

# Chapter 50

## Masculinity and Gender: Interventions to End Gender- Based Violence

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to provide interventions to end gender-based violence (GBV). Most of the GBV interventions that have been used are mainly reactive and focused on survivors of GBV. It therefore argues that there is a need to also focus on masculinity-focused interventions as an alternative to the traditional GBV interventions in order to reduce GBV cases. The study firstly provides definitions of GBV and masculinity. Secondly, it provides a critique of the various types of masculinity. Thirdly, it focuses on traditional GBV interventions, and masculinity-focused interventions.*

### INTRODUCTION

A number of GBV interventions have been provided by the United Nations (UN), governments, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These interventions have been criticised as being ineffective, reactive and only focusing on survivors and victims of GBV without paying attention to the perpetrators who in most cases are men. The study argues that masculinities-focused interventions have a number of positive effects. Masculinities have an impact on GBV. There is a link between GBV and the traditional and conservative norms about the position of women in society. Saffitz (2010, p. 85) argues that ‘GBV is more prevalent in societies with rigid gender roles or in patriarchal communities in which male dominance is engrained in a masculine identity’. Cock (1991, p. 129) also states that ‘tradition is often invoked to justify gender inequality’. This scenario is very true in societies where there is a belief that domestic violence is a ‘private affair’ (Usdin, Scheepers, Goldstein & Japhet, 2005, p.2435). There are various norms which contribute to the acceptance of GBV. These include thinking that a man is the

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authority in a household, that a husband ‘owns’ his wife, or that a woman is not able to refuse to have sex with a man who provides for her financially. These norms provide ‘justifications’ for the use of violence (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottmoeller, 2002). In order to decrease and eventually end GBV a paradigm shift is needed. This entails a focus on the root causes of violence founded in gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.

Gender is defined as the expectations and norms about how men and women should behave and interact with others in a given society (Barker, Contreras, Heilman, Singh, Verma & Nascimento, 2011). It is the socially constructed aspect of a person’s identity which can be learned, taught, and reinforced by society. While individuals have a significant amount of agency in choosing how to perform their gender, the circumstances, context, and society in which they live will heavily impact on this agency (Butler, 1988).

## **Gender Based Violence**

Gender equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys, have equal rights, life prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society. The opposite of this – gender inequality, unequal power relations and discrimination based on gender – is the root of gender-based violence. This violence is also a main obstacle to the achievement of gender equality: unequal power relations are upheld through gender-based violence. Sida (2015) defines GBV as:

*Any harm or suffering that is perpetrated against a woman or girl, man or boy and that has a negative impact on the physical, sexual or psychological health, development or identity of the person. The cause of the violence is founded in gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.*

Many actors, including the UN, use the term ‘violence against women’ (VAW). A multifaceted definition of VAW was articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the General Assembly in 1993. The declaration described abuse as any act of violence:

*‘that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’.* (www.un.org).

The UN further described VAW as;

*‘a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.’*

Due to the fact that GBV mostly affects women and girls, the terms GBV and VAW are often used interchangeably. However, men and boys can also be subject to GBV, and women can be perpetrators. Sida’s definition is in line with the UN definition of violence against women, but has a wider scope so as to include men and boys as potential survivors. GBV against women and girls is linked to gender inequalities and gender norms according to which the ‘female’ and the ‘feminine’ is associated with weakness, inferiority and victimisation. Likewise GBV against men and boys often builds on differ-

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