

# WHY is GBV so widespread?

At the start of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in 2017, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary General, emphasized that GBV "is fundamentally about power. It will only end when gender equality and the full empowerment of women is a reality." Gender-based violence is the violence that is based on gender inequalities, and gender inequality is the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity and value based on gender identity.

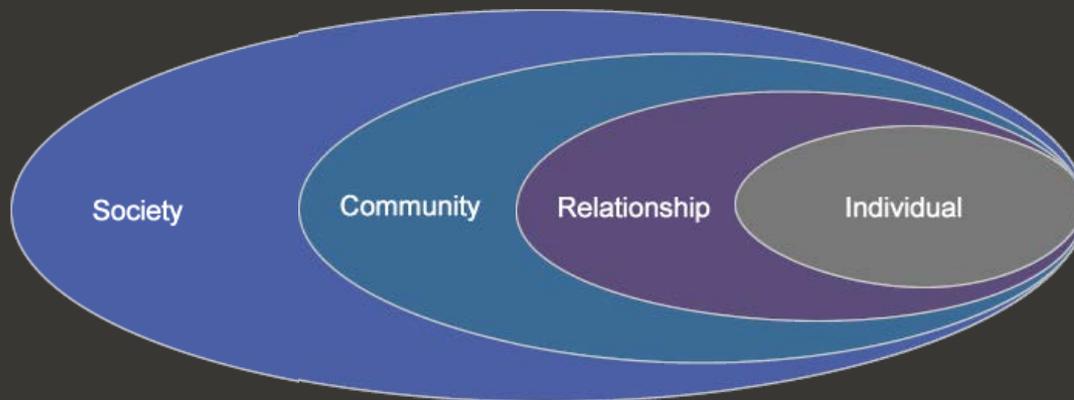
Across the world, women are denied the same opportunities as men and lack access to and control over resources and positions of power. In many societies, men have greater social and economic, as well as civil and political, rights than women. Men receive greater pay than women for doing the same work, and work that is regarded as "women's work", such as the care of children and the elderly, is usually unpaid or, at best, low paid. In these and other ways, women's status in society is devalued when compared with men. Women's vulnerability to violence is linked to this devaluation of women's lives, and violence reinforces their lower status. Gender-based violence is so common because gender inequalities are so widespread.

This module presents information on:

- Factors fueling GBV
- GBV and gender inequalities: '5 Rs'
- GBV and social norms
- GBV and other inequalities

# Factors fueling GBV

One of the clearest ways to understand why GBV is so widespread is to look at the range of factors fueling the violence. We can think of these factors in terms of the different levels at which they operate.



# Factors fueling GBV

## Society Level Factors

Some of the most important factors fueling GBV that operate at the level of the society as a whole include:

- Limited legislative and policy framework for preventing and responding to violence.
- Lack of investments in services to implement laws and policies on gender-based violence.
- Lack of punishment (impunity) for perpetrators of violence.
- Low levels of awareness about GBV among service providers, law enforcement and judicial actors.
- Discriminatory family law that denies women their rights.
- Lack of economic rights for women.
- Religious and ethno-nationalist ideologies that uphold patriarchal subordination of women.
- Conditions that heighten women's vulnerability to GBV, such as war/conflict, forced migration, insecure employment.
- Laws and policies that deny people from gender and sexual minorities their civil, political, social, and economic rights.

# Factors fueling GBV

## Community Level Factors

Some of the most important factors fueling GBV that operate at the level of the community include:

- Attitudes and practices that reinforce women's lower status in the community (e.g. dowry, early marriage).
- Emphasis on women's purity and family honor.
- Lack of safe spaces for women and girls, which can be physical or virtual meeting spaces that allow free expression and communication; a place to develop friendships and social networks, engage with mentors and seek advice from a supportive environment.
- Acceptability of use of violence within the family or community to address conflict.
- Shared belief that women and girls are to blame for their experiences of violence.
- Rigid and hierarchical ideas about masculinity and femininity.
- Discriminatory attitudes and norms toward people from gender and sexual minorities.

# Factors fueling GBV

## Relationship Level Factors

Some of the most important factors fueling GBV that operate at the level of relationships include:

- Male authority and power over the household, including control over household decision-making and assets.
- Significant age disparities between (older) men and (younger) women in an intimate relationship.
- Economic, educational and employment disparities between men and women in an intimate relationship.
- Shared beliefs about strict and gendered division of labor - men's role is to earn money to support their families, while women's role is to provide (unpaid) care for family members.
- Conflict and tension within an intimate partner relationship or marriage.
- Harsh parenting practices.

# Factors fueling GBV

## Individual Level Factors

Some of the most important factors fueling GBV that operate at the individual level include:

- Experience of suffering or witnessing violence during childhood - associated with future perpetration of violence for boys and experiencing violence for girls.
- Attitudes accepting violence, male privilege, and women's subordinate status - whether by the perpetrator or the victim.
- Limited access to education - associated with boys perpetrating violence in the future and girls experiencing violence.
- Limited economic opportunities - for men, associated with perpetrating violence; and as a risk factor for women and girls, including risks of domestic abuse, child and forced marriage, and sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- Women's insecure access to and control over property and land rights.

# GBV and gender inequalities: 5 Rs

Another way to understand the links between gender inequalities and GBV is to consider five aspects of gender and inequalities and look at how they affect vulnerability to violence. These are the five Rs: Rules, Rights, Resources, Relations and Roles.

# Factors fueling GBV

## Rules

Although many countries now have laws against at least some forms of GBV, it is still true that different forms of such violence remain acceptable in many societies. Far from being against the rules, research in a range of countries shows that many forms of GBV are socially accepted, and sometimes, actively promoted. In some societies, forms of GBV such as early marriage and FGM/C are both legally permitted and widely practiced, in the latter case mostly by women. Men's sexual harassment of women in public space is widely tolerated in many countries. Violence against lesbian, gay and transgender people is actively condoned and formally practiced by the laws of many countries; 72 countries continue to criminalize sexual behavior between males and 45 countries criminalize sexual behavior between women. To what extent are different forms of GBV seen as acceptable in the communities in which you work?

# Factors fueling GBV

## Rights

Of the 194 UN member nations, 187 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); only the USA, the Pacific island nations of Tonga and Palua, Iran, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan have not. Coming into force in 1981, CEDAW is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Nearly four decades later, progress has undoubtedly been made in securing equal rights for women in political, economic and social life. But across the world, significant gender inequalities in civil and political, as well as social and economic, rights persist. In 2017, the CEDAW committee called for the repeal of all laws and policies that directly and indirectly excuse, condone and facilitate violence and emphasized the need for approaches that promote and respect women's autonomy and decision-making in all spheres of life. Lesbian, gay and transgender people continue to suffer punitive and discriminatory laws and denial of human rights in many societies. In your national context, which struggles for equal rights are most relevant to your work on GBV?

# Factors fueling GBV

## Resources

Across the world, women are entering the waged work-force in greater numbers. But more women than men work in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs. Globally, women are paid less than men. Women in most countries earn on average only 60 to 75 percent of men's wages. When paid and unpaid work are combined, women in developing countries work more than men, with less time for education, leisure, political participation and self-care. One recent study of 143 countries found that 90 percent had one or more legal restrictions on women's economic opportunities, with 79 countries having laws that restrict the types of jobs that women can do and 15 countries allowing husbands to prevent their wives from accepting jobs.

This deprivation of access to economic resources and opportunities is itself a form of GBV, and increases vulnerability to other forms of GBV. Women's poverty affects their exposure to and experiences of violence. Studies around the world consistently show links between intimate partner violence and poverty at both a household and community level. Women's poverty also puts them at greater risk of sexual exploitation by men in positions of authority. Increased access to assets potentially allows financial autonomy, enabling women to leave a violent relationship. More broadly, reductions in household poverty can reduce economic stress and so reduce potential triggers for conflict. In the communities in which you work, what is the situation in terms of women's access to and control over economic resources and how do you see this affecting their exposure and experiences of different forms of GBV?

# Factors fueling GBV

## Relations

Male peer group relations help to fuel different forms of GBV not only against women and girls but also other men and boys. Research in different countries highlights the role that such violence can play in initiation rituals for male gangs . The violent 'hazing' of military recruits reflects and reinforces a patriarchal masculinity based on violence and domination. In-depth research with men in military and para-military forces in Colombia identified peer cultures of militarized masculinity, in which men's identities as soldiers/fighters were bound up with patriarchal attitudes and behaviors towards women. More generally, research across the world has noted the influence of male peer groups in reinforcing rigid and hierarchical gender roles and stereotyped ideas about masculinity and femininity. How do male peer groups affect vulnerability to GBV in your local context?

# Factors fueling GBV

## Roles

One of the foundations of gender inequality is the limitation placed on women's participation in public life. In many societies, it remains true that responsibility for the family is seen as women's role, whereas participation in public life of the community or country is largely seen as men's role. This division of labor is often very stark. Women are still responsible for most care work. One global study, looking at the period 1999 to 2011, found that women's time spent on unpaid work was almost double that of men's (275 minutes a day compared to 141 minutes a day). By contrast, only 15 of 193 heads of government are women, who remain severely underrepresented in leadership positions in national governments and the private sector. Results from the 2017 International Men and Gender Equality Survey in the Middle East and North Africa found that two-thirds to more than three-quarters of men supported the idea that a woman's most important role is to care for the household. Strong majorities of men also believed it was their role to monitor and control the movements of women and girls outside of their home, a practice most men recalled starting in childhood. Such control is an act of GBV in itself, denying women's rightful access to resources, opportunities and services. But it has also fueled other forms of GBV, by insisting that men's behavior toward women in the home is a 'private family' matter beyond the reach of the law. Passing legislation against this 'domestic' violence has been a significant achievement of the last 30 or more years in many countries. Implementing these laws remains a challenge, however. What is the situation in your country in terms of legislation against 'domestic' violence and its enforcement?

# GBV and social norms

A social norm is a collectively shared belief about what is considered acceptable and appropriate behavior in a given setting and social group. Even though progress has been made in passing laws against at least some forms of GBV, it remains true in many societies that it is acceptable and appropriate for women to have fewer rights than men and for men to exercise power and control over women's lives. Certain practices, such as early marriage or FGM/C that are themselves forms of violence, also remain acceptable in a number of societies. GBV is so widespread because the gender inequalities that fuel the violence are still considered acceptable and appropriate.

# GBV and social norms

## Male authority

Common social norms relating to male authority and GBV include:

- Men should be the head of the household. If necessary, it is okay for men to use violence to assert and maintain this authority.
- Men should be the main person generating income for the family. A man who cannot economically provide for his family is a failure.

# GBV and social norms

## Male aggression

Common social norms relating to male aggression and GBV include:

- Real men are tough and should defend their reputation, with force if necessary.
- Men are naturally aggressive - it is in their nature. They cannot be blamed if they sometimes become violent.

# GBV and social norms

## Male sexuality

Common social norms relating to male sexuality and GBV include:

- Real men have strong sexual appetites and women must expect sexual attention from men.
- Men are entitled to sex. If men feel sexually frustrated, it is not surprising that they sometimes use force to satisfy their sexual urges.
- Men are naturally heterosexual. Men who want to or choose to have sex with other men deserve to be punished because they are immoral.

# GBV and social norms

## Men & Intimate Partner Violence

Common social norms relating to men & intimate partner violence include:

- Physical violence is an acceptable way to maintain authority in a relationship.
- Violence is a private family matter and others should not intervene.
- A husband has a right to expect his wife to obey him and to punish her if she does not.

# GBV and social norms

## Female gender roles

Common social norms relating to female gender roles and GBV include:

- A woman's most important role is to take care of her home and her family.
- It is not appropriate for women to make decisions or participate in political decisions.

# GBV and social norms

## Women & Sexual Violence

Common social norms relating to women & sexual violence include:

- If a woman is raped, she is usually to blame for putting herself in that situation.
- If a woman is raped, she should not report it to the police to protect the dignity of the family.

# GBV and social norms

## Female sexuality

Common social norms relating to female sexuality and GBV include:

- Women need to protect their virtue before marriage by not being sexual. It is better that girls marry early than risk their virtue.
- It is a wife's responsibility to provide sex when her husband wants it.
- It is normally a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant.

# GBV and other inequalities

Many women and those who don't comply with accepted gender norms face other forms of discrimination and disadvantage. In 2013, the UN Commission on the Status of Women emphasized that "that women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination are exposed to increased risk of violence." The different forms of GBV that men and boys may experience are also often linked to these other experiences of inequality and marginalization. Multiple forms of inequality reinforce people's exposure to GBV, not least their vulnerability to violence perpetrated by men in positions of official power (such as the police). Social marginalization linked to multiple forms of inequality also often limits people's access to justice and to services for survivors.

# GBV and other inequalities

## Racial, ethnic, and religious minorities

In many societies, women belonging to particular ethnic or racial groups and/or religious minorities are likely to experience gender-based violence that is linked to violence based on their minority status. Indigenous women are subject to various forms of violence, including violence perpetrated by state officials, sometimes at a much higher rate than non-indigenous women. A 2003 study found that Australian indigenous women were 28 times more likely than non-indigenous women to be admitted to hospital with assault injuries. In India, violence against women based on caste is evident in high rates of sexual violence committed against Dalit women by men of higher caste. In the explosion of inter-communal violence in the western Indian state of Gujarat in 2002, Hindu extremists systematically raped, assaulted and killed hundreds of Muslim women. Racism and other forms of ethnically or religiously-based discrimination also limit women's access to health, social welfare and legal services in cases of violence.

# GBV and other inequalities

## Gender and sexual minorities

Women may encounter violence based on social prejudices against them because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. A 2015 report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights found that lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women face disproportionate levels of violence at the hands of both strangers and intimate partners. In Brazil, transgender women make up a disproportionately large percentage of the victims of hate-motivated violence and the country has the highest reported rate of fatal violence against transgender people. The average life expectancy for a transgender woman in Brazil is reportedly just 36 years. Publicity surrounding cases of rape of lesbian women in South Africa has highlighted the use of rape to punish people who do not conform to perceived social norms regarding human sexuality or gender roles. The problem of sexual and physical violence against gay, bisexual and transgender men is also being increasingly recognized

# GBV and other inequalities

## HIV Status

Research shows the increasing links between GBV and HIV. Women who have experienced violence are at higher risk for HIV and HIV-infected women are more likely to have experienced violence. A global review of 30,000 published and unpublished articles and UN studies shows that physical and sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) and childhood sexual abuse (CSA) increases the risk of HIV infection both directly via viral transmission and indirectly, through increasing the likelihood of subsequent risky sexual behavior. GBV fosters the spread of HIV by limiting a person's ability to negotiate safe sexual practices, disclose HIV status, and access services due to fear of reprisal. A WHO study found that fear of violence was a barrier to HIV disclosure for an average of 25 percent of participating women. In some countries the proportion was as high as 86 percent. Fear of violence prevents women from seeking voluntary counseling and testing for HIV, returning for their test results, getting treatment if they are HIV positive or services to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. Among women living with HIV, IPV can lead to lower antiretroviral therapy use and adherence to HIV treatment, and higher viral loads.

# GBV and other inequalities

## Migrants and undocumented residents

In 2017, there were some 260 million people living outside the countries of their birth, just under half of whom were women. The process of migration can expose women to increased risks of violence. Because of their subordinate status both as migrants and as women, female migrant workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, ranging from sexual exploitation by officials overseeing their recruitment and departure to physical and sexual violence by their employers. Sectors in which migrant women are mainly employed include domestic, care-giving, factory, agriculture, and entertainment. These sectors, often gender-segregated, low-paid and unregulated, are rarely covered by national labor laws and thus offer little protection. Migrant women workers are exposed to violence in many forms, including exploitative working conditions such as long working hours, non-payment of wages, forced confinement, starvation, beatings, rape, or sexual abuse and exploitation. Studies have also highlighted an increase in intimate partner violence within migrant families, with women's migrant status often further limiting their access to support services and information. Those migrants living in a country without legal documentation can face increased risks of sexual exploitation by immigration officials as well as little to no access to formal services and the justice system.

# GBV and other inequalities

## People in detention

The vulnerability of women, men and people of other gender identities to physical violence, rape and other forms of sexual assault in prison and other forms of detention is slowly being recognized. Countries facing an increase in numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons, economic migrants and victims of human trafficking and smuggling often confine people in detainment facilities. Conditions in these facilities expose asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to assault, sexual abuse, torture, ill-health, lack of counseling support, and limited legal assistance. Human rights investigations of immigration detention facilities in South Africa uncovered reports of routine violence, corruption and bribery, insufficient food, overcrowding, lack of reading and writing materials, denial of access to medical care, and indefinite detentions without judicial review. A 2015 Human Rights Watch study of prisons in Brazil found many cases of male prisoners being raped by other inmates as well as prison officers.

# GBV and other inequalities

## People affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies

Attention is now being given to increased vulnerability to GBV in settings affected by conflict and other humanitarian emergencies. The available evidence suggests that the types of GBV most likely to occur in conflict and humanitarian settings are similar to GBV in non-emergency settings. Violence perpetrated by an intimate partner remains the most common form of violence facing a woman in communities affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies. There is some evidence to suggest that rates of GBV increase during times of conflict, though the connection is primarily seen between rates of non-partner assault and times of conflict. The international community now recognizes and seeks to address the use of sexual violence, against not only women and girls but also men and boys, as a "weapon of war". The problem of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeeping forces is also now recognized. Over 135 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance today as a result of armed conflict and natural disasters. People displaced from their homes to camps and other forms of temporary accommodation may face particular risks of GBV, whether from other community members or camp officials

# GBV and other inequalities

## People with disabilities and mental health problems

The concept of "disabilities" covers many different conditions, with different vulnerabilities and needs. When identifying and addressing risks for GBV for individuals with one or more forms of impairment and/or mental health conditions, it is important to focus on the specific experience of the individual as well as particular types of violence, and develop programming accordingly. In general, however, women with physical and/or mental disabilities or mental health conditions may experience violence in particular ways in their homes and institutional settings, perpetrated by family members, caretakers, or strangers. Surveys conducted in Europe, North America and Australia have shown that more than half of women living with disabilities have experienced physical abuse, compared to one third of women who are not living with a disability.

Thank you for  
completing the course  
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