

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & VIOLENT EXTREMISM



Ten year-old Ruth B. is an orphan from Adamawa state, Nigeria. Her father died prior to Boko Haram's invasion of her town. She and her mother escaped, but her mother was later killed by members of Boko Haram for refusing to follow the sect. (Photo by Immanuel Afolabi)

The soldiers [told me], 'We don't kill the women and the girls.' They said they would only rape us. As if rape were different than death.

—Mary, South Sudan

Interviewed by Journalist Aryn Baker, Africa Correspondent for *Time*

Gender-based violence devastates not only affected individuals but also the communities and nations where it is widespread. Violence against women and girls is an especially pervasive form of gender-based violence that persists in all countries, reaching epidemic proportions in some. An estimated one in three women will experience violence in her lifetime, including rape, sexual assault, and killing. In some places, the estimated rates are much higher.¹

Violence against women includes acts committed by intimate and family partners (domestic violence), acts committed by an attacker outside the family, sexual harassment in the workplace or in a public space, trafficking in women, and violence in conflict situations.² Sexual violence is especially damaging and primarily affects women and girls. In recent years, widespread gender-based violence and

sexual violence—including brutal rape and mutilation—have been hallmarks of many security forces, militants, and violent extremists.

Women and girls may also endure multiple forms of violence due to multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion. For example, women who are more marginalized and more vulnerable to violence include women who are living with disabilities; recognized as indigenous; identified as LGBTQ; managing HIV and AIDS; displaced, migrant, or undocumented; forced to live deprived of their rights; and living in the midst of armed conflicts or in emergency situations.³

The risk and incidence of gender-based violence can be extremely high in conflict-affected and fragile states: domestic violence tends to rise, as do sexual assaults outside the home.⁴ In times of armed conflict, gender-based violence has included brutal and pervasive rape and sexual violence primarily against women and girls, kidnapping of boys as child soldiers, and mass killing of civilian men. Such abhorrent acts are inflicted to intentionally cause severe physical and psychological harm to the victim and to devastate the family and society. The international community recognizes that widespread, systematic rape and other acts of sexual violence constitute war crimes.⁵ The moral magnitude, human toll, impact on society, and consequences for security must not be underestimated.

For societies and governments, the economic and social costs of violence against women and girls are massive. The costs include not only loss of human life but also “lost workdays, reduced civic participation, and costs to the justice and health sectors arising from injuries, health problems, mental health services, and more.”⁶

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation, but it is fundamentally a vicious display of power, domination, and control. Deep-seated discrimination intent on diminishing the victim’s relative standing in society underpins it. Where gender-based violence persists, the prospects for development, economic progress, health, and state stability are at risk.

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life.

Gender-based violence can include female infanticide; child sexual abuse; sex trafficking and forced labor; sexual coercion and abuse; neglect; domestic violence; elder abuse; and harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage, “honor” killings, and female genital mutilation/cutting.

Women and girls are the most at risk and most affected by gender-based violence. Consequently, the terms “violence against women” and “gender-based violence” are often used interchangeably. However, boys and men can also experience gender-based violence, as can sexual and gender minorities. Regardless of the target, gender-based violence is rooted in structural inequalities between men and women and is characterized by the use and abuse of physical, emotional, or financial power and control.⁷



Photo by UN Women/Pairach Homtong

COSTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The cost of gender-based violence can be measured in the price of acute health consequences, economic impact, and increased security risks. Far-reaching physiological consequences include trauma, physical injuries, and health problems. But the psychological and emotional harms are frequently at least as deep and long lasting.⁸

Women who have experienced violence inflicted by an intimate partner are more likely to suffer depression, give birth to low birth-weight babies, or contract HIV.⁹ About two-thirds of the victims of intimate partner or family-related homicides are women, in contrast to all cases of homicide, of which 20 percent of the victims are women.¹⁰ Unlike other categories of homicides, which have declined over time, homicide rates for females as a result of intimate partner or family-related violence have remained relatively stable.

The economic impact of violence against women encompasses costs for law enforcement, housing, health care, and other social and psychological services, as well as the diminished returns as a result of reduced employment and productivity, impaired engagement and participation in society, and lower life expectancy.

The cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence is conservatively estimated at between one and two percent of gross domestic product.¹¹ Widespread violence also spurs migration and displacement, which frequently put women and

children at greater risk, contribute to increased national instability, and result in expensive security-related measures.

Men who as children were victims or witnesses of child abuse or violence against their mothers by a male partner run a greater risk of committing violence against their female partner as adults.¹² As Gary Barker, Executive Director of Promundo (an organization devoted to engaging men and boys in preventing gender violence), explains,

We have seen in household research in sixteen countries—including post conflict or conflict affected countries—that men who witness violence growing up, either by their father or another man against their mother, are consistently two and half times more likely to use it against their female partner later on. If we layer on violence that they experienced in school or the community—where they are the victim of fights or violence in the home or in the community—the rates go up to four times, compared to men who did not experience one of those two things. In our prevention work, whether in post conflict or otherwise, we need to understand just how much trauma plus the social norms behind this play into the perpetuation and escalation of violence.¹³

All children and youth who experience or witness violence—not just male children—are more susceptible to engaging in violence in adulthood. Children who have been exposed to violence are at higher risk for emotional and behavioral problems.¹⁴ They also are more likely to experience feelings of extreme isolation, depression, and deficiencies in empathy. Exposure to violence in early childhood can alter biological development, impair brain architecture, and even influence DNA.¹⁵ The prevalence of violence against children increases the urgency for research on effective interventions. Dr. James A. Mercy, director of the Division of Violence Prevention in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Injury Center, put it this way:

Imagine you woke up one morning and newspaper headlines said that scientists had discovered a new disease. The scientists reported that up to 1 billion children worldwide were exposed to this disease every year. And that over the course of their lifetimes children exposed to this disease were at greater risk for mental illnesses like depression and anxiety disorders; at greater risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer; at greater risk of infectious diseases like HIV; and, if that wasn't enough, at greater risk for involvement in social problems like crime (including more violence) and drug abuse. If we had such a disease, what do you think we'd do? The truth is we do have such a "disease;" it's violence against children.¹⁶

In 2013, the CDC extended technical assistance to eight countries to measure the magnitude and nature of sexual, physical, and emotional violence against children.¹⁷ The results showed that violence against children is common, and in five countries

26 to 38 percent of girls and 9 to 21 percent of boys experienced sexual violence;

61 to 74 percent of girls and 57 to 76 percent of boys experienced physical violence;

24 to 35 percent of girls and 27 to 39 percent of boys experienced emotional violence.¹⁸

Key factors increase the risk of exposure to gender-based violence. Girls are more likely than boys to experience sexual violence while travelling to and from school, highlighting the need for measures to enable girls to attend school safely. Indigenous girls and women "face a higher prevalence of violence, harmful practices, and labor exploitation and harassment than other women and girls."¹⁹ Women identified as LGBTQ are at high risk of abuse. Also, girls and women with disabilities and those living in institutions experience a higher prevalence of violence than those living with foster families.²⁰ Most sexual violence takes place in the home.

Child marriage, a form of gender-based violence, exposes children to a lifetime of violence. According to UNICEF, more than 700 million women alive today were married before the age of 18, and more than one in three of these women were 15 years old or younger when they were married or entered into union. UNICEF also reports that boys are married as children, but "girls are disproportionately affected and are often married to men significantly older than themselves."²¹

Violence begets more violence, especially when the consequences are left untreated. These impairments increase vulnerability for perpetuating violence against women and girls and for recruitment into groups that engage in organized violence and violent extremism.²²

Researchers confront methodological and ethical challenges in collecting accurate data on violence against children and in protecting children from recurring victimization.²³ Despite the enormity of the problem and the dreadful impact of childhood exposure to violence, there are no international standards for data collection. Meanwhile, cases of violence against children are generally underreported and are frequently undocumented.²⁴

After their capture, [Yazidi women and girls] were shipped on a fleet of buses to a set of holding pens in the city of Mosul and other areas within Iraq. It was there where many of them heard the word 'sabaya' for the first time. They all describe this really chilling and horrifying moment when they realize what it means—it means slave.

—Rukmini Callimachi

Foreign Correspondent for *The New York Times*, who conducted interviews with 21 women and girls who escaped ISIS.

"I kept telling him it hurts—please stop," said the girl, whose body is so small an adult could circle her waist with two hands. "He told me that according to Islam he is allowed to rape an unbeliever. He said that by raping me, he is drawing closer to God."

—Interview reported by Rukmini Callimachi

Foreign Correspondent for *The New York Times*, article on August 13, 2015

CONNECTION TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Gender-based violence plays an important role in violent extremism. The brutal forms of gender-based violence are an extreme demonstration of control that is used to govern, hold territory, and destroy enemies. Violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria / Levant (ISIS) and Boko Haram commit gross and systematic gender-based violence as part of their strategy for expansion and control. Both groups use sexual violence and enslave women and girls to advance their ideology and reward combatants, while they destroy families and destabilize communities. The impact of these forms of violence persists across generations.²⁵

The systematic rape and enslavement of women and girls has become deeply enmeshed in the radical theology of violent extremist groups. In internal policy that establishes guidelines for slavery, ISIS leadership put forward a narrow, selective reading of the Quran and other religious rulings "not only to justify violence, but also to elevate and celebrate each sexual assault as spiritually beneficial, even virtuous."²⁶ By arguing that such crimes are justified in law and religious doctrine, extremist groups are enabling violence as a normative condition.²⁷

Trafficking women and girls, and then auctioning and selling them, also serves as a source of revenue for the groups. The promise to recruits and new combatants that they will be "given" wives is a further economic incentive in regions where men customarily pay a "brideprice" in order to marry and yet often lack the resources to do so. The removal of this obstacle, combined with the chance to contribute to an ideological cause, is a powerful inducement.²⁸

The United Nations officially declared that ISIS's attacks against the Yazidi minority in Syria and Iraq constitute genocide and other war crimes. The UN Human Rights Council report, *They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis*, is one of a dozen UN documents detailing the brutal atrocities and severity of the crimes.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has inflicted brutal gender-based violence. The majority of the kidnapped Chibok girls remain unaccounted for.

Thirty women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch were subjected to a variety of abuses, including physical and psychological suffering during and after their abduction, sometimes for refusing to convert to Islam; forced labor, including forced participation in military operations; forced marriage to their captors; and sexual abuse including rape. . . . Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the men and boys are often given the option of joining the group or being killed.²⁹

Boys also are exposed to horrifying, gender-specific abuses. They are abducted as soldiers and forced to commit barbarous acts aimed

at permanently severing ties to their families, communities, and the past in general. The gender-based violence inflicted on these boys increases their susceptibility to perpetrating more violence and atrocities in the future. Mausi Segun, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, described a chilling account of the barbarous violence forced upon boys:

Boko Haram ensures boys can never return to their community. I spoke to a seven-year-old in Kano whose mother was already dead. Boko Haram forced this young boy to watch them kill his father and then to carry his father's severed head on his shoulder for hours. This boy was rescued out of Boko Haram. For months everyone thought he was deaf and dumb because he would not speak a word. When he eventually spoke, the horrifying abuse and severity of trauma that he and other children were subjected to became clear.

The prolonged conflict and assault by violent extremist forces, the constant threat of attack, and the severity of the abuses have had a deep impact not only on victims but also on those who witness the assaults and those who are forced to participate.

ISIS permanently sought to erase the Yazidis through killing, sexual slavery, enslavement, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and forcible transfer, causing serious bodily and mental harm.

—Paulo Sergio Pinheiro

Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations

ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: APPROACH & RECOMMENDATIONS

For people to achieve their full potential, their lives must be free from violence. For nations to achieve peace, security, and development, they must intentionally create policies and programs that prevent and respond to gender-based violence and support women to become equal, empowered partners.

Research provides a glimmer of hope. Despite the severity and pervasiveness of gender-based violence, it is possible to disrupt and prevent long-term harm, and there are evidence-based interventions to enable better outcomes. Such interventions can facilitate transition

and transformation in affected regions, lay the groundwork for a more stable future, and enable individuals to reenter society, desist from violence, and understand they have prospects for a path forward.

Many parts of society have a valuable role to play: governments, international organizations (multilateral and bilateral), the private sector, and civil society organizations (including representatives of marginalized groups), foundations, local grassroots organizations, and community-based, faith-based, and regional organizations.

A comprehensive approach to end gender-based violence will involve multiple sectors in three primary areas:

Prevention: disrupting the conditions that enable gender-based violence and building resilience in high-target regions

Recovery: providing interventions and services to survivors of violence and supporting their recovery, reintegration, and ability to reengage productively

Accountability: ensuring perpetrators are prosecuted, strengthening legal and judicial systems, and influencing social norms to support punishment for such acts and to end impunity

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD TAKE SEVERAL ACTIONS

Address the underlying context and causes for gender-based violence.

Invest in reducing the causes (including root causes) of gender-based violence, especially violence against women and girls. This includes reducing discrimination and barriers between women and men and girls and boys in economic, political, and civic arenas. It also involves implementing initiatives that protect human rights and raise societies' respect and value for all women and girls, including inclusive education and economic empowerment opportunities. Review family law and support reforms (where needed) and effective application of laws.

Conduct gender analysis.

Apply gender analysis systematically during the design and implementation of an initiative, determine the potential impact on women and girls, men and boys, including how an initiative may affect their safety and exposure to violence and what actions may be necessary to reduce the possibility of or mitigate violence. In every project—whether it involves economic development, road

Integrate women as equal partners who are fully empowered in the design, decision-making, and implementation of every initiative. Also paramount is care for children and youth to prevent their experiencing or witnessing violence, to support full recovery for those harmed, and to put in place programs that support youth empowerment and teach healthy relationships based on respect, equal value, and greater equality.

construction, political participation, or education programs—it is critical to consult closely with women and local leaders, understand the local context, and design an approach that achieves the policy goals, enhances the equality status of women and girls with men and boys, and seeks to reduce the risk of harm and violence.

Institutionalize and integrate a whole-of-government approach.

Establish a whole-of-government approach to improve collaboration and integration of priorities across sectors. To increase understanding, improve effectiveness, and reduce harmful practices, governments must invest not only in global health, human rights, democracy, governance, and education initiatives, where gender issues have traditionally been part of the discourse, but also in initiatives for economic growth, business development, labor, agriculture, infrastructure, technological sciences, justice, law enforcement, and security.

Strengthen governance institutions, which are key to developing appropriate legislation, standardizing laws, developing action plans, and implementing plans effectively and collaboratively with civil society. Advocate for laws and policies to monitor, prevent, and respond to gender-based violence and to eliminate discrimination.

Utilize and leverage existing policy and program frameworks that are based on proven approaches and provide a menu of evidence-based interventions from which governments can choose. For example, the United States should continue to implement and strengthen the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. In addition, governments should appoint senior-level officials to elevate and integrate gender considerations and gender-based violence issues. For example, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues has worked effectively with the White House and other agencies to address violence against women and girls in U.S. foreign policy.

Reach beyond predictable allies to specific sectors not traditionally associated with addressing gender-based violence and strengthen the role they play. For example:

Encourage labor and trade associations to improve accountability and reduce discrimination and gender-based abuse in the workplace.

Design infrastructure programs to minimize the risk of gender-based violence.³⁰

Ensure health services integrate screening of and response to gender-based violence and deliver relevant safety and psychosocial services.

Invest in community-based initiatives and collaborate closely with civil society.

Build on existing investment platforms to scale up community-based programs that are evidence-based are found to be effective.

Prioritize violence prevention initiatives.

Support the needs of survivors for full recovery and reintegration, including research-based psychosocial programs. These investments will enable greater stability to develop within the community and society.

Build capacity of civil society, including women's organizations, the media, criminal justice sector, health providers, educators, religious leaders, and organizations relating to the security sector.

Support civil society and community-level approaches to change behaviors and attitudes concerning violence and to facilitate discussion among families, community organizations, and religious, traditional, and other community leaders around human rights and gender-based violence. In particular, engage and involve female leaders and women's groups; youth; men and boys; and religious, faith-based, and community leaders in these activities.

Include and empower women in programs designed to build entrepreneurship skills and provide access to jobs in influential sectors. Conduct local gender analysis and take steps to mitigate any potential backlash or violence.

Facilitate women's participation as empowered actors and decision makers in peacebuilding, relief, and reconstruction.

Provide beneficial life skills for adolescent and preadolescent girls and boys, promote youth engagement in positive activities, and promote curricula for healthy, respectful interactions between girls and boys.

Engage men in programs to achieve gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls. As potential allies, facilitators, and activists, men are indispensable for lasting change.³¹

Enlist influential community-based leaders and organizations:

- religious leaders to teach about respect, the harms of violence, and the tenets of the Golden Rule (a doctrine of most faiths)
- educators to train teachers on gender-based violence and to help end sexual coercion and abuse
- parent/teacher councils to improve understanding and collaboration. Positive parenting diminishes children's susceptibility to committing violence and can help persuade combatants to desist from further violence

Include marginalized communities—such as indigenous people, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ, and religious and national minorities—as equal and empowered partners in consultations, initiative design, and decisions.



Ambassador Samantha Power, Former U.S. Representative to the United Nations, meeting with the council of Ministers in Juba, South Sudan, on issues of justice, accountability and an end to violence. "For as long as armed actors, rape, loot and kill with impunity, for as long as they are not held accountable, it will be very hard for the cause of peace to take hold here," Ambassador Power told the council of Ministers in Juba. (Photo by UNMISS, 2016)

Governments have a critical role in addressing the needs of conflict-affected populations.

Design humanitarian relief initiatives with the specific intention of minimizing the risk of further violence, abuse, and repeat traumatization. Create and foster conditions that minimize risks of abuse in humanitarian relief settings. In active conflicts and in postconflict environments, give special attention to the structural needs for protecting women, girls, men, and boys from physical harm and provide the psychosocial support critical for recovery, reintegration, and healthy reengagement with society.

Insist that peace agreements and related accountability or transitional justice mechanisms strongly address crimes of gender-based violence and reduce impunity.³²

Ensure that during the transition from relief to development, emphasis is on initiatives to build resilient communities that do not passively or actively condone gender-based violence or discriminate against survivors.

Prioritize improvements to data collection systems and surveys. Conduct routine, systematic collection of data on key indicators of gender-based violence over time.

Implement population-based surveys on related risk factors, exposures, and health and social outcomes that related to gender-based violence.

Facilitate capacity-building and training programs for planning and implementing data collection systems and surveys.

Collect information from a variety of sectors: justice, health, education, security, labor workforce, and law enforcement.

Ensure surveys integrate metrics related to vulnerable and at-risk populations.

Improve the harmonization of research and data collection methods as a way to improve accuracy, consistency, coordination, and the capacity to compare data.

Support use of common guidelines, share core indicators, and ensure data can be disaggregated for various analyses.

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