



The Mercy Global Action Task Force  
on *Women and Justice Leadership*  
presents:

# **GENDER BASED- VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT THE LIFECOURSE**

**A Handbook for the Global Mercy  
Community on Advocating Against  
Gender-Based Violence**



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## \*CONTENT WARNING

This document contains first-hand stories, descriptions and statistics of gender-based violence, including references to abuse, assault, rape and death. Please read carefully and take care to avoid distressing content if needed at this time.

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# ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

In late 2023, experts on women's rights from across the Mercy World gathered to form the Mercy Global Action Task Force on *Women and Justice Leadership*. Members of this group discussed a wide array of justice issues related to the experiences of women throughout the world. Unsurprisingly, members agreed that gender-based violence remains the biggest barrier to women's equality and meaningful participation in society in almost every country on earth.

Drawing on their networks and diverse areas of expertise, members of the Task Force have put together the following Handbook for this year's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, with the hope that it generates reflection and action throughout the Mercy community. The theme of the 2023 16 Days is 'UNITE! Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls'. We know that many Sisters of Mercy and Mercy ministries continue to invest in effective prevention strategies and work tirelessly for the right to life, safety and flourishing for women and girls around the world. This Handbook pays homage to the strength and resilience of women, and those who support them, and will hopefully motivate readers to collaborate with initiatives and services that inspire their own passion for justice.

Our world will never be equal unless every person can live free from violence and oppression. Let's get this sorted. #NoExcuses

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## How do we define violence?

[From UN Women Australia, 2020]

*Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and deep-seated patriarchal systems.*

*The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. While women and girls suffer disproportionately from GBV, men, boys and non-binary individuals can also be targeted.*

*Violence against women and girls is defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*

*Violence against women and girls encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family or within the general community, and perpetrated or condoned by the State.*



This Handbook is divided into four sections, that make up the 'life course' of a woman:

1. **Birth & Early Childhood**
2. **Youth**
3. **Adulthood**
4. **Late Adulthood**

Each section features a description of the types of violence commonly experienced by women and girls at this stage in their life course, along with key statistics and grassroots stories of lived experience. This is followed by some examples of best practice prevention and response strategies, along with organisations working in this space, and critically, a spotlight on relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, we present a number of calls to action for our Mercy community.





# BIRTH & EARLY CHILDHOOD

**AGES: APPROX. 0-10 YEARS**

Gender-based violence impacts babies and children in unique ways. Given their young age, experiences of abuse are an impediment to healthy growth and development. The younger the child, the greater the impact. This has a detrimental impact on their life course trajectory into the future. A child who witnesses abuse is negatively impacted by this and the trauma of this abuse can result in delayed brain development. This in turn, impacts emotional, psychological and behavioural functioning and development. Throughout the world, babies and children experience gender-based violence in a myriad of ways including in the family home, in places where armed conflicts are active, in social environments, in child care settings and in schools.



## STORIES FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Extracts from *I have a voice: Trafficked Women in Their Own Words.*  
Reed & Latonio, 2015

*“My name is Aleta. From the time I was born I labelled myself as a disgrace because I was born as a result of my parent’s extramarital affair. My father did not want me to be born and when I was born he denied that I was his daughter. when I first learnt of this my heart was so heavy as if a bomb had been dropped. My mother wanted to keep me but after a few months she was forced to leave me in the care of relatives. The two women who cared for me I considered my parents. ...If I could relive my childhood I would have a very simple wish. First I would want to get the attention of my mother and have better communication. Those times when we had no contact would be patched up with love and care between mother and daughter. The second wish would be to play. I had no time to play and I would like to have had plenty of toys.”*

*“My name is Emerita. I was born in 1992 in Mindanao. I am the fourth of five children, My father worked in a fishing company owned by his friend but was later fired by the owner because my father had a mistress in the office... At four, I was raped by my uncle in my grandmothers house. He was working on a ship and only came home every two years. One time he asked my grandmother, “May I borrow Emerita for a while? She is so cute that I want to buy things for her in the mall.’ I said no to my grandmother, but my Lola said, “You go with your uncle”. I was so terrified, from then on, I hated boys.”*



## WHAT DOES GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE LOOK LIKE AT THIS STAGE OF THE LIFE COURSE?

Gender-based violence against children is a crime against girls and boys that “undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims” . Violence against girls includes sexual violence, child marriage, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, intimate partner violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. ([Save the Children, 2023](#)). It also includes institutional violence, for example, when children suffer ill-treatment in the justice system.

The impacts are significant in both the short- and long-term, and can include serious physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, forced and unwanted pregnancies, and greater risk of maternal mortality. The psychological effects of childhood abuse on the girl child can include withdrawal and depression, guilt, shame, anxiety and other impacts. A child’s exposure to violence and abuse, even indirectly, through popular culture and media (e.g. television shows, music), can have a significant impact on their self-esteem, educational attainment and learning.

## STATISTICS

The threat of gender-based violence is pervasive and contributes to the end of childhood for millions of children around the world, as shown by staggering global trends ([Save the Children, 2023](#)):

- 15 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year
- 30 million girls are at risk of female genital mutilation in the next decade
- 1 in 3 girls and women live in countries where marital rape is not an explicit crime

In 83 countries with SDG data (mostly from developing regions), nearly 8 in 10 children aged 1–14 years experienced regular violent discipline by caregivers in the home, including verbal aggression (e.g. being yelled at or called names) and physical punishment ([UNICEF, 2020](#)). Nearly 3 in 4 children - or 300 million children - aged 2–4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers ([WHO, 2022](#)).

## BEST PRACTICE POLICIES AND RESPONSES

### **MCAULEY COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN - AUSTRALIA**

McAuley Community Services for Women was established in 2008, and provides disadvantaged women and children with accommodation, education and social services.

McAuley recognises that children's pain and trauma is unique and different in nature to that of their mothers' and requires a specialist response. They have a playroom with a specialist children's worker. Through art, play and conversation, a child's feelings about what has happened in their family can be explored.

McAuley also focuses attention on improving the bond between mothers and their children, which has often been damaged by violence.

[Visit the MCAULEY website](#)



### **SONGA MBELE NA MASOMO CHILDREN CENTRE - KENYA**

Songa Mbele na Masomo Children Centre serves children from the Mukuru Slum living with disabilities as well as vulnerable children who have never attended school or have been excluded from school due to poverty.

The Centre is the only one of its kind in Mukuru and comprises two sections: 1) Special Unit for the children with disabilities and 2) Coaching Unit for children who have never been to school or who dropped out of school for one reason or another. The Centre's goal is to promote positive mindsets and attitudes towards children living with disabilities, and create a second chance for those children who dropped out of school or delayed joining school. The children's activities include daily care, feeding, therapy and learning at the different levels of capability.

[Visit the MUKURU website](#)



In 1992, the Philippines enacted new laws to protect children. This legislation is entitled 'Republic Act No. 7610 - An Act providing for stronger deterrence and special protection against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination, and for other purposes'.

This legislation forms the basis for the Department of Education to mandate that all public and private schools write their own manual to secure the protection of learners in the school setting.

# CALLS TO ACTION...

## TO PREVENT & RESPOND TO VIOLENCE IN BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD



### At the **INDIVIDUAL** level:

- Create safe, secure and nurturing family environments.
- Foster age-appropriate conversations with children about respectful relationships and gender equality. Role-model positive, affirming behaviours and attitudes. Let children know that violence is never ok. Help them to understand where they can go, and who they can talk to, if they feel unsafe.
- Challenge disrespectful or demeaning attitudes about girls, including sexist jokes. Build awareness about the inherent dignity of all girls.
- Listen actively and take children's views seriously. Always follow up with a trusted service provider if you think a child may be experiencing neglect, abuse or violence.

### At the **COMMUNITY / SERVICE PROVIDER** level:

- Ensure that all girls attend school and receive appropriate educational opportunities to help them learn, grow and develop interests and skills.
- Build strong data systems that recognise girls of every age and background. Capturing gender-specific data helps to inform policy.
- Support families to care appropriately for their children. Work to prevent child abandonment and the placement of children in residential care where they may be at greater risk of violence.
- Work with schools and related services to embed respectful cultural attitudes, policies and practices that uphold the dignity of all children. Have best practice reporting strategies in place to respond appropriately to disclosures, allegations and/or concerns.
- Insist on policies that require those working with children to have police checks and adequate safeguarding training.

### At the **NATIONAL / POLICY** level:

- Ensure legal frameworks are in place to prohibit violence against children in any form. Create and maintain effective justice pathways.
- Ensure that women are involved at all levels of decision-making, especially on those issues that will have direct impacts on the experiences of girls.
- Provide sufficient funding for evidence-based service provision.
- Continuously monitor the enforcement of policies and relevant laws to safeguard the rights of children.







# ADOLESCENCE & EARLY ADULTHOOD

**AGES: APPROX. 11 - 25 YEARS**

## WHAT DOES GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE LOOK LIKE AT THIS STAGE OF THE LIFE COURSE?

Gender-based violence manifests in specific and heightened ways at the life stages of adolescence and early adulthood. It is during these stages that girls and women become cognisant of their role within the patriarchy, begin to pick up on the extra precautions they need to take for their personal safety, and are targeted by predators for the unique vulnerabilities that come with their newfound womanhood. It is also during these stages that they tend to explore new behaviours — such as drug and alcohol use, and unprotected

sex — which by no fault of their own, increases their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Inadequate education about consent, recognising the signs of gender-based violence, and accessing support services exacerbates the problem. Types of gender-based violence which are unique to, or particularly common for girls and women at the life stages of adolescence and early adulthood, include school violence, child and forced marriage, grooming, human trafficking, and femicide.



## TYPES OF VIOLENCE COMMONLY EXPERIENCED BY YOUNG WOMEN...

- School Violence
- Child and Forced Marriage
- Human Trafficking
- Femicide



## SCHOOL VIOLENCE

According to UNESCO, school violence can be “physical, psychological or sexual” and include “gender-based violence, bullying and cyberbullying” ([UNESCO](#)). It can occur “in the classroom, playgrounds, toilets and changing rooms, on the way to and from school, and online” ([UN Free & Equal](#)).



School violence is detrimental to students’ mental health and learning outcomes, and it poses a significant threat to the fundamental right of young people to quality education. Students experiencing or witnessing school violence are more likely to be absent from school, have lower grades, and drop out of school indefinitely. While it affects students of all gender identities, school violence directed at girls and LGBTQ+ students is of particular concern due to the unique ways in which it manifests.

For example, “demands for sexual ‘favours’ by teachers and classmates, in return for covering school transport, enrolment fees or other school-related costs are regularly reported by girls in countries where education is not free” ([OHCHR](#)). Even without such enticements, girls may fear the consequences of refusing advances from people within their learning environments. Additionally, the UN states, “data from some countries suggests that teenage girls are three times more likely to be cyber-bullied than boys through online rumour spreading and the receiving of unsolicited explicit images” ([United Nations](#)). For LGBTQ+ students, whose gender identities and/or sexual orientations do not fit societal norms, school violence by teachers and peers is also a heightened reality; one that is often exacerbated by deep-rooted cultural beliefs and reinforcing curriculum materials.



## CHILD AND FORCED MARRIAGE (CFM)

A forced marriage is any marriage where one or both parties have not personally expressed their full, free and informed consent to the union. Child marriage is a form of forced marriage, given that anyone under the age of 18 cannot give their consent. According to the OHCHR, 1 in every 5 girls is married before the age of 18, and in the least developed countries, this number doubles: 40% of girls are married before age 18, and 12% before age 15 ([OHCHR](#)).

CFM threatens the lives and futures of women and girls. It disrupts their education, robs them of the agency to make decisions about their lives, prevents their full participation in the economic, political, and social spheres of life, and increases their exposure to gender-based violence. It is often accompanied by early pregnancy and childbirth, resulting in poor health outcomes such as increased maternal mortality rates ([OHCHR](#)).



## REGIONAL CASE STUDY

The tradition of paying lobola or a 'bride price' is a customary marriage practice prevalent in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, D.R. Congo, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Lesotho. The lobola ceremony is a formal process of negotiation between two families in order to come to a mutual agreement on the price of a bride, to be paid by the groom's family. The value, traditionally paid in cattle but more commonly paid with money today, is dependent on the bride-to-be's attributes, such as her social class, level of education, youth, and virginity. While the tradition is widely respected as a means of validating a marriage, in extreme cases it can perpetuate oppressive gender roles that enable or exacerbate gender-based violence.

*"I think more traditional practices of lobola do create a patriarchal society as the idea was that the woman would become the "property" of her husband and his family. I believe that as time has passed, the practice of paying lobola is less of a purchase and more of a display that the husband is able to take care of his wife and provide for his family." - Mercy student*

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking includes the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit" or some other gain ([Palermo Protocol](#)).



Types of exploitation include forced labour, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and organ harvesting. While anyone can be a target, human trafficking disproportionately affects women and girls. For every 10 victims detected globally in 2020, approximately four were adult women and two were girls ([UNODC TIP Report 2022](#)). Additionally, female victims represent over 90% of those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and are 3 times more likely to experience extreme violence during trafficking compared to boys and men ([UNODC TIP Report 2022](#)).

Knowing that people in vulnerable positions are more susceptible to grooming and coercion, perpetrators often target adolescents – especially those who are unaccompanied, are not getting their basic needs met, or have histories of trauma. As Angela Reed Rasmussen and Marietta Latonio explain in their publication '[I Have a Voice](#)', human trafficking rarely constitutes a woman's first experience of abuse or exploitation – it almost always occurs as part of a broader "continuum of abuse" that began at a very young age.



## FEMICIDE



Femicide is broadly defined as the killing of a girl or woman because of her gender. Accounting for the deaths of over 45,000 girls and women in 2021, the form of femicide most commonly experienced by adolescents and young adults is 'intimate femicide' ([UN Women](#)). This involves the murder of a girl or woman by someone who is well-known to her, such as a family member or a past or present intimate partner. In such cases, the murder is almost always preceded by abusive behaviours such as stalking, harassment and sexual violence, representing a failure in the provision of adequate and timely support services.

Other forms of femicide include non-intimate femicide, perpetrated by an acquaintance or stranger, armed conflict femicide, in which girls and women are used as 'weapons of war' by state and non-state actors, and honour-based femicide, in which girls and women are killed because their behaviour was seen by the perpetrator/s as bringing shame to her family ([UN Women](#)). Honour-based femicide is another form common among this age group due to the prevalence of beliefs which attach the value of a young woman's life to her virginity and conformance to gender roles at this stage of life.

Girls and women in vulnerable positions, such as the contexts of sex work, human trafficking, and broader political or economic instability, and those who face intersecting marginalities, such as in relation to race and gender expression, are at an increased risk. Additionally, in places where firearms are easily accessible, GBV is significantly more lethal.

## REGIONAL CASE STUDY



Girls and women in South Africa are faced with pronounced challenges, stemming from a history of colonialism and apartheid, government corruption, strong patriarchal cultural attitudes, and widespread poverty. As a result, the country has some of the highest rates of GBV and femicide in the world. The rate at which women are killed by intimate partners in South Africa is 5 times higher than the global average, and in the first quarter of 2022 alone, 10,818 rape cases were reported ([Govender](#)).

***"The angst each time I hear about a woman who was murdered by her husband or [hear about] a family member whose male partner is abusive in any way... It's exhausting, it's depressing."*** - Mercy student

***"There is a myth that has been perpetrated in South Africa, which says that if you have sex with a virgin you will be cured of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is very prevalent in the country and so this has led to very high instances of sexual abuse in this age range and, unfortunately, amongst infants too."*** - Mercy teacher

## MERCY STUDENTS PERFORM FOR CHANGE

Grade 11 students from St Teresa's School, Johannesburg, have created a performance piece using movement and poetry, to depict their feelings on gender-based violence in this life stage. The poem that is being spoken is named 'Every Three Hours' by Koleka Putuma. *Every. Three. Hours.* A woman is murdered in South Africa. The statistics are shockingly high. The song in the background is entitled 'Madoda Sabelani', performed by local artist Loyiso, and is an emotional protest against GBV in the country.



"I feel honoured to have been part of a campaign that depicts the scourge of GBV in our country. Choreographing the movement piece, to such a powerful song, made me feel as though I have added my voice to the fight against GBV. I hope those who watch it will feel compelled to speak out and not be silent, to know that they are not alone."

- Lisakhanya Tshili, performer

## BEST PRACTICE PREVENTION & RESPONSE INITIATIVES



### MERCY HOUSE - JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Mercy House is a non-profit organisation in Johannesburg which has offered transitional shelter for female victims of domestic abuse and human trafficking, as well their young children, since 2001. The shelter is partnered with the International Organisation for Migration and registered under the South African Department of Social Development. Some of its best practices include:

- Providing holistic residential care which caters for the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs of women who have been abused.
- Providing skills training, in computer competency, baking, sewing and craft-making, so that women can develop their full potential and gain economic independence.
- Supporting trafficking survivors to open cases against perpetrators and to return to their homes when they are ready to do so.
- Establishing the Bophelo Project, a domestic abuse, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDS education project run from the shelter. It educates domestic and unskilled workers at their workplaces and organises campaigns (at stations, parks, streets, etc.).
- Running the Drop-in Centre, which serves as an advice bureau for local women, caters for those seeking short-term shelter, and helps stranded women find a way home.

## ACRATH (AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN HUMANS)

ACRATH has been a key player in the fight to eliminate human trafficking and the exploitation of persons since 2005, predominantly in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Notably, it was a central figure in the campaign for the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act (2018), and it continues to be an active foundational member (2008) of the Australian Government's National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery. In addition to its awareness raising and legislative advocacy work, ACRATH trains its volunteers to accompany and support trafficking survivors through the ACRATH Companionship program.

Visit the [ACRATH website](http://www.acrath.org.au)



[www.acrath.org.au](http://www.acrath.org.au)  
People are NOT for sale

## THE ALLIANCE TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING (FOUNDED BY U.S. CATHOLIC SISTERS)

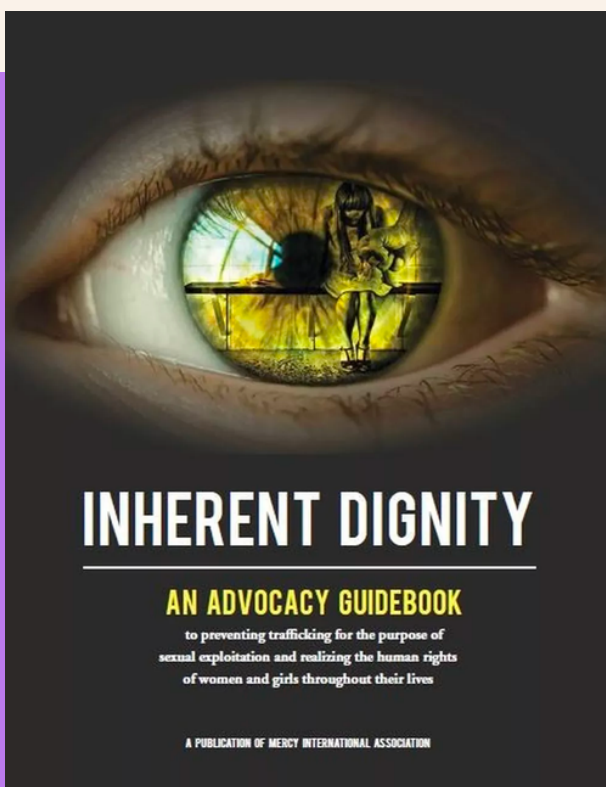
The Alliance to End Human Trafficking (formerly known as U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking), is a collaborative, faith-based network that connects congregations, organisations, and individuals in the mission to end human trafficking. The Alliance offers educational resources, leads advocacy campaigns for anti-trafficking legislation, and connects survivors of trafficking to support services. It also raises money through an 'education and employment' fund, which aims to place survivors of trafficking in higher education and job-training courses that help them to reach economic independence.

Visit the [AEHT website](http://www.aeht.org)



**ALLIANCE TO END  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Founded and Supported by U.S. Catholic Sisters



In 2018, Mercy Global Action published **'Inherent Dignity: An Advocacy Guidebook'** ([view here](#)). This publication features stories of women with lived experience of human trafficking, as well as an in-depth exploration of the human rights pertinent to this issue and government obligations to protect women and girls within (and across) jurisdictions. The guidebook also includes recommended strategies and frameworks to help inform organisations and individuals on what they can do to prevent trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and to realise the human rights of women and girls around the world.

# CALLS TO ACTION...

## TO PREVENT & RESPOND TO VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENCE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD



### At the **INDIVIDUAL** level:

- Educate yourself about the common forms of gender-based violence experienced by adolescents and young women. Foster age-appropriate conversations with young women to help them understand the risk factors and where they can go to seek help if needed.
- Challenge gender stereotypes and the disrespectful portrayal of young women in popular culture and offer alternative books/movies/music that fosters a sense of empowerment.
- Report to trusted authorities any photos or social media content that exploits young women. Never turn a blind eye to online violence.
- Look out for your friends and stand up for their rights. Interrupt abuse if you see any warning signs. Ensure that women get home safely from parties / if they have been drinking. Practice and encourage informed consent.
- Report any businesses or operations that give cause for concern around gender-based violence, especially those that you think could be involved in human trafficking.

### At the **COMMUNITY / SERVICE PROVIDER** level:

- Embed online safety training in schools.
- Embed respectful cultures in all learning environments and teach students about the importance of healthy relationships, informed consent and bystander intervention.
- Connect tailored service providers who can provide wrap-around or holistic support to those who have experienced violence, or who may be at risk of experiencing violence, e.g. youth homelessness services, mental health service providers.
- Ensure that young women are well supported and financed if they travel away from home.
- Include adolescent/youth voices in the development of prevention/response strategies and policies.

### At the **NATIONAL / POLICY** level:

- Ensure legal frameworks are in place to prohibit violence against women. Create and maintain effective justice pathways.
- Ensure that women are involved at all levels of decision-making, especially on those issues that will have direct impacts on the experiences of young women.
- Provide sufficient funding for evidence-based service provision.







# ADULTHOOD

**AGES: APPROX. 26 - 60 YEARS**

## **DESCRIPTION OF VIOLENCE AT THIS STAGE IN THE LIFE COURSE**

The patriarchy and gendered violence that impact girls through childhood and adolescence become increasingly complex at the adulthood life stage. While the transition into adulthood may in a legal sense suggest more autonomy for women, that autonomy remains subject to the limitations of sexist structures and societies. In fact, the norms of marriage and motherhood often realised in this life stage expose women to new forms of gendered violence, abuse, and human trafficking.



## **REGIONAL CASE STUDY**

The interplay between domestic violence and human trafficking are exemplified by Halima, a survivor referred to Whispers of Hope, a safe house and support organisation in the United Kingdom for women subject to domestic and honour based violence.

Halima arrived in the UK on a spousal visa, and for 12 years was treated as a modern-day slave by her husband and his family. She was required to look after the household, have her phone checked daily, and was restricted to the home except for school pickup and drop-off. She was also denied contact with family, prohibited from attending English classes, and threatened with deportation and arrest should she try to leave. This amounts to profound emotional, psychological, and financial abuse.

Stories like Halima's show the multiple points of failure at which intervention could have prevented trafficking and abuse, and at which intervention could have created a more accessible escape route. Eventually thrown out by her husband and denied access to her then 8-year-old son, Halima's immigration status excluded her from accessing public funds and had virtually nowhere to turn.

## STATISTICS

Though abuse can take physical, sexual, and psychological forms, the most widely available data tend to be on physical and sexual violence. Around 30% of women and girls aged above 15 have experienced violence of this nature, from an intimate partner or other individual. This proportion is devastatingly large, yet likely an underestimate; discrepancies in measurement methods, a scarcity of data, and social stigma attached to disclosing violence result in underreporting. Additionally, the available data is often not disaggregated, making it difficult to illustrate the precise contours of GBV.

Intimate partner violence is the most widespread form of gendered violence, and is most prevalent among women aged 20-44. These also tend to be the ages at which it becomes uniquely logistically challenging to avoid or leave a potentially abusive partner. First, there is still an overwhelming pressure for women to marry. Marriage may come with certain gendered expectations and divisions of labour that see women excluded from formal paid employment, and that designate the management of money to their husbands. This understandably imposes massive economic costs and uncertainty on those considering escape. Second, the presence of children in the family unit complicates violence further. On the one hand, children may present an extra incentive to escape violence, but on the other, women may be deterred from exiting the relationship for fear of retribution (physical or legal) against their kids.

Human trafficking takes the barriers to escape mentioned earlier and adds an additional layer of precarity: immigration status. Where women are trafficked into forced marriages or sexual exploitation across borders, their immigration status may be highly contingent on remaining under the control of their abusers. Returning to their country of origin may present fatal or near-fatal risks, loss of custody of their children, or abandoning meaningful connections to community in the destination country.



### REGIONAL CASE STUDY

Bernadette Mueni rsm, a member of the MGA Task Force on Women in Justice Leadership, speaks about her own experience encountering violence in her community in Nairobi, Kenya:

*“Violence against women is a day-to-day thing especially where I live and work. The Hospital is surrounded by a BIG slum in it with more than six villages. I engaged the police women for a week every day taking statistics of how many cases are reported each day. After a full week of recording, the conclusion is that EVERY DAY THE POLICE HANDLE BETWEEN 15 AND 20 CASES of all sorts of Domestic violence: physical abuse, assault of all forms, even rape cases. The police women told me they can spend a whole day listening to cases of violence and many times they have no solution except taking these abused women to court [to seek justice]. Many of the abused women don't get fair hearings because they have no money to bribe their way and they cannot afford a lawyer. This makes me very sad because where will these poor women turn to, and so the story of abuse continues.”*

## BEST PRACTICE PREVENTION & RESPONSE INITIATIVE

### Whispers of Hope - United Kingdom

Recall Halima's story from earlier. After being thrown out, Whispers of Hope provided her with a safe house, financial and psychological support, assistance to apply for a concession for social welfare, online banking skills, and English language classes. She now has her own home, secure and stable employment, and is rebuilding her relationship with her son.



The poster features the organization's logo at the top, which consists of a stylized bird-like shape and the text 'Whispers of Hope'. Below the logo, there are several key messages in purple circles: 'Opening escape routes for women trapped in abusive relationships.', 'Supporting them to find safety and freedom.', and 'Volunteer A range of opportunities available. See our website.' A central image shows a woman wearing a hijab. To the right, there is a QR code and the text 'Help save lives donate here:'. At the bottom, the contact information '0333 090 6663' and 'whispersofhope.uk' is displayed. Various icons representing a house, a person, and social media platforms are also present.

Preventing the conditions that make women vulnerable to trafficking and domestic violence in the first place is crucial. According to the WHO, that means investing in underprivileged communities around the world and providing women with access to secondary education and formal employment, reforming discriminatory family laws, strengthening women's economic rights, reducing exposure to violence in childhood, and addressing substance abuse. It also means dispelling cultural norms that pressure women into marriage or relationships and that promote masculinities of control and domination - both within intimate relationships and society at large.

We know from Whispers of Hope that connecting women to economic resources, social activities, stable immigration status, and emotional support can prove profoundly transformative once violence and abuse has occurred. These policies *work*. The next steps then must be to ensure that these services are made more accessible to women, and that they are well-funded enough to meet the task.

*Two women supported in Whispers of Hope safe house. Image used with permission.*





# CALLS TO ACTION...

## TO PREVENT & RESPOND TO VIOLENCE IN ADULTHOOD



### At the **INDIVIDUAL** level:

- Take care of your own mental health and wellbeing, and nurture a strong sense of self-worth. Build awareness of your human rights. Encourage your friends and families to do the same.
- Challenge gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes, particularly those that arise with regards to parenthood or women in the workplace. Champion the rights and value of women in all settings.
- Check in often with neighbours, friends and new mothers, and let a trusted authority know if you think they are experiencing - or at risk of experiencing - gender-based violence, including intimate-partner violence (IPV).
- Inform yourself about the reality and prevalence of gender-based violence, and the diverse realities of women around the world. Nurture an intersectional perspective.

### At the **COMMUNITY / SERVICE PROVIDER** level:

- Create safe spaces for women to share their stories and struggles.
- Support grassroots organisations working directly with women who are experiencing violence or intersecting forms of discrimination. This could be through providing financial support, volunteering, or spreading awareness about their work.
- Encourage respectful attitudes towards women in religious and community settings. Tradition and doctrine are never excuses for violence.

### At the **NATIONAL / POLICY** level:

- Ensure legal frameworks are in place to prohibit violence against women. Create and maintain effective and accessible justice pathways.
- Ensure that women are involved at all levels of decision-making, especially those who have experienced gender-based violence.
- Fund evidence-based prevention programs and service provision, particularly those that are specialised in services for disabled and/or First Nations women.
- Embed effective healthcare systems that provide women with gender-specific care.
- Eliminate structural and systemic barriers that limit options for migrant and refugee women, and ensure they are given timely medical and mental health care.
- Ensure domestic policies are consistent with international law and human rights frameworks.







# LATE ADULTHOOD

**AGES: APPROX. 60+ YEARS**

Violence against older women reflects a lifetime of disadvantage and the intersection between ageism and gender inequality. For older women who have experienced violence throughout their lives, aspects of ageing, such as frailty, injuries, chronic disease, and cognitive decline, make coping with different forms of violence more difficult than earlier in life.

Older women are often forgotten in our efforts to end gender-based violence. Where older women are undervalued and made 'invisible', violence against them is more likely to be ignored, or even condoned.

The pervasive impact of violence against older women on physical and mental health, relationships, social networks, hope, and sense of well-being indicates the importance of taking violence against older women, in all its manifestations, seriously as a public health and human rights issue.

As older persons live longer and birth rates decrease, a demographic change is slowly occurring, putting older persons at risk of violence if nothing is done to address this issue.



## **TYPES OF VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY OLDER WOMEN**

There is currently no globally accepted definition of “elder abuse”, “abuse against older persons” or “violence against older persons”. The most frequently-cited definition comes from the World Health Organization, which defines elder abuse as “a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.”

Abuse can be deliberate or unintentional. It can occur once or many times. Abuse does not have to be physical – misusing an older person’s money or threatening to restrict access to friends and family can cause immeasurable and lasting damage to an individual and their family. It can also lead to older people needing more help from the health and aged care systems, government benefits, and other services.



While debates remain around definitions, most of them recognize five forms of abuse of older persons, including physical abuse; psychological or emotional abuse; sexual abuse; financial or material abuse; and neglect.

- **Physical abuse** is an act that causes physical pain or injury to an older person. It also includes inappropriate use of drugs or physical restraints.
- **Psychological or emotional abuse** is an act that causes emotional pain or injury to an older person. It can include insulting or threatening a person, acts of humiliation or disrespect, and controlling behaviours including confining or isolating a person.
- **Sexual abuse** is any sexual behaviour without a person's consent. It includes sexual interactions and non-contact acts of a sexual nature.
- **Financial abuse** is the misuse or theft of an older person's money or assets. It can include using finances without permission, using a legal document such as an enduring power of attorney for purposes outside what it was originally signed for, withholding care for financial gain, or selling or transferring property against a person's wishes.
- **Neglect** is the failure to meet a person's basic needs such as food, housing and essential medical care.



This video on older women, violence and homelessness by Yumi Lee, CEO of Older Women's Network, is an excerpt from the Webinar 'The Human Right to Housing' hosted by the Mercy Foundation in September 2023. The full webinar can be accessed [here](#).



Older women, who face intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination, are more likely to experience economic and housing insecurity, which makes them more at risk of being placed in situations of dependence where violence and neglect could occur. Older women face particular forms of ageism and gender inequality, the impacts of which often accumulate over a lifetime. This includes the impact of unpaid caring roles undertaken throughout their lives, limited control of finances and decision-making, as well as attitudes that limit the participation and representation of older women in the media, government and business.

Older women are more likely to live in poverty and face challenges in accessing safe and secure housing. Coupled with a longer life expectancy and the normalization of dynamics rooted in traditional gender roles, this leads to increased dependence in old age and contributes to older women being at greater risk of domestic abuse.

## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

As women age, research shows that there is a decline in physical violence, however other forms of violence such as psychological, financial and economic abuse increase. (Study) Older women are more likely than older men to be victims of both intimate partner violence, and other forms of family violence, including violence from children. Physical and mental health impacts of intimate partner violence are cumulative and compounded by the ageing process and are exacerbated by changes in social situations.



Older women described social and gender norms as shaping their decisions to stay in relationships to provide care for an abusive spouse, often reinforcing shame and social isolation. They share the social and gender norms of younger women in terms of keeping violence victimization private and overall silence surrounding intimate partner violence. Women cope by trying to 'make the best of their situation', staying in a relationship by feelings of duty, 'for the sake of the children' and gender norms.



There are significant gaps in the evidence-base concerning older women's experiences of violence in low and middle-income countries. More research is required into experiences of women from different cultures with different cultural norms.

## A GAP IN INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PROTECTIONS

In the absence of an international legally-binding instrument dedicated to the human rights of older persons, existing international human rights standards provide scattered protection against violence, abuse, and neglect of older persons. Specific international provisions tailored to the unique risks of older persons are still lacking.

Claudia Mahler, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons said in September 2023, "The human rights of older persons are, naturally, included within the fundamental principles laid out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite its existence, older persons remain largely invisible in international human rights law due to the lack of recognition of ageism and of an explicit prohibition of age-based discrimination."

The absence of a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination based on age in international human rights law leaves its treatment to the discretion of the State. This could explain why ageism is so prevalent in our societies and it considerably contrasts with existing treaties that oblige States parties to take steps to eliminate gender or racial discrimination for instance.



## A NEW CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

A new, legally binding instrument (a convention) would bring clarity to both the nature of older persons' rights and the responsibilities necessary to protect them. A convention on the rights of older persons would, among other things:

- View older persons as rights-holders;
- Codify the rights of older persons in one single document, recognizing the specific challenges related to ageing and serving as a tool for both empowerment and protection;
- Establish a common, global understanding of definitions and minimum standards of practice;
- Act as an anti-discriminatory tool to challenge prevailing negative stereotypes about old age;
- Require governments to collect data, develop indicators, establish laws and policies, and develop programmes that take into account the rights and concerns of older persons;
- Improve State accountability and transparency with respect to actions taken for older persons, including with their active participation;
- Raise public awareness in respect of older persons' rights;
- Create societies and environments for all ages, where older persons are also able to contribute, prosper and enjoy their rights.

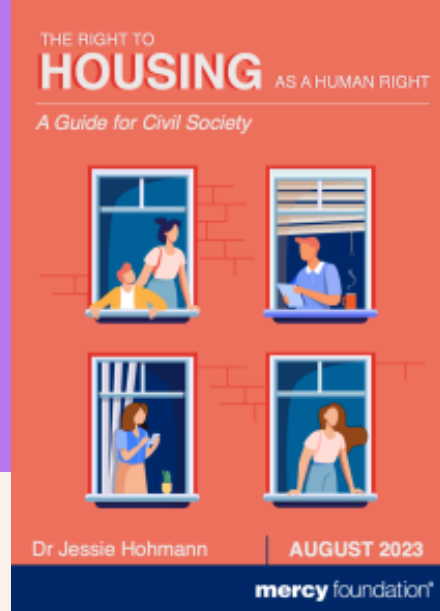
## PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST OLDER WOMEN

There are factors that may act as precipitating factors for the increase or initiation of violence, including changes in caregiving dynamics or the retirement of a spouse, and these could be points of potential intervention and additional support for older women, especially if there is a history of past violence.

Healthcare providers are in a unique position to provide support and respond to women who have been affected by violence. Some older women have concerns about lack of confidentiality and health care providers not taking their abuse seriously. Group support through discussion groups, individual support through home visiting, and psychosocial education programs improve social support for older women affected by violence. Services for older people need to be aware of the prevalence and forms of violence against older women and know when to identify and respond in a sensitive and non-judgmental way, to improve prevention of and response to violence against older women.



In September 2023, Mercy Foundation in Australia released a publication entitled **'The human right to housing: A guide for civil society'** ([view here](#)). This document looks at the importance of secure, safe and affordable housing to a person's health and wellbeing, particularly for older women and women and children escaping domestic violence.



## REGIONAL CASE STUDY

**Shared by Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association, Australia**

Ms. Mather came to Australia on a fiancée visa (300). She travelled with her teenage son from her previous marriage. Only four months into her marriage, her Australian husband started complaining that she was not contributing to the household expenses, and that her son was an additional burden. He demanded that Mather send her son back to her country, as he did not wish to support another man's child.

Mather told her husband that it was the understanding between them right from the start of the relationship that her son would be with her. There was no one to take care of her son in her country of origin and also that she would not be able to stay in Australia without her son.

This was just the start of their problems. Her husband started coming home drunk and began to abuse and insult Mather. These fights became a norm. When Mather refused to send her son back, her husband refused to give money for their food and care. Mather could not work in Australia due to her visa condition. With no income of her own, Mather was trapped in an abusive relationship with no means of escape.

Mather was referred to Immigrant Women's SpeakOut (SpeakOut) by the Police Local Area Command. SpeakOut supported Mather with her Partner visa application and later with the Permanent residency application. She was also linked to the General Practitioner, Counsellor for her physical and mental wellbeing and legal services.

Mather wanted to be financially independent. She started working as a Cleaner in a Hospital. She worked hard and was able to save some money. Alongside this work, she undertook a Disability Support Worker's Course and started working as a full time Personal Carer. She was motivated and determined to give a good life to her son. Soon she was able to rent a two-bedroom unit in private rental arrangement.

Mather and her son are now free from the violence and live in a safe place. Her son went on to study in the University. She has been able to reclaim her self-esteem through therapeutic counselling. Mather acknowledges and appreciates the support SpeakOut provided. "Thanks to you", she says, "My son and I are now safe and free from violence!"

# CALLS TO ACTION...

## TO PREVENT & RESPOND TO VIOLENCE IN LATE ADULTHOOD



### At the **INDIVIDUAL** level:

- Check-in with older women, especially those who may have few friends or family members living nearby. Take their feelings and concerns seriously.
- Coordinate local help and support for over-burdened caregivers. This might include helping with the provision of meals, assisting with outings, and connecting them with relevant support services and counselling if needed.
- Educate yourself about the nature and forms of elder abuse and violence against older women, including intimate partner violence, financial abuse, and neglect.
- Reflect on your own attitudes and unconscious biases regarding gender and ageing.
- Challenge sexist and ageist stereotypes. Honour the wisdom shared by older women.
- Report elder abuse, or suspected abuse, to a trusted authority.

### At the **COMMUNITY / SERVICE PROVIDER** level:

- Ensure all infrastructure and activities are accessible by older women, including translations and appropriate formats, particularly for people with limited mobility, dementia, and other disabilities.
- Create safe social spaces for older women to gather, talk and share concerns. Provide relevant skills training and access to support and assistance.
- Provide financial literacy and money management programmes for older women, with awareness training around financial exploitation.
- Raise awareness about the nature and various forms of elder abuse and violence against older women. Provide evidence-based prevention and response training to relevant professionals, including healthcare professionals.
- Apply an intersectional approach to your work with older women, recognizing how intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression shape older women's lives.
- Center the voices of older women in your work, including as experts and leaders.

### At the **NATIONAL / POLICY** level:

- Advocate your national or local government to develop anti-discrimination laws on the basis of age that ensure that age discrimination receives the same standard of scrutiny as other forms of discrimination.
- Advocate your national governments to negotiate, ratify and implement a new Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.





# A Spotlight on the UN Sustainable Development Goals



<p><b>1 NO POVERTY</b></p>	<p>Women have the right to enjoy good health and wellbeing, free from fear caused by GBV. They need safe access to responsive healthcare and reproductive systems, and effective mental health services.</p>	<p><b>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</b></p>	<p><b>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</b></p>	<p><b>5 GENDER EQUALITY</b></p>
<p>Women need access to economic resources that give them financial independence and the ability to leave abusive situations.</p>	<p>Women need meaningful work options, which don't force them into insecure and unsafe employment that leaves them vulnerable to violence.</p>	<p><b>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</b></p>	<p>Quality education is critical for a woman's ability to live a fulfilling and self-sufficient life. If all girls had a secondary education, there would be two-thirds fewer child marriages.</p>	<p>Achieving gender equality depends on eliminating violence against women and girls. Changing social norms around gender are an important part of the solution.</p>
<p><b>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</b></p>	<p>Women and girls face compounding intersecting forms of discrimination. Women with disabilities are more likely to experience sexual violence as women without disabilities.</p>	<p><b>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</b></p>	<p>Cities, services &amp; infrastructure are often 'built' with men in mind. Women need safe spaces that enable greater social and economic participation in community life.</p>	
<p><b>13 CLIMATE ACTION</b></p>	<p>With rising sea levels, frequent natural disasters and general food insecurity, women are more likely to face violence caused by stress, grief and trauma.</p>		<p><b>16 PEACE AND JUSTICE STRONG INSTITUTIONS</b></p>	<p>Our world will never experience peace until all women and girls are free from fear and violence. This begins with change at the local level, along with strong justice pathways and institutions.</p>

*While achieving SDG 5 would arguably enable and accelerate progress on all SDGs, the evidence suggests that unless we end violence against women and girls globally, we won't achieve at least 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. - [The Equality Institute, 2021, p.4](#)*

# ORGANISATIONS

## A list as recommended by Task Force members:

- **ACARTH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans)**

Our mission is to eliminate human trafficking and the harm it causes, in Australia, the Asia Pacific region and globally.

- **Ageing on the Edge NSW (AOTENSW)**

A national action project to respond to rapidly increasing house problems facing older people in Australia.

- **Alliance to End Human Trafficking (US)**

A collaborative, faith-based national network that offers education, supports access to survivor services, and engages in advocacy in an effort to eradicate human trafficking.

- **Black Sisters Southall (UK)**

A free helpline, holistic advocacy services and No Recourse Fund to support women and girls experiencing all forms of violence and abuse.

- **Casa de Misericordia (US)**

A Mercy-sponsored shelter for victims of domestic violence, which provides comprehensive, holistic services and consistent long-term support.

- **Centro de Mujeres Colonenses en Camino (Panama)**

The participants in the MUCEC program are helped according to their individual needs. Daily and weekly workshops are offered based on the suggestions of the women participating - topics include cooking, sewing, carpentry etc.

- **Find The Glow (UK)**

A multi-service organisation supporting people experiencing abuse to find safety and rebuild their lives.

- **Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association (Australia)**

An organisation for migrant and refugee women, providing support for those experiencing domestic and family violence or who are at risk of homelessness due to violence or abuse.

- **McAuley Community Services (Australia)**

An integrated and holistic Mercy organisation providing 24-hour crisis accommodation as well as refuges for women and their children escaping family violence.

- **Mercy Foundation (Australia)**

Provides grants to end homelessness, human trafficking and slavery and bring about greater social justice in communities across Australia.

- **Mercy Weaver of Dreams Program (Honduras)**

Mercy Weaver of Dreams Program (Programa de la Misericordia Tejedora de Sueños) is a women's group that supports the spirituality of non-violence and healing.

- **Ñande Roga Guazú and Fundación Espacios de la Mujer (Argentina)**

Both of which assist victims of gender violence and help women in their personal growth and healing.

- **PAV (Proyecto Alternativas a la Violencia) (Bolivia)**

An experiential training program that allows participants to deal with potentially violent situations in new and creative ways.

- **Red Kawsay (Peru)**

Serving victims and survivors of trafficking and/or groups with vulnerabilities

- **Together in Peace Home (Guyana)**

Safe house for women who have been trafficked. The house can accommodate 12 women. It provides space for private and group counseling, educational and recreational activities, skills training and basic computer instruction.

- **Whispers of Hope (UK)**

Whispers of Hope supports victims of domestic abuse and sex trafficking who have no recourse to public funds and complex immigration issues. They provide crisis accommodation, holistic accompaniment and ongoing support.

- **women@thewell (UK)**

A women-only drop-in centre in Kings Cross, London, dedicated to supporting women whose lives are affected, or at risk of being affected, by prostitution.





# FURTHER RESOURCES

"Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace."

- Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General



Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls

## FLYING with two wings

A multi-faith toolkit addressing violence against women

### WOMEN LIVING IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

**Increasing justice and protection for migrant women in the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill**

There are women living in the UK whose immigration status means they are more vulnerable to abuse and less likely to access support, advocacy, and criminal justice measures.

Migrant women are disproportionately at risk from gendered violence including domestic violence, sexual violence, "honour-based" violence, forced marriage, FGM and trafficking. Ethnic minority and migrant women in England experience higher rates of domestic homicide and need specialist support. But, services for these women are being cut. Successive immigration policies and the "hostile environment" exacerbate this risk, creating a context in which women are more vulnerable to violence, while at the same time making them less able to access specialist support, public services or justice.

The Istanbul Convention requires that victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are protected regardless of their immigration status. For this to happen it is essential immigration policies are designed so they can't be used as a weapon by abusers or as an excuse by authorities not to help women or take action.

There is an urgent need to consider how to increase support and protection for migrant women and the measures which should be included in the Domestic Violence & Abuse Bill.

The hostile climate exacerbates the fear and unwillingness of women subject to immigration control to disclose abuse, as women are forced to balance their need to access services such as a refuge or homeless shelter, the police, or a doctor against well-founded fear that their own or their family's residency status could be impacted or questioned as information provided to one of these institutions can be shared with the Home Office.

**Immigration policy and the Hostile Environment**

Women with an insecure immigration status, or whose migration status is dependent on a spouse or employer, are often at a heightened risk of violence and exploitation.

These women have come to the UK in different ways, including:

- on a visa which gives them leave to remain without recourse to public funds.
- as a refugee seeking asylum.
- on a visa connected to their spouse.
- as a victim of trafficking.
- on a time-limited visa (student or work visa) which has expired.

They face a perceived and real risk of being detained and deported rather than assisted if they report abuse, coupled with considerable barriers in accessing protection, support and specialist services. The hostile environment is created with internal border controls such as immigration checks in healthcare and maternity, housing and education settings, and indefinite immigration detention.

The impact of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions on migrant women who have suffered domestic abuse and are financially or otherwise dependent on their spouse or partner has been devastating.

The hostile climate exacerbates the fear and unwillingness of women subject to immigration control to disclose abuse, as women are forced to balance their need to access services such as a refuge or homeless shelter, the police, or a doctor against well-founded fear that their own or their family's residency status could be impacted or questioned as information provided to one of these institutions can be shared with the Home Office.

## END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

## deliver for GOOD

Investments in girls & women power progress for all.

The Investment Case for Girls & Women

THE LANCET WOMEN DELIVER

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

THE EQUALITY INSTITUTE | 2021

### SAFE CONSULTATIONS WITH SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

GLOBAL RIGHTS for WOMEN

Australian AID

UN WOMEN GENERATION EQUALITY

### Violence against women and girls 1

#### Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?

Mary Ellsberg, Dana/Ange, Matthew Martin, Fariza Ginnari, Swoning Ekefound, Marisol Contreras, Charlotte Wiers

In this Series paper, we review evidence for interventions to reduce the prevalence and incidence of violence against women and girls. Our reviewed studies cover a broad range of intervention models, and many forms of violence—from intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Evidence is highly skewed towards data from studies from high-income countries, with these evaluations mainly focusing on responses to violence. This evidence suggests that women-centred, advocacy, and justice-inclusive programmes can reduce a woman's risk of further victimisation, with less conclusive evidence for the preventive effect of programmes for perpetrators. In low-income and middle-income countries, there is a greater research focus on violence prevention, with promising evidence on the effect of group training for women and men, community mobilisation interventions, and combined livelihood and training interventions for women. Despite shortcomings in the data base, several studies show large effects in programme effectiveness. Across different forms of violence, effective programmes are commonly participatory, engage multiple stakeholders, support critical discussion about gender relationships and the acceptability of violence, and support greater communication and shared decision making among family members, as well as non-violent behaviour. Further investment in intervention design and assessment is needed to address evidence gaps.

**Introduction**

Violence against women and girls is a global human rights violation and a substantial development challenge. It affects women throughout the world, across cultural and economic boundaries. WHO estimates that more than 30% of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual partner violence; 7% of women worldwide have experienced non-partner sexual assault. About 100–140 million girls and women worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) and more than 1 million girls are at risk for FGM every year in Africa alone. Nearly 70 million girls worldwide have been married before the age of 18 years, many of them against their will.<sup>1</sup> The effect of violence against women and girls on their health and welfare, their families, and communities is substantial.<sup>2</sup> The costs of violence against women and girls, both direct and indirect, are a staggering burden for households and economies.<sup>3</sup>

In the past 20 years, much research has been dedicated to the extent of violence against women and girls and understanding the underlying causes and risk factors associated with violence perpetration and victimisation.<sup>4</sup> There has also been extensive growth in the quantity and breadth of interventions in diverse settings, including in health care, justice systems, and social campaigns to address violence against women and girls worldwide.<sup>5</sup> The first generation of interventions mainly focused on provision of support services for survivors of violence, and sought to reduce perpetrators' impunity and increase the effectiveness of the justice system. A second generation of programming, mainly in low-income and middle-income countries, has had a greater focus on violence prevention. These interventions developed organically, often linked to

**Key messages**

- Evidence for interventions is highly skewed towards high-income countries, and response, rather than prevention. Most research has been done on intimate partner violence, with far less evidence on how to prevent other forms of violence.
- In high-income countries, regional interventions have shown greater success in improvements in physical and mental health outcomes for survivors of violence and increased use of services, but evidence for their effectiveness to reduce revictimisation is weak. Much research has been done on interventions for perpetrators, with little evidence of effectiveness.
- In low-income and middle-income countries, there is increasing emphasis on prevention of different forms of violence against women and girls, including intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Assessment of programmes indicates that it is possible to prevent violence, with some interventions achieving large effects in programme effectiveness. Successful programmes engage multiple stakeholders with multiple approaches, aim to address underlying risk factors for violence including social norms that condone violence and gender inequality, and support the development of non-violent behaviours.
- The quality of evidence presented is at an early stage. Further investment is needed to expand the evidence base for a wider range of interventions across different contexts, assess a broader range of intervention models, and explore issues of intervention cost, sustainability and stability.

Series

Violence against women and girls 1

THE LANCET WOMEN DELIVER

# THE CHANGE YOU WANT IS WITHIN YOU

**A REFLECTION BY MAGDALENE MUSAU RSM,  
TASK FORCE MEMBER**

This is for all;  
Children who don't know who they are because the  
Big people's words and deeds in their lives  
Have adulterated their image  
They have forgotten who they are.

Those who have gone to bed earlier than they would have wanted  
Or left home unwillingly because it is unbearable  
Or even stayed back for the sake of peace  
Someone knows how it feels like

The hearth is lifeless!  
So, you may not eat tonight  
Or the stove and the cutlery is strewn on the floor

From last night's parents' fighting episode  
You do not know when to smile  
You whose antennae always go up.  
Because you sense something is about to happen

Go to bed not knowing whether your parent will come home or not  
Who may sometimes have to be put up?  
As the rent has not been paid,  
Or for school fees are urged to 'tell the teacher you are orphaned!'

Not knowing where your parent is since the last drinking spree.  
For you women with black eyes due to the 'accident!' last night  
Those men too ashamed to shout or cry as culture doesn't let you.  
This is for you vulnerable children not feeling safe in your house.

For you who feel blamed for just being you.  
For anyone who is too challenged to move and have to keep it in.  
How do we redeem ourselves from those after us?  
This is for all of us, who choose to stand up for change.





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INTERNATIONAL  
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