Dramatically Reduce Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices

Facts, Solutions, Case Studies, and Policy Recommendations

OVERVIEW

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a phenomenon that transcends social, economic, and geographic borders. Impacting girls and women all over the world, GBV is fueled by multiple factors, including cultural norms, male dominance, social acceptance of harmful practices, and insufficient legal protections. Yet recognizing these triggers has helped identify steps to lessen the vulnerability of girls, women, and marginalized populations (based on class, caste, faith, sexual orientation, gender identity, profession, migrant status, or disability status) to gender-based violence. This policy brief discusses several approaches that can help societies step up GBV prevention and build a stronger response to violence when it occurs. These include: addressing gender norms through legislation and behavior change; improving cross-sectoral services to support GBV survivors; increasing equitable access to economic assets; and investing in women's movements.

SECTION 1: FRAMING THE ISSUE

Human rights violations inflicted by gender-based violence and harmful practices occur in every country of the world. The negative impact on girls and women is particularly acute. Gender-based violence can take a heavy toll on women's and young people's health—including physical injury, depression, chronic pain, sexually-transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancy, increased risk of HIV infection, and death—but it does not stop there.[1,2,3] It also impedes the participation of girls and women in society, as well as their empowerment, and ultimately, further contributes to inequality. Numerous international agreements uphold girls and women's rights to live free from violence and harmful practices, yet levels of violence remain unacceptably high.

Globally, 38.6% of female homicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner.[4] When family members are included as perpetrators that number jumps up to nearly 50%.[5] While GBV hurts girls, women, and sexual minority survivors first, it has a ripple effect hindering their families and communities, carrying an economic price tag as well.[6] In some countries, like Bangladesh and Chile, the economic cost of intimate partner violence greatly outweighs government spending for primary education.[7] For example, it is estimated that the cost of GBV around the world is about $4.4 trillion which amounts to 5.2% of the global GDP.[8] Globally, it is estimated that one in three women experiences physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime, most often by an intimate partner.[9]

Gender-based violence can affect girls and women of any age, from pre-birth to old age and takes many forms. It is important to acknowledge the higher global rate of female infanticide as a form of gender-based violence. For example, in many communities because of the lower status of women both economically and socially, female infants also face higher rates of abandonment.[10] Roughly 26% of US women have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18,[11] and data show that around 120 million girls globally, roughly 1 in 10, have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts.[12] The most common perpetrators of these acts of sexual violence are not strangers, but partners, teachers, or family members.[13] For example, one study in Zimbabwe showed that 78% of girls who experienced sexual violence reported that the first incidence was perpetrated by a boyfriend or partner.[14]

Existing legal and social protections, while meager, break down during conflict, emergency, and humanitarian crises, when rape is often a weapon of war.[15,16] Climate disasters have been shown to increase sexual harassment,[17] domestic violence,[18] sexual exploitation of children,[19] and human trafficking.[20] Displacement and migration following a disaster can result in overcrowding and unsafe living conditions in evacuation centers, temporary housing, and other shelters.[21] Women become more vulnerable to harassment and violence, and increased poverty and loss of community likewise increase the propensity for violence.[22]

➔ *For more, please reference the brief focused on Investing in Women to Tackle Climate Change and Conserve the Environment.*

Harmful practices continue to impair the health, wellbeing, and future of girls and women. It is estimated that at least 200 million girls and women across 30 countries have been subjected to some form of female genital mutilation/cutting, which creates an increased risk of prolonged bleeding and infection, complications during childbirth, infertility, and even death.[23,24] In 2017, more than 700 million

Eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices is linked to the achievement of multiple SDG goals and targets, including:

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- **3.1** By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

- **3.2** By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- **4.a** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- **5.1** End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere

- **5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

- **5.3** Eliminate all harmful practices such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

- **5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life

- **5.c** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

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living women had been married before the age of 18.[25] Globally, 37,000 girls are married each day.[26] As child brides are often unable to negotiate safe sex or family planning, they are particularly vulnerable to early and unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.[27] It is estimated that if the rate of child marriage does not slow, by 2050, the global number of women married as children will reach 1.2 billion.[28] Although violence permeates every society, certain groups of women—particularly those who suffer multiple forms of discrimination—are especially vulnerable. This includes girls and women living with disabilities; those from minority ethnic, racial, or indigenous communities[29]; those who are lesbian or bisexual; transgender or gender nonconforming people; those living in rural and remote communities; those who are migrants or refugees; those who have been trafficked; sex workers; domestic workers and those living with HIV.[30,31,32,33,34]

SECTION 2: SOLUTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

Multiple factors fuel gender-based violence. In communities characterized by male dominance, there is often a direct link to harmful and rigid gender norms that assert control over women and gender-diverse people, rendering them more vulnerable to violence.[35] Research suggests that certain cultural gender-related norms, including widespread acceptance of wife-beating or prioritized access to financial resources for men, are predictive of violence against women.[36]

In order to step up prevention and build a stronger response to violence when it occurs, we need to:

• Expand efforts to target harmful gender norms and educate young people, women, and men through behavior change initiatives and community-based programming

• Improve multi-sectoral services to support gender-based violence survivors

• Increase equitable access to economic assets

• Invest in the women's movements in civil society

Expand Efforts to Target Harmful Gender Norms and Educate Young People, Women, and Men Through Behavior Change Initiatives and Community-Based Programming

In order to stop violence against girls and women, a comprehensive approach that addresses legislation gaps and incorporates quality services for survivors is necessary. Recent estimates show that in most countries, less than 40% of the women who experience violence seek help or support.[37] Among those who do, most look to family and friends; less than 10% go to the police due to stigma and fear.[38]

Preventing violence against girls and women is only possible through the implementation of strong legal and policy frameworks that recognize all forms of gender-based violence and inequality among genders, address harmful attitudes, and respect human rights, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.[39]

Numerous programs have been developed to address harmful gender norms in society that perpetuate discrimination against girls and women and give rise to violence. Recognizing the various levels at which gender norms operate—individual, family, community, and society—successful programs work with all affected stakeholders, engaging men and women together, as well as young people.[40] The programs seek not only to question harmful gender norms, but to develop gender equitable behaviors as well as effective mechanisms for protection. Such programs have effectively addressed stigma around GBV, intimate partner violence, school-related GBV, FGM, and child, early, and forced marriage. Many of the programs, particularly those for youth, incorporate sexuality education and take a rights-based approach.[41]

Case Study: TOSTAN Supports Women as Agents of Change
Through education and community mobilization, Tostan supports women as agents of change in their communities across Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and the Gambia.[42,42,44] Education and community engagement programs help community members identify traditional practices that are barriers to good health.[45,46] The community mobilization component culminates in a public declaration renouncing the harmful practices they have identified, such as FGM.[47,48] Villages participating in the program had lower proportions of women and girls subjected to this harmful practice.[49,50]

Case Study: Eradicating Child Marriage in Malawi
Through the utilization of an incubator-style model, Rise Up (a.k.a Let Girls Lead), has worked with local leaders who empower girls to advocate for their rights.[51] By providing them with funding, training, and the ongoing support they need to advocate effectively, chiefs in 22 villages in Malawi created bylaws that outlawed child marriage, charging men significant fines of goats, chickens, and land if they engaged in the practice.[52] After five years of advocacy by multiple organizations and partners, Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill, which outlaws child marriage nationwide and increases the national age of marriage from 15 to 18 years. Rise Up is now mobilizing to ensure that the legislation is successfully implemented.[53]

Improve Multi-Sectoral Services to Support Gender-Based Violence Survivors

Many survivors lack access to the most basic services for their safety, protection, and recovery,

What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is violence that is directed at an individual based on biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation. Rooted in economic, social, and political inequalities between men and women, GBV takes on many forms, including child, early, and forced marriage, and can occur throughout the life cycle. (USAID)

Violence Against Women (VAW) is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women." The most common form of VAW is intimate partner violence (IPV)—physical or sexual violence at the hands of a current or past partner. (UNWOMEN)

Harmful practices refer to child, early, and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and crimes committed in the name of honor, dowry-related violence, and son preference. (OHCHR)

While recognizing that all forms of GBV are violations of human rights—and often times sexual rights—this brief will focus primarily on Violence Against Women and harmful practices.

including timely access to justice, emergency hotlines, safe accommodation, and psycho-social counseling. An American study found that women who experience violence often use mental health, emergency department, hospital outpatient, primary care, pharmacy, and specialty health services,[54] though many do not disclose the abuse to their healthcare providers.[55] They may be entering the healthcare system but missing out on the full range of services abuse survivors require. Young women, and in particular LGBTQI women often experience increased vulnerability when seeking care. Issues such as lack of confidentiality and privacy, needing to travel to access services, cost of services, and needing parental consent for medical procedures are all barriers to young women and LGBT women when accessing supportive care.[56]

Given this reality, healthcare providers need to be able to identify women who have experienced violence and respond appropriately. That response should include first line support to meet the survivor's emotional and physical safety, as well as ongoing support.[57] Woman-centered, first-line support that is holistic in nature, comprised of psychological first-aid and support, safety planning, and referrals for legal, medical, and psychosocial services and support.[58] It is also important that sexual and reproductive health and rights programs and services are recognized as critical entry points to support survivors of gender-based violence.[59] While universal screening or repeated inquiry should not be implemented, health providers should be trained on the correct ways to inquire about violence when deemed appropriate and be able respond appropriately to women who do chose to disclose, especially when conditions may be caused or exacerbated by gender-based violence.[60] Services should also be youth-friendly, and any measures taken to improve quality of service for young people should include their meaningful participation and leadership.[61]

Recognizing that healthcare providers may mirror their communities' gender-inequitable beliefs regarding intimate partner violence, health systems must train and support them to provide quality GBV services.[62] This training should be grounded in human rights and ethics to combat stigma, abuse, and apathy. In addition to comprehensive training, healthcare providers may be supported with protocols, procedures, and referral networks.[63]

GBV survivors should have access not only to quality healthcare, but also to other relevant services in the law enforcement, justice, and social services sectors such as employment, housing, and education. Where such services are available, efforts should focus on improving quality, coordination, and funding to increase meaningful support to abused girls and women.[64]

Increase Equitable Access to Economic Assets

Building girls' and women's economic empowerment is key to transforming relations between men and women and integral to changing attitudes and behaviors and to ultimately ending gender-based violence.[65] There are multiple approaches to designing programs that make access to economic assets more equitable for girls and women. Examples of effective programs include those that increase girls' access to education; provide marketable skills training for women as well as finance opportunities; and work to secure land, inheritance, and property rights impacting women.[66] The relationship between women's economic empowerment and intimate partner violence is a complicated one which changes over time and context. Introducing economic empowerment into communities may lead to a temporary increase in IPV, pointing to a need to address harmful and restrictive gender norms along with economic empowerment in such situations.[67,68]

In many contexts, even when women do have access to economic assets, a pervasive gender wage gap persists, contributing to gender inequality and intimate partner violence.[69] A study conducted across the United States showed that a decrease in the wage gap reduces violence against women.[70] It is also important to note that increasing equitable access to economic assets does not only refer to initiatives that aim to improve women's abilities to enter the workforce, and therefore, earn a salary or wage. Increasing access to economic assets also includes increasing access to land. Securing land rights for women is an integral step towards breaking cycles of poverty and supporting the economic empowerment of women.[71] When women are empowered to build a life outside the home, and a life outside the informal economy, they are better able to access legal and supportive services in response to violence.[72] Reducing women's economic dependence on their partners also enables women to leave environments where there are incidences of domestic violence.[73]

➜ *For more, please reference the brief focused on Boosting Women's Economic Empowerment.*

Case Study: The Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) Study
South Africa's IMAGE study targeted women living in the poorest households in rural areas, combining financial services with training and skills-building workshops on gender and cultural norms, communication, intimate partner violence, and HIV prevention.[74,75,76] The program also encouraged the participation of boys and men. Study results revealed that, two years after completing the program, the participant group reported 55% fewer acts of violence by their intimate partners in the past year compared to the group that did not participate.[77,78,79] After the program, participants were also found to disagree more often with statements that condoned physical and sexual violence towards an intimate partner.[80,81,82]

Relevant International Agreements:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1992)

- 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women

- Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (1994)

- Beijing Platform for Action (1995)

- Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 57: Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (2013)

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015-2030)

- Global Strategy on Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (WHO) (2017)

Promoting gender equality and tackling violence against women
Even though women working in the formal sector earn a salary, social acceptance of the use of violence, lack of skills within management teams, and gender-blind policies remain key drivers of women's experience of violence. BSR's <u>HERrespect</u> program leverages the workplace as incubator of social change; using a combination of gender transformative training, factory and community campaigns, and strengthening of workplace policy, HERrespect connects buyers, factories, workers, and civil society organizations to prevent and address violence against women workers in the global supply chains. HERrespect is currently being piloted in 13 factories in Bangladesh and India, and reflections from participants show early signs of change in attitude and behavior towards violence. Aiming to influence business practices at scale, BSR developed a <u>Business Toolkit</u> with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) to provide guidance for companies in India seeking to strengthen their own policies and activities that prevent and address sexual harassment.[83]

Invest in the Women's Movements in Civil Society

A global comparative analysis of policies on violence against women (VAW) over four decades found that strong, feminist movements were the original catalysts for government action.[84] Feminist civil society affects policy change by influencing global treaties, influencing regional agreements on VAW, and exerting pressure at national and regional levels to conform to new norms.[85]

While Millennium Development Goal 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women) led to considerable progress in empowering girls and women, its focus on education and health was not enough to secure their equality. Without a corresponding emphasis on the rights of girls and women, SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) will fall into the same trap. Gender equality requires consistent engagement of gender equality activists and experts, which in turn require institutional and financial support.[86]

SECTION 3: THE BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT

Investing in the elimination of GBV and harmful practices is both ethical and practical. While little evidence exists regarding the cost-effectiveness of GBV interventions, the costs of *inaction*—including physical and mental health impairments, loss of productivity, and costs related to social, legal, and medical service provision—are staggering.[87,88] Globally, the cost of female homicide by intimate partners is estimated to be just over US$40 billion annually.[89] Intimate partner violence costs US$4.4 trillion globally, while sexual violence against women accounts for another US$66.7 billion per year.[90] Based on these numbers, a group of the world's leading economists and Nobel Laureates found that investing in the elimination of all forms of GBV is one of the 19 most cost-effective SDG targets.[91]

SECTION 4: CALLS TO ACTION

The first step to eliminating gender-based violence is to ensure that national legal frameworks and policies are in place, guided by a national GBV strategy that is coordinated among all levels of government. These actions then need to be backed by the infrastructure and human resources required to enforce laws and ensure protection for girls, women, and GBV survivors. Donors and civil society groups can play an important role in national efforts by speaking out against violence and harmful gender norms and allocating resources to prevent and respond to them. Finally, all stakeholder groups should involve young women and girls in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs aimed at ending gender-based violence.

In order to power progress for all, many different constituents must work together—governments, civil society, academia, media, affected populations, the United Nations, and the private sector—to take the following actions for girls and women:

- Enact and enforce comprehensive legal frameworks and policies to protect against gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting.
  (Most relevant for: governments)

- Create and enforce gender-responsive legal frameworks that address the increased vulnerability of women in emergency and conflict settings and support women's protection and empowerment.
  (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, affected populations and the United Nations).

- Invest in prevention programs that end GBV and harmful practices and empower girls and women.
  (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, the United Nations, and the private sector)

- Scale up efforts targeting harmful gender norms and educate young people, women, and men about GBV and harmful practices, including through community-based programs.
  (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, academia, media, affected populations, the United Nations, and the private sector)

- Train all health providers to address GBV and harmful practices to ensure that needed services are available, accessible, acceptable, and of quality for all.
  (Most relevant for: governments and NGOs)

- Implement comprehensive sexuality education that addresses gender inequity, gender roles, GBV, and the rights of young people to seek services and justice.
  (Most relevant for: governments and NGOs)

- Invest in the women's movements in civil society.
  (Most relevant for: governments and the private sector)

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this technical paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of all partnering organizations.

These briefs are intended to be used by policymakers, decision-makers, advocates, and activists to advance issues effecting girls and women in global development. These materials are designed to be open-sourced and available for your use.

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