

BRIEF 2: UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Different social and health problems have different types of causes. We need to understand these various causes in order to develop effective prevention programmes. For example, the diagram gives two models of causation from the field of public health, which can help us understand the causes of violence against women (VAW):

- Necessary direct cause: Malaria parasite → Malaria**
 A mosquito infected with malaria parasites bites you. The parasite is a direct cause and is necessary for you to get malaria.
- Multiple, overlapping causes → Heart disease**
 Obesity, hypertension, smoking and eating fatty foods are all 'risk factors' that increase the probability of a heart attack. But the presence of one factor alone is less likely to result in heart disease.

As with heart disease, VAW has multiple causes. Its prevention requires strategies that address multiple, inter-related risk factors and situational triggers.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Here, we introduce the multiple causes of VAW and how to analyse these factors in different contexts.

With other briefs in the series, this one is designed to support practitioners, activists and policy makers to develop prevention programmes and initiatives to prevent VAW using a feminist-inspired approach.

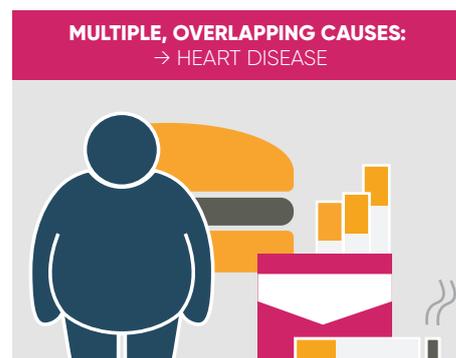
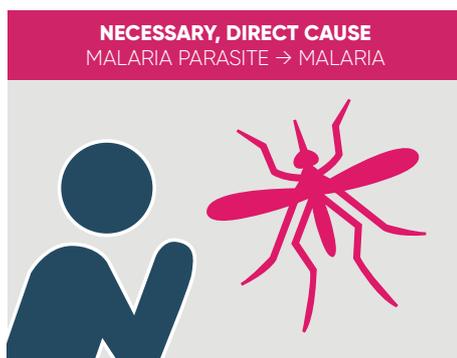
BRIEF 1: What is prevention of violence against women?

BRIEF 2: Understanding the causes of violence against women

BRIEF 3: Violence against women prevention programmes

BRIEF 4: Designing a prevention programme

MODELS OF CAUSATION



WHY FOCUS ON THE CAUSES?

VAW is caused by multiple factors. Gender inequality is a powerful driver of VAW, and various risk factors and situational triggers make violence more likely. Understanding these multiple causes and how they intersect can help us develop programmes to address them and prevent violence. At the same time, there are certain protective factors that can be strengthened to lower the likelihood of violence occurring.

CAUSALITY: UNDERSTANDING TERMS

RISK FACTOR = A characteristic of an individual, setting or society that increases the likelihood of violence occurring.

PROTECTIVE FACTOR = A characteristic of an individual, setting or society that reduces the likelihood of violence occurring.

SITUATIONAL TRIGGER = An immediate event or circumstance which can precipitate an incident of violence.

RISK FACTORS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

The socio-ecological model is a useful tool to explore the interaction between multiple factors operating across and within different levels: individual, interpersonal, community and societal.ⁱ The model can be used to analyse how risk factors at different levels intersect to increase or decrease the likelihood of violence. Since different types of violence (e.g. IPV, non-partner sexual violence, female genital cutting) have distinct risk factors that may vary in different settings, a socio-ecological model is most useful when it is tailored to a specific type of violence and specific setting. In this brief, we use a socio-ecological model for **IPV in heterosexual relationships**.

- The wider **society** comprises the broader environment that either enables or inhibits IPV, including relevant policy and legislative frameworks and economic and cultural influences.
- The **community** level captures the factors in the immediate environment that encourage, condone or create a local enabling environment for men to perpetrate IPV.
- The **interpersonal** level comprises factors in relationships that increase the risk of IPV. Depending on the setting, this may include factors operating at the level of intimate partners, a family, and/or a peer or friendship network. In intimate partner relationships, these risk factors need to be understood alongside a set of specific situational triggers that can precipitate an incident of violence.
- At the **individual** level, risk factors related to individual attributes, developmental histories and behaviours can increase the likelihood of men perpetrating violence and women experiencing violence.

The diagram below lists risk factors which have been shown through research in multiple settings to increase the risks of men perpetrating IPV and women experiencing IPV. These risk factors can be reframed as protective factors. For example, social isolation can increase the likelihood of women experiencing violence while social support can decrease it. The most salient risk and protective factors may vary in different settings, and there may be additional risk and protective factors in certain settings.

RISK FACTORS FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

SOCIETAL

- Gender-discriminatory laws / policies
- Other forms of discrimination (e.g. racial, religious)
- Collectivist cultural orientation
- Armed conflict
- Political instability
- Corrosive macro-economic forces

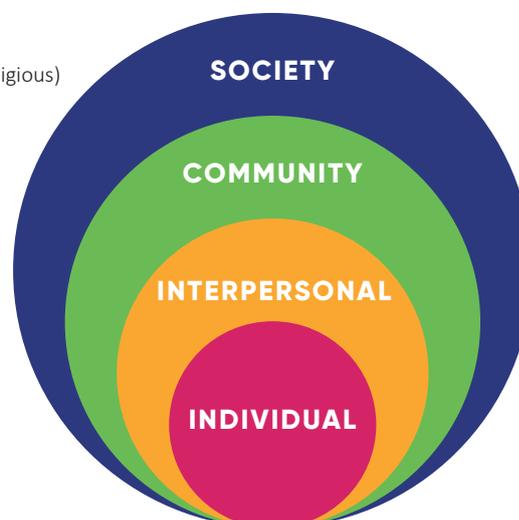
INTERPERSONAL

- Male dominance in decision-making
- Violence seen as appropriate 'discipline'
- Poor communication skills
- High relationship conflict
- Lack of trust / emotional intimacy
- Association with violent and antisocial peers
- Social isolation

INDIVIDUAL WOMAN

(risk of experiencing violence)

- Age (young women are at higher risk)
- Depression
- Experiencing violence in childhood
- Witnessing violence in childhood
- Attitudes accepting violence / VAW
- Disability
- Low social support



Factors that increase or decrease risk depending on context

- Women's employment / income generation
- Women's asset ownership
- Women's access to credit

COMMUNITY

- Rigid norms around expected male and female roles and behaviours
- Norms condoning male authority over women and children
- Norms linking men's honour to women's behaviour
- Norms accepting VAW
- Norms of family privacy
- Lack of social / legal sanction for VAW
- Local poverty + unemployment

INDIVIDUAL MAN

(risk of perpetrating violence)

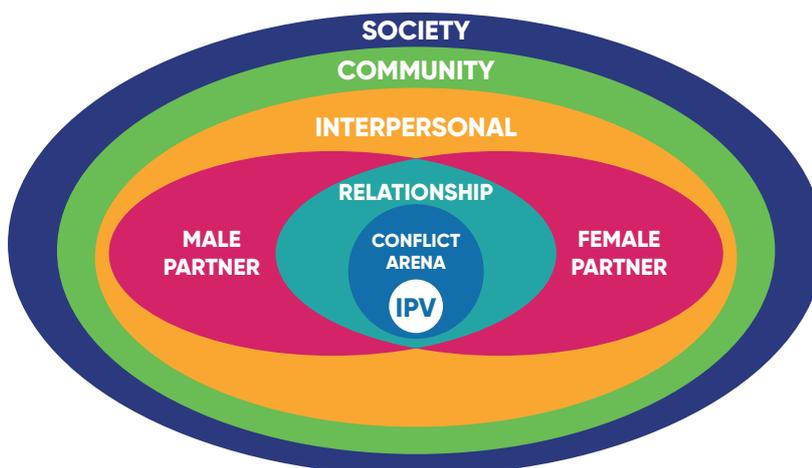
- Age (young men are at higher risk)
- Depression
- Experiencing violence in childhood
- Witnessing violence in childhood
- Attitudes accepting violence / VAW
- Gender inequitable attitudes
- Low education level
- Psychological dysfunction
- Harmful alcohol / substance use

WHERE DOES GENDER INEQUALITY FIT?

Systemic gender inequality, which exists in nearly all societies across the world, is a powerful driver of men's violence against women. In most societies, men have greater access to power and resources than women. These gender inequalities are created and reinforced at every level of the socio-ecological model, for example, through discriminatory social norms, practices and structures within families, communities and institutions.ⁱⁱ

SITUATIONAL TRIGGERS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Recent research on IPV in heterosexual relationships has identified **situational triggers** — immediate events or circumstances that can cause conflict in a relationship and precipitate an episode of violence — such as excessive drinking, jealousy and disagreements about household spending. Some of these situational triggers relate to instances where a woman or man fails to meet certain gendered expectations. For example, a man may beat a woman as a form of “discipline” for some perceived domestic infraction such as failure to prepare a meal or to care for the children “properly”. Likewise, conflict can arise if a man does not bring home sufficient money for the household, thus failing to meet gendered expectations of men as providers. Feelings of shame, inadequacy or anger can prompt men to respond violently, especially if they feel their authority or masculinity is somehow threatened.



TRIGGERS

- (Perceived) failures to meet gendered expectations
 - Women's disobedience / challenge to male authority
 - Reaction to women working / earning income
 - Men's failure to provide economically
 - Women's perceived inadequacy in domestic sphere
- Refusal of sex, especially in marriage
- Behaviours perceived to threaten family honour
- Accusations of infidelity
- Disagreements over money or resources
- Arguments over alcohol or substance use
- Discord around children's care or behaviour
- Intoxication
- Other stressors/shocks

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

When understanding the causes of VAW, it is important to identify the ways in which gender inequality intersects with other sources of oppression and discrimination, power and privilege. These intersections can increase the risk, severity and/or frequency of experiencing violence for specific women.

An intersectional approach analyses how women's experiences of violence are shaped by their race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, (dis)ability and geographic location as well as legacies of slavery, colonisation and ethnic conflict.^{iii, iv} This approach is essential to ensure that prevention initiatives are tailored to women's diverse needs and do not compound exclusion.

APPROACHES TO ADDRESS DIFFERENT FACTORS

Violence prevention programmes can address underlying gender inequalities, risk factors and situational triggers either individually or in combination across the different levels of the socio-ecological model. To understand which factors are most relevant in a specific context, it is important to read existing studies, commission research or build on your own learning on the causes of violence in this specific setting. The table overleaf gives some examples of approaches to address specific factors at different levels. Individual programmes need to prioritise the most relevant factors and develop a clear theory of change for their approach. (See Brief 4).

PARTICIPANTS	SUGGESTED PREVENTION FOCUS
SOCIETAL LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote positive social movements against violence • Amend laws and policies that discriminate against women • Widely publicise laws that prohibit VAW • Guarantee women's equal access to employment, wages, political participation, access to credit and ownership of property • Increase budgets for healthcare and education for women and children • Address poverty and malnutrition through national social protection programmes
WITHIN COMMUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge norms that sustain violence and justify gender inequality • Promote flexible roles and gender norms for women and men • Reduce stigma and increase support for victims of violence • Support legal and community sanctions against violence • Facilitate women's access to employment and the public sphere • Develop local interventions to tackle poverty and deprivation • Promote local collective activism against violence
INTERPERSONAL (WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce harsh punishment • Reduce exposure to violence in the family • Teach positive, nonviolent strategies for disciplining children • Challenge gender inequality and gendered division of labour in the household • Improve livelihoods to reduce poverty, deprivation and unemployment
INTIMATE PARTNERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalyse reflection on inequitable gender roles, responsibilities and entitlements • Enhance communication skills between partners • Build capacity in conflict resolution, shared decision making and managing finances • Foster sexual intimacy, including full consent • Encourage shared responsibility for childcare and domestic labour • Promote empathy and deep listening
WOMEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve mental health and address unresolved trauma and depression • Challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs around gender and violence • Cultivate critical reflection skills, assertiveness, leadership, self-efficacy and other capabilities • Promote social and economic empowerment
MEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce harmful alcohol use • Improve mental health and address unresolved trauma and depression • Challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs around gender and violence • Improve communication and emotional regulation skills • Strengthen livelihood options

WHAT'S NEXT?

Brief 3 introduces different types of intervention programmes, who they target, how they work and specific examples of successful programmes.

ⁱ Heise, L. (1998). Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. *Violence against Women*, 4(3), 262-290.

ⁱⁱ Michau, L., Horn, J., Bank, A., Dutt, M., & Zimmerman, C. (2015). Prevention of violence against women and girls: Lessons from practice. *The Lancet*, 385(9978), 1672-1684.

ⁱⁱⁱ Keel, M., Torney, J., Fulu, E., McCook, S., Holmes, S., Hunt, M., Lay, Y., & Warczak, C. (2017). Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to change the story. Melbourne: Our Watch, Australia.

^{iv} The term 'intersectionality' was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African-American legal scholar.