Thematic Brief: Gender-based Violence

Aawaz II Focus and Pathways to Change

In line with the programme mandate and pathways to change, Aawaz II in partnership with communities will be focusing on:

- Creating awareness and promoting behaviour change to highlight the negative effects of Gender-based Violence (GBV) and the positive effects of equitable gender relations benefitting women, men, girls, boys and transgender persons;

- Inspiring social dialogue and action on inclusion, voice and empowerment of girls/women, encouraging families, community, duty bearers to reduce acceptance of GBV at different levels;

- Enabling community to engage in dialogue and raise informed demands with relevant duty bearers/services providers/support structures to address the harmful practices and make provisions for prevention and protection of survivors/those at risk of GBV;

- Investing in capacities and engaging youth volunteers to support in promoting behaviour change and citizen engagement for inclusion, voice and improved action for protection from GBV and other harmful practices.

Definition and Scale

Gender-based Violence (GBV) is an expression of control and domination to limit the ability of a person to make choices about life. The harm that is committed against a person’s will, is a result of power imbalances and justified based on differences in social roles and positions of women and men and other people of gender identities in a society. GBV is a violation of human rights – the right to live in dignity and have security and protection from the state. GBV is a violence that is directed against an individual or group of individuals based on their gender identity. Both women and men experience violence, but women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence. Violence against women and gender based violence are often used interchangeably. The UN defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

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The global statistics suggest that GBV is prevalent across countries and socio-economic groups and takes on many forms. It is estimated that one in three women worldwide will suffer from some form of GBV within the course of their lifetime. The WHO estimates that this is leading cause of death among women aged 16-44 years. The violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, economic or socio-cultural occurring in the family, community and committed or condoned by the state. Forms of violence include domestic violence; beating; burning; acid throwing; rape; assault; abduction of women for sex work; trafficking; sexual harassment; emotional abuse and harmful practices of early/forced marriage, honour killing; dowry related violence; genital mutilation etc.
In Pakistan, GBV exist in many forms, affecting the lives of women and girls across rural and urban settings. GBV is considered a private family matter, rarely reported and remain hidden, making it difficult to establish the magnitude of the problem. The PDHS report (2017-2018) noted that the most common type of spousal violence is emotional violence (26 percent), followed by physical violence (23 percent). A decreasing trend in physical violence is reported since age 15 from 32 to 28 percent over the past 5 years.

The percentage of women who have experienced physical violence is highest in former FATA (56 percent), followed by Balochistan (48 percent) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (43 percent). Women in Sindh are least likely to have experienced physical violence (15 percent).

Divorced, separated, and widowed women are more likely to have experienced physical violence (41 percent). Women with a higher education have experienced less physical violence (12 percent)\(^5\).

### Impact of Gender-based Violence

The prevalence and persistence of GBV in various forms and varying degrees across institutional settings have multiple impact on the victim/survivor, perpetrator, family, community, organisations and state. The consequences range from effects on health, gender relations and social, political and economic costs to entitlement to protection and individuals’ right to live in dignity without a fear of violence. The incidents of GBV reinforces the patterns of gender inequality and discrimination leading to further marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream socio-economic, civic and political processes.

**Impact on Women/Girls: Health:** Numerous studies and reports have noted the adverse effects of GBV on social well-being, physical, reproductive and sexual harm of women/girls. The health impact ranges from immediate to long-term multiple physical, sexual and mental consequences including death.\(^6\) Violence against women/girls (intimate partner violence and sexual violence) a major public health problem leading to injuries, unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality and morbidity, sexually transmitted infections including HIV.\(^7\)

**Reinforcing gender inequalities and discrimination:** GBV increases vulnerability and discrimination against women/girls’ manifold. Women are usually subjected to violence in their homes where they are supposed to be protected and safe. Women resist seeking help as often they have internalised the social norms of male privileges over women and social entitlements, allowing men to assert control by committing violence against women. Even those women who think it is inappropriate behaviour, they cannot exercise choice and don’t have options to go against the social and cultural norms and standards for fear of rejection, further harm and lack of support mechanisms.

**Experience of Violence: Pakistan-Scale**

- 28 percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence since age 15, and 6 percent sexual violence
- 8 percent of ever-married women reported marital control (controlling behaviour by husbands)
- 34 percent of ever-married women experienced spousal violence (physical, sexual, or emotional)
- 56 percent of survivors of violence not sought any help or talked with anyone about resisting or stopping the violence

*Source: Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017–2018*
Fear of violence and social sanctions restrict their choices and freedom of movement. Violence or threat of violence erode woman’s self-esteem, restraining her ability to take action in defence, escape or redressal. Women’s ability to access opportunities, resources and services such as education, health, livelihoods, decision making spaces etc is further constrained due to perpetual violence and disempowerment.

**Impact on Children and Families:** Violence extends beyond the victim/survivor to the society starting with effects on the family: where children suffer emotional and psychological damage due to violent male behaviours towards their mothers/sisters. Children of such families may accept violence as a norm and practice the same behaviour later in life.

**Impact on marginalised groups:** Women and girls from economically poor backgrounds, such as domestic workers, minority groups, disabled persons and transgender are more exposed to discrimination and hence violence.

**Impact of Emergencies:** The risk of GBV increases due to heightened social, economic and gender inequalities during emergencies. The outbreak of Covid-19 with specific containment measures put women and girls especially the vulnerable groups at a greater risk of GBV.

The financial strain, loss of employment by men, stay at home and isolation cause stress and anxiety leading to harmful coping mechanism and perpetration of abuse. GBV prevention and response services are further curtailed, in such situations, as not considered essential to prioritise and adapt to meet the prevention, immediate protection and rehabilitation needs of victims/survivors of GBV.

**Factors Driving GBV**

**Unequal Gender Power Relations:** The underlying cause of GBV is the power inequalities between women and men that emanate from the societal beliefs and norms. Social beliefs associate more value to boys/men compared to girls/women leading to higher status and privilege for men and lower status of women. The socially ascribed roles and relations deprive women of their autonomy and decision making capacity to question the domination, discrimination and exclusion and seek protection against violence. Women’s lack of voice and power to exercise choice perpetuate the vicious circle of violence. The norms of masculinity (Male social privilege and control) and notion of family honour associated with women (conformity to behavioural standards) are used as justifications for committing violence against women.

Violence is a product of power and control, stemming from inequality between women and men and with varying levels of inequality. It is upheld by individual attitudes, beliefs and practices; broader social norms around gender and violence; and systems and structures that replicate these inequalities.
Risk Factors for GBV

Community and Societal Factors
- Harmful gender norms that uphold male privilege and limit women’s autonomy
- Poverty, unemployment, violence and crime
- Inadequacy and absence of enforcement of laws to address GBV
- Low levels of women’s employment and education
- Gender discrimination in institutions (e.g. police, health, etc.)

Interpersonal and Individual Factors
- High levels of inequality in relationships/ male-controlled relationships
- Childhood experience/exposure to violence
- Attitudes condoning or justifying violence as normal or acceptable

National and Provincial Legislation to Combat Gender-based Violence

- Women Protection Act 2006
- Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act, 2016
- Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or Pretext of Honour) Act, 2016
- Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011
- Hindu Marriage Act 2017
- Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018
- Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2011
- Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act, Sindh (2013) and Baluchistan (2014)
- Punjab Protection of Women against Violence, Act 2016
- Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act, 2018
- Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Enforcement of Women Ownership Rights Act, 2012
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Deserving Widows and Special Persons Act, 2014
- Elimination of Custom of Ghag Act, 2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)


Addressing GBV

- Targeted awareness raising and behaviour change campaigns about the negative consequences of GBV on women/girls and boys involving key stakeholders especially young men, community and household elders, religious leaders and other influentials;
- Sensitise women and men on gender issues, GBV and women’s empowerment. Provide safe and inclusive spaces for discussion on GBV issues;
Enable Aawaz forums to pre-empt GBV through early warning and response mechanism;

Conduct thematic dialogues with relevant service providers (health, social welfare, women protection structures, police/law enforcement) from the platform of Aawaz Aagahi Centres;

Establish linkages and referral pathways through Aawaz Aagahi Centres (AACs) with available local women protection structures, human rights committees, social welfare, shelters, legal aid and police department for information, services and actions on GBV;

Influence through Aawaz Provincial and District Forums for enforcement of GBV protection laws and operationalisation of grievances redress structures and mechanisms particularly the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016;

Assess the availability of GBV services and advocate for coordinated response and provision of essential services at grassroots level to address the survivors needs especially during crisis/emergencies.

Endnotes
3 ILO, Briefing Note 3.1. Introduction to Gender based Violence in the World of Work. http://gbv.itcilo.org
4 N 2.
5 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18, National Institute of Population Studies Islamabad, Pakistan.
8 N 1.
11 Ibid