Understanding Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender. It is deeply rooted in unequal power dynamics and social norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence against specific genders, predominantly affecting women, girls, and gender minorities. However, anyone can be a victim of GBV, regardless of gender.

How Gender-Based Violence Manifests

GBV can take many forms, each deeply harmful and often intertwined with other types of abuse. Here are some key ways it manifests:

1 Physical Violence

This includes physical harm such as hitting, slapping, punching, or using weapons to intimidate or hurt someone. Physical violence is often the most visible form of abuse but can co-exist with less visible forms of violence. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is also a form of gender-based violence.

2 Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Emotional abuse involves actions that harm a person’s self-worth, mental health, or emotional well-being. This includes constant criticism, threats, manipulation, gaslighting (making someone question their reality), or isolation from family and friends. Over time, psychological abuse can erode a survivor’s confidence and sense of safety.

3 Sexual Violence

Sexual violence includes any non-consensual sexual activity, such as rape, molestation, unwanted touching, or sexual harassment. It also includes acts like forced participation in pornography or sexting, or being coerced into sexual activity against one’s will.

4 Financial or Economic Abuse

Financial abuse occurs when one partner controls or restricts access to financial resources. This could include preventing the victim from working, taking their money, controlling their access to bank accounts, or using financial dependence to maintain control.

How Gender-Based Violence Manifests

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5 **Stalking**

Stalking is a form of harassment where someone repeatedly follows, monitors, or contacts another person, causing them to feel unsafe. Stalking can occur physically or digitally, such as through repeated messages, calls, or social media monitoring.

6 **Reproductive Coercion**

Reproductive coercion refers to behaviors that interfere with a person's autonomy in making decisions about their reproductive health. This could involve forcing or pressuring someone to become pregnant, terminating a pregnancy against their will, or sabotaging contraceptive methods.

7 **Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage is when one or both individuals are coerced into marriage against their will. This type of abuse is often tied to cultural or familial pressure and can have severe emotional and psychological consequences.

8 **Cultural or Religious Abuse**

In some cases, abusers use cultural or religious beliefs to justify or mask abusive behavior. This could include manipulating cultural traditions, misusing religious teachings to control behavior, or isolating someone from their community under the guise of protecting cultural norms.

9 **Digital Abuse**

With the rise of technology, digital abuse has become more common. It includes monitoring or controlling a partner's online activity, sending threatening messages, sharing intimate photos without consent (revenge porn), or using GPS tracking to control a partner's whereabouts.

The Impact of Gender-Based Violence

GBV has severe and long-lasting impacts on survivors. It can affect their physical health, leading to injuries, chronic conditions, or disabilities. Survivors often experience mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or suicidal thoughts. The trauma from GBV can also disrupt their daily lives, affecting relationships, work, and the ability to trust others.