

Introduction to Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

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Key concepts, types, drivers, impacts, and preventive approaches

1. What Is Gender-Based Violence?

Element	Description
Definition	Any act of violence that is directed at an individual because of their gender or that results in a difference in power between genders.
Scope	Encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse.
Target	Primarily women and girls, but also includes violence against men, boys, LGBTQ+ people, and gender-nonconforming individuals when the motive is gender-related.
Legal framing	Recognized in international instruments (e.g., UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, CEDAW, Istanbul Convention).

2. Core Types of GBV

Type	Typical manifestations	Example settings
Physical violence	Hitting, kicking, choking, burning, use of weapons.	Domestic spaces, workplaces, public streets.
Sexual violence	Rape, sexual assault, forced prostitution, marital rape, sexual harassment.	Home, schools, conflict zones, online platforms.
Psychological / emotional violence	Threats, intimidation, humiliation, isolation, gaslighting.	Intimate partner relationships, caregiving contexts.
Economic violence	Controlling finances, denying access to work or education, forced labor.	Household budgeting, employment discrimination.
Harmful traditional practices	Female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, “honor” killings, forced sterilization.	Community rituals, legal systems that tolerate the practice.
Cyber-enabled GBV	Revenge porn, doxxing, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images.	Social media, messaging apps.

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3. Root Causes & Risk Factors

Category	Drivers
Patriarchal norms	Beliefs that men hold authority over women; gender role expectations.
Power imbalances	Economic dependence, limited decision-making power, legal discrimination.
Social & cultural practices	Traditions that condone or normalize violence (e.g., “honor” concepts).
Conflict & instability	War, displacement, and breakdown of law enforcement increase vulnerability.
Economic stress	Poverty, unemployment, and lack of social safety nets can exacerbate tension.
Substance abuse	Alcohol or drug misuse is a frequent aggravating factor.
Legal & institutional gaps	Weak enforcement of laws, lack of survivor-centered services.
Technology	Anonymity and reach of digital platforms facilitate new forms of abuse.

4. Consequences of GBV

4.1 Individual-level impacts

- **Physical health:** Injuries, chronic pain, reproductive health problems, HIV/STIs.
- **Mental health:** Depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation.
- **Economic:** Loss of income, reduced productivity, increased health-care costs.
- **Social:** Stigma, isolation, disrupted education or career trajectories.

4.2 Community & societal impacts

- **Intergenerational trauma:** Children who witness or experience GBV are at higher risk of perpetuating or suffering violence.
- **Economic burden:** Estimated global cost of violence against women exceeds 2% of GDP in many countries.
- **Public health strain:** Higher demand for medical, legal, and psychosocial services.

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- **Undermined development:** Hinders gender equality, education, and empowerment goals