

GBV Core Concepts & Approaches

Core GBV concepts and approaches are grounded in evidence-based theories, principles, and practices foundational to effective GBV prevention and response. These concepts and approaches underpin all efforts to engage community leaders in GBV prevention and response.

It is essential that staff have a sound understanding of these concepts and approaches and skills to apply them to GBV prevention and response programming before engaging community leaders in programming. In turn, GBV teams can support community leaders to also learn about and apply these concepts and approaches in the community. Core GBV concepts and approaches are described briefly in this section, and then explored in more depth in the [**Training Manual**](#).



Understanding GBV

What is GBV?

Gender-Based Violence is “...an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.” (IASC., 2015, p.5)

The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) identifies six core types of GBV, as represented in the table below.¹ All incidents of GBV may be captured within this classification, but when GBV programs and community leaders discuss GBV they are more likely to refer to broader categories of violence against women and girls, such as:

- Intimate partner violence (IPV), or domestic violence, which is defined by the relationship between the survivor and perpetrator and may relate to multiple types of violence, including rape, sexual assault, physical assault, denial of opportunities, and emotional abuse.
- Harmful traditional practices (HTP), which includes types of violence that may be tied to local social, cultural, or religious values, including early/forced marriage (EFM) and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).
- Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), which is defined by the power relationship between survivor and perpetrator and in humanitarian settings is largely used to describe incidents of GBV perpetrated by aid workers, including rape, sexual assault, and exchange of money, goods, benefits, or services for sexual contact.

Why do we use the term GBV?

The terms GBV and violence against women (VAW), or violence against women and girls (VAWG) are largely synonymous. The terms can be adapted in different contexts and within different organizations.

The term GBV was used in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW, 1993) to underscore the human rights dimensions of violence against women and corresponding responsibilities of States.

Six Core Types of GBV	Description
Rape	Non-consensual penetration (however slight) of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. Also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object.
Sexual Assault	Any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration. Examples include attempted rape, as well as unwanted kissing, fondling, or touching of genitalia and buttocks. FGM/C is an act of violence that impacts sexual organs, and as such should be classified as sexual assault. This incident type does not include rape, i.e., where penetration has occurred.

¹ The GBV Classification Tool was developed by UNFPA, UNHCR and IRC as part of the GBVIMS project initiated in 2006 by OCHA, UNHCR, and the IRC. The GBV Classification Tool and other GBVIMS resources are available at: [GBVIMS: Gender-Based Violence Information Management System](#)

Physical Assault	An act of physical violence that is not sexual in nature. Examples include hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting or use of any weapons, acid attacks or any other act that results in pain, discomfort, or injury.
Forced Marriage	The marriage of an individual against their will.
Denial of Resources, Opportunities or Services	Denial of rightful access to economic resources/assets or livelihood opportunities, education, health, or other social services. Examples include a widow prevented from receiving an inheritance, earnings forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member, a woman prevented from using contraceptives, a girl prevented from attending school, etc. Reports of general poverty should not be recorded.
Psychological/ Emotional Abuse	Infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, harassment, unwanted attention, remarks, gestures, or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things, etc.

Consequences of GBV

GBV results in serious and harmful consequences for survivors, as well as their families and the overall community. Consequences of GBV can be physical, emotional/psychological, social, and/or economic and may relate to short or long-term impacts. Below are some examples of the consequences of GBV:

Health Consequences for Survivors:

- Death, suicide, homicide, infant mortality, and maternal mortality
- Sexual and reproductive health consequences including sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, problems with pregnancy, unsafe abortion, miscarriage, sexual disorders, loss of the ability to have children)

Psychological/ Emotional Consequences for Survivors:

- Long-lasting psychological effects including depression, anxiety, traumatic stress
- Eating and sleeping disorders
- Fear, anger, loss of trust in others, helplessness, and hopelessness
- Substance abuse

Social Consequences for Survivors:

- Withdrawal from school, employment, family engagement, participation in community activities
- Forced marriage to preserve family honor/ community cohesion
- Stigma, blame
- Rejection from family/community, decline in marriageability
- Lack of power and resources to escape continued perpetration of GBV

Consequences for Family Members and Wider Communities:

- Children may witness GBV, experience social consequences along with their mothers, or may not be receive sufficient care, which can impact school performance, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing and development.
- Intimate relationships with survivors may deteriorate (lack of sex, increased tension and fighting, decreased happiness in relationships), partners may contract STIs, HIV/AIDS, may need to carry increased household workload
- Loss of income to the family, increased medical costs
- Increased medical, legal and social service expenses for the community

The immediate and longer-term physical, reproductive, and mental health consequences of GBV vary from person to person depending on individual and contextual factors, the type and nature of violence experienced, the survivor's developmental level and stage, and the care and support she receives. The different effects of GBV can be interrelated; for example, physical wellbeing affects psychological wellbeing.

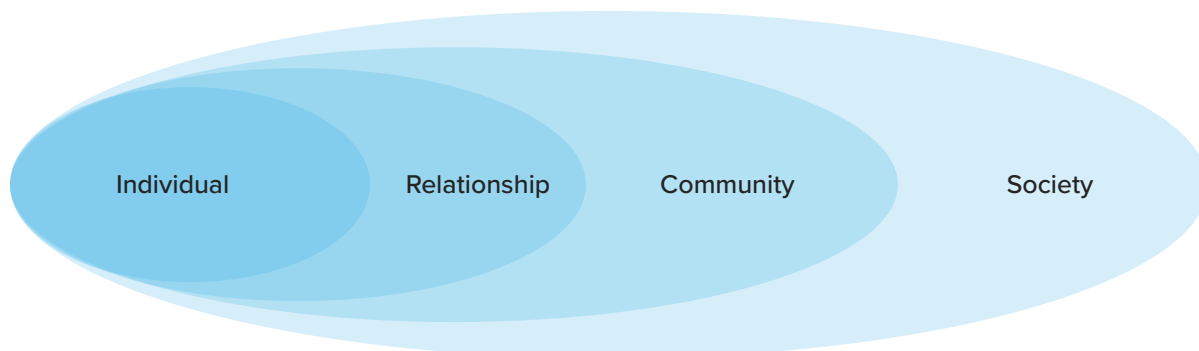
Causes and Drivers of GBV

Gender Inequality

The root cause of GBV is gender inequality. Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of people based on their gender, and it is reflected in unequal power relations that grant men systemic power and privilege over women. Gender inequality cuts across public and private spheres and impacts social, economic, cultural, and political rights. It restricts and limits women's and girls' freedoms, choices, and opportunities. Inequality can increase women's and girls' risk of abuse, violent relationships, and exploitation. For example, women's economic dependency on men – combined with discriminatory marriage, divorce, and child custody laws – means that women are often unable to escape violent relationships. GBV is not only a consequence of gender inequality; it also reinforces it. Violence keeps girls and women at a lower status and entrenches the power disparities between men and women.²

The Ecological Model and Contributing Factors

While gender inequality is the root cause of GBV, other factors that contribute to, enable, and perpetuate GBV. The ecological model helps explain these numerous intersecting drivers and contributing factors. Within the ecological model, violence is influenced and affected by various factors across different levels of the social ecology. These are individual, relationship, community, societal levels, also referred to as 'circles of influence'.



Ecological Model

² UNICEF GBVIE Programme Resource Pack, Kit 1, Getting Started: https://aa9276f-9f45-487a-2a3e8-7f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/uqd/aa48_9276eb30b1a7654c8d885a537e3ae810d2.pdf

The inner-most circle represents individual factors that can influence experiences of GBV, such as personal attitudes and beliefs, personal history and experiences, and individual characteristics. The second circle represents the influence of family and relationship, while the third circle reflects the influence of community level factors, including community leadership and community norms and practices. The fourth and final circle represents societal level factors that influence GBV, such as national laws, policies, and wider societal norms.³ Risk factors and protective factors that increase or decrease risk or likelihood of GBV can be identified at each level of the ecological model, relating to both GBV victimization and GBV perpetration. Examples of risk factors associated with women’s experiences of GBV can be seen in the table below.

Examples of Factors Associated with Women’s Risk of GBV Across the Ecological Levels	
<p>Individual Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes toward gender equality • Use of alcohol and drugs • Witnessing GBV as a child • Low education level • Physical/ mental ability 	<p>Family/Relationship Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early/forced marriage • IPV in the home • Poverty • Perceptions of family honor • Level of support within family
<p>Community Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low levels of community safety and security • Displacement • Lack of availability of information about GBV and services for survivors • Inequitable gender norms and social norms that condone GBV 	<p>Society Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discriminatory and weak laws against GBV • Lack of functioning formal justice systems • Conflict • Poverty

Using the ecological model, GBV teams can identify risk and protective factors, and relevant strategies to address GBV in each context. As community leaders are particularly influential in at the community level of the ecological model, GBV teams can work with leaders to identify and address GBV risk factors, while reinforcing and promoting protective factors.

Power

As noted above, gender inequality, which results in an imbalance of power, is the root cause of GBV. Understanding this, as well as other power dynamics that exist within communities, can help GBV teams avoid unintentionally reinforcing or contributing to inequitable power dynamics that perpetuate discrimination and violence.

Further, understanding different types of power can help teams consider how power can be harnessed to promote positive changes in work with community leaders. See below for an overview of different types of power.

³ Heise, L. *Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework*, 1998. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/11127184_Violence_Against_Women_An_Integrated_Ecological_Framework

Different Types of Power⁴

Power within is the strength inside ourselves when we recognize the equal ability within all of us to positively influence our own lives and community. By discovering the positive power within ourselves, we are compelled to address the negative uses of power that create injustice in our communities.

Power over means the power that one person or group uses to control another person or group. This control might come from direct violence or more indirectly, from the community beliefs and practices that position men as superior to women. Using one's power over another is injustice.

Power with means the power felt when two or more people come together to do something that they could not do alone. Power with includes joining our power with individuals as well as groups to respond to injustice with positive energy and support.

Power to is the belief, energy, and actions that individuals and groups use to create positive change. Power to is when individuals proactively work to ensure that all community members enjoy the full spectrum of human rights and can achieve their full potential.

Using a **power analysis** helps GBV staff working with community leaders reflect on:

- Unequal power relations across multiple levels of the social ecology and circles of influence (individual, family, community, and society)
- Power dynamics within community leadership structures, and between community leaders and other members of communities
- Individual and collective power, and how power can be effectively used to create change and prevent GBV

➔ See *Training Manual – GBV Core Concepts* for further learning on core concepts. The GBV Core Concepts training modules are designed for both GBV teams and community leaders.

⁴ Raising Voices. *SASA! Preventing Violence Against Women and HIV*, 2008.

GBV Programming in Humanitarian Contexts

In settings impacted by humanitarian emergencies, GBV programming commonly centers on four areas of intervention:

Responding to GBV survivors

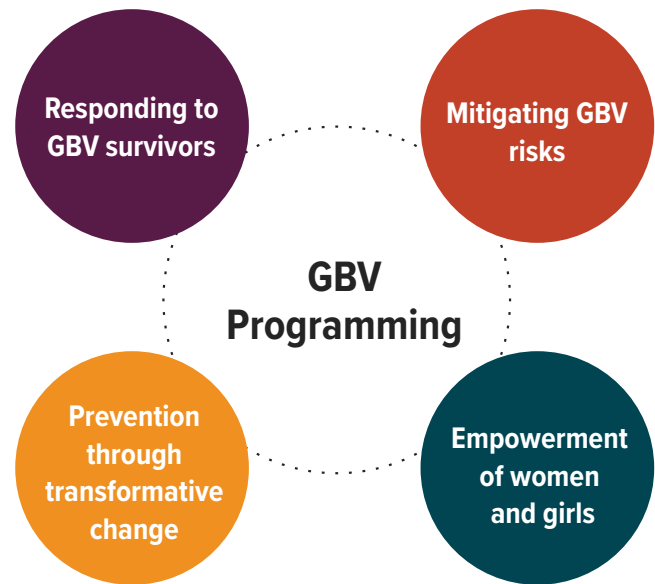
1. Mitigating GBV risks to reduce the likelihood of GBV occurring
2. Catalyzing transformative change to ultimately prevent GBV
3. Empowerment of women and girls

GBV response – Aims to assist and support GBV survivors with access to good quality, coordinated, compassionate and confidential health, psychosocial, safety, justice, and other services to promote their safety, wellbeing, and recovery from GBV.

GBV risk mitigation – Aims to identify and reduce risk factors for GBV across all humanitarian sectors and services and within the community. GBV risk mitigation is guided by the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action.⁵

GBV prevention through transformative change – Involves tackling the underlying causes and drivers of GBV to prevent violence in the longer-term. This work centers on promoting laws, policies and norms that promote equality between men and women, and strengthening communities and relationships based on respect and non-violence.

Empowerment of women and girls – Involves expanding opportunities and resources available to women and girls to strengthen their cognitive, personal, psychosocial, and socio-civic empowerment and reduce the risks they face.



This Toolkit provides ideas for engaging community leaders related to these areas of programming.

⁵ <https://gbvguidelines.org/en/>

Good Practice Approaches for GBV Programming

The following good practice approaches apply to all programming— response, risk mitigation, transformative change, and empowerment of women and girls. Staff should receive training to build their knowledge and skills in applying these approaches and work together to identify how to apply the approaches throughout their work engaging community leaders in GBV prevention and response.

Intersectional Feminist Approach

A feminist, women-led approach means that women and girls drive the priorities and actions when engaging with community leaders. By promoting a women-led approach, GBV teams ensure that women and girls' voices are at the center of programming, and that women are provided opportunities to be leaders in developing appropriate and sustainable solutions to GBV with community leaders. A feminist women-led approach recognizes that women and girls have the knowledge, expertise, and skills to guide engagement with leaders. They know better than anyone their own realities, their needs, the risks they face, and what types of community leader engagement would be most beneficial. This approach is grounded in the belief that all women and girls of all ages and abilities have the same rights, value and worth.⁶ A women-led approach:

- Recognizes that power imbalance between men and women is the root cause of all types of GBV.
- Aims to transform patriarchal power relations.⁷
- Is grounded in human rights and a commitment to equality, justice, and dignity for all people
- Applies an intersectional lens to identify and address inequality.

An **intersectional feminist lens** allows GBV teams to understand how women and girls experience overlapping and intersecting forms of oppression, discrimination and marginalization based on their multiple co-existing identities, such as their race or ethnicity, their class, or sexual identity.⁸ Applying an intersectional lens can help GBV teams and community leaders recognize and address multiple forms of oppression, discrimination and inequality that women and girls experience simultaneously in a given context.⁹

Using an women-led intersectional approach to working with community leaders might involve:

- Ensuring women and girls participate in every aspect of community leader engagement (e.g., working around women and girls' schedules and providing transport and childcare so they can participate).
- Asking women and girls from all groups and backgrounds (considering age, religion, ethnicity, disability, etc.) for information and including them in information gathering activities so that their needs and priorities guide all actions.
- Providing training to women and girls in GBV prevention and response so they are better equipped to participate in programming.
- Creating opportunities for women to increase their knowledge and skills for exercising different types of power, including power with, to, and within.

6 Raising Voices. *SASA! Together: An activist approach for preventing violence against women*, Kampala, Uganda, 2020.

7 Raising Voices. *SASA! Together: An activist approach for preventing violence against women*, Kampala, Uganda, 2020. p.51.

8 GBV AoR. *The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming*, 2019.

<https://gbvaor.net/#keydocument-block>

9 GBV AoR, 2019. p. VII

- Asking women and girls about their assets and resources (support systems, material, financial, family, local leaders) and what they need to support risk mitigation.
- Promoting women’s leadership within the organization and the GBV team and ensuring women staff are involved with community leader engagement.
- Supporting women leaders, strengthening women’s representation and participation at different decision-making levels both within formal and traditional structures.¹⁰
- Partnering with local women’s organizations and networks for community leader engagement.

Strengths-based Approach

A strengths-based approach recognizes human potential and appreciates that women and girls, community leaders and members “...have untapped, undetermined reservoirs of mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual abilities” that they can pull from to address their own needs, develop solutions, and make needed changes. GBV teams can focus on community leaders’ different strengths and positive attributes along with resources available within the community to address GBV.

Applying a strengths-based approach to engaging community leaders might include:

- Focusing on opportunities, rather than weaknesses or deficits
- Focusing on positive aspects of culture, religion, norms, etc.
- Recognizing people as experts in their own lives
- Reinforcing what’s working, including positive use of power, efforts of local organizations, etc.
- Strengthening relationships and building alliances to promote positive change
- Providing opportunities for women and girls to lead

Participatory Approach

A participatory approach is important for effective GBV prevention and response. Genuine participation of communities and community leaders is empowering, fosters ownership of the problem, and ensures locally appropriate solutions. Without genuine participation from women and girls, and boys and men, strategies to address risks and promote change will be inadequate. The participation and agency of communities in GBV programming recognizes that:

- Change is more likely to happen and be sustained if the individuals and communities most affected own the process, or at least contribute to it.
- Communities should be the agents of their own change.
- Change is more likely if the process is based in discussion and dialogue rather than on persuasion and telling people what to do.

Applying a participatory approach to engaging community leaders might include:

- Ensuring GBV staff are comfortable with high levels of participation and have skills to facilitate this
- Recognizing community leaders and members are experts in their community
- Valuing process and not only outcomes

¹⁰ GBV AoR, 2019.

- Prioritizing inclusion of different groups in the community, especially those who often have less voice and agency
- Selecting methods and tools for different activities that support participation and needs of different groups
- Identifying barriers and risks related to participation in GBV activities
- Recognizing that discussion and dialogue leads to mutual learning (between staff and community leaders, leaders, and the community, and among community members)
- Acknowledging the capacity of community leaders to bring positive change to their communities

Survivor-centered Approach

A survivor-centered approach is a cornerstone of GBV work. The safety, rights, dignity, and empowerment of GBV survivors is always a top priority. A survivor-centered approach aims to make sure each survivor's rights are at the forefront of all action, that each survivor is treated with dignity and respect, and that each survivor's agency is recognized and supported. Putting the survivor at the center of the helping process promotes recovery, reduces risks of further harm, and reinforces agency and self-determination. A survivor-centered approach recognizes that every survivor:

- Has equal rights to care and support;
- Is different and unique;
- Will react differently to violence;
- Has different strengths, capacities, resources and needs;
- Has the right, appropriate to her age and circumstances, to decide who should know about what has happened to her and what should happen next; and
- Should be believed and be treated with respect, kindness, and empathy.

Applying a survivor-centered approach to engaging community leaders might include:

- Training staff engaging with community leaders and community leaders on survivor-centered principles of confidentiality, safety, respect, and non-discrimination
- Sensitizing community leaders to survivor-centered principles
- Working with leaders to strengthen community-level GBV response and referral protocols that reflect a survivor-centered approach
- Advocating with community leaders on behalf of survivors

Ethics and Safety

GBV interventions and programs can paradoxically increase risks of violence for girls and women. In some emergency settings, simply gathering information about GBV can have serious – even life-threatening – implications for survivors, other community members, or GBV staff. Girls and women who do disclose GBV may face retaliation from perpetrators and their supporters, and even reprisal from authorities. Such retaliation can range from social exclusion to being charged with criminal offences (such as adultery) and subjected to further violence, including so-called “honor killing”.

In addition to safety risks, there are ethical dimensions of GBV programming in emergencies. For example, all humanitarian actors have an ethical obligation to ‘do no harm’ to affected people and communities. As GBV is very common, many staff and community members have had direct and indirect exposure to GBV – as

survivors, witnesses, or family members –and have experience coping with its consequences. GBV programs have an ethical responsibility to promote GBV survivors’ and other community members’ wellbeing and to not cause further harm through re-traumatizing them.

Ensuring that engagement with community leaders promotes safe and ethical programming might include:

- Ensuring that all GBV staff are trained in initial GBV response and can make supportive referrals for quality care and support services
- Sensitizing staff engaging with community leaders on ethical and safety dimensions of GBV prevention and response
- Anticipating, mitigating, and monitoring risks and unintended consequences arising from working with community leaders
- Ensuring that staff have regular opportunities to reflect on and discuss ethical and safety issues that arise in work with community leaders

➡ See *Training Manual – Foundations: Key Approaches for Engaging Community Leaders* for further learning on key approaches to engage community leaders.