

Insights paper

Promoting safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace



Foreword

YLab and Our Watch would like to acknowledge the young people that participated in this project for generously sharing their ideas, experiences, stories and perspectives. Your invaluable contributions have helped shaped this insights paper.

A special thank you to:

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We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which we work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the young people who are our collective future. We acknowledge the continued resistance and enduring determination of First Nations peoples in dismantling outdated colonial systems and are grateful to work alongside these communities as ally organisations.

This always was, always will be Aboriginal Land.



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Background and context



Most Australians spend a large part of their lives at work. However, workplaces can be a place where unsafe practices, gender inequality and disrespect towards women and other communities are reinforced, resulting in experiences of harassment, violence and discrimination. Our work lives have a significant influence on us professionally and personally, and help shape our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. As such, workplaces are the perfect place to tackle this problem.

Gender-based violence presents an enormous cost to Australian employers through lost productivity, staff turnover, negative impacts on workplace culture, resources associated with responding to complaints, and reputational damage.

Workplaces have a responsibility to not only be safe and supportive but prevent this issue. More organisations are recognising the need to promote safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace, yet the needs and expectation of young people are largely underrepresented in research and workplace initiatives. By understanding what drives this issue and taking action to change the conditions that allow it to occur, we can help create a future where all Australians feel safe, equal and respected at work.

About the project

Our Watch engaged YLab to conduct desktop research and interviews with an intersectional group of young people from across Australia, aged 15 and 24. The outcomes of this project are presented through this insights paper and a series of communications materials to support employers to effectively engage and empower young people in the promotion of safety, gender equality and respect in their workplace.

About Our Watch

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and children in Australia. We work to embed gender equality and prevent violence where Australians live, learn, work and socialise.

ourwatch.org.au

About YLab

YLab is a social enterprise dedicated to designing better services and systems with young people. We bring people with lived experience and technical expertise together to solve the most pressing problems facing this generation.

ylab.global

Executive summary

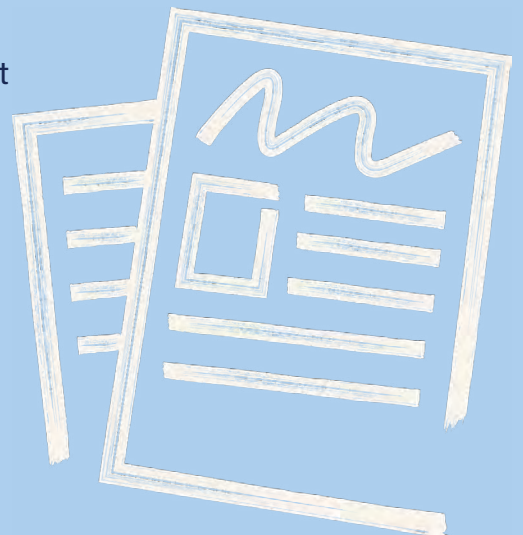
This insights paper was developed by YLab and Our Watch to promote safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace. The insights and ideas we have gathered are intended to ensure the voice of young people is embedded in employers efforts to prevent violence against women and children at work.

The research has been completed to amplify the voices of young people aged 15-24, a demographic often overlooked in gendered violence prevention initiatives. By combining desktop research with in-depth interviews, we sought to gain a nuanced understanding of young people's experiences, challenges and opportunities relating to gendered violence at work.

Our methodology combined a comprehensive review of existing literature with in-depth interviews conducted with a diverse group of young people aged 15-24. This approach allowed us to gain a multifaceted understanding of young people's needs and aspirations to create safety, gender equality, and respect in the workplace; the drivers of gendered violence; the actions employers can take to address these drivers; and how young people view themselves as part of the solution.

Through this research, young people have leveraged their lived experience and expertise to impart a range of insights and ideas, providing a solid foundation for recommendations to inform future practices among employers and prevention practitioners.

We hope you find this insights paper useful in guiding your effort to make progress of this critical and prevalent systemic issue.



Key findings

We have summarised our key findings at a high-level across the following pages, in line with the structure of this insights paper:

1. Needs and aspirations

- **Safety:** A common theme is the necessity for both physical safety (such as adequate training, safe working conditions) and psychological safety (such as freedom to express concerns and feel valued without fear). Young people highlighted how critical it is to create a work environment where employees, especially young and minority workers, feel safe and protected.
- **Gender equality:** The importance of having equal opportunities regardless of gender was a key takeaway. Young people spoke about the disparities in pay, roles, and the treatment of women and non-binary individuals in male-dominated industries. Gender stereotyping and unequal treatment were frequently mentioned. Young people emphasised the need to dismantle traditional gender roles in the workplace to ensure true equality.
- **Respect:** Respect among coworkers was highlighted as a fundamental component of a positive workplace culture. Young people noted the importance of open communication, being valued, and having personal boundaries. The discussions often centered around the necessity for policies that explicitly address and challenge disrespectful behaviors such as sexism, racism, and homophobia.

2. Drivers and actions

- **Drivers:** The interviews emphasised the need to address systemic issues like workplace violence, sexual harassment, rigid gender stereotyping, and inequality in leadership roles. These were seen as the primary drivers of a toxic workplace culture. Young people often expressed that policies addressing these drivers must be accompanied by meaningful enforcement and a shift in workplace culture to ensure long-term change.
- **Actions:** Young people suggested that regular, meaningful training and workshops are critical to building understanding and fostering respect in the workplace. Training should focus on sexism, gender equality, and positive masculinity. Interviewees emphasised the need for transparent policies with clear consequences for discriminatory behavior. Additionally, creating reporting mechanisms that are anonymous and accessible was seen as vital for empowering employees to speak up.

3. The role of young people

- **Youth participation:** Young employees are seen as pivotal in driving changes in workplace culture, advocating for progressive practices and fostering inclusivity. Interviewees emphasised the importance of young people speaking up against injustices and contributing to the design of policies and initiatives.
- **Youth empowerment and engagement:** Young people noted that they often struggle with being taken seriously by older colleagues or management, highlighting the need for inclusive decision-making processes that give young workers a voice. Engaging young people in decision-making processes at all levels of the organisation is critical, leading to innovative solutions and helping create a work environment that reflects the values of the next generation.

4. Recommendations

- **For employers:** Employers should promote a culture of safety, advance gender equality, foster respect and inclusion, combat gender-based violence and harassment, and engage and empower young people. This involves implementing physical and emotional safety measures, addressing gender disparities, cultivating culturally sensitive environments, establishing clear policies against harassment, and sharing power with young people.
- **For prevention practitioners:** Prevention practitioners can support organisational change by developing policies, facilitating training, and providing resources. They can also contribute by conducting research to inform interventions, building collaborative networks, and advocating for stronger legal protections.

The insights paper emphasises the need for a transformative shift in Australian workplaces, driven by the active involvement of young people. By adopting the recommended measures, employers can establish environments where every employee, irrespective of age or background, can thrive through safety, gender equality, and respect.

Research methodology

YLab utilised a combination of desktop research and one-on-one interviews with an intersectional group of young people aged 15-24 from across Australia. This approach aimed to fill the gaps in current research and support employers and prevention practitioners to create safe, equal and respectful workplaces.

This project aimed to gain a deeper understanding of young people's experiences with gendered harassment, violence, and discrimination in the workplace. By creating a safe space for their voices, we sought to co-create solutions that could empower employers to address these issues effectively.

To achieve this, we employed a data-driven approach and developed a dedicated synthesis framework. The synthesise framework was organised around following the categories:

- Safety
- Gender equality
- Respect
- Drivers
- Actions
- Youth participation

We conducted a desktop review and interviewed 14 young people, building a strong foundation of evidence to better understand the problem and potential solutions. By combining these data sources and applying our synthesis framework, we were able to identify a number of key themes, direct quotes and best practices for workplaces.

This insights paper showcases the results of this process. Our research is intended to guide future workplace initiatives and amplify the critical voices of young people within the prevention system.

Our approach

Synthesis framework development

We developed a synthesis framework to guide our data collection, analysis, and reporting. This framework was reviewed and refined at key stages — desktop research, data collection, and synthesis — to ensure it met the objectives of this insights paper.

Desktop research

We conducted a review of key research by Our Watch and external sources to gain a deeper understanding of the project issue. Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect Standards and Change The Story, an evidence-based framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing gendered violence, provided a baseline to ensure strategic alignment with key drivers and actions relevant to the project.

Recruitment and onboarding of young people

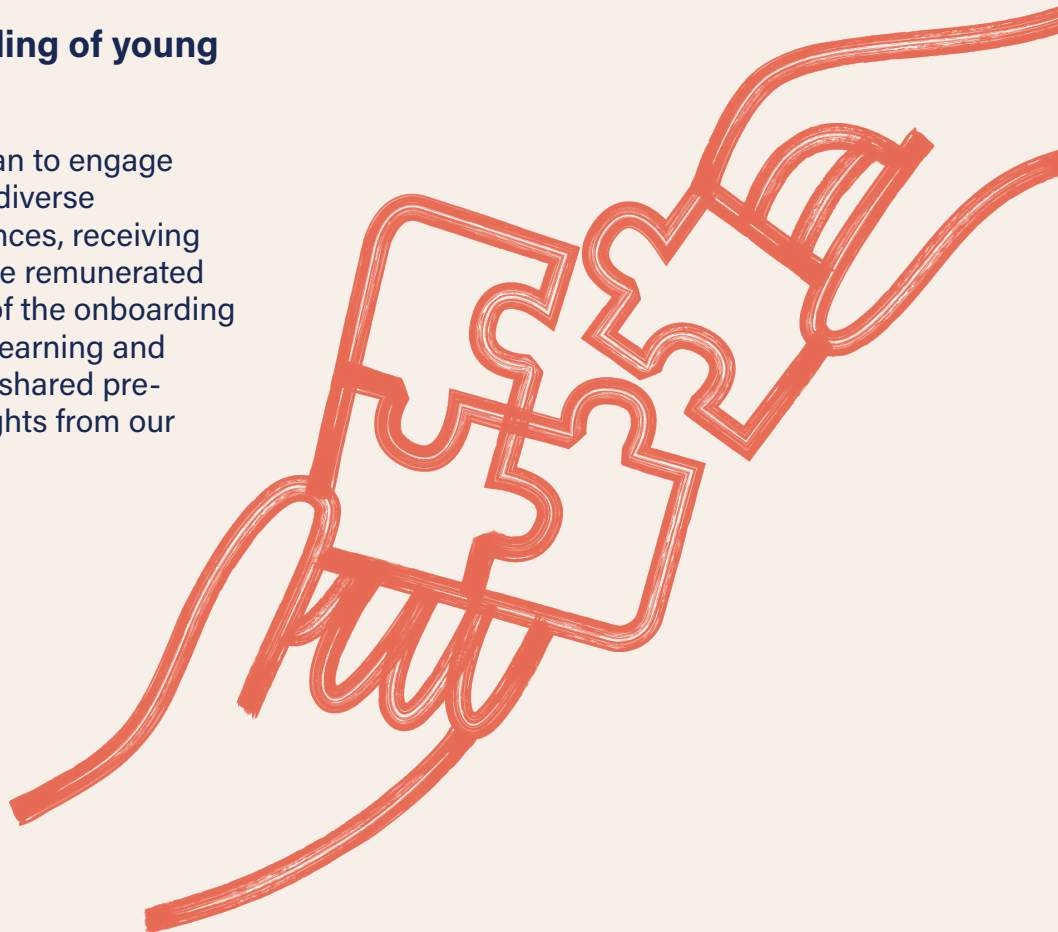
We developed a recruitment plan to engage young people aged 15-24 from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, receiving 87 expressions of interest for the remunerated interview opportunity. As part of the onboarding experience, we identified their learning and accessibility requirements and shared pre-reading materials with key insights from our desktop research.

Interviews

We conducted 1 hour interviews with 6 young people aged 15-17 and 8 young people aged 18-24 to gain their insights and ideas on the project issue. The interviews were semi-structured, featuring a series of questions and an interactive Miro activity based on the lines of inquiry from the synthesis framework.

Data synthesis and reporting

We utilised our synthesis framework to analyse the data and extract key insights and self-determined solutions from young people relating to safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace. Our findings were compiled into this insights paper, integrating feedback from Our Watch to ensure the report is fit for purpose.



Synthesis framework

Category	Lines of inquiry
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How important is feeling safe in the workplace to young people? ▪ What does safety in the workplace look like to young people? ▪ What is young people's experience and/or observation of issues relating to safety in the workplace? ▪ What actions do young people think employers can take to promote safety in the workplace?
Gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does gender equality in the workplace look like to young people? ▪ What do young people think employers can do to ensure gender equality for everyone? ▪ What is young people's experience and/or observation of issues relating to gender equality in the workplace? ▪ What actions do young people think employers can take to promote gender equality in the workplace?
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does respect in the workplace look like to young people? ▪ What is young people's experience and/or observation of exclusion in the workplace? ▪ What is young people's experience and/or observation of inclusion in the workplace? ▪ What actions do young people think employers can take to promote respect in the workplace?
Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What drives gendered violence in the workplace? ▪ Why do young people think it is important for employers to tackle the key drivers of gendered violence in the workplace?
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What actions do young people think employers could take to challenge sexism in the workplace? ▪ What actions do young people think employers could take to promote gender equality, safety and respect in the workplace? ▪ What actions do young people think employers could take to challenge gender stereotyping in the workplace? ▪ What actions do young people think employers could take to support and engage men to promote positive masculinity and supportive peer relationships in the workplace?
The role of young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What role do young people see themselves playing in promoting safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace? ▪ What do young people think employers can do to better engage and empower young people to address issues relating to safety, gender equality and respect at work?

Needs and aspirations

This section of the insights paper summarises the needs and aspirations of young people to promote safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace. Employers and prevention practitioners can use these insights to better understand the desired future state and create fit-for-purpose interventions for young workers.

Needs and aspirations encompasses the following lines of inquiry from our synthesis framework.

Safety:

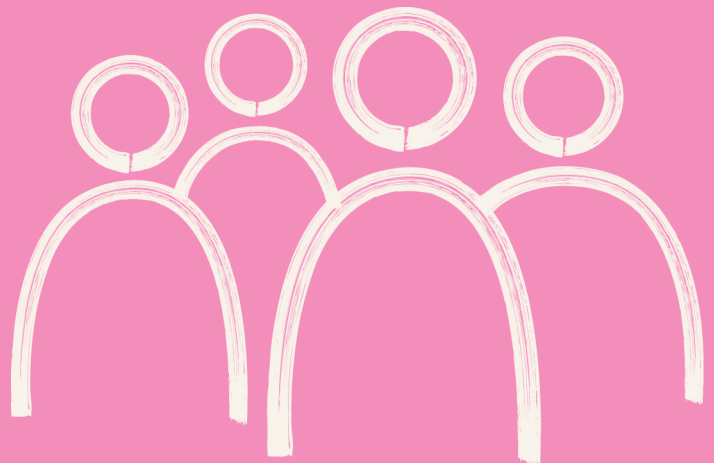
- How important is feeling safe in the workplace to young people?
- What does safety in the workplace look like to young people?
- What is young people's experience and/or observation of issues relating to safety in the workplace?
- What actions do young people think employers can take to promote safety in the workplace?

Gender equality:

- What does gender equality in the workplace look like to young people?
- What do young people think employers can do to ensure gender equality for everyone?
- What is young people's experience and/or observation of issues relating to gender equality in the workplace?
- What actions do young people think employers can take to promote gender equality in the workplace?

Respect:

- What does respect in the workplace look like to young people?
- What is young people's experience and/or observation of exclusion in the workplace?
- What is young people's experience and/or observation of inclusion in the workplace?
- What actions do young people think employers can take to promote respect in the workplace?



“You spend more time at work than you do at home, so you want to be somewhere you feel safe and accepted.”



Safety

Young people shared the following insights on their experiences of unsafe behaviour at work:

- **Experiences of unsafe behaviour:** Young people reported various forms of unsafe behavior at work, ranging from verbal abuse and physical threats to discrimination and neglect of safety protocols. Younger and less experienced workers, in particular, feel vulnerable due to perceived power imbalances.
- **Inadequate support and response:** Many employees feel unsupported by management when reporting unsafe behavior. The fear of retaliation or being ostracized prevents many from speaking up. In some cases, reported issues are not taken seriously, leading to a cycle of repeated offenses.
- **Impact of hierarchy and management style:** A strict hierarchical structure can discourage open communication, making it difficult for employees, especially younger ones, to report issues or seek help. Management styles that lack empathy and understanding can exacerbate feelings of unsafety.
- **Lack of proper training and induction:** Employees often receive inadequate training, particularly on handling difficult situations, which can leave them unprepared to deal with conflicts effectively. This lack of training is particularly detrimental in customer-facing roles where interactions can become contentious.

Solutions for employers to handle these situations put forward by young people include enhanced training and support, co-design and inclusive policy making, union support and collective action, and transparent communications channels.

Overall, the narratives suggest a pressing need for systems change that prioritise safety, ensuring that all employees, regardless of age or experience, can work without fear of mistreatment or discrimination.

“You wouldn't treat an adult the same way. I feel like people can sort of take advantage of young people in that sense.”

Safety

Young people shared the following insights on what a safe workplace looks like to them:

- **Handling of feedback and criticism:** There is a fine line between constructive criticism and negative feedback, which can often be misused under the guise of being “helpful,” potentially creating a toxic environment.
- **Professional and supportive management:** Employees value management styles that are professional but approachable, highlighting the need for management to maintain a balance between authority and amiability.
- **Transparency and open communication:** A transparent communication channel within the organisation is essential. This includes clear policies, open lines of communication, and regular feedback mechanisms.
- **Inclusivity and diversity:** Workplaces that embrace and reflect diversity in their staff are perceived as safer because they show a commitment to understanding and meeting the diverse needs of their employees.
- **Physical and emotional security:** Participants noted the importance of both physical safety measures (such as security presence and proper training for physical tasks) and emotional safety (such as supportive management and a non-toxic culture).
- **Adaptability to individual needs:** Recognising and accommodating individual needs, such as flexible working conditions and acknowledging unique identities, is crucial for creating a universally safe environment.

These insights highlight that a safe work environment is multifaceted, involving respect, inclusivity, effective communication, and supportive management practices, ensuring both physical and emotional wellbeing of employees.

“I think safety underpins everything. If you don’t feel safe, you are not able to give your all in a workplace.”



“Gender equality means acknowledging inherent disparities and using that understanding to ensure people are safe and respected at work through genuine measures.”

Gender equality

Young people shared the following insights on the challenges and opportunities to promote gender equality in the workplace:

- **Experiences of gender inequality:** Many young people witnessed or experienced gender inequality in various forms, including derogatory comments, inappropriate behavior, and gender-based discrimination.
- **Stereotyping and discrimination:** Employees from diverse backgrounds, especially those who are female or non-binary or from regional and rural areas, often face discrimination and stereotyping.
- **Gendered roles and segregation:** There is a noticeable trend where certain genders are funneled into specific roles within organisations, often reinforcing traditional gender roles and affecting career progression.
- **Disparity in opportunities:** Several interviewees spoke about the disparities in pay, roles, and the treatment of women and non-binary individuals in the workplace.
- **Inadequate response to harassment:** Instances of harassment, whether sexual or based on gender stereotypes, are not always addressed effectively, leading to a work culture that can feel unsafe for affected individuals.

Solutions proposed by young people to address situations of this kind include active use of pronouns and respect for identities, inclusive policies and practices, equal opportunities, education and open discussions.

These insights highlight the pervasive nature of gender inequality in the workplace and the need for comprehensive strategies that address both the symptoms and root causes of this issue.


“Gender shouldn’t dictate the way people are treated in the workplace...We should treat everyone equally and provide them with the same opportunities no matter how they identify.”

Respect

Young people shared the following insights on the critical components of promoting respect in the workplace:


- **Equality and non-discrimination:** True respect means interacting with colleagues without prejudice or differential treatment based on personal attributes.
- **Privacy and boundaries:** Respectful work environments honor individual privacy and boundaries, avoiding gossip and intrusive behaviors, especially regarding personal matters.
- **Supportive interactions:** Promoting a friendly and supportive atmosphere where colleagues help each other, share responsibilities, and engage in positive social interactions enhances mutual respect.
- **Professionalism and conduct:** Maintaining a professional demeanor that includes refraining from derogatory or overly casual remarks that might make others uncomfortable is crucial for a respectful work environment.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Workplaces need to cultivate an environment where cultural differences are not only acknowledged but celebrated, ensuring that no one feels 'othered' because of their background.
- **Valuing young workers:** Young people often feel underestimated or marginalised due to perceived inexperience. Workplaces can foster respect by valuing young workers' input and ensuring they are treated fairly and without exploitation.

These insights highlight that respect in the workplace is multi-dimensional, involving fair treatment, recognition of privacy, supportiveness, and professional behavior. By addressing these aspects, organisations can create a more inclusive and respectful working environment.



“Respect is about being able to bring my whole self to work and having confidence that this will be respected.”

“Respect among co-workers is primarily about treating everyone equally, valuing each person’s contributions and ensuring everyone’s voice is heard and considered.”





Respect

Young people shared the following insights on their experience of inclusion and exclusion in the workplace:

- **Experiences of exclusion:** Exclusion in the workplace can arise from being overlooked, not receiving necessary support or adjustments, and feeling isolated due to poor integration into the team. This often happens due to preconceptions about one's abilities based on age, gender, or other traits.

Some of the strategies to foster inclusion that young people proposed included:

- **Effective onboarding and training:** Ensuring new employees feel welcome and part of the team from the beginning, with proper training and integration efforts, can significantly boost feelings of inclusion.
- **Team building:** Regular team-building activities, especially in larger organisations, help foster connections among employees, bridging gaps that may form due to different schedules or locations.
- **Supportive culture:** Creating an environment where help and guidance are readily offered, especially when someone is struggling, reinforces a culture of support and teamwork.
- **Cultural sensitivity and awareness:** Enhancing sensitivity towards cultural differences and personal backgrounds helps in making everyone feel respected and valued.
- **Recognition and visibility:** Ensuring that all team members, especially those from underrepresented or marginalised groups, are recognised and their contributions valued can help mitigate feelings of exclusion.

These insights highlight the importance of active management strategies in fostering an inclusive workplace, where every employee feels valued, respected, and part of the team. By addressing these key areas, organisations can not only enhance employee satisfaction but also improve overall productivity and morale.

Drivers and actions

This section is based on Our Watch's Change The Story, an evidence-based framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing gendered violence. The insights and ideas shared by young people validate the importance of addressing these drivers, with a range of potential solutions to bring the corresponding actions to life.

Drivers and actions encompasses the following lines of inquiry from our synthesis framework.

Drivers:

- What drives gendered violence in the workplace?
- Why do young people think it is important for employers to tackle the key drivers of gendered violence in the workplace?

Actions:

- What actions do young people think employers could take to challenge sexism in the workplace?
- What actions do young people think employers could take to promote gender equality, safety and respect in the workplace?
- What actions do young people think employers could take to challenge gender stereotyping in the workplace?
- What actions do young people think employers could take to support and engage men to promote positive masculinity and supportive peer relationships in the workplace?



Drivers

“We need to focus on the root causes of workplace issues, not just the symptoms. This means looking at systemic drivers behind the scenes.”

Violence against women and children is a serious and prevalent issue in Australia, with devastating and widespread impact. It is both a violation of human rights, and extremely costly to the whole of society.

Overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, the problem takes place in many settings and exists in many forms. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, financial and technology-facilitated violence or abuse, and stalking. It can be a one-off incident, or an ongoing pattern of deliberately coercive and controlling behaviour.

In the [Change The Story](#) framework, Our Watch have identified four key factors that most consistently predict or ‘drive’ the problem and explain its gendered patterns in the workplace. The four drivers are:

1. **Excusing or minimising violence against women and sexual harassment in workplace, or trying to justify why the violence occurred.** This could include dismissing women’s experiences of sexual harassment and sexually suggestive comments or jokes that intimidate or offend.
2. **Gender inequality in workplaces resulting in men dominating decision-making.** This could include gender pay gaps, lack of women in leadership and lack of respect for women.
3. **Rigid gender stereotyping which limits the ways people can express themselves.** This could include making assumptions that different types of work are better suited to certain gender identities.
4. **Male peer relations at work that disrespect women and each other.** This could include “locker-room talk”, unwanted touching or sexual gestures, readily excusing disrespectful behaviour, and feeling discouraged from taking a stand due to fear of rejection from peers.

Gender inequality is the social context in which violence against women arises in the workplace. The social context is also characterised by many other intersecting forms of inequality and oppression that exist at work. This includes ableism, ageism, racism, colonialism, class discrimination, sexism, heteronormativity, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, cisnormativity, and geographic disadvantage.

Actions and workplace equality and respect standards

“Actions speak louder than words. We need to see our solutions enacted with clear examples and accountability.”

Violence against women in the workplace is preventable. In the [Change The Story](#) framework, Our Watch has proposed four essential actions to address the issue.

1. **Challenge sexism in the workplace.** This could include supporting staff to be active bystanders who challenge attitudes and practices that justify or downplay inappropriate workplace behaviours.
2. **Promote gender equality, safety and respect.** This could include increasing the representation of diverse women in formal and informal decision-making roles.
3. **Challenge gender stereotyping.** This could include promoting and supporting gender-equitable domestic and parenting practices through workplace initiatives.
4. **Support and engage men to promote positive masculinities and supportive male peer relationships in workplaces.** This could include setting up male allyship initiatives that promote representations of men modelling respectful, fair, ethical, safe and inclusive behaviours in the workplace.

Additionally, Our Watch has developed five [Workplace Equality and Respect Standards](#) to help employers create equal and respectful environments for employees.

1. **Commitment:** Employers demonstrate an ongoing commitment to workplace gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.
2. **Conditions:** Employers apply a gender lens to their workplace policies and practices to ensure they are fair and equitable.
3. **Culture:** Employers promote a culture where all people feel safe, confident, and supported to actively challenge gender bias and discrimination, gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms without adverse consequences.
4. **Support:** Employers listen to, respect and support people who experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence through policies and practices that consider the impact of trauma.
5. **Core business:** Employers promote gender equality in their external engagement with customers, stakeholders and the community.




Excusing or minimising violence against women and sexual harassment in the workplace, or trying to justify why the violence occurred.

Young people shared the following insights on why it is important to tackle this driver in the workplace:

- Normalising such behaviours discourages people from coming into the office.
- This kind of toxic workplace culture is dehumanising, traumatising for victims, and negatively impacts broader personal and societal conduct.
- There should be a zero tolerance policy towards violence and sexual harassment, with strict enforcement from employers and consequences for perpetrators.
- Support is needed for those who disclose their experiences and employers have a responsibility to take claims seriously and act on them.

These insights reflect a collective call from young people for strict policies, supportive workplace cultures, and responsible actions to effectively address and prevent violence and harassment, reinforcing the need for safety and respect as foundational workplace values.



“Sexual harassment is horrific and traumatising for victims, and can really discourage people from coming into the workplace.”

“The opinions and culture around us at work feed into our personal lives. We start to embody the behaviours of the people we spend the most time around.”

Challenge sexism in the workplace.

Young people shared the following ideas to bring this action to life in the workplace:

- **Diverse leadership and decision-making:** Placing women in decision-making and leadership roles.
- **Cultural shifts and empowerment:** Acknowledging historical mistreatment of women and promoting a shift in workplace culture.
- **Inclusive conversations:** Involving everyone in sexism-related discussions to foster collective responsibility.
- **Calling out sexism directly:** Individuals and leaders using their power to directly confront sexist comments and encourage authoritative correction.
- **Systemic changes and quotas:** Addressing systemic misogyny through intentional quotas and rethinking power dynamics.
- **Corrective actions and dismissals:** Punitive measures for misconduct, including probation, behaviour monitoring and potential dismissal.
- **Simplified reporting processes:** More straightforward reporting mechanisms and visible representation in handling claims.
- **Education and training:** Creating forums for open discussion and training programs that address sexism in early careers.
- **Legal and policy reforms:** Stringent laws and policies to penalise workplace harassment and promote inclusion.
- **Supportive mechanisms for victims:** Supportive measures that allow victims to recuperate without penalty such as paid leave.

These solutions showcase a comprehensive approach to combating sexism in the workplace, including leadership adjustments, direct action against sexism, educational initiatives, systemic reforms, and supportive measures for affected individuals.

Gender inequality in workplaces resulting in men dominating decision-making.

Young people shared the following insights on why it is important to tackle this driver in the workplace:

- Diverse leadership encourages open communication and improves performance.
- Seeing women in leadership roles makes such positions seem attainable, motivating further career ambitions from young girls and women and promoting societal progress.
- Gender balance and female representation create a respectful and inclusive environment.
- Men dominating decision-making generates concerns about safety and fairness, especially given the history of prejudice and harassment.

These insights reflect a broad consensus among young people that gender equality in workplace decision-making not only fosters a safer, more inclusive environment but also drives innovation and empowerment across the board.



"It's important that everyone has a say in decision-making. It's not fair for just one group to hold all the power."

"Seeing women in those positions of leadership is the first step in creating more safe spaces."

Promote gender equality, safety and respect.

Young people shared the following ideas to bring this action to life in the workplace:

- **Proactive bystander approach and respect for privacy:** Encouraging standing up to inappropriate behaviour without fear of consequences, whilst respecting others privacy to create a safe and supportive environment.
- **Representation and diverse leadership:** Advocating for more female representation at all level without tokenistic quotes and equal treatment of women in the leadership roles, so their authority is not undermined.
- **Inclusive policies and regular feedback mechanisms:** Inclusive, co-designed policies that allow for regular input from employees, perhaps through regular conversations and anonymous feedback.
- **Balancing gender representation in roles:** Eliminating gender-specific roles and balancing shifts between different genders. This could also include the promotion of leadership and mentorship opportunities for women in male-dominated industries.
- **Awareness and employee-driven change:** Communicating standards and boundaries from the outset of careers and creating space for initiatives that are led by employees rather than top-down workplace initiatives.
- **Open conversations and legal protections:** Fostering open conversations around appropriate workplace behaviour and ensuring that workplaces are legally bound to enforce safety and equality policies.


These solutions emphasise the need for proactive engagement, representation, policy development, employee education, and supportive environments to promote gender equality, safety, and respect across all levels of the workplace.

Rigid gender stereotyping which limits the ways people can express themselves.

Young people shared the following insights on why it is important to tackle this driver in the workplace:

- Gender stereotypes can deter individuals from entering certain professions, reducing industry diversity and representation.
- Gender segregation and male-dominated industries can enable discriminatory behaviours.
- Stereotypes can also limit access to leadership roles for women, affecting diversity of perspective and decision-making power in organisations.
- Stereotyping limits expression and authenticity, which is detrimental for comfort and innovation in the workplace.
- Stereotypes create toxic environments that perpetuate unfair treatment and deduce individual potential.

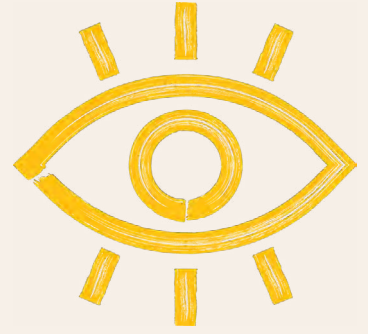
These insights underline the significant impact of rigid gender stereotypes on workplace safety, diversity, leadership access, and personal expression, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable professional environment.



“There are so many jobs that women steer away from because of stereotypes, which results in some workplaces becoming oversaturated or undersaturated in terms of gender representation.”

“Stereotypes are a stepping stone to broader instances of misogyny, sexism and violence against women.”

Challenge gender stereotyping.



Young people shared the following ideas to bring this action to life in the workplace:

- **Anonymous reporting and accountability:** Creating systems to anonymously report inappropriate behaviours, with consequences when work rights are violated.
- **Inclusive and flexible policies:** Policies that support diverse needs, such as gender affirmation and flexible work arrangements to accommodate personal circumstances.
- **Open discussion and educational initiatives:** Regular workshops and open discussion about stereotypes to educate and engage employees. Young people also stressed the importance of unified education on topics like consent, challenging the traditional separation by gender in existing programs.
- **Visibility and representation in leadership:** Diverse representation in leadership roles to combat stereotypes about gender and abilities.
- **Gender-neutral standards and practices:** Equal workplace dress codes and parental leave policies to be more inclusive and less-gender specific.
- **Transparency, vulnerability and commitment in policy creation:** Transparent commitment to policies that challenge stereotypes, with clear consequences for violations.
- **Empowerment and engagement in policy creation:** Co-designing policies with diverse groups to ensure all voices are heard and valued, fostering an open and inclusive environment.

These solutions underscore the need for a multi-faceted approach to combatting gender stereotyping, which includes enhancing policy transparency, fostering inclusive educational practices, and ensuring diverse representation and flexibility in workplace standards and leadership.

Male peer relations at work that disrespect women and each other.

Young people shared the following insights on why it is important to tackle this driver in the workplace:

- A culture of joking about inappropriate topics among male peers can make it difficult to challenge and leads to a toxic work atmosphere.
- Normalising sexist comments among men dehumanises women and sets a tone that makes violent behaviours towards them more conceivable.
- The pressure to conform to disrespectful behaviours can make men feel unsafe and perpetuates a culture.
- Discussions about gender issues need to be framed to engage men without triggering defensiveness, emphasising the broader impact of mental health and safety for all genders.

These insights underscore the significant impact of disrespectful male peer relations on workplace culture, personal safety, and professional conduct, highlighting the necessity of addressing this issue to foster a more inclusive and respectful work environment.

"It's hard to call out. If all your mates are joking around about it, you would feel weird about calling it out. You'd be judged if you did."

"Sexist jokes and locker room talk make women and other men feel unsafe. Men are rewarded for treating people poorly, so it just continues to fester."

Support and engage men to promote positive masculinities and supportive male peer relationships in workplaces.

Young people shared the following ideas to bring this action to life in the workplace:

- **Accountability and anonymous reporting:** Committing to calling out sexist comments as an organisation and implementing anonymous reporting systems to protect victims and those who report.
- **Mental health support for men:** Addressing men's mental health to challenge toxic masculinity by encouraging open discussions about feelings and challenging derogatory remarks.
- **Respectful role models:** Promoting healthy masculinity in the workplace through the presence of respectful role models for younger men to emulate.
- **Queer and feminist advocacy:** Enhancing queer resistance and creating feminist groups for men to tackle deep-seated homophobia and sexism, promoting a broader acceptance of diverse masculinities.
- **Safe spaces and open discussions:** Creating non-segregated safe spaces where open discussion can occur, helping break down barriers and promote understanding.
- **Education and mentorship:** Programs facilitated by positive male role models that foster empathy and discuss toxic masculinity.

These solutions emphasise the need for comprehensive approaches that include educational initiatives, policy reforms, mental health support, and the promotion of positive role models to engage men in building supportive and respectful peer relationships in the workplace.

The role of young people

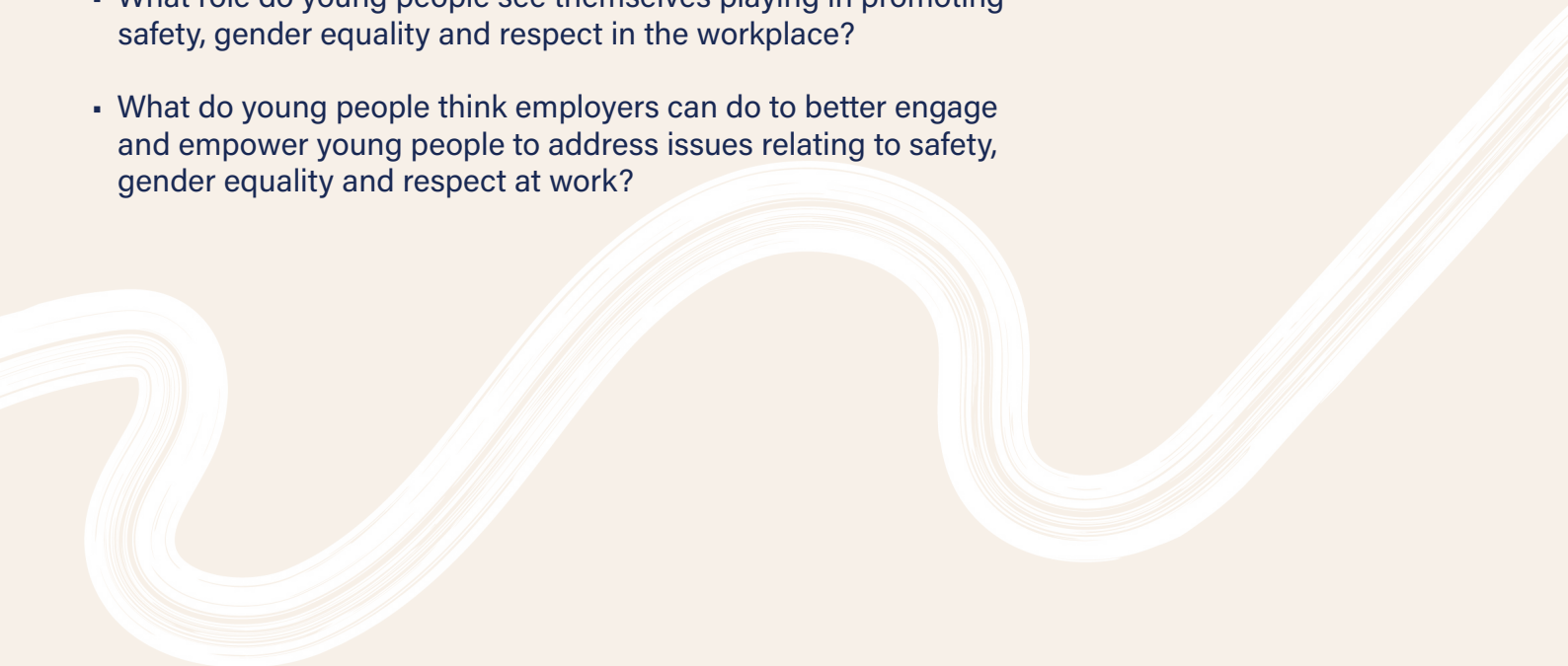


This section of the insights paper summarises how young people see themselves as part of the solution relating to promoting safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace.

Young people can refer to these insights to better understand the role they can play in tackling this issue, while employers can utilise them for empowering and engaging young employees in their efforts to prevent violence against women and children.

The role of young people encompasses the following lines of inquiry from our synthesis framework.

The role of young people:

- What role do young people see themselves playing in promoting safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace?
 - What do young people think employers can do to better engage and empower young people to address issues relating to safety, gender equality and respect at work?
- 

“I think young people have a bigger role to play than we’re aware of...We can step into our power and be role models.”




Youth participation

Young people shared the following insights on the role they can play in promoting a safe, equal and respectful workplace:

- **Advocacy and calling out injustice:** Young people are viewed as critical in challenging inappropriate behaviors and advocating for changes within the workplace. This involves calling out sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination, even when there are risks involved.
- **Creating support systems and safe spaces:** Young workers can foster inclusive environments by forming support networks where experiences and strategies are shared, enhancing mutual support and empowerment.
- **Educating peers:** Educating young people about their rights and proper procedures for reporting unfair treatment is essential. This is especially important as many young people may feel lost or uncertain about how to address workplace issues.
- **Influencing the modern workforce:** The next generation are accepting and progressive, potentially leading to more inclusive practices that accommodate diversity in terms of gender expression, race, and other identities.
- **Sharing power in decision-making:** There is a call for more youth involvement in decision-making processes at higher levels, such as on boards and in management, to ensure that their voices and perspectives shape future workplace policies.
- **Community and online engagement:** Utilising online platforms and community groups can amplify their advocacy, providing a space to share experiences and rally support for inclusive practices.

These insights emphasise the pivotal role young people play in shaping workplace cultures that are safe, respectful, and inclusive. By leveraging their unique perspectives and collective power, they can significantly influence positive changes in workplace dynamics.



“Young people should speak up and report unfair treatment. It’s important to know your rights and have support.”

Youth empowerment and engagement

Young people shared the following insights on the what employers can do to better empower and engage young people to be part of the solution:

- **Promotion of open communication and reporting:** Employers can encourage young people to report inappropriate behavior without fear of retribution. This includes making them aware that calling out incidents is protected and supported by workplace policies.
- **Enhancing training and awareness:** Implementing comprehensive training sessions that include modules on creating a diverse and healthy work environment.
- **Inclusive policy development and youth consultation:** Engaging young employees in policy development ensures that their needs and perspectives are considered. This can be achieved through structured feedback mechanisms like surveys and inclusive meetings where all employees can lead discussions on topics important to them.
- **Youth-led initiatives and leadership opportunities:** Providing young employees with leadership roles or project ownership can enhance their engagement. This includes opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes that affect their work and wellbeing.
- **Community and online engagement:** Utilising online platforms and community groups can amplify their advocacy, providing a space to share experiences and rally support for inclusive practices.
- **Addressing workplace exploitation and ensuring fair treatment:** Employers need to ensure that young workers are not exploited for cheap labor and are given fair working conditions. This includes adherence to labor laws regarding working hours, overtime, and breaks.

These insights highlight the need for proactive strategies that empower young people to actively participate in creating safer, more respectful, and equitable workplaces. By engaging young employees in meaningful ways and providing them with the tools and platforms to express their concerns and ideas, employers can harness their unique perspectives to drive positive organisational change.



Recommendations

For employers

Promote a culture of safety:

1. Implement both physical and emotional safety measures, including security presence and supportive management.
2. Create transparent communication channels and ensure management styles encourage openness and professionalism.
3. Recognise and accommodate individual needs and identities to enhance safety for everyone.

Advance gender equality:

1. Address gender disparities by ensuring equal opportunities, pay, and representation in leadership roles.
2. Implement inclusive policies that respect all gender identities and actively challenge gender stereotypes.
3. Encourage and support female and non-binary leadership to counteract male-dominated decision-making.

Foster respect and inclusion:

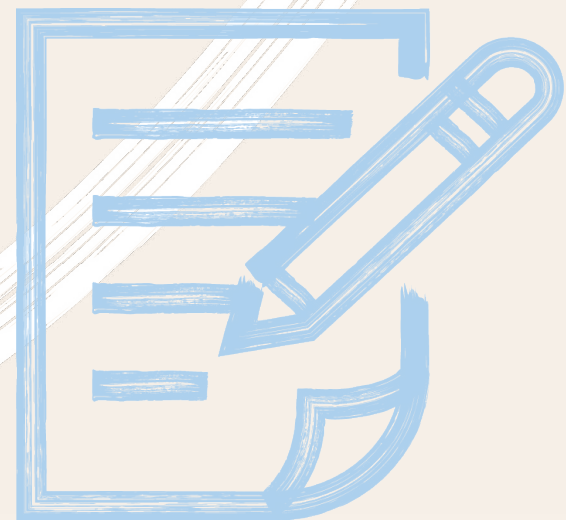
1. Cultivate environments that value cultural sensitivity and diversity, and treat young workers with respect.
2. Implement policies that support mutual respect, professional conduct, and privacy.
3. Regularly engage employees in discussions about inclusion and develop mechanisms for feedback and improvement.

Combat gender-based violence and harassment:

1. Establish clear policies with zero tolerance for sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
2. Support victims with comprehensive support systems including trauma-informed care and safe reporting mechanisms.
3. Educate employees on being active bystanders and empower them to challenge disrespectful behavior.

Youth engagement and empowerment:

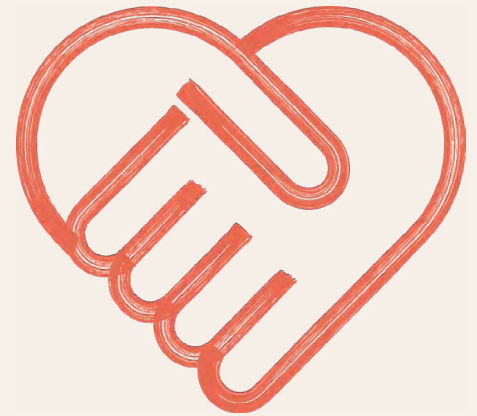
1. Engage young people in decision-making processes and policy development.
2. Offer leadership opportunities and mentorships that reflect diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
3. Create and support youth-led initiatives to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility in workplace culture changes.



For prevention practitioners

Support organisational change:

1. Help organisations to develop and refine policies that promote gender equality, safety, and respect.
2. Facilitate workshops and training sessions that address sexism, harassment, and discrimination.
3. Provide tools and resources to aid organisations in creating a supportive and inclusive culture.



Research and insights:

1. Conduct ongoing research to stay updated on the challenges and experiences of different employee groups, especially young people.
2. Use insights to guide interventions and policy changes tailored to the specific needs of workplaces.

Community and network building:

1. Foster collaborations between different organizations to share best practices and resources.
2. Build networks that can provide support and advocacy for individuals experiencing harassment or inequality at work.

Promote legal and policy advocacy:

1. Advocate for stronger enforcement of existing laws and the introduction of new policies that protect employees from discrimination and violence.
2. Work with legal experts to ensure that workplace policies comply with national standards and are effectively implemented.

These recommendations aim to guide employers and prevention practitioners in creating safer, more respectful, and equitable workplaces, where all employees, especially the young people, feel valued and empowered to contribute.



Appendix

Further resources

If you want to dive deeper into the topics covered in this insights paper, we've curated a list of resources for you to pick and choose from to suit different learning styles.

Our Watch

- Change the story is an evidence-based framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women. Here you can find a suite of resources related to this project, including an explainer video.
- Workplace Equality and Respect is a hub of tools and resources to support workplaces to embed gender equality and prevent sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. Here you can find an explainer video for the standards, as well as factsheets on sexual harassment in the workplace.

Respect@Work

- The Respect@Work website brings together resources to support individuals and organisations to better understand, prevent and address workplace sexual harassment, including resources for young workers.
- The Good Practice Indicators Framework for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Sexual Harassment contains intended outcomes and indicators of good practice for employers.

SafeWork Australia

- The SafeWork Australia website has a suite of information to support organisations to manage the work health and safety risks of workplace sexual and gender-based harassment.



Australian Human Rights Commission

- The Time for Respect report presents the findings of the fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces, including infographics with key statistics from the survey.
- The Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry report outlines the Commission's findings and recommendations from the national inquiry into workplace sexual harassment.

Australian Government

- The Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality website outlines where the Government will focus its efforts over the next decade to achieve gender equality.

Womens and Girls Emergency Centre

- The End Gender-Based Violence website features a video series to learn more about gender-based violence and guides on taking action for individuals and workplaces.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency

- The Gender Equality Strategy Toolkit features tools aimed at helping organisations to achieve workplace gender equality.

Chief Executive Women

- The Respect is Everyone's Business Resource Pack has been designed to help equip leaders with the tools and confidence to appropriately prevent and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.

Champions of Change Coalition

- The Disrupting the System report provides a guide to more effective organisational approaches to preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace.

Wellbeing support services

If this project raises any issues for you or someone you know, please call the 24/7 national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or seek support from one of the wellbeing support services listed here.

Lifeline

24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention.

- 13 11 14
- lifeline.org.au (webchat available)

Beyond Blue

24/7 confidential counselling.

- 1300 22 4636
- beyondblue.org.au (webchat available)

Kids Helpline

24/7 confidential counselling for young people aged 5 to 24.

- 1800 55 1800
- kidshelpline.com.au (webchat available)

13YARN

24/7 culturally safe crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- 13 92 76
- 13yarn.org.au

QLife

QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTQIA+ peer support and referral for people in Australia wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships. Available 3pm–12am every day.

- 1800 184 52
- qlife.org.au (webchat available)

National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline

Reporting abuse or neglect of people with disability.

- 1800 880 052
- [Find out more info on the Job Access website](#)

Men's Referral Service

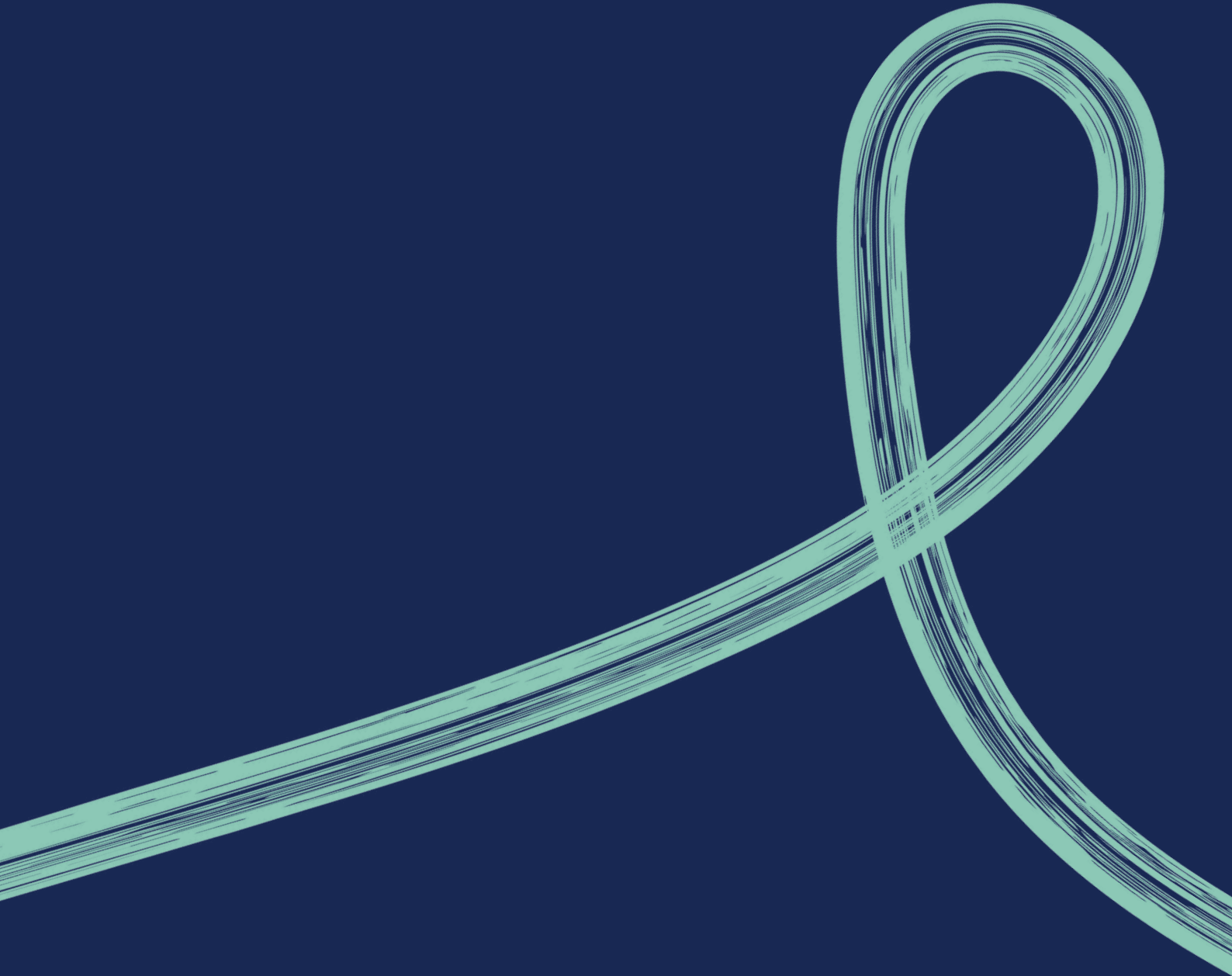
24/7 telephone counselling, informal and referral service for men using, or at risk or using, violent or controlling behaviour.

- 1300 766 491
- ntv.org.au/mrs

National Relay Service

The National Relay Service (NRS) is an Australia-wide phone service for people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing and/or have speech communication difficulty and people wanting to communicate with them.

- [Find the correct contact number depending on the service required on the Access Hub website](#)



Our Watch

Preventing violence against women



Our Watch

GPO Box 24229
Melbourne VIC 3001

ourwatch.org.au

YLab

GPO Box 239
Melbourne VIC 3001

ylab.global