Resources for Learning about GBV Prevention Theories and Approaches

GBV is a complex social issue and there are many factors that contribute to this violence. Careful reflection on these factors can help teams develop appropriate programs and interventions aimed at preventing GBV.

There are a variety of theories to explain why people behave as they do and how to catalyze changes in behaviors that are harmful. Models and theories that are proving useful and effective for prevention of GBV include:

- The ecological model
- Behavior change theories
- Social norms theories

The Ecological Model

The ecological model for understanding violence against women[12] presents the context for how violence against women occurs. It recognizes that no one factor causes violence against women, but that rather it is caused by the interplay between individual, interpersonal, community, and socio-cultural factors. In this way, the ecological model helps us gain a deeper understanding of the issue of violence against women. For example, by using the ecological model, we can see why just telling an individual man not to use violence against women will not put an end to this behavior if his family and friends continue to support the use of violence, if the social norms that justify men's dominance over women are not changed, and if the laws to punish violence against women are not properly implemented. In addition to helping us understand the problem of GBV, the model helps us identify the most effective solutions, illustrating that we need to work with different institutions, groups, and individuals across all levels to drive and enable positive change because if we do not, we will not succeed in changing the norms that sustain GBV.

Theories of Behavior Change

Multiple theories of human behavior exist that can help to better understand why some individuals perpetrate GBV, as well as the needs and motivations of individuals and groups to make positive changes in behaviors. GBV programs that are guided by a theory, or multiple theories of behavior change, can more effectively engender desired changes in communities.

Across several theories, there is consensus that the following eight factors account for most of the variation in health-related behaviors relevant to GBV prevention:[13, 14]

1. The person forms a strong positive intention or makes a commitment to perform the behavior.
2. There are no environmental barriers that make it impossible to perform the behavior.
3. The person possesses the skills necessary to perform the behavior.
4. The person believes that the advantages of performing the behavior outweigh the disadvantages.

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12 Heise, L. *Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework*, 1998.
13 Five theories include: The Health Belief Model, the Social Cognitive Theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Self-Regulation and Self-Control, and the Theory of Subjective Culture and Interpersonal Relations.
14 Gielen and Sleet. *Application of Behavior-Change Theories and Methods to Injury Prevention*. Epidemiol Rev, 76-65 :(1) 25 .2003. **http://www.epirev.oxfordjournals.org/content/65/1/25.full.pdf+html**

5. The person perceives more normative pressure to perform the behavior than to not perform it.

6. The person perceives that performance of the behavior is consistent with his or her self-image or values.

7. The person's emotional reaction to performing the behavior is more positive than negative.

8. The person perceives that he or she has the capabilities to perform the behavior under different circumstances.

The behavior change theory that is most applied to GBV prevention work in humanitarian settings is the transtheoretical model, or *Stages of Change*[15]. The Stages of Change Model identifies phases of change people go through as they work towards changing their behaviors and practice. This model can be applied individual and collective transformational change:

- Stage 1: Pre-contemplation: an individual is unaware of the problems and its consequences in her/his life.
- Stage 2: Contemplation: an individual begins to think about whether the problem related to her/his life.
- Stage 3: Preparation for action: an individual obtains more information and develops an intention to act.
- Stage 4: Action: an individual begins to try new and different ways of thinking and behaving.
- Stage 5: Maintenance: an individual recognizes the benefits of the behavior change and maintains this change.

Learn more about applying the Stages of Change Model to address GBV:

- Michau, L. (2007) *Approaching Old Problems in New Ways: Community Mobilisation as a Primary Prevention Strategy to Combat Violence against Women*: **https://www.jstor.org/stable/20461184**

Social Norms

Social norms are increasingly recognized as a key driver of GBV. Social norms are unspoken standards of behavior or rules governing what is and is not acceptable behavior; they guide the way people interact and behave. Social norms can be very powerful influences on behavior, even more so than personal opinions and understanding how norms influence behavior is an important development in GBV prevention. The desire to conform to social expectations means that social norms can be very persuasive and can be stronger than other factors influencing behavior. For example, many men still use violence against women, even when there are laws against it. It is important for violence prevention initiatives to encourage communities to focus on a positive vision for change. To make real and sustained change programs need to shift harmful unspoken group rules about gender, discrimination and violence that perpetuate GBV and replace them with norms that promote gender equitable and non-violent beliefs and behaviors.

Learn more about social norms and GBV:

- Jewkes, R. (2017) *Social Norms Evidence Brief*: **https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/165-social-norms-evidence-brief-website/file**
- UK Department for International Development (2016) *Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls*: **https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/507845/Shifting-Social-Norms-tackle-Violence-against-Women-Girls3.pdf**
- GSDRC and University of Birmingham (2016) *Social Norms Professional Development Pack*: **www.gsdrc.org/professional-dev/social-norms/**

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15 The Transtheoretical Model was developed by Prochaska and DiClemente in the late 1970s.

Additional theories and frameworks have informed how these theories and models have been applied to understand GBV. In particular, feminist theories and principles and human rights frameworks and principles have significantly influenced how different theories are interpreted and applied to GBV prevention programs and interventions.

Further, a range of other theories are used to inform particular elements of programs. For example, in addition social norms theory, a program seeking to engage and empower community leaders may apply theories of adult learning, empowerment or collective action to the program. What matters is that programs are based on relevant theories that explain the problem of GBV and provide a clear framework for how desired changes will be created. Doing further research and looking at different interventions and program designs will help identify the various ways that theories are used to inform GBV prevention.

Effective Approaches to GBV Prevention

The evidence base about effective approaches to preventing GBV is growing and evolving as new programs and interventions are developed and studied. Through global efforts such as What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls— an initiative which works across 13 countries to build the evidence base on effective approaches to preventing GBV in low-middle income settings— learning is emerging about characteristics of effective GBV prevention programs. Findings from this and other research offer valuable learning about the types of GBV programs that have shown promising results in creating a transformative change to prevent GBV. Reviewing evidence about different approaches to GBV prevention is helpful when designing GBV prevention programming— including with community leaders. While the majority of initiatives have not been implemented in humanitarian settings, the information about more effective approaches will be a helpful starting point for considering which types of initiatives might be appropriate in your context.

Resources for learning more about GBV prevention design and approaches

- Murphy, M. et al (2019) *What works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crisis: Synthesis Brief*: **https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/355-p868-irc-synthesis-brief-report-lr-26092019/file**

- Gibbs, A. and Bishop, K. (2019) *Combined economic empowerment and gender-transformative interventions*: **https://www.whatworks.co.za/resources/evidence-reviews/item/652-combined-economic-empowerment-and-gender-transformative-interventions**

- Jewkes, R., Stern, E., and Ramsoomar, L. (2019) *Community activism approaches to shift harmful gender attitudes, roles and social norms*: **https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/357-social-norms-briefweb-28092019/file**

- Kerr-Wilson A. et al (2020) *A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls*: **https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/374-evidence-reviewfweb/file**

- Jewkes, R. et al (2020) *Effective design and implementation elements in interventions to prevent violence against women and girls*: **https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/373-intervention-report19-02-20/file**

- Women's Refugee Commission (2014) *Empowered and Safe: Economic strengthening for adolescent girls in emergencies*: **www.womensrefugeecommission.org/images/zdocs/Econ-Strength-for-Girls-Empowered-and-Safe.pdf**