The Gender Dimensions of Violence in Crisis Settings

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Abstract

UN Security Council Resolution (UN SCR) 1325 calls on the UN, Member States, and parties to conflict to take action at multiple levels to protect women and girls in conflict situations. To date, most efforts have focused on special measures to address gender-based violence and on other targeted actions to bring to light the particular threats women face. There is a growing recognition that men and boys have a role to play in preventing violence against women, and that their needs and perspectives must also be addressed if violent norms and relationships are to be transformed. However, in practice, men and boys' experiences in crisis settings, and approaches to engaging men in violence prevention, are much less well understood. UNDP BCPR initiated a study on the gender dimensions of violence to address this gap. This presentation provides an overview of the insights that a deeper understanding the gender dimensions of violence – particularly men's experiences as perpetrators and victims of violence – can provide for interventions to prevent and transform violent behavior in crisis settings.

Defining the gender dimensions of violence

The Gender Dimensions of Violence (GDV) is a lens for analyzing the causes, impacts and dynamics of violence in crisis settings from a gender perspective. It seeks to understand the differences in men and women's experiences and needs as victims and perpetrators of violence in crisis settings, and to examine how gender identity influences violent norms and behavior.

Men and women as victims of violence

Conflict and non-conflict related violence affects men, women, girls and boys in different ways. The vast majority of victims of violent deaths and injuries involving firearms are men and boys. In countries with high overall homicide rates, such as South Africa, Jamaica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Colombia, men represent between 87-93% of the victims. This concentration of deaths among young men is greater in settings characterized by high levels of violence,[7] which may reflect young men's involvement in violent or criminal activities.

Women, on the other hand, are more likely to die from violence committed in the private sphere. The WHO estimates that 40-70% of all female homicides are committed by an intimate partner. Women are victims of some forms of violence because of their gender or sex, including rape, murder, sexual abuse, infanticide, trafficking, and honor killings. In conflict settings, violence against women can become a political instrument and often escalates in the climate of impunity. The data collected on violence against women is still too limited and unsystematic to give a full understanding of how women's victimization changes in crisis contexts.

Men and women as perpetrators of violence

Gender also influences men and women's roles as perpetrators of violence. The vast majority of violent acts are committed by men, principally aged between 15 and 35. Statistically, societies with youth bulges are more prone to armed conflict.[8] The proportion of young adults is also often correlated with homicide rates. Young, unmarried men are most vulnerable to recruitment into armed forces and groups, gangs and other violent activities. Despite this, even in crisis settings where youth are exposed to pervasive violence, most do not get directly involved as perpetrators.

Women also play a role as perpetrators. Some are trained as combatants or join gangs. However, more often, they provide material support, such as cooking, carrying and concealing weapons and supplies, and providing safe havens. Women enable violence by supporting the ideologies and norms that legitimize

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[7] In countries with low overall homicide rates, such as Canada and Netherlands, the proportion of men is lower 54-73%. GBAV 2008, p 81

[8] Over 80 per cent of all armed civil conflicts since the 1970s began in countries where more than 60 per cent of the population was younger than 30. Geneva Declaration Secretariat, GBAV, 2008, p 60

violence and calling for revenge and vindication At the same time, they use their influence to persuade their partners and sons not to fight, to mediate disputes, and to mitigate violence.

Men's identities in crisis

Masculine identity plays an important role in influencing violent behavior. Crisis settings can be profoundly disempowering for men, stripping them of their identities and their ability to live up to traditional masculine norms. Men's identities as providers and protectors, and their ability to achieve prestige through social responsibility, are often challenged as economic opportunities decline, livelihoods are destroyed, and insecurity increases.

For some, this frustration and disempowerment leads to self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse or suicide. Others attempt to reassert their dominance, often in the domestic sphere, leading to violence against women. Men's vulnerability to recruitment into gangs, militant ideological or religious groups, or other violent groups can increase, as these groups play on men's crisis of identity, offering income, prestige, protection, access to women, and also importantly, a sense of belonging. A violent masculine ideal can come to dominate, which increases the importance of men's identities as warriors, and legitimizes violence as a means to achieve manhood.

Men's vulnerability and resilience to violence

Despite the challenges they face in crisis, the vast majority of young men choose to reject violence and membership in perpetrator groups. The motivations of the minority of perpetrators is often the focus. But, the factors enabling the majority to withstand pressures to engage in violence are equally important to developing responses. While the contexts and actors vary, the following are some common factors that shape young men's vulnerability and resilience to involvement in violence.

Key factors in individual vulnerability and resilience to violence	
Vulnerability	Resilience
- Early exposure to violence - Physical insecurity and lack of protection - Thwarted expectations - Lack of positive male role models - Unemployment and insecure livelihoods - Illiteracy and lack of practical skills - Poor physical and mental health	- Positive family relationships and childhood experiences - Support from community members - Positive peer groups and social activities - Adult attention, guidance and mentorship - Purposeful employment and opportunities for advancement - Self-esteem, identity and purpose - Desire to overcome physical insecurity

Reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience at the community level

Action is needed at multiple levels to address vulnerability to violence and strengthen resilience. At an individual level, both rehabilitative and punitive measures are needed to address the core group of perpetrators and 'at risk' individuals. At the same time, preventative and transformative action at the community level is critical to reduce community vulnerabilities to violence, empower those who promote resilience, and deter enablers of violence or potential recruits. The following are some examples of entry points for integrated, multi-sectoral programming at the local level.

Examples of entry points for integrated, community-level programming	
Governance	Promoting inclusion and citizenship of men, women, boys and girls
Security and justice	- Developing capacity to address SGBV, including engaging men to change attitudes - Improving trust between police and public, particularly women and youth - Access to justice, including juvenile justice

Livelihoods	• Developing skills and opportunities for purposeful employment
	• Reintegration of former combatants and violent offenders
Community environment	• Safe schools for boys and girls and safe spaces for social activities
	• Developing youth community/environmental corps
Public health	• Parenting skills and early prevention
	• Psycho-social support for ex-combatants and violence affected communities
	• Counselling and life skills for 'at risk' youth
SALW control	• Changing attitudes towards masculinity and gun ownership, and providing alternative symbols of manhood
Peacebuilding	• Promoting youth leadership in peace-building

Recommendations

Efforts to prevent violence against women, to ensure women's protection, and to promote gender equity must engage men in order to succeed. Including men in gender work is not about transferring benefits from women to men. Rather, it is about making all interventions more meaningful for men, women, boys and girls, and about engaging men in efforts to promote gender equity.

1. **Gender mainstreaming should not only integrate women and girls' specific needs, but also the particular needs of men and boys.** Both men and women's perspectives should be considered at each phase of the programming cycle: from assessment, to programme design and implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. More systematic collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data relating to patterns of violence and victimization is necessary to develop gender-sensitive responses.

2. **Strengthen strategic partnerships with men to prevent violence and promote women's security.** Understanding men's attitudes and identities, and engaging with men as partners, is necessary to transform the norms and relationships that encourage violent behavior. There are a number of successful initiatives and examples of good practice that can be built upon and strengthened.

3. **Increase the human and financial resources dedicated to fully integrating gender in programming to prevent violence and to promote security.** While advisors with a gender focus are important, technical experts from many sectors and disciplines need to have gender expertise to develop integrated, gender-sensitive responses to violence. Additional resources are needed to ensure that both men and women's particular needs are addressed in violence prevention programming, and to enable deeper engagement with men. Limited resources should not be drawn away from targeted initiatives to address the disadvantages faced by women.

4. **Ensure interventions to rehabilitate perpetrators and prevent violence among at risk groups are sensitive to gender and socio-cultural factors that influence violent norms and behavior.** Often the focus of efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants or develop alternatives for at risk youth is on employment, livelihoods and strictly economic alternatives. These initiatives provide an entry point to address the social issues, such as the desire for respectful employment, the development of life skills, and self-esteem, which are critical to successful outcomes.