



## What Is Gender-Based Violence?

Running Time: 3 hours

Materials: Flipchart and flipchart stand/chalkboard, markers;  
Handout: *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*

Target Audience: can be used for awareness-raising with various audiences/participants

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### Introduction

Facilitator: Violence against women is a persistent and universal problem occurring in every culture and social group. Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime – most often by someone she knows, including a member of her own family, an employer or a co-worker. Violence against women has been called “the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world.” Accordingly, the Second World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1994 gave priority to this issue, which jeopardizes women’s lives, bodies, psychological integrity and freedom. Violence against women is often known as ‘gender-based’ violence because it partly stems from women’s subordinate status in society. During this session we will examine the meanings of the concept ‘gender-based’ violence, what types of violence are considered ‘gender-based’, where gender-based violence occurs, who are its main victims and perpetrators. We will also explore gender-based violence as a violation of women’s human’s rights.

### Learning Objectives:

Facilitator: At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Define gender-based violence.
- Identify different types and sites of gender-based violence, its main victims and perpetrators.
- Discuss what gender-based violence is and why it is a violation of women’s human rights.
- Analyze gender-based violence from the women’s human rights perspective.

### Activity 1: Gender-Based Violence: Definitions

1. Facilitator leads a brainstorming session to create a list of words that describe gender-based violence. Facilitator asks each of the participants to share their ideas randomly or in turn. The ideas are not criticized or discussed; participants may build on ideas voiced by others. The questions for brainstorming are:
  - What does the phrase ‘gender-based violence’ mean to you?
  - What acts do you qualify as ‘violence’?

❖ *Write down each answer as they are offered on a flipchart without any comments, notes or questions for 5-7 minutes. After discussing the ideas, post the list on the wall so it is visible throughout the training workshop.*
2. Facilitator summarizes the results of the brainstorming and highlights the following concepts:
  - ◆ Gender-based violence is violence against women based on women’s subordinate status in society. It includes any act or threat by men or male dominated institutions that inflict physical,

sexual, or psychological harm on a woman or girl because of their gender. In most cultures, traditional beliefs, norms and social institutions legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women.

- ♦ Gender-based violence includes physical, sexual and psychological violence such as domestic violence; sexual abuse, including rape and sexual abuse of children by family members; forced pregnancy; sexual slavery; traditional practices harmful to women, such as honor killings, burning or acid throwing, female genital mutilation, dowry-related violence; violence in armed conflict, such as murder and rape; and emotional abuse, such as coercion and abusive language. Trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, forced marriage, sexual harassment and intimidation at work are additional examples of violence against women.
- ♦ Gender violence occurs in both the 'public' and 'private' spheres. Such violence not only occurs in the family and in the general community, but is sometimes also perpetuated by the state through policies or the actions of agents of the state such as the police, military or immigration authorities. Gender-based violence happens in all societies, across all social classes, with women particularly at risk from men they know.

3. Facilitator divides participants into pairs and allows them 10-15 minutes to discuss which major types of violence occur in the family, community/society, and the ones perpetrated or condoned by the state.



*Prepare two flipcharts with major types and sites of gender-based violence prior to the exercise. During the discussion, display only the flipchart listing major types of gender violence, leaving the one listing the sites of gender violence covered until the end of the discussion.*

Types of Gender-Based Violence	Sites of Gender-Based Violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Overt physical abuse (includes battering, sexual assault, at home or in the workplace)</li> <li>♦ Psychological abuse (includes deprivation of liberty, forced marriage, sexual harassment, at home or in the workplace)</li> <li>♦ Deprivation of resources needed for physical and psychological well-being (including health care, nutrition, education, means of livelihood)</li> <li>♦ Treatment of women as commodities (includes trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ is one of the primary sites of gender violence.</li> <li>♦ prepares its members for social life, forms gender stereotypes and perceptions of division of labor between the sexes.</li> <li>♦ is the arena where physical abuses (spousal battering, sexual assault, sexual abuse) and/or psychological abuses occur. (Domestic violence can also take such forms as confinement, forced marriage of woman arranged by her family without her consent, threats, insults and neglect; overt control of a woman's sexuality through either forced pregnancy or forced abortion.)</li> <li>♦ because violence within the family and household takes place in the home, it is often seen as a 'private' issue and information about it is lacking.</li> </ul> <p><b>Community/Society</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ as a group sharing common social, cultural, religious or ethnic belonging, it perpetuates existing family structure and power inequalities in family and society.</li> <li>♦ justifies the behavior of male abusers aimed at establishing control over women in the family, and supports harmful traditional practices such as battering and corporal punishment</li> <li>♦ workplace can also be a site of violence. Either in governmental service or in a business company, women are vulnerable to sexual aggression (harassment, intimidation) and commercialized violence (trafficking for sexual exploitation).</li> </ul> <p><b>State</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ legitimizes power inequalities in family and society and perpetuates gender-based violence through enactment of discriminatory laws and politics or through the discriminatory application of the law.</li> <li>♦ is responsible for tolerance of gender violence on an unofficial level (i.e. in the family and in the community).</li> <li>♦ To the extent that it is the State's recognized role to sanction certain norms that protect individual life and dignity and maintain collective peace, it is the State's obligation to develop and implement measures that redress gender violence.</li> </ul>

4. Facilitator reconvenes the entire group and asks participants to present the results of their discussion. Facilitator then summarizes the results, reading the information on the sites of gender violence from the flipchart. Facilitator goes on to highlight the following ideas:
- ♦ The primary inequality that gives rise to gender-based violence is the power inequality between women and men.
  - ♦ The majority of perpetrators of gender-based violence are men. However, despite the fact that no society is free from it, male violence against women varies in degree and intensity according to the specific circumstances. Many men choose to reject dominant stereotypes of violent, controlling masculinity.
  - ♦ Some types of violence against women are perpetrated by women. Some authors (e.g. Francine Pickup, in *Ending Violence Against Women: A Challenge for Development and Humanitarian Work*, Oxfam GB 2001) point out that oftentimes, women commit violence as a way to ensure their own survival and security within a social, economic, and political context that is shaped and dominated by men. For example in some societies, older women may display violent behavior towards their daughters-in-law. Race and class may also interact to cause violence against women, when these are the factors increasing women's vulnerability. Upper-class women who are socially and materially dependent on their husbands may use violence against their domestic workers to protect and assert their position as wives.
  - ♦ Gender-based violence is not exclusively a woman's concern. It is both a cause and consequence of gender perceptions. The use of the term 'gender-based violence' provides a new context in which to examine and understand the phenomenon of violence against women. It shifts the focus from women as victims to gender and the unequal power relationships between women and men created and maintained by gender stereotypes as the basic underlying cause of violence against women. Source: UNIFEM Gender Fact Sheet No., available at <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/Gendiss/downloads/UNIFEMSheet5.pdf>. Let us explore what a gender perspective on violence is.



*Prepare a flipchart with the explanation of the gender perspective on violence prior to the exercise. While presenting the information from the flipchart, ask the group questions to engage participants in a discussion and get feedback.*

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A gender perspective:

- ✓ distinguishes between the terms "sex" (biological distinctions) and "gender" – the different roles, attributes and conduct that society deems socially appropriate for men and women;
- ✓ refers to the relative status and position of men and women, and women's greater disadvantage in most societies;
- ✓ recognizes that women's less valued roles marginalize them from ownership and control over material (land, income) and non-material resources (political participation, time);
- ✓ considers the interaction between gender and the other social categories such as class, race and ethnicity; and
- ✓ holds that as gender inequities are socially conditioned, they can be changed at an individual and societal level in the direction of justice, equity, and partnership between men and women.

A gender perspective on violence against women achieves change by:

- ✓ acknowledging gender-based violence;
- ✓ addressing the similarities and differences in the violence experience by women and men in relation to vulnerabilities, violations and consequences; and
- ✓ addressing the differential impacts of policies on men and women.

Source: *Trafficking in Persons: A Gender Rights Perspective*, UNIFEM Briefing Kit, October 2002, available at <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/Resources/Traffick2.html>

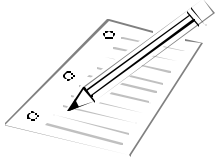
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- ♦ Questions to ask the group:
  - Justifications for violence frequently evolve from gender norms – that is, social norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women. What are examples of traditional gender roles?
  - What qualities are considered “male” or “female”?
    - ❖ *Write down the group’s ideas on a flipchart or a blackboard. Summarize the answers and highlight the following idea:*

*Masculinity is often associated with characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control. Femininity is, on the other hand, associated with weakness, gentleness, tolerance, passivity and emotion. These characteristics result from a combination of biological, cultural and social influences and relate to our understanding of power in society as a whole.*
  - How does the interaction between gender and social variables such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc. affect women’s experiences of violence?

## **Activity 2: Gender-Based Violence: A Human Rights Violation**

1. Facilitator gives a mini-lecture on gender-based violence as a violation of women’s human rights, emphasizing the following concepts:
  - ♦ The conceptualization of violence against women and girls as a violation of human rights was one of the achievements of the women’s movement during the Second World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. In March of the following year, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights set forth a resolution that integrated women’s rights within the mechanisms assuring protection of human rights. In answer to the request of women’s organizations at the Vienna conference, this Commission also named a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. The Special Rapporteur’s mission is to receive and investigate information on situations of gender-based violence throughout the world.
  - ♦ Also in 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), which is currently the main international document addressing the problem of gender-based violence. In DEVAW, the UN offered the first official definition of gender-based violence. In the remaining time we will explore the definition of gender-based violence found in the DEVAW.
2. Facilitator divides participants into small groups of 4-5 and hands out to each group the text of the Declaration (see information on the handout below), a sheet of paper and a marker. Facilitator allows the participants 30 minutes to read and discuss the text of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women following the questions below:
  - ♦ What definition of the term “violence against women” is given in the Declaration?
  - ♦ What is the main cause for violence against women as identified in the Declaration?
  - ♦ What types of violence are underlined and what specific violence acts are enumerated in the Declaration? What major sites of violence against women does the Declaration define?
  - ♦ The historic significance of the Declaration lies in the identification of practical measures needed to combat gender violence. Precisely what actions does the Declaration recommend to the States?



**Handouts:** (download and print copies)

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women

In English, available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

In Russian, available at <http://www.un.org/russian/document/declarat/violence.htm>

3. Facilitator reconvenes the entire group and summarizes the discussion highlighting the following ideas:
  - ♦ The Declaration was the first international document which defined violence against women within a broader gender-based framework and identified the family, the community and the state as major sites of gender-based violence.
  - ♦ The Declaration's basic assertion is that violence against women arises from historic inequality between men and women that results in the domination of men over women and causes gender discrimination. It emphasizes that violence is one of the crucial social mechanisms "...by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men."
  - ♦ Since the adoption of the Declaration, international law can be interpreted to define gender-based violence as a human rights violation.
  - ♦ The historic significance of the Declaration lies in the identification of practical measures needed to combat gender-based violence. The Declaration reflects growing international concern about the problem and calls on States to develop national action plans to promote the protection of women against any form of violence, create effective legislative remedies to eliminate such violence, review and reform legislation and law enforcement policies to ensure proper protection of women's rights.
  - ♦ Furthermore, the Declaration recommends that States adopt measures in the field of education to modify "...the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women and to eliminate prejudices, customary practices and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes and on stereotyped roles for men and women."
  - ♦ Finally, it is of great importance for both law enforcement agencies and NGOs that the Declaration states clearly that violence against women constitutes a violation of women's fundamental rights and freedoms. Thus gender-based violence is incompatible with the values of a democratic state and the rule of law.
4. Facilitator presents facts and statistics on gender-based violence worldwide allowing time for group discussion if necessary.



*Prior to the exercise, prepare a flipchart with statistical data on gender-based violence including sample global, regional and national facts. It is important for facilitator to include statistical data from the country of training, where available.*

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#### Facts about Gender-Based Violence Worldwide

- ✓ Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused by a man in her lifetime. More than 20 % of women are reported to have been abused by men with whom they live.
- ✓ Approximately 60 million women, mostly in Asia, are "missing" – killed by infanticide, selective abortion, deliberate under-nutrition or lack of access to health care.
- ✓ Among women aged 15-44 years, gender-based violence accounts for more death and disability than the combined effects of cancer, malaria, traffic-related injuries and war.
- ✓ Trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation by men is most common among poor women and girls.
- ✓ Each year, 2 million girls between ages 5 and 15 are introduced into the commercial sex industry.
- ✓ Women who are victims of domestic violence are 12 times more likely to attempt suicide than those who do not experience such violence.

- ✓ During war and civil conflict, women and girls are often targeted for special forms of violence by men as a way of attacking the morale of the enemy, both women and men. Such violence often redounds doubly against women, first through the direct experience of violence and its aftermath and secondly through the reactions of their families, particularly the men, to their status as survivors of sexual crime.
- ✓ Based on recent studies, more than 130 million women and girls in Africa, Middle East and Asia, have undergone female genital mutilation and an estimated 2 million girls are at risk for undergoing the procedure each year.
- ✓ In Canada, the cost of domestic violence amounts to \$1.6 billion per year, including medical care and lost productivity. Estimates in the United States place this figure between \$10 and \$67 billion.
- ✓ Only 1 in 100 battered women in the U.S. reports the abuse she suffers. Every nine seconds, a woman is battered by her domestic partner.
- ✓ A 1998 study found that in the United States 1 out of every 6 women has experienced an attempted or completed rape. Of these women, 22 % were under 12 years old and 32 % were aged 12-17 at the time of the crime.
- ✓ Studies suggest that one-quarter to one-third of the 170 million women and girls currently living in the European Union are subjected to male violence.
- ✓ In European Union, it is estimated that 45% to 81% of working women experience sexual harassment in the workplace.
- ✓ In France, 95% of the victims of violence are women, 51% of them are at the hands of their husbands.
- ✓ In Russia, half of all murder victims are women killed by their male partners.

*Sources:*

Council of Europe's Equality Division, *Summary of the Plan of Action to Combat Violence Against Women*.

Logar, Rosa. 2000. "Male Violence Against Women and Children in Families: A Brief Survey of the Situation in Europe," presentation for the Women's World Forum Against Violence, 23-25 November, Valencia, Spain.

The Monee Project/UNICEF: 1999. *Women in Transition*, Regional Monitoring Report No 6. Florence, Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre, *available at* <http://www.eurochild.gla.ac.uk/Documents/monee/pdf/MONEE6/monee6.htm>

Spindel C., Levy E., Connor M., 2000. *With an End in Sight: Strategies from the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women*, UNIFEM.

Tjaden, P. and Thoennes, N. 1998. *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, *available at* <http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/topics/abuse/2098.40a8.html>.

The Tribune Newsletter No. 46, 1991.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2000. *The State of the World Population 2000*. New York: UNFPA, *available at* <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm>.

WLP Facts and Figures, *Gender Violence*, *available at* <http://www.learningpartnership.org/facts/gender.phtml>.

## Summary and Closing:

Facilitator closes, emphasizing the following ideas about the changing approach to gender-based violence:

- ◆ There are multiple approaches to gender-based violence (i.e. human rights, health, development) and they are being integrated to address the problem.
- ◆ The topic is no longer merely about the survivors, the women who have been and are abused, but also about those who abuse.
- ◆ The topic now focuses not just on the individual man but also on the concept of masculinity and male culture.
- ◆ The notion of the impact of gender-based violence is expanding from considering the immediate effects on the women to examining the effects on the larger community, family, society.
- ◆ Gender-based violence is not just a 'women's issue', but an issue that concerns all men and not just individual perpetrators.

- ♦ Cultural institutions, beliefs, norms and practices that are often used as an excuse to justify gender-based violence are not static. Women's rights activists are exploring the ways in which culture can serve as a creative resource for intervention.

**Questions and Comments:**

Facilitator should end the session by asking if there are remaining questions or comments related to this material. Keeping track of feedback will allow the facilitator to make useful changes to future presentations.