

Dramatically Reduce Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices

Facts, Solutions, Case Studies, and Call to Action

OVERVIEW

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a phenomenon that transcends social, economic, and geographic borders. Impacting girls and women all over the world, and becoming increasingly visible thanks to global movements such as #MeToo,¹ GBV is rooted in power imbalances between the sexes and fueled by multiple factors, including cultural norms, social acceptance of harmful practices, and insufficient legal protections. Conflict, displacement, and natural disasters can exacerbate GBV because of breakdowns in social systems, lack of law enforcement, and limited access to health facilities.^{2,3} However, recognizing these drivers is a step toward lessening the vulnerability of girls, women, and marginalized populations to gender-based violence. This policy brief discusses several approaches that can help societies step up the prevention of gender-based violence and build a stronger response to violence when it occurs.

SECTION 1: FRAMING THE ISSUE

Human rights violations inflicted by gender-based violence and harmful practices occur in every country of the world, transcending socio-economic status, ethnicities, religions and language groups. The negative impact on girls and women is particularly acute.⁴ GBV is an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated against a person on the basis of their sex, with the intention of impacting their ability to enjoy their human rights.⁵ It is grounded in power inequalities between women and men and based on assumed gender roles. In short, GBV is violence perpetrated on a person because of their sex⁶ and gender, and manifests in several ways. Harmful practices are both a manifestation and perpetuation of GBV; they are targeted forms of violence committed primarily against girls in the name of honor or tradition and can lead to grave health consequences.⁷ The two most common forms of harmful practices are female genital cutting⁸ — the partial or total removal of a female's external genitalia — and early child marriage — a marriage wherein one partner is younger than 18.⁹ The consequences of these practices are vast and include: physical injury, depression, chronic pain, sexually-transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, increased risk of HIV infection, and it does not always stop there.^{10,11,12} It also impedes the participation of girls and women in society, their empowerment, and ultimately, perpetuates inequality.

Globally, 38.6% of female homicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner.¹³ When family members are included as perpetrators, that number jumps up to nearly 50%.¹⁴ Globally, it is estimated that one in three women experiences physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime, most often by an intimate partner.¹⁵ Recent figures show that one in five women and girls reported physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner over the past 12 months.¹⁶ While GBV hurts girls, women, and sexual minorities first, it has a ripple effect hindering their families and communities, socially and economically.¹⁷ In some countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam, the economic cost of intimate partner violence greatly outweighs government spending for primary education.¹⁸

Gender-based violence (GBV) 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 and sex-selective abortion as a form of gender-based violence.^{19,20} Roughly 26% of U.S. women have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18,²¹ and data show that around 120 million girls globally, roughly 1 in 10, have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts.²² The most common perpetrators of these acts of sexual violence are not strangers, but partners, teachers, or family members.^{23, 24}

As women and girls go about their lives in public spaces, they regularly face sexual harassment that can discourage them from pursuing education and employment opportunities.²⁵ Harassment can take place in a variety of settings and manifest in a variety of ways, including psychological and physical abuse on the street, at the workplace, and on the internet. As movements — such as #MeToo — have gained traction around the world, women are increasingly, and publicly, holding men to account for the everyday sexual harassment and violence that women experience.²⁶ In a world where 54% of the population is connected to the internet,²⁷ cyber violence has become a problem as well, with 1 in 10 European women having experienced online harassment.^{28,29,30}

Existing legal and social protections, while meager, break down during conflict, emergency, and humanitarian crises, when rape is often used as a weapon of war.^{31,32} Climate disasters have been shown to increase sexual harassment,³³ domestic violence,³⁴ sexual exploitation of children,³⁵ and human trafficking.³⁶ Displacement and migration following a disaster or conflict can result in overcrowding and unsafe living conditions in evacuation centers, temporary housing, and other shelters.^{37,38,39} Women

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Eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices is linked to the achievement of multiple SDGs 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



become more vulnerable to harassment and violence, and increased poverty and loss of community likewise increase the propensity for violence.⁴⁰

Harmful practices like female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage 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, long-term gynecological issues — such as fistulas and infertility — and even death.^{41,42} Beyond health, FGC has long-term consequences on the fulfillment of other rights, including non-discrimination and education.⁴³

It is estimated that every year, 12 million girls are married before they turn 18 and that by 2050,⁴⁴ the global number of women married as children will reach 1.2 billion.⁴⁵ Early and forced child marriage has compounding impacts on a girl's ability to exercise and enjoy her human rights. It contributes to higher school dropout rates as well as forced exclusion from schools;⁴⁶ increased risk of violence; food insecurity; and numerous negative health risks — including mental health.⁴⁷ For example, 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.⁴⁸ Girls who are married early also suffer from fewer economic opportunities and greater levels of social isolation.

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;⁴⁹ those who are lesbian or bisexual; transgender or gender nonconforming people; those living in rural and remote communities; those who are migrants or refugees;^{50,51} those who have been trafficked; sex workers; domestic workers; those who inject drugs;⁵² and those living with HIV.^{53,54,55,56,57} Indigenous women are a prime example of intersecting identities that often leads to increased risk of suffering violence. They experience high rates of gender-based violence, femicide, and disappearances, and they often lack access to legal and social services due to their marginalized status.^{58,59}

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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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 comprehensive sexuality education, behavior change initiatives, and community-based programming
- Engage men and boys in the prevention of violence and promotion of gender equality
- Ensure and enforce legal protections and justice for survivors of gender-based violence
- Improve multi-sectoral services to support gender-based violence survivors, including those living in humanitarian and fragile settings
- Increase equitable access to economic assets
- Invest in local women's movements and women-led civil society

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

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.⁶² 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 gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence, school-related GBV, female genital mutilation (FGM), and child, early, and forced marriage. Many of the programs, particularly those for youth, incorporate sexuality education and take a rights-based approach.⁶³

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is an important aspect of gender-based violence prevention because it aims to provide young people with the knowledge necessary to engage in safe, consensual sexual behavior. CSE not only covers all aspects of reproductive and sexual health, inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations, but it also normalizes sexuality and reduces stigma. Furthermore, CSE contributes to gender equality by increasing awareness of the diversity and impact of gender in people's lives. By embracing CSE, governments can promote healthy, inclusive, and consensual sexuality that discourages violence and coercion.⁶⁴



- **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





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.^{65,66,67} Education and community engagement programs help community members identify traditional practices that are barriers to good health.^{68,69} The community mobilization component culminates in a public declaration renouncing the harmful practices they have identified, such as FGM.^{70,71} Villages participating in the program had lower proportions of women and girls subjected to this harmful practice.^{72,73}

Case Study: Eradicating Child Marriage in Malawi

To protect girls from child marriage, Rise Up, in partnership with the Girls Empowerment Network (GEN), the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, created an initiative called Enabling Girls to Advance Gender Equity (ENGAGE). ENGAGE invests in local leaders from civil society, youth, and community organizations to advocate for laws and policies that protect the rights of girls, improve their educational opportunities, and move toward gender equity in their communities in Malawi.⁷⁴ The fight to end child marriage began with Rise Up and GEN partnering to train more than 200 girls in leadership, advocacy, and public speaking, which allowed those girls to mobilize their peers and convince 60 chiefs to pass laws raising the minimum marriage age to 21.⁷⁵ After years of advocacy, Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill in 2015, which outlawed child marriage nationwide and increased the national age of marriage to 18 years.⁷⁶ Finally, in April 2017, President Peter Mutharika signed a constitutional amendment into law that makes marriage before age 18 illegal, providing additional protection to Malawian girls.⁷⁷

Case Study: Engaging a Critical Mass to Change Social Norms with SASA!

SASA! is a community mobilization intervention created by Raising Voices in Uganda that seeks to change community attitudes, norms, and behaviors that result in gender inequality, GBV, and HIV risk for women. SASA! works with a broad range of stakeholders to promote a critical analysis and discussion of power inequalities between genders. SASA! is implemented through a step-by-step Activist Kit that goes beyond awareness, raising to meaningful community action.⁷⁸ Findings from a randomized controlled trial showed a lower rate of intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by women in the past year among intervention communities compared to control communities. The intervention was also associated with less social acceptance of IPV, greater understanding of a woman's ability to refuse sex, more community support for survivors, and less sexual concurrency among men.⁷⁹

Engage Men and Boys in the Prevention of Violence and Promotion of Gender Equality

Gender equality and gender-based violence will never be eliminated without the full participation of men and boys. Because men generally have more power than women, they often are the decision-makers — in families, communities, the private sector, and governments. Men tend to control women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, finance, and transportation, and men's violence against women around the world is pervasive.^{80,81} However, some men are interested in moving toward more equal societies.⁸² Many men recognize the existing gender imbalance in home and child care and want to work toward a more balanced dynamic,⁸³ and research has shown that male leaders are important allies in the prevention of violence against women.⁸⁴

Interventions that include men and boys should take a multi-level approach, recognizing the importance of impacting at the individual, family, community, society, and governmental levels, and including boys, young men, and adult men. These programs aim to foster non-violent masculinities and strengthen partnerships with women's rights organizations.^{85,86} Any solution involving men and boys should aim to improve the lives of men and boys as well as women and girls, and it should be inclusive of diversity among men in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and masculinity.^{87,88,89}

Case Study: Using Football to Engage Men in GBV Prevention

In Brazil, Promundo targeted adult men participating in a community football tournament, using weekly matches as a focal point to distribute outreach material and conduct group sessions. By deploying the intervention during weekly matches, the likelihood of participant retention was increased. The intervention curriculum was centered on a general discussion of violence against women, and a video titled "Não é Fácil Não!" (It's Not Easy!) further engaged participants. The intervention aimed to increase men's knowledge of gender inequality, gender-based violence, and related laws, and to improve men's ability to denounce violence against women in their communities. At the end of the study, fewer men in the intervention group agreed that women deserved to be beaten and more men believed that violence in a relationship should be discussed outside the couple. Men in the intervention group also reported more equitable sharing of household responsibilities and less touching of women without consent.⁹⁰

Ensure and Enforce Legal Protections and Justice for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

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.⁹¹

Governments must be held to account for their responsiveness to and investment in reducing GBV and their protection of women survivors in the justice system, which includes deterring perpetrators.⁹² In order to increase women survivors' access to justice, governments should create, strengthen, and ensure the implementation of laws that provide thorough protection from GBV. Furthermore,

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)



governments must ensure effective prosecution of perpetrators and justice for survivors, which includes funding a range of rehabilitation and treatment programs. This can be accomplished through the establishment of mobile courts, specialized police units — such as women’s police stations — and specially-trained prosecution teams. Finally, survivors should have access to legal support and services, especially doubly-disenfranchised survivors, including migrants, refugees, people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, and people in humanitarian and conflict-affected regions.⁹³

Case Study: Women’s Police Stations to Improve Quality of Survivor Services in Latin America

One innovation intended to improve the quality of survivors’ services are women’s police stations. Women’s police stations should be specialized for women, staffed by women, more approachable than traditional police, and visible to survivors.⁹⁴ They have a long history in Latin America, where they were first created in Sao Paulo, Brazil; as of 2016 there were almost 500 women’s police stations in the country. However, the quality of services in women’s police stations is not consistent, and many in Brazil lack enough specialized personnel to provide the highest-quality service to women survivors.⁹⁵ On the other hand, Nicaragua has succeeded in implementing higher-quality women’s police stations throughout the country. Their more than 135 stations cater to women and children alike and display a high degree of gender-responsiveness, primarily due to their close coordination with women’s rights organizations. Civil society in Nicaragua works to connect the women’s police stations with clinics and forensic, psychological, and legal services.⁹⁶ The difference in success between Brazil and Nicaragua is a reminder of the importance of multi-sectoral services, highly trained staff, and sufficient government funding.

Case Study: Empowering Rural and Indigenous Women to Gain Legal Justice in Guatemala

Women in Guatemala suffer the highest level of gender-based violence in the world, and indigenous and rural women are disproportionately affected.^{97,98} The Women’s Justice Initiative (WJI), established in 2016 with a grant from the UN Trust Fund, works with indigenous women and girls in a rural Guatemalan community to provide legal literacy courses and mobile legal outreach. It offers legal services in the woman’s preferred language, thus eliminating the linguistic barrier that rural indigenous women often face, as well as legal advocates to help women navigate the complicated legal system. As a result of its legal support, WJI saw a 145% annual increase in the number of survivors who reported gender-based violence.⁹⁹ WJI helped 66 survivors of domestic violence in 2016 alone, with a total 2,700 women and girls who have been provided with legal services and women’s rights education.¹⁰⁰

Improve Multi-Sectoral Services to Support Gender-Based Violence Survivors Including Those Living in Humanitarian and Fragile Settings

A comprehensive approach to stopping violence that addresses legislation gaps and incorporates quality services for survivors is necessary. Recent estimates show that in most countries, fewer than 40% of the women who experience violence seek help or support.¹⁰¹ Among those who do, most look to family and friends; fewer than 10% go to the police due to stigma and fear.¹⁰² Many survivors lack access to the most basic services for their safety, protection, and recovery, including timely access to justice, emergency hotlines, safe accommodation, and psycho-social counseling. A study from the United States found that women who experience violence often use mental health, emergency department, hospital outpatient, primary care, pharmacy, and specialty health services,¹⁰³ though many do not disclose the abuse to their healthcare providers.¹⁰⁴ Reporting cases of sexual and gender-based violence may be more difficult in conflict settings, where political settings can be more oppressive.¹⁰⁵

Women may be entering the healthcare system but missing out on the full range of services abuse survivors require. Young women, and in particular LGBTQIA+ communities, 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 LGBTQIA+ women when accessing supportive care.¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷ Woman-centered, first-line support is holistic in nature, comprised of psychological first-aid and support, safety planning, and referrals for legal, medical, and psychosocial services and support.¹⁰⁸ 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.^{109,110} 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 to respond appropriately to women who do choose to disclose, especially when conditions may be caused or exacerbated by gender-based violence.¹¹¹ 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.¹¹²

Recognizing that healthcare providers may mirror their communities’ gender-inequitable cultural norms regarding intimate partner violence, health systems must train and support them to provide quality GBV services.¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, it is important that GBV services are regularly assessed in terms of local knowledge, attitudes, availability, and barriers, so that gaps can be remedied.¹¹⁵

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.



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.



Where such services are available, efforts should focus on improving quality, coordination, and funding to increase meaningful support to abused girls and women.¹¹⁶

Especially in humanitarian crises or otherwise fragile settings, it can be difficult for women and girls to have access to comprehensive, multi-sectoral services.¹¹⁷ When crises occur, existing emergency response frameworks break down, leaving a gap in the usual services for survivors. When governments alone are unable to provide the services that survivors need, NGOs and community-based organizations should coordinate with government agencies to monitor existing systems and develop inter-agency solutions to provide those missing services. While evaluating service gaps, organizations should consider the safety and security risks of affected populations; potentially unequal access to services for women, girls, and other marginalized groups; the inclusion of affected populations in the planning, design, and implementation of services; and the deployment of GBV specialists in the health sector.¹¹⁸

One risk-reduction intervention that health sector actors can implement at the onset of every emergency is the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for reproductive health. This package ensures that basic health needs are met and mitigates long-term effects of violence. The MISP is a series of priority actions that includes: preventing and managing the consequences of sexual violence; preventing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality; reducing the transmission of HIV; and planning for comprehensive reproductive health services in the early phase of emergencies.¹¹⁹

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, behaviors, and to ultimately ending gender-based violence.¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹ The relationship between women's economic empowerment and intimate partner violence is a complicated one that changes over time and context. Introducing economic empowerment into communities may lead to a temporary increase in intimate partner violence, pointing to a need to address harmful and restrictive gender norms along with economic empowerment in such situations.^{122,123}

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.¹²⁴ A study conducted across the United States showed that a decrease in the wage gap reduced violence against women.¹²⁵ It is also important to note that increasing equitable access to economic assets does not refer only to initiatives that aim to improve women's abilities to enter the workforce and 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 toward breaking cycles of poverty and supporting the economic empowerment of women.¹²⁶ When women are empowered to build a life outside the home and outside the informal economy, they are better able to access legal and supportive services in response to violence.¹²⁷ Reducing women's economic dependence on their partners also enables women to leave environments where there are incidences of domestic violence.¹²⁸

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.^{129,130,131} 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.^{132,133,134} After the program, participants were also found to disagree more often with statements that condoned physical and sexual violence toward an intimate partner.^{135,136,137}

Case Study: HERrespect, 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 HERrespect program leverages the workplace as an 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.¹³⁸ HERrespect is currently being piloted in four factories in Bangladesh,¹³⁹ and reflections from participants show early signs of change in attitude and behavior toward violence.¹⁴⁰ Aiming to influence business practices at scale, BSR developed a Business Toolkit with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) to provide guidance to companies in India seeking to strengthen their own policies and activities that prevent and address sexual harassment.¹⁴¹

Invest in local women's movements and women-led 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.¹⁴² 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.¹⁴³

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, Sustainable Development Goal (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 requires institutional and financial support.^{144,145}

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.^{146,147} The World Bank has estimated that the costs of intimate partner violence for a range of countries run from 1.2% to 3.7% of gross domestic product (GDP), equivalent to what many governments spend on primary education.¹⁴⁸ 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.¹⁴⁹



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.^{150,151} 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.¹⁵²

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), including all forms of harassment, and harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, and media)
- 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).
- Recognize, plan for, and protect against the increased risk of gender-based violence and the breakdown of social and governmental frameworks during humanitarian crises. (Most relevant for: governments, NGOs, and civil society)
- Invest in prevention programs that end GBV and harmful practices and empower girls and women to claim their rights. (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)
- Involve and encourage men and boys in efforts to change unequal gender norms, increase societal understanding of gender-based violence, and prevent violence against women at all levels. (Most relevant for: governments, NGOs, civil society, and media)

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ENDNOTES

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