



Orange the world: End violence against women now!

Statement by the [WFAD Gender Working Group](#)

Today on November 25th, WFAD commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, also known as Orange Day. Orange Day is followed by 16 days of activism, leading up to the International Day of Human Rights. These days highlight the urgency to stop violence against women. Violence against women includes a strong interconnection with substance abuse and is a global health issue that requires attention, measures, and change every single day of the year. The issue might have seen an increase of attention in the recent years. Yet, the measures are still lacking and the number of cases of gender-based violence against women and girls have remained mainly unchanged in the last decade, if not increased. Especially the COVID pandemic has shown an increase of violence, also known as the shadow pandemic. **Therefore, preventive and active measures are needed now!**¹

Definitions of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is a deep-rooted structural issue and requires efforts on all levels to be eradicated. It happens all over the world in all areas of society. In general, gender-based violence has a widespread definition. It is defined as an act that inflicts physical, mental, sexual harm or suffering, and deprivation of liberty. Gender-based violence (GBV) is an act done to someone against their will based on gender norms and unequal power relationships and often involves crimes of power intending to degrade, humiliate, and subjugate victims. There are different forms of GBV, including physical, sexual, psychological, and socio-economic violence. The perpetrators of GBV either are people in power with control over others or experience a loss of power and are often known to the victims. Most, but not all, perpetrators are men. Gender-based violence is not only between partners, but can also be between family members or happens in the community.

GBV against women and girls encompasses a complex mix of gender roles and expectations, male entitlements, and sexual objectification. There is a clear connection between men's attitude regarding equality and their violence. Gender norms are central in cases where the young men carry out violence due to stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity ([The World Bank](#)). At the same time, social indicators reflect the access to various resources, which can be restricted. The community also plays an immense role in the continuation of GBV since they often want to treat it as a private matter and are not open to speaking about the issues.

Additionally, Strategies targeting gender-based violence must include the particular risk women with disabilities, refugee women, and indigenous women face regarding violence against them. They can be particularly vulnerable due to stereotypes, face barriers to access services and justice, and may experience a lack of power and resources.

The biggest misconception is that gender-based violence only appears in adulthood. Often characteristics are already developed in adolescence, making gender-based violence also happen in young people's relationships, including controlling and power measures. The forms of violence in youth relationships are similar to adult relationships. The only difference is that it might be the first relationship, so the victim [nor abuser] does not have [many] other relationships to compare. Hence, creating the risk of normalisation of violence in the relationship. Besides this, in the case

¹ Together with Carlton Hall Consulting LLC, WFAD organised a 5-fold webinar series on prevention. One webinar specifically focused on gender-based violence prevention approaches. Find the recordings and summary [here](#)

of an older and experienced partner, a major power imbalance can exist. Therefore, prevention measures must include targeting young persons as well through, for example, boy- and girl groups. Resources need to be strengthened and showcase that violent and controlling behaviour is unacceptable, even in the early ages, and that society has to stand up to it².

Numbers on Gender-Based Violence

The [WHO](#) estimated that on a global average “1 in 3 women aged 15 years and older have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, non-partner or both, at least once in their lifetime”. These forms of violence can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress and other anxiety disorders, sleep difficulties, eating disorders, and suicide attempts. These numbers do not include the effects of the shadow pandemic that has appeared during the COVID-pandemic. The [UNFPA](#) showcased that the pandemic has intensified the risk factors of violence against women and girls. During the pandemic, an increase of gender-based, such as violence by a partner (intimate-partner violence), violence in a digital context, sexual harassment and exploitation, has increased due to restricted movement and financial insecurities. Furthermore, the UNFPA estimates the inability of 11 million girls to return to school after COVID-19, increasing the risk of child marriage. At the same time, [UN Women](#) concluded that the “economic fallout is expected to push 47 million more women and girls into extreme poverty in 2021”, which reverses decades of efforts and progress while it continues structural inequalities that reinforce gender-based violence.

Additionally, violence against women and girls has also increased due to violent conflicts and humanitarian crises in the world. The most recent and striking examples are the loss of the hard-earned rights of women in Afghanistan and the increase of instability and violence against Haitian women after the earthquake.

Overall, as shown by [UNODC](#) and [our webinar on GBV prevention approaches](#), women face difficulties “accessing justice whether they are victims, witnesses, alleged, offenders or prisoners”. Barriers to access justice are rooted in discriminatory criminal laws and procedures. At the same time, stigma in the communities also stops women from speaking up and reporting the violent case.

Gender-Based Violence and Substance Abuse

There is a strong correlation between GBV and substance abuse. Even though a [paper](#) by Larry W. Bennett, published in 1998, already elaborated on the various dynamics correlating the two issues, not many studies on the specific, yet important, interlinkage have followed. The awareness of the correlation should be increased, integrated, and reflected in services and policies.

The paper by Larry W. Bennet highlights seven correlating ways between substance abuse and GBV while dismantling the misconception that abstinence and recovering substance abusers would automatically stop violence.

- 1) Substance use can be used as an [excuse](#) for violent and controlling behaviour rather than blaming the abuser-self.
- 2) Substances can [disrupt the cognitive perception](#) of the user and its ability to perceive, integrate, and process information, leading to an increased risk for violence.
- 3) Substance abuse and GBV can be rooted in the need to achieve [personal power](#) and control by the perpetrator.

² For more information or in need of help, visit <https://1000mojligheter.se/>

- 4) In a situational relationship where GBV and illegal drugs are involved, the abused woman may use substances with her abuser in an attempt to manage his violence and increase her own safety, or she may be forced to use substances with her abuser.
- 5) Substances can stimulate a chemical reaction on brain mechanisms linked to aggression.
- 6) Substance abuse may increase the risk for women abuse only for those men with certain characteristics, which have already approved aggression against women before.
- 7) Generational substance abuse and abuse against women and girls can lead to repeated practice, either as a victim or an abuser.

Simultaneously, women who are victims of gender-based violence are at increased risk of substance use due to the need to “self-medicate” and cope with the trauma and abuse. Additionally, women using substances are more likely than non-substance users to live with men who are substance abusers, leading to a higher risk to face physical violence. Finally, women who use drugs may be less likely to have the social and financial means to escape from their abuser. They might not report the violent attack due to the fear that their partner will physically, emotionally, or financially retaliate.

End Violence Against Women Now!

Today, and the following 16 days, showcase the urgency to act up now to reduce gender-based violence and end generational cycles of abuse. To do so, we need to do the following:

- Raise awareness
- Educate children, women, men, families, and the community
- Ensure that evidence-based interventions are put in place
- Provide basic social skills training – target men and boys, hold them accountable for their action, and ensure that the society will consider GBV unacceptable
- Include trauma-informed interventions
- Integrate the urgency of the issue and its services in policymaking
- Advocate

Even though it sometimes seems almost impossible to create structural change, there is hope in creating change [in small steps]. Best practices have shown that determination from civil society can lead to positive outcomes. It remains necessary to work with a preventive matter regularly. Overall, it is important to 1) know the facts and risks, 2) stay alert and reduce risk factors, 3) educate children, 4) listen, believe and support victims, and 5) finally, react responsibly. A safe space should be provided for victims to be able and encouraged to speak up. Additionally, economic empowerment can help women to get independence and control of their lives.

It cannot be stressed enough that we can only raise awareness through education while including all levels of society. We need to support and encourage survivors to speak up while ensuring that their voices are heard and believed. Speaking up without a good infrastructure will be devastating. Therefore, we need to strengthen institutions and advocate for further integration of services in policymaking. There is a need for a multidisciplinary approach to the issue to avoid the victim having to go through various processes simultaneously and ensure a neutral and un-politicised space from the start, including enough resources. Finally, the power of [online] media should be recognised and used by showcasing the importance of the issue and the effects various decisions and actions have, how actions or no actions affect the victim. **Every bit of effort can change a life of a women who is facing gender-based violence.**