Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to violence directed against someone because of their sex or because their gender identity or expression deviates from prevailing socio-cultural norms. Most GBV is perpetrated by men against women, girls and gender minorities.

Violence against women (VAW) includes a range of abuses through the life cycle from sex selective abortion and forced marriage to domestic violence and ‘honour’ killings (see below). Abuse by an intimate partner – intimate partner violence (IPV) – is the most common type of VAW.

Preventing VAW means stopping new episodes of violence before they occur. This is different from response, which is about providing support and services to survivors of violence. Response services are critical, but we can’t solve today’s high levels of violence by supporting one survivor at a time. We must go upstream and address the causes of violence against women and girls.

While VAW is rooted in gender inequalities and unequal power relations between men and women in patriarchal systems, there is no single cause of violence, nor is there a single pathway to perpetration. Therefore, preventing violence requires interventions to reduce the multiple risk factors and triggers of VAW (see Brief 2).

Above This Brief
This brief aims to provide practitioners with an introduction to VAW prevention, and to look at the differences between prevention and response programmes.

It is the first of a series of briefs designed to support practitioners to develop prevention programmes and initiatives to prevent violence against women (VAW) using a feminist-inspired approach.

Brief 1: What is prevention?
Brief 2: Understanding the causes of VAW
Brief 3: Roadmap of VAW prevention programmes
Brief 4: Designing a prevention programme

Definition of VAW
VAW is any act of gender-based 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.

(UN 1993)
UNDERSTANDING PREVENTION APPROACHES

Prevention approaches have often been categorised as primary, secondary or tertiary prevention depending on which point of the cycle of abuse is prevented.

This distinction is between preventing violence before it starts (primary), preventing the recurrence of violence (secondary) and limiting the impacts of violence (tertiary)- also called response.

However, a more useful categorisation has been developed to distinguish universal prevention programmes, selective programmes and response programmes:

- **Universal prevention programmes** comprise holistic, whole-of-population interventions that are implemented as part of coordinated, comprehensive and multi-pronged approaches which seek to prevent violence at a population level. They are directed at an entire population or group without knowing their status or individual / family risk status.

- **Selected prevention programmes** are aimed at families or populations considered to be at high risk (e.g. families under stress and/or with mental and substance use problems); or individuals or families already experiencing violence. They seek to prevent the recurrence of violence.

- **Response programmes** address the short- or long-term needs of VAW survivors, and work to strengthen institutional capacities to provide more relevant and timely services and accountability.

Universal prevention programming complements the work undertaken in the targeted programming and response sectors. As universal prevention targets the whole population, it inevitably reaches those who are already experiencing or perpetrating violence, or who are at an increased risk of this. It can therefore enhance targeted programmes and response initiatives by helping to reduce recurrent violence, and transforming violence-supporting structures, norms and practices that may be present within support and justice services.

All levels of intervention across the prevention to response continuum are important for a comprehensive systems approach adapted to the local context to prevent VAW and its consequences.

THE PREVENTION TO RESPONSE CONTINUUM

**UNIVERSAL PREVENTION**

- Working to reduce violence, exploitation and abuse at a community/whole of population level

**SELECTIVE PREVENTION**

- Programmes that work with high-risk families or groups to intervene early to stop abuse from escalating

**RESPONSE**

- Addressing needs of survivors
- Reforming institutional responses (police, health, etc.)
HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The table below gives examples of different programmes which fall within the categories of universal prevention, targeted and response programmes. Read through them and be sure you understand which ones fall under which category and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAMME</th>
<th>UNIVERSAL / SELECTIVE / RESPONSE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with parents at a school to provide them with information on positive disciplining.</td>
<td>UNIVERSAL - this approach works with all parents using a general message without identifying the specific parents who may be using corporal punishment against their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening women in an internally displaced camp for experiences of VAW to refer them to GBV services.</td>
<td>SELECTIVE - this involves checking in with a vulnerable group of women for experiences of VAW in order to refer them to a service provider and to reduce reoccurrence of episodes of VAW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting a community radio programme which provides information and conducts discussions on reducing VAW.</td>
<td>UNIVERSAL - the information is being shared with the entire community without focusing its messaging on a particular group within that community that may be more vulnerable to VAW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A female survivor of violence receiving counselling services.</td>
<td>RESPONSE - GBV services are being provided to a woman who has experienced violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting programmes with children on how to reflect on their own experiences and seek emotional support if required.</td>
<td>UNIVERSAL - if the programme is conducted for any child. SELECTIVE - if sessions were tailored for children requiring specific emotional support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing government GBV crisis centre protocols to help improve delivery of services.</td>
<td>RESPONSE - improving delivery of GBV services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting a group discussion with men who have a history of perpetrating intimate partner violence to help them reflect on the causes of violence and learn how to prevent it from happening again.</td>
<td>SELECTIVE - this involves working with a specific group of men who have perpetrated IPV and therefore require a focused approach to address drivers and risk factors to prevent the reoccurrence of violence.</td>
</tr>
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PREVENTION IS POSSIBLE

Rigorous evidence exists to show that VAW is preventable and greater gender equality can be achieved. Several evidence-based prevention strategies have shown substantial reduction in the levels of VAW after only a few years of implementation (see Brief 3).

Emerging evidence also shows that well-designed programmes can target individuals at higher risk of VAW and address intersections between violence against children (VAC) and VAW, helping to break the intergenerational cycle of abuse. (See brief 4 for guidance on designing a prevention programme).
WHY TAKE A FEMINIST INSPIRED APPROACH TO PREVENTING VAW?

If prevention programmes are to have a sustained and powerful impact on women’s lives, they need to keep women at the centre. For the Prevention Collaborative, a feminist approach to designing and implementing programmes to prevent violence against women (VAW):

• Ensures that violence prevention programmes are accountable to women first and foremost, supporting them to make their own choices and decisions about their lives in ways that respect their fundamental rights to physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. This includes ensuring that survivors and women at risk have access to information, support services and resources, can express their voices and take action concerning their safety and wellbeing.

• Means working in partnership with local women’s organisations across the world, which have worked relentlessly to improve resources, legislation and services to prevent and respond to violence against women. This may include learning from their experiences, elevating their voices and practices, and partnering to provide financial and other resources to strengthen their work at a local level.

• Commits to addressing the unequal relations of power between men and women that are the root causes of violence against women. We focus primarily on violence in the ‘home’ because this is where rates of VAW are most prevalent globally.

• Recognises that women’s experiences of violence are shaped by their race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, (dis)ability, geographic location, etc. as well as legacies of slavery, colonial violence, ethnic conflict, genocide, state nationalism and neoliberal globalisation.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Brief 2 will explain more about the risk factors and triggers for VAW perpetration as well as the protective factors which reduce the risk of VAW. It aims to help the reader understand how a prevention programme can address these factors across individual, relational, community and societal levels.

REFERENCES

i The acronyms VAW and Gender Based Violence (GBV) are often used interchangeably because most GBV is perpetrated by men against women and girls. However, it is important to recognise that GBV includes violence directed at anyone based on their biological sex, their actual or perceived gender identity or their perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity or femininity (a concept known as gender expression). This expands the category of GBV to include violence directed at Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) Individuals.


iv Heise, L, (2013) Moving beyond response: Integrating primary prevention into violence against children programming {power point slides}


WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Preventing VAW means stopping new episodes of violence before they occur. Response services are critical, but we can’t solve today’s high levels of violence by supporting one survivor at a time. We must go upstream and address the causes of violence against women and girls.