

BRIEF 1: WHAT IS PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to violence directed against someone because of their sex or because their gender identity or expression does not follow socio-cultural norms. Most GBV is perpetrated by men against women, girls and gender minorities.

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

Preventing VAW can mean stopping violence before it starts, or reducing the frequency and severity of new episodes where it has previously occurred. This is different from response, which is about providing support and services to survivors of violence. Response services are critical, but we cannot reduce today’s high levels of violence by supporting one survivor at a time. To prevent violence against women and girls, we must address the underlying causes of the violence.

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.)

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief introduces VAW prevention and looks at the differences between prevention and response programmes.

With other briefs in the series, it 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

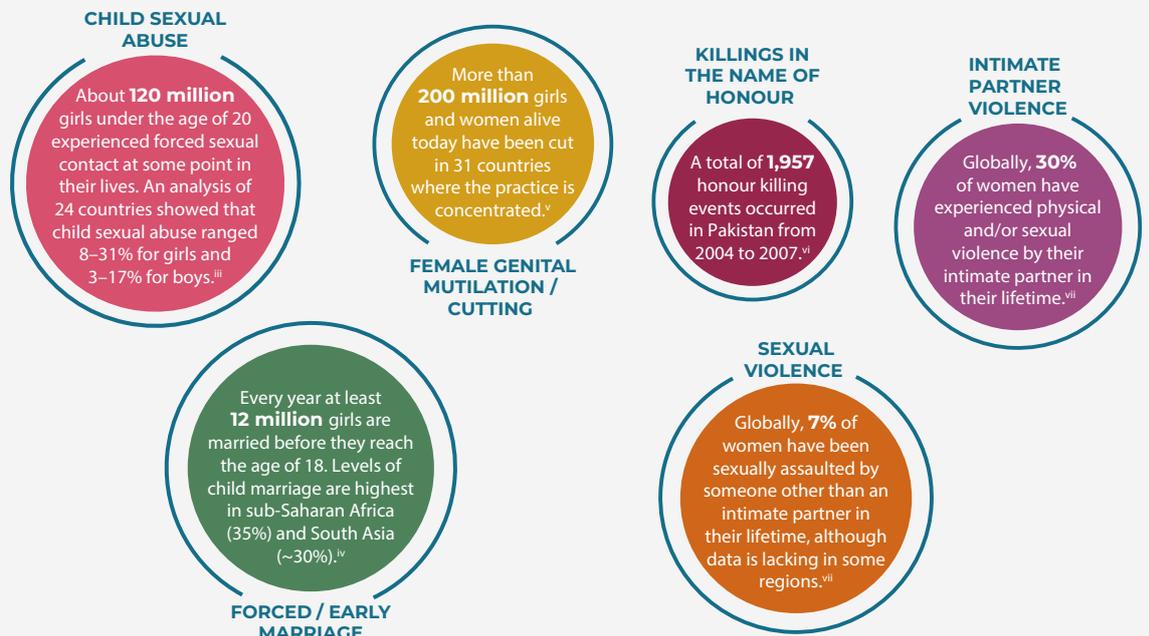
BRIEF 3: Violence against women prevention programmes

BRIEF 4: Designing a prevention programme

DEFINITION OF VAWⁱⁱ

Violence against women 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.

A FEW COMMON TYPES OF VIOLENCE



PREVENTION APPROACHES^{vix}

In public health, historically, approaches have been categorised as *primary*, *secondary* or *tertiary* prevention (also called *response*) depending on the timing of the intervention. *Primary prevention* aims to stop violence before it starts; *secondary prevention* aims to detect violence early and prevent the recurrence of violence; and *tertiary prevention*, or *response*, works to meet the immediate needs of survivors to limit the impacts of violence.

A more recent categorisation, based on the group being targeted by the intervention, distinguishes between *universal prevention* programmes, *selective prevention* programmes and *response* programmes:

- **Universal prevention programmes** are directed at an entire population, community or group regardless of whether participants experienced or used violence or their individual / family risk status.
- **Selective prevention programmes** are directed at specific groups or individuals considered to be at higher risk (e.g. families under stress and/or with mental health and substance use problems) or individuals or families already experiencing violence.
- **Response programmes** offer services to 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.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS POSSIBLE

Rigorous evidence shows 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).

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.^x See Brief 4 for guidance on designing a prevention programme.

Universal, selective and response initiatives complement one another. As universal prevention targets the whole population, it inevitably reaches those who are already experiencing or perpetrating violence, or who are at increased risk. It can therefore enhance selective and response programmes by helping to reduce recurrent violence and transforming structures, norms and practices that enable violence.^{xi}

All levels of intervention across the prevention-to-response continuum are important for a comprehensive systems approach adapted to the local context.

THE PREVENTION TO RESPONSE CONTINUUM^{xii}



IS IT UNIVERSAL, SELECTIVE OR RESPONSE?

The table below gives examples of different programmes which fall within the categories of *universal prevention*, *selective prevention* and *response* programmes.

PROGRAMME	UNIVERSAL / SELECTIVE / RESPONSE ?
Working with parents at a school to provide them with information on positive discipline.	UNIVERSAL — this approach works with all parents without identifying specific parents who may be using corporal punishment against their children.
Conducting a community radio programme that provides information and conducts discussions on reducing VAW.	UNIVERSAL — the information is being shared with the entire community without focusing its messaging on a particular group within that community that may be at higher risk of VAW.
Providing counselling services to survivors of violence.	RESPONSE — Counselling services are being offered to someone who experienced violence.
Conducting a school-based programme with adolescents on healthy relationships.	UNIVERSAL — if the programme is available to all adolescents in the specific grade(s). SELECTIVE — if the sessions are specifically tailored to adolescents who are at higher risk of experiencing or using violence.
Reviewing government GBV crisis centre protocols to help improve delivery of services.	RESPONSE — improving delivery of GBV services.
Conducting a group discussion with men who have a history of perpetrating IPV to help them reflect on the causes of violence and learn how to prevent it from happening again.	SELECTIVE — this involves working with a specific group of men who have perpetrated IPV and therefore require a focused approach to prevent the reoccurrence of violence.

A FEMINIST-INSPIRED APPROACH TO PREVENTING VAW

If violence prevention programmes are to have a sustained and powerful impact on women's lives, they need to keep women at the centre. Feminism is a collection of social movements globally that advocate for the fundamental equality of people of all genders, and is a useful framework for violence prevention work. For the Prevention Collaborative, a feminist approach to designing and implementing programmes to prevent VAW:

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

- Entails working in partnership with local women’s organisations across the world that have worked to improve resources, legislation and services to prevent and respond to VAW. This may include learning from their experiences, elevating their voices and practices, and partnering to provide financial and other resources to strengthen their work.
- Means a commitment to addressing the unequal relations of power between men and women that drive VAW. The Prevention Collaborative focuses 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.^{xiii}

WHAT'S NEXT?

Brief 2 explains risk factors and triggers for VAW perpetration as well as protective factors that reduce the risk of VAW. It focuses on how a prevention programme can address these factors across individual, relational, community and societal levels.

REFERENCES

- ⁱ The acronyms VAW and 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 sex assigned at birth, 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.
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- ^{iv} UNICEF. (2020). Child marriage — UNICEF DATA. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage>
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- ^{xi} Keel, M., Torney, J., Fulu, E., McCook, S., Holmes, S., Hunt, M., Lay, Y., & Warczak. (2017). Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to change the story. Melbourne: Our Watch.
- ^{xii} Heise, L. (2013). Moving beyond response: Integrating primary prevention into violence against children programming (power point slides)
- ^{xiii} Prevention Collaborative. (2019). Being feminist-inspired: What this means?” (unpublished)