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# **INTRODUCTION**

Gender Base Violence is a catastrophic violation of human rights which is able to cause lifelong or life threatening trauma to survivors or victims. All human rights and humanitarian actors should make sure that actions are taken from the beginning to minimize any form of gender base violence and put in place sufficient care, management and rehabilitation to all victims and survivors.

Cases of gender base violence are part of the most frequent forms of violence in most places of the world and learned to be affecting lives and livelihoods of women, girls, men and boys throughout the world. Violence based on gender happens in every community, societies and in every culture. Factors that expose people to become more vulnerable to violence include political instability, conflicts, in adequate family and community structures.

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# **GENDER BASE VIOLENCE- what is it?**

It is violence subjected to an individual based on his or her gender or sex of being male or female; it involves all actions that lead to physical, mental or sexual trauma and threats that may prevent women from their freedom. This includes physical, sexual, psychological violence which are commonly accepted or tolerated in families, communities and state institutions.

# **FORMS OF GENDER BASE VIOLENCE**

**Sexual violence-** it is the real aim or threat to rape someone, involving marital rape, coital abuse, extreme pressure into prostitution, harassment and humiliation. Like in rural Gambia, sexual violence is commonly done by men and usually among close relatives but even if the act is known, it is not reported but kept secret to maintain the dignity of the family. It is mostly heard outside if the culprit is from another family with a different ethnic background. Men in this community usually scale/jump the local fences and open unsecured doors were women sleep and rape or molest them and all tribes in the Gambia and Senegal have names for such acts example: “Yeketan in Wollof, Oyod in Serere, wutu sunya in Mandinka” languages respectively.

**Physical Violence-** it is the real act of physical assault or bullying in the form of slave-like practices such as work without pay and proper feeding and trafficking. Physical violence between spouses has been a deeply rooted practice and is accepted in many communities particularly in the Sene-Gambian region. Many men and women in this areas describe it as a form of correction but they accept that is should not be to the extreme of causing injury and men who are physically violating their wives to the extent of causing injury may not be able to marry within their community when they divorce their first wife because many other family will not want their daughters to face the same rate of violence. Physical violence has now declined drastically due to the rate of awareness, education and information from mass media and the abolishment of forceful marriages.

**Emotional and Psychological Violence-** this includes intensively shaming someone either with abusive words, denying them freedom of expression, movement, depriving them from having access to certain rights. It is also in existence in must societies where some deliberately deny their spouses fish money when they violate or deny them sex or continue to reject their spouses due to forceful marriage. Neglect of firs wife as a result of a new wife in a polygamous family have been experienced in many societies as women are directly dependent on men for their financial needs men uses this advantages to emotionally violate their wife/wives.

**Harmful Traditional Practices-** this includes practices like female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C), forced marriages, child marriage, infanticide, neglect, abuses, depravation of education, denial of economic gain for women and girls.

**Socio Economic Violence-** biased and denial of opportunities or services because of sex or gender, exclusion, denial of access to legal practice, employment and access to all other rights.

# **CAUSES OF GENDER BASE VIOLENCE**

**Physical factors-** in availability of adequate security that results to violation of the rule of law, formation of armed factions, deflect the enforcement of the rule of law, poor governance, and lack of access to justice, weak institutions and community structures. This exposes women and girls more vulnerable to violence particularly at the time of routing activities like fetching firewood, farming, searching for food, shelter and water.

**Poverty-** being deprived of proper education and living opportunities and lack of access to shelter, food, water and income for survival greatly contributes to gender base violence against women and girls in particular. Example is many rich/wealthy and cruel people will take advantage of girls and women society leading them to forced marriage, early marriage and deprivation of access to education. These factors can lead them to prostitution.

**Social/cultural and political factors-** biased religious and cultural laws in the society led to the marginalization of respect for women and girls rights making them more vulnerable to abuse by men. The ineffective family and community structures and biased family roles between men and women have pose higher risk and drastically reduce their mode of coping and protection opportunities in society.

Lack of women empowerment led to lack of confidence and thrust among women and girls in social and public institutions which discourage them as survivors from seeking for justice and redress.

**A Judicial Barrier-** poor governance and weak institution causes lack of adequate access to justice for women and girls resulting in rampant abuse of this vulnerable group. Lack of proper representatives in legal systems and laws that can bring the culprits to justice or safeguard the right of women and girls contributes to the continuation of gender base violence in the community.

**Individual Barriers:** Fear of stigma social barring. Threats to face more consequences to punishment from perpetrators, authorities, security officers dealing with the perpetrators, community and peers are issues preventing victims from talking about their experiences or seeking for help.

# **EFFECTS OF GENDER BASE VIOLENCE**

The effects or complications of gender base violence can be in different forms. The state of every incident is commonly due to the relationship that exists between victims and the perpetrators, the community and environment where it happens. The effects or complications can cause long term and lifelong complications which ranges from non-erasable marks or disabilities which can be health related and seriously demoralize the victims in society. This can also leads to death related to suicide or homicide. Complication or effects as a result of gender base violence includes:

* Physical abuse like rape leads to injuries such as bruises, genital trauma like lacerations as a result of forceful penetration in rape cases. Disabilities such as fractures, unconsciousness in gang rape or assault. Everlasting health related problems like hypertension, genital and reproductive health problems, diseases (sexually transmissible diseases like HIV, syphilis, and unwanted and high risk pregnancy) and death.
* Psychological effects either direct or indirect such as anxiety, lack of thrust on others in society particularly men as most of the perpetrators, loss of concentration on future goals, stress related to trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. It also leads to withdrawal or isolation, alcohol and drug abuse. Fear of future violence among women and girls in communities where it happens.
* Social and Economic effects: victims may face abandonment by family members, stigma and discrimination in the community. This will emotionally affect their involvement in activities that can shape their lives better and reduce their participation in decision making at family and community level. Huge impact on women confidence leading to reduce participation in public issues, education and other opportunities of generating income. It can also lead to job loss as a result of absenteeism due to injuries, diseases and psychological trauma to victims of gender base violence.
* Reproductive health issues such as unwanted pregnancy, miscarriage, illegal abortion, menstrual disorders, pregnancy and delivery complications, dyspareunia, maternal death and effects to the unborn child like congenital abnormalities, premature delivery, low birth weight due to maternal malnutrition, intrauterine growth restrictions and intrauterine fetal death. Severe Malnutrition of young infants due neglect or isolation from routine family support to mothers.
* Effects on the family and other dependents will include disorganized family due to divorce. Risk of future violence on children within families or communities involved in domestic violence. Emotional and psychological effects on children who experience violence against their mothers and girls at home such as behavioral or attitudinal change, nightmares, aggression and bullying behaviors among peers and risk of facing violence from perpetrators at home or community level.
* Gander base violence also have effect on perpetrators such as arrest, imprisonment, flogging in the community as in religions like Islam if it involves rape, divorce and family breakups, loss of position in society and among peers, loss of self-esteem and migration.
* Effect on society include: miss trust between women and men, more work load on the health and judicial systems. Low participation of women in economic development and other productive activities in society. Minimized or low participation of women in decision making in the society.

# **THE MOST AFFECTED VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF GENDER BASE VIOLENCE**

Gender Base Violence affects everyone that is men, women, boys, girls, the elderly and the young (all ages) but the most affected are women and girls. Women and girls are usually the first victims or survivors whilst men and boys are commonly targeted as perpetrators and also recruited or forced into violent groups involved in gender base violence such as gangs, rebellion and armed forces.

Women and girls are commonly faced with rape and other forms of sexual violence such as intimate partner violence, sexual harassment. People who are displaced by any means such as armed conflicts, separation from family and community people, homelessness, lack of shelter, improper education are part of the most vulnerable groups to gender base violence. Others at risk also include refugees and migrant children unaccompanied, female household heads, the physically challenged persons, detainees, house maids girls or mothers and children born to rape victims or out of wedlock.

# **THE MAIN PERPETRATORS OF GENDER BASE VIOLENCE**

In most of our communities, the main perpetrators are commonly persons holding position in society or in control of other or being superior to other in terms of position, earnings or status either in the public sector or the private sector. In most communities, the culprits are known or closely related to the survivors/victims and this may include extended family members, immediate parents, immediate partners, teachers, friends, coworkers, community leaders, scholar and others in position of authority like presidents, judges, doctors, police, armed forces and groups are commonly culprits of such behaviors. These acts are commonly conducted by armed forces and groups during armed conflicts.

# **ACTIONS AND RESPONSES FOR PREVENTING GENDER BASE VIOLENCE**

The prevention of gender base violence in the world should be a cross cutting issue which should involves all parties to from local, national and international levels. Every country or state has the main responsibility for responding and preventing the acts of violence based on gender at all level. Governments can introduce judicial, legislative, administrative laws to prevent, find out and charge every form of gender base violence no matter where it happens and support adequately for the care of the victims or survivors.

A bright example is ensuring that all acts of gender base violence are criminalized and make sure laws, policies and practices are implemented, respected and human rights particularly rights of women and girls are respected and protected without any form of segregation based on gender. All forms of violence requires thorough investigations by professionals and those found wanting are dealt with without fear or favor and also ensure that the victims or survivors have sufficient care, treatment, counseling, psycho-social support and rehabilitation. Take actions to abolish all harmful beliefs, practices either cultural, religious, social, economic factors that discriminate against women and girls as the main victims/survivors.

**HEALTH CARE RESPONSES:** proper training of all health care providers irrespective of specialty to be able to recognise and provide sufficient care to victims of gender base violence. Ensuring that proper referral of victims is put in place with good reporting mechanisms and confidentiality at all levels. All services required in the management of victims/survivors should be available and accessible at all times they needs it. The provision of counseling services by trained experts for victims/survivors will create a thrusting room to share their experiences with regards to gender base violence and its forms. This will minimize the risk of repeated exposure to violence in their lives and the perpetrators can be brought to book. Although many women would not like to discuss about issues of gender base violence, good counselling services will create an opportunity for discussion.

**SECURITY AND SAFETY:** the provision of security and safety in the communities and areas where women and girls activities are mostly engaged such as water sources, markets, gardens and so on will minimize harm and exposure to any form of violence and the perpetrators will be easily apprehended and brought to justice. Governments should expand the provision of more police units to densely populated areas where most of the acts are practiced and empower the communities to take responsibility in ensuring that the culprits are brought to book.

**COMMUNITY MOILIZATION:** Reinforcing community and individual capacities to identify and protect them from any form of gender base violence and take appropriate measures to plan and implement and evaluate activities to promote change through active participation of women and girls and ensure accountability and transparency. Promote family and community support groups especially women and youth groups to support and encourage social recreational programmes and good cultural and spiritual activities.

**EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES:** The provision of access to safe education to develop vocational knowledge and skills training to boost self-reliance and economic opportunities among women and girls. Providing safe and reliable learning environment within and around all educational facilities and also creating awareness among children, parents, teachers and higher authorities and the relevant local authorities like the parent teacher associations (PTA) and the village development committees (VDCs) will aid in appropriate understanding of Gender base violence and actions to be taken.

**TRANSFORMATION OF ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND NORMS.**

Gender base violence is deeply rooted and sustained I society due to socio economic and cultural context in the community. Communities should be engaged to discussion about the causes and consequences of gender base violence. These will enable men and other influential leaders to critically reassess their roles in society to change their mind sets. A change in mindset and in cultural practices does not occur overnight but gradually it can be overcome.

**INFLUENTIAL LEADERS AS ROLE MODELS**

The use of influential leaders who are role models to advocate for the prevention of gender base violence in society cannot be overemphasized. Influential leaders like the Imams, Chiefs, Alkalos (Village heads), Traditional Healers and Traditional Birth Attendants (council of elders) plays a crucial role in the maintenance of peace and settlement of disputes between spouses. Most women who are abused by their spouses often complain to this group of people who usually summon a meeting of the spouses and settle their disputes particularly on marital issues. Reporting a case at police is a taboo in some cultures and therefore most cases does not go out of the community but solved within by the influential leaders. So empowering these structures in society will play a very vital role in reducing gender base violence.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

More emphasis is needed by every government, regional, national and international organizations to implement all legal measures recommended for the violation of human rights. The effective implementation of laws recommended for perpetrators will greatly add to the reduction of gender base violence and promote respect for human rights particularly women, girls and child rights . All regional and international human right laws prohibit all types of violence including gender base violence which are regarded as serious violations of human rights. More is needed by every state to ensure the maximum implementation of the laws on all acts of gender base violence and bring the perpetrators face justice and give full support like psychological, emotional, and socioeconomic to all victims or survivors of gender base violence everywhere in the world.

# **CONCLUSION**

Gender base violence should end and can end with more commitment. It can only happen if come together collectively as campaigners, activist, law makers (parliamentarians), and law enforcers (like the police) and all citizens to bring a change. There may be more women suffering from these act and we should collectively take action now.

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