behaviours to prove their strength, and not all these behaviours will be safe. This kind of response has been researched in a number of male-dominated workplaces, such as fire-fighting and the defence forces. This topic was also canvassed at Resources Safety’s 2010 roadshow workshops and anecdotal evidence indicates it is an issue in some mining workplaces.

## Activity 1 Understanding homophobia (30 minutes)

### Aim

The aim of this first activity is to encourage some general discussion about homophobia. We want to explore what people understand by the term "homophobia". We also want to see what links we can make between homophobia and the workplace in general. To start with, we are not looking at your workplace specifically.

### Discussion points

- What might be considered to be a homophobic action? Give some specific examples.
- Why might people's attitudes towards what is defined as homophobia differ?
- Is homophobia illegal? You don't have to be a lawyer to answer this. Is it possible that it might be illegal? Should it be illegal?
- Why does homophobia exist?
- Why might homophobia exist in a workplace? What drives it?
- What are the links between homophobia and gender? Do you think men are more likely than women to use homophobic language?

### Activity idea

Prepare a list of cards with each card containing one of the following words:

- Gay
- Faggot
- Princess
- Poofter
- Girl
- Sissy
- Mommy's Boy
- Wuss
- Homo
- Pretty boy.

Hand one card to each participant and ask them to think about when this word might be used. What would be the context for its use? Go around the group and ask them to share their scenarios.

Then, as a group, try to rank the cards in order. Which would you consider to be the most homophobic and why?

Finally, make two piles. The first pile should be all those words you know you could hear being used somewhere in a workplace. The second pile is for those words you are sure you would never hear being used anywhere in a workplace.

### Action planning

Homophobia is a complex issue. It is not just about a fear or hatred of homosexuals. It is also not something we often address in the mining industry. But research shows that it can have an effect on employees and workplace culture.

- Who in your workplace would most benefit from developing a better understanding of homophobia? What would they be able to do with this information? And what information would be relevant?
- The link between homophobia and gender may not be clear at this point. How can you further explore this link? And how might you use this information to think about safety in your workplace?

## Activity 2 Homophobia in the workplace (50 minutes)

### Aim

The intent of this activity is to try and understand the role of homophobia in male-dominated industries like mining. How do groups of men display homophobia? And why are seemingly homophobic words and behaviours important to them? This is not to say that women cannot be homophobic. However, the research suggests that practices of homophobia, whether serious or jovial, are more important to men and their identities as men.

### Discussion points

- Why might homophobia be prevalent in male-dominated industries?
- What do men gain from homophobia? If I am a man, what “reward” do I get if I call somebody a name or behave in a way that suggests homophobia?
- Do you think that men would be more likely to engage in homophobic activities than women in your workplace? If yes, why would this be the case?
- What are some of the things that men do or say in your workplace that could be taken as evidence of homophobia? Why do you think they do or say these things?
- What do you think about the term “homophobia”? Are you comfortable discussing it? How comfortable do you think your workforce would feel discussing it?
- Do you see any value in discussing this issue in the context of your workplace?

### Activity idea

For this activity, you will use the same cards as you used for Activity 1. Each person should take one card with them and walk around the workplace. They should show the card to as many employees as they can and ask them:

- What do you think about this word?
- Have you ever heard it being used in our workplace? If yes, in what context?
- Have you ever used this word in our workplace? If yes, in what context?
- What would you think if somebody called you this? How would you respond?

When the group comes back together, share the responses you received from the employees you spoke to.

You should firstly share how comfortable people appeared to be when discussing the words. What were their initial reactions to seeing and hearing the word spoken?

Then, as a group, consider the following:

- Were the piles you made in Activity 1 correct? Did the employees you spoke to agree with your classification of the words you would hear in a workplace and those you would not?
- From the responses given by the employees you spoke to, what would you say the general attitude towards homophobia is at the grassroots level in your organisation?
- Does this attitude match what your organisation might expect to see and hear at a corporate level? Do the responses you heard match your corporate values?
- Did you notice any differences in the responses of men and women? If yes, what were these differences? And why do you think they exist?
- Why might men need to or like to display homophobia in your particular workplace?

- Are you aware of any particular groups of men where the use of homophobia is or could be more commonplace in your organisation?

As a final point for consideration, respond to the following:

- You may have heard the response from some of the people you spoke to that when they use these words, it doesn't mean anything bad. They may say that they are not really talking about gay men. They may even add that they know gay people and don't have a problem with them and these words mean something else. What do you think about this kind of response?

### Action planning

It is very rare to hear any discussion about homophobia on a mine site. We talk about gender diversity, sexual harassment and bullying, but we don't drill down into the details. A discussion on homophobia might be uncomfortable for a lot of people, including senior management, because many people do not have the skills to address the issue.

- Do you see any benefit in trying to encourage men to use different ways of talking and behaving in your workplace? How difficult would this be to achieve?
- What could you do to find out more about homophobic practices in your workplace? This may not be something you can discover through a survey or similar, as people may be reluctant to express their opinions honestly this way. So what are the other options?
- How can you explore what the options might be to help people in your workplace find different choices of words, or really understand the potential impact of the words they might currently use?
- Would it benefit your organisation to include a reference to homophobic or wider discrimination in its workplace policies or cultural vision statement? How could this be achieved? Who would be the best person to tackle this?

- Homophobia can also be expressed between men in physical ways. For example, men often make reference to each other's bodies, make jokes about body parts or use images of particular body parts in their humour. What could you do to understand this more? Who in your organisation would benefit from understanding the way men use the body as a means of communication?

### Activity 3 Homophobia and safety (40 minutes)

#### Aim

The purpose of this activity is to think about the specific relationship between homophobia and safety. Does homophobia in the workplace have an effect on safety?

#### Discussion points

- In what ways could words like faggot and sissy encourage risk-taking behaviour?
- Why might a man prefer to engage in risk-taking behaviour rather than risk being called a poofter? What are the possible rewards for him?
- Do you think there would be a difference between how a young man or an older man would respond to the words on the cards used in Activities 1 and 2? And could this affect their willingness to engage in at-risk behaviours differently?
- Would the same words encourage women to take risks?

#### Activity ideas

To run this activity you will need to prepare copies of two or three recent incident investigations from your workplace. The activity will run better if these investigations relate to serious incidents. The names of the employees involved and identifying details should be removed for privacy. If this is problematic, search for examples from outside your organisation that would be suitable.

Divide the participants into groups and give each group a copy of one of the incident investigations. The group should read through all the materials and then consider:

- How might this incident have been affected by homophobia?
- Is it possible that homophobic language or actions could have helped cause this incident?

You are not expected to analyse the truth of the incident here. You are simply expected to hypothesise. Given what occurred, is it possible that what you have discussed so far in relation to homophobia and homophobia in your workplace could have contributed to the outcome in some way?

Share your thoughts with the rest of the participants.

What you are doing here is trying to analyse safety alongside its relationship to gender. Do not be concerned if you do not understand this fully. This is not a skill that can be gained easily. You are simply practicing it for the first time.

Finally, as a group, consider the following:

- Given what you have heard from your employees and discussed with regard to these safety incidents, do you feel the safety of people in your workplace might be affected by homophobia in some situations?

#### Action planning

There are ways you can improve your ability to make a connection between gendered behaviours that might indicate homophobia and safety and related concerns. But these are not skills you can necessarily learn in a quick training session. People who specialise in dealing with these kinds of workplace issues often train for years to understand, firstly, the theoretical concepts, then, how these function among groups of men in the workplace.

- You may not feel totally comfortable with this topic right now. So what can you do to further understand what it means and how it relates to safety? Who would benefit most from a deeper understanding of homophobia and its relationship to safety?
- If you recognise that the safety of your employees could be being affected by homophobia, what can you do to respond to this? What external resources might you be able to draw on to further investigate what you can do?
- What are the potential rewards for your organisation in addressing this issue? What are the risks in taking this kind of work on?

# 5 AGGRESSION AND SAFETY

## Background information

Research into aggression in schools has received a lot of attention. More recent research shows that aggression also happens in homes, at universities, on the streets and in the workplace. In fact, it is estimated that around 1 in 8 people are faced with some kind of aggressive behaviour towards them in the workplace. If this is also true for the mining industry, what might the implications be?

In this workshop, you will think about the link between aggression, gender and safety. You will investigate what can be done to ensure that aggressive attitudes and behaviours do not put people at risk.

Aggression and masculinity are said to be strongly connected. If we think about the kinds of activities boys are encouraged to engage in, we can see that displays of aggression in boys are not only sanctioned but often strongly encouraged. Boys are encouraged to participate in aggressive sports, which often involve fierce competition and placing their bodies at risk. They are often provided with stories and toys that relate to war and violence. Displays of aggression are how a boy can show he is not a “girl”.

A lot of research has looked at the effects of aggression on workplace cultures and employees in the health professions where there are issues relating to patient-to-nurse aggression and aggression by managers. Power is often cited as a reason why people act aggressively – they want to dominate and control situations or people.

Unfortunately, not a lot of research has been done to look at levels of aggression specifically in the mining industry. Somewhat controversial research in 2011 suggested that acts of aggression may be more commonplace among fly-in, fly-out male personnel than we would expect to find in the wider male population in Australia. Wider research has yet to confirm this.

Aggression in the workplace can be verbal or physical. It can take place as an isolated incident or occur continuously over an extended period of time. Those on the receiving end of the aggression may feel a need to “toughen up” and say nothing. They may be left to deal with the consequences of the aggression by themselves. Or they might feel they need to respond in an equally aggressive manner, so as not to show any sign of weakness.

The existence of aggression in the workplace can have an effect on an individual's sense of self-worth and their level of comfort. People who are engaging in aggressive behaviour may not be fully focused on their job because they are too concerned with maintaining their position of dominance through their acts of aggression. People on the receiving end (and others in the workplace) may also be distracted by the compulsion to retaliate, or may feel very unhappy about the situation and be afraid.

## Research resources

The following references provide some useful information on aggression and gender.

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## Activity 1 Aggression and gender (30 minutes)

### Aim

The aim of this first activity is to think about the link between aggression and gender. We want to get a sense of how participants understand this link and what they think about it.

### Discussion Points

- Do you feel that our culture promotes aggression as a suitable way for men to behave?
- What are the reasons why men might be more prone than women to engage in aggressive behaviour?
- Why might a particular kind of man be more likely to engage in acts of aggression? What is this particular kind of man?
- What does a person achieve by engaging in aggressive behaviour? This may be a real achievement or perceived.
- Are these achievements important to men? If yes, why?
- Are these achievements sometimes important to women? Explain your answer.

### Activity idea

Make a list of all the different ways aggression could be shown. Be specific in your answers. For example, rather than talking about “aggressive language”, identify the specific words you are talking about.

Against this list, indicate whether you think it is more likely for a man or a woman to engage in this display of aggression. You can either use a simple tick and cross indicator or, if you want to ensure you have a bit more of a debate about each way of showing aggression, you can assign a percentage. For example, you may feel that when it comes to pointing a finger at somebody when they are talking to them, men are 80 per cent likely to do this and women are 20 per cent likely to do this.

Once you can see the full list and an indication of how likely it is that men and women would engage in each kind of aggression, discuss the following:

- Is there any evidence to suggest that men are more prone to engage in aggressive behaviour than women?
- Why might a woman choose to engage in aggressive behaviour? What would she have to gain from this?

### Action planning

It is not often we get to discuss aggression in the workplace. It usually does not become visible until there has been an incident. But aggression can be shown in many different ways, some of which are hidden.

- Is there anything you could do to investigate whether women in your organisation feel they are often faced with uncomfortable levels of aggression as a result of working alongside men? How would you go about doing this without making the assumption that this is the case? And what would you hope to do in response to your findings?
- Workplace bullying often involves aggressive behaviours. Who can take on the task of reviewing your organisation’s policy and procedures in regard to bullying, and accessing some additional resources to see if these can be improved?



## Activity 2 Aggression in the mining industry (40 minutes)

### Aim

In this activity we want to explore people's experiences of dealing with aggression during their careers in the mining industry. We will also discuss why aggression might be part of the mining industry's workplace culture. What we are looking at here is the mining industry as a whole, and not your organisation exclusively.

### Discussion points

- What is it about the mining industry that could potentially make it prone to witnessing acts of aggression in its workplaces? Does it have anything to do with the history of the industry? What about the geographical locations of mine sites? Are there any other factors that might encourage aggression in the mining industry?
- For those who have worked in other industries, how do you think the mining industry compares when it comes to levels of aggression in the workplace?

### Activity idea

To run this activity, participants will need to be willing to share personal experiences of dealing with aggression in the workplace. Ideally, we want to think about experiences in the mining industry specifically, but if participants do not have enough experience in this industry, you can always widen the scope. These personal experiences might involve you being the recipient of aggression by a co-worker. They could also reveal examples of when you personally have acted in an aggressive manner towards a colleague. Honesty and confidentiality will need to be discussed and agreed to.

In pairs, share your personal experiences of dealing with aggression in the workplace. If participants prefer, this would be a good time to step out of the room and find a space to have a coffee, thereby allowing a more informal chat within the pair.

After you have shared personal experiences, jot down three points for each experience that has been shared:

1. What roles in the organisation (e.g., manager, secretary, supervisor) did each person involved in the aggressive behaviour have?
2. What were the genders of the people involved?
3. What do you believe was the root cause of the aggression that took place?

Back in the group, share the three points about the experiences you discussed. You do not have to spend additional time retelling the experiences. You only need to give the three points.

Once each pair has shared these three points, consider as a group:

- Is there anything to suggest that aggression is more likely to be initiated by people in particular roles?
- Is there anything to suggest that men are more aggressive than women in the workplace? If yes, why do you think this is the case?
- Are there any agreed ideas about what causes aggression in the workplace?

### Action planning

- Given that you now have an understanding of where aggression is most likely to occur and why it is likely to occur, what can you do with this information to benefit your organisation? Is there some way you can find out if what you have discussed here rings true for your organisation?
- You have now had the chance to discuss your experiences of aggression that occurred in the past. Would it benefit your organisation to consider developing ways to encourage and allow employees to discuss incidents of aggression as they occur? If so, who can do some research to find out what these ways might be?

### Activity 3 Aggression and safety (50 minutes)

#### Aim

The purpose of this activity is to think about the specific relationship between aggression and safety. We will look at aggression as it occurs at both the crew and management or professional levels, and see if we can identify the potential impacts aggressive behaviour may have on employees working in these different levels areas.

#### Discussion points

- Which do you feel is more likely to affect a person's safety – verbal aggression or physical aggression? Explain your choice of answer.
- What are some of the specific ways that a person might be at risk if on the receiving end of aggressive behaviour from a work colleague?
- It is easy to see acts of aggression that are physical. It is easy to identify verbal aggression. But are there other latent or hidden forms of aggression that could cause stress for people in the workplace?

#### Activity ideas

This activity is about trying to understand the types of aggression that employees may experience at a crew or professional level.

Using two sheets of flipchart paper, allocate the main roles in your organisation into “crew” or “professional”. You don't have to spend too much time discussing every role. You just need a broad understanding of what role fits where. It may help to think of terms such as “operations” and “administration”.

Go back to the list of ways of showing aggression developed in Activity 1. Working through this list, identify whether each way of showing aggression is more likely to be seen at the crew or professional level. Again, you can use a tick and cross or percentage approach, depending on how much time you have to discuss each way of showing aggression.

Once you have completed this part of the activity, discuss the following:

- Can you summarise the ways of showing aggression most likely to occur at the crew level and then at the professional level? Are there similarities between the two groups? Or do the two groups show very distinct ways of showing aggression?
- Are there any additional acts of aggression you can now think of that you did not think of in the previous activity, and who is more likely to engage in these?
- Looking at your lists, what do you think the possible safety implications might be within the two groups? Is one group more at risk physically than the other? Does one group have access to more coping strategies than the other?

#### Action planning

You may never have considered the impact of aggression on your workplace safety. You may have no way of knowing if there are aggressive behaviours that are affecting safety in your workplace. Until you know this for sure, you cannot really make any decisions about whether you need to respond and if so, how.

- Have your safety personnel ever been asked to think about and respond to the way acts of aggression might affect safety? How could you encourage this? What skills might they need to be able to achieve this?
- In order to see if aggression does have any impact on safety in your organisation, it would be helpful to review some recent safety incidents. This review might involve simply hypothesising about whether aggression could have been an influencing factor in the incident. Or you could think about doing some interviews with people involved. Who would be best to look into this?

# NOTES



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