

MEDIA RELEASE
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Parliament calls for employer understanding of domestic violence

On Thursday 11 October 2012, the Commonwealth House Of Representatives passed a motion introduced by Amanda Rishworth, Federal Member for Kingston, calling for Parliament to recognise the impact of domestic violence on women's paid employment.

This motion is strongly supported by the Commonwealth-funded National Women's Alliances: Equality Rights Alliance, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance and economic Security4women.

"This is a positive first step towards addressing the wide-spread belief that domestic violence is a private issue," says Julie Oberin, Chair of the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance. "For too many women, domestic violence is something they feel ashamed to talk about with their employer, their landlord, or their neighbours. We need these women to feel safe and supported so that domestic violence does not also cost them their job, their home, or their social networks. Domestic Violence is not a private issue, it's a workplace issue, it's a community issue, it's a societal issue."

"Secure work is crucial to women's lifelong financial security, and our members support measures that assist employers and employees to address the impact of domestic violence on women's workforce participation" says Sandra Cook, Chair of economic Security4Women.

The private motion called for Parliament to recognise the impact of domestic violence on women's paid employment, including:

- Lost productivity as a result of anxiety and distraction in the workplace;
- Absenteeism due to sustaining physical and psychological injuries;
- Disrupted work histories as victims often change jobs;
- Lower personal incomes and reduced hours of work; and
- Risks to personal safety in the workplace as well as to co-workers.

"Employers are placed in a difficult position if their employees feel compelled to hide their experience of violence. Women may lose their jobs simply because their employer was ignorant or unaware," Helen Dalley-Fisher, Manager at Equality Rights Alliance, noted. "Ms Rishworth's motion attempts to create a safe space in the workplace for discussing and responding to violence, including identifying the non-physical signs of violence and risks to personal safety in the workplace, such as controlling and stalking by the perpetrators. Reforms of this kind will only be effective if they form part of wider community engagement to recognise, and respond to, domestic violence, focusing also on preventing violence against women happening in the first place.

"Women who have, or who are, experiencing domestic violence need to be safe and supported whilst in their workplace and not disadvantaged or discriminated against," says Dr Caroline Lambert, Executive Director at YWCA Australia. "Being able to keep their job is vital for women who have experienced domestic violence and need to find a safe place to live. Health care and legal advice are also easier to access when you have an independent, reliable income."

For media comment or interview, please contact Helen Dalley-Fisher, Equality Rights Alliance – 02 6230 5152 or 0413 065 822 or Julie Oberin Australian Women Against Violence Alliance - 0419 539 346.

Equality Rights Alliance is Australia's largest network of organisations advocating women's equality, women's leadership, and recognition of women's diversity, and is managed by YWCA Australia. www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au

The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance focus is addressing all forms violence against women, to ensure that all women and children are able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse. www.awava.org.au

eS4W is committed to strengthening economic wellbeing and financial security for women. www.security4women.org.au