

# CHAPTER 1

## OVERVIEW OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Sexual and gender-based violence is a violation of human rights. This kind of violence perpetuates the stereotyping of gender roles that denies human dignity of the individual and stymies human development. The overwhelming majority of the victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence are women and girls.

Sexual and gender-based violence includes much more than sexual assault and rape. Although it may occur in public contexts, it is largely rooted in individual attitudes that condone violence within the family, the community and the State. The root causes and consequences of sexual and gender-based violence must be understood before appropriate programmes to prevent and respond to this violence can be planned.

As the United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection to refugees. UNHCR, together with States, thus shares the responsibility for ensuring that refugees are protected against sexual and gender-based violence.

### A Few Facts about Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

- World-wide, an estimated 40 to 70 per cent of homicides of women are committed by intimate partners, often in the context of an abusive relationship.
- Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.
- Trafficking of humans world-wide grew almost 50 percent from 1995 to 2000 and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that as many as 2 million women are trafficked across borders annually.
- More than 90 million African women and girls are victims of female genital mutilation.
- At least 60 million girls who would otherwise be expected to be alive are missing from various populations, mostly in Asia, as a result of sex-selective abortions, infanticide or neglect.
- In recent years, mass rape in war has been documented in Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda. A European Community fact-finding team estimates that more than 20,000 Muslim women were raped during the war in Bosnia.
- Ninety-four percent of displaced households surveyed in Sierra Leone have reported incidents of sexual assault, including rape, torture and sexual slavery. At least 250,000, perhaps as many as 500,000, women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

*From Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden (World Bank 1994)  
Fact Sheet on Gender Violence: A Statistics for Action Fact Sheet (L. Heise, IWTC, 1992)  
and  
Progress of the World's Women (UNIFEM, 2000)*

## Protecting Refugees Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.**

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
UN General Assembly  
10 December 1948*

Prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence are directly linked to the protection of human rights.

Human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interconnected and interdependent. Every individual, without regard to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or status, is entitled to the respect, protection, exercise and enjoyment of all the fundamental human rights and freedoms. States are obliged to ensure the equal enjoyment of all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights for women and men, girls and boys.

Acts of sexual and gender-based violence violate a number of human rights principles enshrined in international human rights instruments. Among others, these include:

- The right to life, liberty and security of the person.
- The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- The right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
- The right to freedom of movement, opinion, expression, and association.
- The right to enter into marriage with free and full consent and the entitlement to equal rights to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
- The right to education, social security and personal development.
- The right to cultural, political and public participation, equal access to public services, work and equal pay for equal work.

Several international instruments specifically address sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** adopted by the General Assembly in 1981, the **United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women**, adopted by the General Assembly in 1993, and the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, adopted in Beijing in 1995, include all forms of discrimination as violence against women and girls and reaffirm States' responsibility to work to eliminate them. Most recently, the **1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court** defines rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation or any other form

of sexual violence of comparable gravity as a crime against humanity. **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325** (2000) emphasises States' responsibility to end impunity for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including sexual and other forms of violence against women and girls.

(UNHCR's Executive Committee)...Deplores gender-related violence and all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex directed to refugee and displaced women and girls, and calls upon the States to ensure that their human rights and physical and psychological integrity are protected, and they are made aware of these rights.

*Executive Committee Conclusion No. 85 (XLIX), 1998*

United Nations, human rights and humanitarian agencies share the responsibility with States to ensure that human rights are protected. As the UN refugee agency, UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection to refugees and seek durable solutions to their problems. Thus, UNHCR and States share the responsibility for ensuring that refugees are protected against sexual and gender-based violence.

### UNHCR's Definition of Protection

All actions aimed at ensuring the equal access to and enjoyment of the rights of women, men, girls and boys of concern to UNHCR, in accordance with the relevant bodies of law (international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law).

In settings where no actions to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence have been taken, UNHCR should take the lead in co-ordinating and establishing, as part of its core activities, protection and assistance programmes that address this kind of violence. This includes advocating for the rights of refugees, advising States on how to adapt their national legislation so it conforms to international standards, and taking actions to minimise the risk of trafficking in persons, a risk that increases when individuals are displaced.

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

*Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, November 2000*

**See also:**

- **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000)**
- **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)**
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**
- **United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1994)**
- **Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)**
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)**
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)**
- **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)**
- **Statute of the Office of the UNHCR GA Res 428(v) (1950)**
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**

## What is Sexual and Gender-Based Violence?

*Sexual violence, gender-based violence and violence against women* are terms that are commonly used interchangeably. All these terms refer to violations of fundamental human rights that perpetuate sex-stereotyped roles that deny human dignity and the self-determination of the individual and hamper human development. They refer to physical, sexual and psychological harm that reinforces female subordination and perpetuates male power and control.

**While gender-based violence has a devastating impact on the lives of women and girls who are the majority of victims/survivors, it is also hinders the development of men and boys. Eliminating gender-based violence and gender inequalities helps to strengthen entire communities.**

The term **gender-based violence** is used to distinguish common violence from violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. Gender-based violence has been defined by the CEDAW Committee as violence that is directed at a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threat of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.

The term **violence against women** refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual and psychological harm to women and girls, whether occurring in private or in public. Violence against women is a form of gender-based violence and includes sexual violence.

**Sexual violence**, including **exploitation and abuse**, refers to any act, attempt or threat of a sexual nature that results, or is likely to result, in physical, psychological and emotional harm. Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence.

UNHCR employs an inclusive conception of **sexual and gender-based violence** that recognises that, although the majority of victims/survivors are women and children, boys and men are also targets of sexual and gender-based violence.

### Expanded Definition of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence used by UNHCR and Implementing Partners

(based on Articles 1 and 2 of the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) and Recommendation 19, paragraph 6 of the 11th Session of the CEDAW Committee)

... gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.... While women, men, boys and girls can be victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are the main victims.

...shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to the following:

- a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring **in the family**, including battering, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse of children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
- b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring **within the general community**, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.
- c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence **perpetrated or condoned by the State and institutions**, wherever it occurs.

Sexual and gender-based violence is largely rooted in unequal power relations. These perpetuate and condone violence within the family, the community and the State. The distinction made between public and private spheres should not serve as an excuse for not addressing domestic violence as a form of SGBV. The exclusion of women and girls from the public arena only increases their vulnerability to violence within the family. **Domestic violence** reinforces gender-based discrimination and keeps women subordinate to men.

#### See also:

- **Population Reports: Ending Violence against Women (Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health 1999)**
- **Violence against Women: The Hidden Health Burden (World Bank 1994)**

## Defining Key Concepts

Sexual and gender-based violence includes much more than sexual assault and rape. To understand its root causes and consequences, it is essential to define and distinguish between the terms *gender* and *sex*.

The term **sex** refers to the *biological characteristics* of males and females. These characteristics are congenital and their differences are limited to physiological reproductive functions.

**Gender** is the term used to denote the *social characteristics* assigned to men and women. These social characteristics are constructed on the basis of different factors, such as age, religion, national, ethnic and social origin. They differ both within and between cultures and define identities, status, roles, responsibilities and power relations among the members of any society or culture. Gender is learned through socialisation. It is not static or innate, but evolves to respond to changes in the social, political and cultural environment.

**Gender is learned, and therefore changeable.**

People are born female or male (sex); they learn how to be girls and boys, and then become women and men (gender). Gender refers to what it means to be a boy or girl, woman or man, in a particular society or culture. Society teaches expected attitudes, behaviours, roles and activities. Gender defines the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and privileges of men and women in any context. This learned behaviour is known as **gender identity**.

Women around the world are usually in a disadvantaged position compared to men of the same social and economic levels. Gender roles and identities usually involve inequality and power imbalance between women and men. Violence against women, and its acceptance within society and cultures, is one of the manifestations of this inequality and power imbalance.

A comprehensive prevention and response plan should focus on the roles and needs of both women and men and how both can become agents of change. **Focusing only on women when addressing sexual and gender-based violence tends to place the responsibility for prevention and response on the victims/survivors.**

**Violence** is a means of control and oppression that can include emotional, social or economic force, coercion or pressure, as well as physical harm. It can be overt, in the form of a physical assault or threatening someone with a weapon; it can also be covert, in the form of intimidation, threats, persecution, deception or other forms of psychological or social pressure. The person targeted by this kind of violence is compelled to behave as expected or to act against her will out of fear.

An incident of violence is an act or a series of harmful acts by a perpetrator or a group of perpetrators against a person or a group of individuals. It may involve multiple types and repeated acts of violence over a period of time, with variable durations. It can take minutes, hours, days or a lifetime.

**Abuse** is the misuse of power through which the perpetrator gains control or advantage of the abused, using and causing physical or psychological harm or inciting fear of that harm. Abuse prevents persons from making free decisions and forces them to behave against their will.

**Coercion** is forcing, or attempting to force, another person to engage in behaviours against her will by using threats, verbal insistence, manipulation, deception, cultural expectations or economic power.

**“[Violence against women]..... is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men which have led to the domination over and the discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.”**

*UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women  
23 February 1994*

**Power** is understood as the capacity to make decisions. All relationships are affected by the exercise of power. When power is used to make decisions regarding one's own life, it becomes an affirmation of self-acceptance and self-respect that, in turn, fosters respect and acceptance of others as equals. When used to dominate, power imposes obligations on, restricts, prohibits and makes decisions about the lives of others. To prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence effectively, the power relations between men and women, women and women, men and men, adults and children, and among children must be analysed and understood.

In humanitarian crises, affected populations depend on the protection and assistance of institutions. Humanitarian aid workers, government, security and law enforcement officials are in a privileged position as they have the power to make decisions that will affect the well-being of the persons they are assisting. **Exploitation and abuse** occurs when this disparity of power is misused to the detriment of those persons who cannot negotiate or make decisions on an equal basis. Exploitation and abuse can take the form of physical and psychological force or other means of coercion (threats, inducements, deception or extortion) with the aim of gaining sexual or other favours in exchange for services.

**In institutional terms, sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian staff represents a failure on the part of humanitarian agencies, whose stated role is to provide protection and care.**

*Inter-Agency Standing Committee  
Policy Paper on the Protection from Sexual Abuse and  
Exploitation in Humanitarian Crises  
Rome 9 April 2002*

**Consent** is when a person makes an informed choice to agree freely and voluntarily to do something. The phrase *against her will* is used to indicate an absence of informed consent. There is no consent when agreement is obtained through the use of threats, force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, or misrepresentation.

The use of a threat to withhold a benefit, or a promise to provide a benefit, in order to obtain the agreement of a person is also an abuse of power; any agreement obtained this way is not considered to be consensual. There is also no consent if the person is below the legal (statutory) age of consent or is defined as a child under applicable laws (see Chapter 5).

A **perpetrator** is a person, group, or institution that directly inflicts, supports and condones violence or other abuse against a person or a group of persons. Perpetrators are in a position of real or perceived power, decision-making and/or authority and can thus exert control over their victims.

It is a myth that sexual and gender-based violence is usually perpetrated by strangers. In fact, most acts of sexual and gender-based violence are perpetrated by someone known to the survivor, and many violent incidents are planned in advance.

Sexual and gender-based violence can also be perpetrated by family and community members. States and institutions condone and perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence when discriminatory practices are not challenged and prevented, including through the use of legal and policy instruments. During war and conflict, sexual and gender-based violence is frequently perpetrated by armed members from warring factions.

**Perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence are sometimes the very people upon whom survivors depend to assist and protect them.**

Most cases of sexual and gender-based violence involve a female victim/survivor and a male perpetrator. Most acts of sexual and gender-based violence against boys and men are also committed by male perpetrators.

**Intimate partners** (husbands, boyfriends): In most societies, the accepted gender role for male intimate partners is one of decision-making and power over the female partner. Unfortunately, this power and influence is often exerted through discrimination, violence, and abuse.

**Family members, close relatives and friends:** Girls are far more likely to suffer sexual and gender-based violence within the domestic sphere. From neglect to incest, these human rights violations are not always reported, since they involve fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, brothers and/or uncles as perpetrators. Harmful traditional practices also take place with the knowledge and sometimes the participation of family members and close relatives and friends.

**Influential community members** (teachers, leaders, politicians): Leaders and other community members in positions of authority can abuse that power through acts of sexual and gender-based violence. The victim/survivor in these situations is even more reluctant to report the violence because of the perpetrator's position of trust and power within the community.

**Security forces and soldiers, including peacekeepers:** Soldiers are often the embodiment of ultimate power. They are usually armed and have a mandate to ensure security in communities. In some settings, soldiers can - and do - detain and/or arrest people with impunity. Often, soldiers and security forces are in the position of granting or withholding rights and privileges for refugees. Crossing borders, going through checkpoints, and requesting goods and services from armed forces can increase the risk of becoming subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, especially for refugee women.

**Humanitarian aid workers:** International, national and refugee staff of humanitarian aid organisations, including NGOs, UN agencies, and host government ministries, hold positions of great authority in refugee settings. They are perceived by the community to have money, influence and power. Unfortunately, there have been cases of workers abusing this power and committing acts of sexual and gender-based violence. It is crucial that all humanitarian aid staff receive training and sensitisation about gender and sexual and gender-based violence and that they be held accountable for inappropriate behaviour. (See Appendix 1 for UNHCR's Code of Conduct (2002).)

**Institutions:** Discriminatory practices in the delivery of social services help maintain and increase gender inequalities. Withholding information, delaying or denying medical assistance, offering unequal salaries for the same work and obstructing justice are some forms of violence perpetrated through institutions.

**See also:**

- **Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Paper on the Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Humanitarian Crises (2002)**
- **The UNHCR Code of Conduct (2002)**

## Types of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The following table describes some of the more common forms of sexual and gender-based violence. The list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. It is a practical tool that can be used in each location to help identify the different forms of sexual and gender-based violence that exist. Acts of sexual and gender-based violence have been grouped into five categories:

- Sexual violence.
- Physical violence.
- Emotional and psychological violence.
- Harmful traditional practices.
- Socio-economic violence.

## Sexual Violence

Type of act	Description/Examples	Can be perpetrated by
Rape and marital rape	The invasion of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body by force, threat of force, coercion, taking advantage of a coercive environment, or against a person incapable of giving genuine consent (International Criminal Court).	Any person in a position of power, authority and control, including husband, intimate partner or caregiver.
Child sexual abuse, defilement and incest	Any act where a child is used for sexual gratification. Any sexual relations/interaction with a child.	Someone the child trusts, including parent, sibling, extended family member, friend or stranger, teacher, elder, leader or any other caregiver, anyone in a position of power, authority and control over a child.
Forced sodomy/anal rape	Forced /coerced anal intercourse, usually male-to-male or male-to-female.	Any person in a position of power, authority and control.
Attempted rape or attempted forced sodomy/anal rape	Attempted forced/coerced intercourse; no penetration.	Any person in a position of power, authority and control.
Sexual abuse	Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, including inappropriate touching, by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.	Any person in a position of power, authority and control, family/community members, co-workers, including supervisors, strangers.
Sexual exploitation	Any abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiting momentarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (IASC); Sexual exploitation is one of the purposes of trafficking in persons (performing in a sexual manner, forced undressing and/or nakedness, coerced marriage, forced childbearing, engagement in pornography or prostitution, sexual extortion for the granting of goods, services, assistance benefits, sexual slavery).	Anyone in a position of power, influence, control, including humanitarian aid workers, soldiers/officials at checkpoints, teachers, smugglers, trafficking networks.
Forced prostitution (also referred to as sexual exploitation)	Forced/coerced sex trade in exchange for material resources, services and assistance, usually targeting highly vulnerable women or girls unable to meet basic human needs for themselves and/or their children.	Any person in a privileged position, in possession of money or control of material resources and services, perceived as powerful, humanitarian aid workers.
Sexual harassment	Any unwelcome, usually repeated and unreciprocated sexual advance, unsolicited sexual attention, demand for sexual access or favours, sexual innuendo or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, display of pornographic material, when it interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.	Employers, supervisors or colleagues, any person in a position of power, authority, or control.

Type of act	Description/Examples	Can be perpetrated by
Sexual violence as a weapon of war and torture	Crimes against humanity of a sexual nature, including rape, sexual slavery, forced abortion or sterilisation or any other forms to prevent birth, forced pregnancy, forced delivery, and forced child rearing, among others. Sexual violence as a form of torture is defined as any act or threat of a sexual nature by which severe mental or physical pain or suffering is caused to obtain information, confession or punishment from the victim or third person, intimidate her or a third person or to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.	Often committed, sanctioned and ordered by military, police, armed groups or other parties in conflict.

### Physical Violence

Type of act	Description/Examples	Can be perpetrated by
Physical assault	Beating, punching, kicking, biting, burning, maiming or killing, with or without weapons; often used in combination with other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.	Spouse, intimate partner, family member, friend, acquaintance, stranger, anyone in position of power, members of parties to a conflict.
Trafficking, slavery	Selling and/or trading in human beings for forced sexual activities, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs.	Any person in a position of power or control.

### Emotional and Psychological Violence

Type of act	Description/Examples	Can be perpetrated by
Abuse/Humiliation	Non-sexual verbal abuse that is insulting, degrading, demeaning; compelling the victim/survivor to engage in humiliating acts, whether in public or private; denying basic expenses for family survival.	Anyone in a position of power and control; often perpetrated by spouses, intimate partners or family members in a position of authority.
Confinement	Isolating a person from friends/family, restricting movements, deprivation of liberty or obstruction/restriction of the right to free movement.	Anyone in a position of power and control; often perpetrated by spouses, intimate partners or family members in a position of authority.

## Harmful Traditional Practices

Type of act	Description/Examples	Can be perpetrated by
Female genital mutilation (FGM)	Cutting of genital organs for non-medical reasons, usually done at a young age; ranges from partial to total cutting, removal of genitals, stitching whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons; often undergone several times during life-time, i.e., after delivery or if a girl/woman has been victim of sexual assault.	Traditional practitioners, supported, condoned, and assisted by families, religious groups, entire communities and some States.
Early marriage	Arranged marriage under the age of legal consent (sexual intercourse in such relationships constitutes statutory rape, as the girls are not legally competent to agree to such unions).	Parents, community and State.
Forced marriage	Arranged marriage against the victim's/survivor's wishes; often a dowry is paid to the family; when refused, there are violent and/or abusive consequences.	Parent, family members.
Honour killing and maiming	Maiming or murdering a woman or girl as punishment for acts considered inappropriate for her gender that are believed to bring shame on the family or community (e.g., pouring acid on a young woman's face as punishment for bringing shame to the family for attempting to marry someone not chosen by the family), or to preserve the honour of the family (i.e., as a redemption for an offence committed by a male member of the family).	Parent, husband, other family members or members of the community.
Infanticide and/or neglect	Killing, withholding food, and/or neglecting female children because they are considered to be of less value in a society than male children.	Parent, other family members.
Denial of education for girls or women	Removing girls from school, prohibiting or obstructing access of girls and women to basic, technical, professional or scientific knowledge.	Parents, other family members, community, some States.

## Socio-Economic Violence

Type of act	Description/Examples	Can be perpetrated by
Discrimination and/or denial of opportunities, services	Exclusion, denial of access to education, health assistance or remunerated employment; denial of property rights.	Family members, society, institutions and organisations, government actors.
Social exclusion/ostracism based on sexual orientation	Denial of access to services, social benefits or exercise and enjoyment of civil, social, economic, cultural and political rights, imposition of criminal penalties, discriminatory practices or physical and psychological harm and tolerance of discriminatory practices, public or private hostility to homosexuals, transsexuals or transvestites.	Family members, society, institutions and organisations, government actors.
Obstructive legislative practice	Denial of access to exercise and enjoy civil, social, economic, cultural and political rights, mainly to women.	Family, community, institutions and State.

## When and Where does Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Occur?

Sexual and gender-based violence can occur anywhere, at any time. It is used as a weapon of war; it is perpetrated in the supposed safety of one's home. Just as the laws and structures that govern a society influence the behaviour of individuals, so, too, can individual attitudes influence the way families, communities and societies respond to certain types of behaviour. The following diagram represents the clear linkages between the individual and the society.



At the *individual* level, the degree of knowledge, personal security, access to and control of resources, services and social benefits, personal history and attitudes towards gender can influence whether a person will become a victim/survivor or a perpetrator of violence.

The second level, *relationship*, represents the immediate context in which abuse can occur: between individuals, even within families. At this level, existing power inequalities among individuals begin to reinforce subordinate/privileged positions.

The *community* level represents the dynamics between and among people that are influenced by socialisation within such local structures as schools, health care institutions, peer groups and work relationships. For refugees, this structure is found in the refugee camp or setting, where the availability of and access to social services and the very layout of the camp can have a direct impact on whether or not incidents of sexual and gender-based violence occur.

*Society* includes the cultural and social norms about gender roles, attitudes towards children, women and men, the legal and political frameworks that govern behaviour, and the attitude towards using violence as means of resolving conflicts.

It is clear to see that changes in behaviour and attitudes in any one of the areas can have an impact on all of them. Interventions to prevent or respond to sexual and gender-based violence should thus target all levels.

**Sexual and gender-based violence occurs in all classes, cultures, religions, races, gender and ages.**

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence During the Refugee Cycle

During armed conflict, social structures are disrupted. Women and children face the additional risks of being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence when fleeing the fighting and seeking asylum. Family members are often dispersed during flight, leaving children separated from the rest of their families and women as solely responsible for protecting and maintaining their households. The following chart, adapted from a table developed by S. Purdin, describes the types of violence that can occur during the various phases of the refugee cycle.

Phase	Type of Violence
<b>During conflict, Prior to flight</b>	Abuse by persons in power; sexual bartering of women; sexual assault, rape, abduction by armed members of parties in conflict, including security forces; mass rape and forced pregnancies.
<b>During flight</b>	Sexual attack by bandits, border guards, pirates; capture for trafficking by smugglers, slave traders.
<b>In the country of asylum</b>	Sexual attack, coercion, extortion by persons in authority; sexual abuse of separated children in foster care; domestic violence; sexual assault when in transit facilities, collecting wood, water, etc.; sex for survival/forced prostitution; sexual exploitation of persons seeking legal status in asylum country or access to assistance and resources, resumption of harmful traditional practices.
<b>During repatriation</b>	Sexual abuse of women and children who have been separated from their families; sexual abuse by persons in power; sexual attacks, rape by bandits, border guards, forced/coerced repatriation.
<b>During reintegration</b>	Sexual abuse against returnees as a form of retribution; sexual extortion in order to regularise legal status, exclusion from decision-making processes; denial of or obstructed access to resources, right to individual documentation and right to recover/own property.

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence During the Life Cycle

The following table, developed by L. Heise, describes the forms of violence to which women can be subjected to during the different stages of their lives.

Phase	Type of Violence Present
<b>Pre-birth</b>	Sex-selective abortion; battering during pregnancy; coerced pregnancy.
<b>Infancy</b>	Female infanticide; emotional and physical abuse; differential access to food and medical care.
<b>Girlhood</b>	Child marriage; genital mutilation; sexual abuse by family members and strangers; differential access to food, medical care and education.
<b>Adolescence</b>	Violence during courtship; economically coerced sex (e.g. for school fees); sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; arranged marriage; trafficking.
<b>Reproductive age</b>	Physical, psychological and sexual abuse by intimate male partners and relatives; forced pregnancies by partner; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape; abuse of widows, including property grabbing and sexual cleansing practices.
<b>Elderly</b>	Abuse of widows, including property grabbing; accusations of witchcraft; physical and psychological violence by younger family members; differential access to food and medical care.

# Causes and Consequences of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

To plan appropriate programmes to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, it is important to analyse the causes and consequences of such violence in each setting. Understanding the causes will help you to develop effective actions to prevent the violence; understanding the consequences allows you to develop appropriate response packages for victims/survivors.

**CAUSES -> Prevention activities**  
**CONSEQUENCES -> Response activities**

## Causes of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The root causes of sexual and gender-based violence lie in a society's attitudes towards and practices of gender discrimination, which place women in a subordinate position in relation to men. The lack of social and economic value for women and women's work and accepted gender roles perpetuate and reinforce the assumption that men have decision-making power and control over women. Through acts of sexual and gender-based violence, whether individual or collective, perpetrators seek to maintain privileges, power and control over others.

Gender roles and identities are determined by sex, age, socio-economic conditions, ethnicity, nationality and religion. Relationships between male and female, female and female, and male and male individuals are also marked by different levels of authority and power that maintain privileges and subordination among the members of a society. The disregard for or lack of awareness about human rights, gender equity, democracy and non-violent means of resolving problems help perpetuate these inequalities.

## Contributing Risk Factors

While gender inequality and discrimination are the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence, various other factors determine the type and extent of violence in each setting. It is important to understand these factors in order to design effective strategies to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.

**Equal access to and control of material resources and assistance benefits and women's equal participation in decision-making processes should be reflected in all programmes, whether explicitly targeting sexual and gender-based violence or responding to the emergency, recovery or development needs of the population.**

The following chart describes some causes or risk factors that can increase the risks of becoming a victim/survivor or perpetrator of sexual and gender-based violence:

## Causes or Risk Factors for SGBV

Individual risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loss of security</li> <li>● Dependence</li> <li>● Physical and mental disabilities</li> <li>● Lack of alternatives to cope with changes in socio-economic status</li> <li>● Alcohol, drug use/abuse</li> <li>● Psychological trauma and stress of conflict, flight, displacement</li> <li>● Disrupted roles within family and community</li> <li>● Ignorance/lack of knowledge of individual rights enshrined under national and international law</li> </ul>
Social norms and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discriminatory cultural and traditional beliefs and practices</li> <li>● Religious beliefs</li> </ul>
Legal framework and practices in host country and/or country of origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discrimination and condone sexual and gender-based violence</li> <li>● Lack of legal protection for women's and children's rights</li> <li>● Lack of laws against sexual and gender-based violence</li> <li>● Lack of trust in the law enforcement authorities</li> <li>● Application of customary and traditional laws and practices that enforce gender discrimination</li> <li>● General insensitivity and lack of advocacy campaigns condemning and denouncing sexual and gender-based violence</li> <li>● Discriminatory practice in justice administration and law enforcement</li> <li>● Under-reporting of incidents and lack of confidence in the administration of justice</li> <li>● Lack of willingness to effectively prosecute all cases reported to authorities</li> <li>● Low number of prosecutions obtained in proportion to the number of cases reported</li> <li>● Police and courts inaccessible because of remote location of camp</li> <li>● Absence of female law enforcement officers</li> <li>● Lack of administrative resources and equipment by local courts and security officials</li> <li>● Laws or practices in the administration of justice that support gender</li> </ul>
War and armed conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Breakdown of social structures</li> <li>● Exertion of political power and control over other communities</li> <li>● Ethnic differences</li> <li>● Socio-economic discrimination</li> </ul>
Refugee, returnee and internally displaced situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collapse of social and family support structures</li> <li>● Geographical location and local environment (high crime area)</li> <li>● Design and social structure of camp (overcrowded, multi-household dwellings, communal shelter)</li> <li>● Design of services and facilities</li> <li>● Predominantly male camp leadership; gender-biased decisions</li> <li>● Unavailability of food, fuel, income generation, leading to movement in isolated areas</li> <li>● Lack of police protection</li> <li>● Lack of UNHCR/NGO presence in camp</li> <li>● Lack of security patrols</li> <li>● Lack of individual registration and identity cards</li> <li>● Hostility of local population (refugees are considered materially privileged)</li> </ul>

## Consequences of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence are at high risk of severe health and psycho-social problems, sometimes death, even in the absence of physical assault. The potential for debilitating long-term effects of emotional and physical trauma should never be underestimated.

Understanding the potential consequences of sexual and gender-based violence will help actors to develop appropriate strategies to respond to these after effects and prevent further harm.

A sectoral breakdown is used in the following summary of consequences.

### Health

There are serious and potentially life threatening health outcomes with all types of sexual and gender-based violence.

Fatal Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homicide</li> <li>• Suicide</li> <li>• Maternal mortality</li> <li>• Infant mortality</li> <li>• AIDS-related mortality</li> </ul>

Non-Fatal Outcomes		
Acute Physical	Chronic Physical	Reproductive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injury</li> <li>• Shock</li> <li>• Disease</li> <li>• Infection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Somatic complaints</li> <li>• Chronic infections</li> <li>• Chronic pain</li> <li>• Gastrointestinal problems</li> <li>• Eating disorders</li> <li>• Sleep disorders</li> <li>• Alcohol/drug abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miscarriage</li> <li>• Unwanted pregnancy</li> <li>• Unsafe abortion</li> <li>• STIs, including HIV/AIDS</li> <li>• Menstrual disorders</li> <li>• Pregnancy complications</li> <li>• Gynaecological disorders</li> <li>• Sexual disorders</li> </ul>

## Psycho-Social

Emotional & Psychological Consequences	Social Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post traumatic stress</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anxiety, fear</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Shame, insecurity, self-hate, self-blame</li> <li>• Mental illness</li> <li>• Suicidal thoughts, behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaming the victim/survivor</li> <li>• Loss of role/functions in society (e.g. earn income, child care)</li> <li>• Social stigma</li> <li>• Social rejection and isolation</li> <li>• Feminisation of poverty</li> <li>• Increased gender inequalities</li> </ul>

- Most societies tend to blame the victim/survivor. This social rejection results in further emotional damage, including shame, self-hate and depression.
- As a result of the fear of social stigma, most victims/survivors never report the incident. Indeed, most incidents of sexual and gender-based violence go unreported.

## Legal/Justice

- If national laws do not provide adequate safeguards against sexual and gender-based violence, or if practices in the judicial and law enforcement bodies are discriminatory, this kind of violence can be perpetrated with impunity.
- Community attitudes of blaming the victim/survivor are often reflected in the courts. Many sexual and gender-based crimes are dismissed or guilty perpetrators are given light sentences. In some countries, the punishment meted out to perpetrators constitutes another violation of the victim's/survivor's rights and freedoms, such as in cases of forced marriage to the perpetrator. The emotional damage to victims/survivors is compounded by the implication that the perpetrator is not at fault.

## Safety/Security

- The victim/survivor is insecure, threatened, afraid, unprotected and at risk of further violence.
- When dealing with incidents of trafficking in persons, police and security workers are at risk of retaliation.
- If police and security workers are not sensitive to the victim's/survivor's needs for immediate care, dignity and respect, further harm and trauma may result because of delayed assistance or insensitive behaviour.

## Key Points to Remember

- Sexual and gender-based violence violates human rights. UNHCR and States share the responsibility for ensuring that refugees and other displaced persons are protected. Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence against refugees is thus part of the overall strategy to protect refugees.
- Women and girls make up the vast majority of victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, although boys and men can also be victims/survivors.
- Gender refers to what it means to be a boy or girl, woman or man, in a particular society or culture.
- A comprehensive prevention and response plan should focus on the roles and needs of both women and men and how both can become agents of change.
- Most acts of sexual and gender-based violence are perpetrated by someone known to the survivor.
- Perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence are sometimes the very people upon whom survivors depend to assist and protect them.
- Sexual and gender-based violence occurs in all classes, cultures, religions, races, gender and ages. Interventions to prevent or respond to sexual and gender-based violence should target individuals, close relationships, the community and society, in general.
- Understanding the causes of sexual and gender-based violence will help you to develop effective actions to prevent it; understanding the consequences of sexual and gender-based violence allows you to develop appropriate response packages for victims/survivors.
- Gender inequality and discrimination are the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Equal access to and control of material resources and assistance benefits and women's equal participation in decision-making processes should be reflected in all programmes, whether explicitly targeting sexual and gender-based violence or responding to the emergency, recovery or development needs of the population.
- The potential for debilitating long-term effects of emotional and physical trauma should never be underestimated.

