

Who are Community Health Advocates?

Community Health Advocates (CHAs) are people that undertake community and district-level advocacy for health and human rights in their respective communities. They help mobilize individuals, families and the community and guide them through the health care system - with free information, advice.

They advocate and engage duty bearers at the grassroots and local government levels on their communities' emerging health issues , including violations of health rights.

Introduction

This information sheet has been prepared to guide Community Health Advocates, grassroots paralegals and community-based groups and organizations during community awareness sessions on the topic of **Gender Based Violence**. It is part of a broader campaign by CEHURD and partners to mobilize, engage and work with communities and community-level actors to demand a human rights-based approach to health care delivery and programming in Uganda. It covers meaning, forms and effects of gender based violence (GBV), including myths and realities; women's rights; and redress mechanisms for gender based violence.

MEANING OF GENDER AND SEX

- **Gender** refers to society's understanding or perceptions of the differences between men and women in terms of their characteristics and roles in society. Gender refers to role society expects women to perform as opposed to those which men perform.
- **Sex** refers to the natural differences between women and men. Sex is a biological description. The social definitions of what it means to be female or male vary among cultures and change over time, while that of sex remains the same wherever you go, all the time.
- **Gender equity** means fairness and justice in the distribution of resources (property, assets, jobs, etc.) and responsibilities between women and men according to their needs. It recognizes that women and men have different needs.
- **Gender equality** calls for women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, opportunities, resources, and the benefits of development. It includes the following:
 - ▶ Same opportunities to access and control resources for men and women, girls and boys.
 - ▶ Same opportunity to access education, health services, and politics for men and women, girls and boys.

MEANING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Gender-based violence is violence involving men and women, in which the female is usually the victim; and which is derived from unequal power relationships between men and women.
- Violence is directed specifically against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women more.
- Unequal power relationships between women and men in form of women's submission to men, make women greatly vulnerable to violence

MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Myths and false beliefs	Reality and appropriate response
<p>GBV only happens to poor and marginalized women.</p>	<p>GBV happens among people of all socio-economic, educational, and racial profiles</p>
<p>Men cannot control themselves. Violence is simply part of their nature.</p>	<p>Male violence is not genetically based. It is perpetuated by traditions and norms that encourage men to be aggressive</p>
<p>Most women are abused by strangers. Women are safe when they are home.</p>	<p>Most women who experience GBV are abused by people they know; often the offenders are people they trust and love</p>
<p>Women who disobey their husbands deserve to be beaten. Women who are raped “ask for it” because of the way they dress or act.</p>	<p>Blaming the victim can cause great harm to them and reflects a failure to acknowledge gender-based violence as a violation of human rights. There is no excuse for violence.</p>
<p>Violence stops when a woman becomes pregnant.</p>	<p>One in every four women is physically abused during pregnancy.</p>

Myths and false beliefs	Reality and appropriate response
If a woman tries to please a man, he will love her more and will not beat her.	Relationships should be based on mutual respect, not on submission of the wife to the husband.
A wife must give her husband sex every time he wants it.	Women have a right to say “no” if they don’t want to have sex with their husband.
GBV occurs because a couple does not know how to communicate with each other.	Violence is not the result of poor communication. Poor communication is the result of violence.
We should teach women to chose the right moment and appropriate manner to address her husband so that he does not beat her.	Blaming the woman for her poor communication make hers responsible for the violence. GBV is the responsibility of the offense
Certain acts by women such as infidelity, warrant the use of violence.	If a man finds his wife’s behavior bad, he has the right to end the relationship but not to beat her.
All couples have conflicts, and they should not separate for that reason.	Conflicts in marriages often they require external help to resolve them. Violence is not a conflict; it is a way of expressing conflict.

FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- **Physical violence:** This includes scratching, pushing, throwing, grabbing, biting, strangling, shaking, hair-pulling, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, use of a weapon (gun, knife, etc.), and use of one's strength and physical force against another person. Physical violence may harm, injure or endanger the health, safety, life or well-being (mentally or physically) of the victim.
- **Emotional/psychological violence:** This includes deliberate acts that shame or demean a person; control what the person can and cannot do; withhold information from the person; get annoyed if the person does not agree; deliberately do something to make the person feel diminished (e.g. less smart, less attractive); isolate the person from friends and family; prohibit access to a telephone; threaten loss of custody of children; and smash objects or destroy property.
- **Economic violence:** This includes deliberate acts that stop women from working; deny them property ownership; deprive them of money and assets; grab their valuables (e.g. domestic animals or harvests).

- **Harmful traditional practices:** This includes some of the norms attributed to religion, e.g. polygamy and denying women access to family planning information and services; acts attributed to culture, e.g. female genital mutilation, forced child marriage, bride price; and acts attributed to social morals, e.g. unreasonable submission of women to men, silence about violence.

- **Sexual violence:** This includes:
 - ▶ Use of physical force to force a person into a sexual act against his or her will.

 - ▶ An attempted or completed sex act involving a person who is unable to understand the nature or condition of the act, to decline participation or to communicate unwillingness to engage in the sexual act (because of e.g. young age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or due to intimidation or pressure).

 - ▶ Abusive sexual contact, including intentionally touching directly or through the clothing, of the private parts, breasts, buttocks of any person against his or her will, or of any person who is unable to give informed consent.

- ▶ The use of words, gestures or weapons to threaten to cause harm or to compel a person to engage in sex acts against their will or when they are unable to give informed consent.

- **Threats of violence:** Threatening to do any of the above to a person because of their gender – even if that threat is not carried out – also amounts to violence.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Physical	Emotional	Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wife beating • Assault and other physical violence • Harmful traditional practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal abuse • Humiliation • Discrimination • Denial of services • Wife confinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial of rights to own property • Dispossession of harvests, domestic animals, etc.
<p>Harmful traditional practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early/forced marriage • Honor killings • Female genital mutilation • Dowry abuse • Widow inheritance • Punishments directed at women for crimes against culture • Denial of education to girls due to gender role expectations 		

CAUSES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Societal level	Community level	Relationship level	Individual level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms that give men economic and decision-making power in the household • Social norms that justify violence against women • Women's lack of legal rights (e.g. access to divorce) • Lack of criminal sanctions against perpetrators of GBV (impunity) • High levels of crime • Armed conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak community sanctions against GBV • Lack of shelters or other forms of assistance/ sanctuary • Poverty • Use of violence to settle disputes • Social norms that restrict women's public visibility • The safety of public Spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marital conflict • Family dysfunction • Male dominance in the family • Economic stress • Early age at marriage • Large number of children • Friction over women's empowerment • Family honor taking priority over the health and safety of the victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A history of violence in the perpetrator's • Male alcohol and drug use • Male personality disorders • Young age and immaturity

IMPACT OF GBV ON THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

- More than three in every five young women in Uganda have encountered at least one experience of GBV. One in three report to have ever experienced forced sex.

Forced sex exposes adolescent girls and young women to unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and dropping out of school and other negative consequences.
- Sexual violence exposes women, especially adolescent girls and young women to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Women who have experienced violence are more likely to be infected with HIV than those who have not.
- Emotional and psychological violence causes emotional stress and torture – and suicidal tendencies in women.
- Physical violence has the potential to cause death, disability, injury, or harm.
- GBV denies women and girls basic human rights, good health, dignity and wellbeing

Summary of the health effects of gender-based violence

Non-fatal outcomes			
Fatal Outcomes	Physical	Sexual and reproductive	Psychological and behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death/murder • Suicide • AIDS-related death • Death of mothers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical injury • Chronic pain • Muscle and born pains • Permanent disability • Disorders and complications in the stomach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV • Unwanted pregnancy • Pregnancy complications • Fistula (leaking of urine and feaces) • Unsafe abortion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression and anxiety • Eating and sleep disorders • Drug and alcohol abuse • Poor self-esteem • Post-traumatic stress disorder • Self harm

- Women who have experienced intimate partner violence and/or sexual abuse are more likely to use family planning in secrecy.
- GBV during pregnancy poses direct risks to mother and child through physical trauma and increased chronic illnesses, and indirect risks, including depression, alcohol abuse, anemia (lack of blood), bleeding, and poor maternal weight gain. Women who have experienced physical intimate partner violence are more likely to have complications during delivery.
- Violence increases babies' risk of being born underweight; having sleeping problems; being harder to comfort; having difficulties learning to walk, talk, and learn well, etc.

REDRESS MECHANISMS AND STRUCTURES FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- The formal structures for handling cases of GBV are local councils, police and the courts of law.
- The **district probation office**, charged with child protection, also plays a role in realizing justice for minors who suffer GBV.
- At the subcounty level, the mandate of child protection is under the office of the **Community Development Officer**.
- **LC I Courts:** These can handle simple cases, e.g. assault (beating), debts, damage to property, trespass, land disputes, marriage disputes, inheritance, etc.
- The affected person can appeal the decision of the LC I Court to the LC II (parish), subcounty courts and **magistrates' courts**.
- **Police:** Criminal cases are reported to police, where minor cases are handled by the Child and Family Protection Unit, while serious cases are handled by CID. Police refers victims of sexual violence to the Police Surgeon or Health Centers for medical examination and attention

- After investigations, police cases are referred either to the **Probation and Welfare Office** or to the **Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)/ State Attorney** for sanctioning before the case proceeds to court.
- **Courts of law:** Minor cases are tried by magistrates' courts (Grade II, Grade I and Chief Magistrates) while capital cases like murder, rape and defilement are tried by the High Court.
- **Probation and Welfare Officer/Community Development Officer:** The district Probation and Welfare Office is responsible for child protection within the district. It handles cases of child neglect, abuse and defilement, among others. They follow up with concerned parties and tries to ensure the child's rights are protected in cases of domestic disagreements, separation and violence.
- **Health Unit Management Committees (HUMCs):** HUMCs link the health facility to the community, and have the mandate to handle complaints from patients about health workers.

HOW CAN HEALTH PROFESSIONALS RESPOND TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

- Health workers should have a positive, sympathetic attitude towards women experiencing violence, and avoid the belief that they may have provoked the violence, or that women who continue to stay in violent relationships have only themselves to blame.
- Health workers should be responsive and ethical in attending to victims of violence, rather than be inhibited by a fear of legal liability, as for example when dealing with cases of sexual assault, rape and serious physical injury.
- Integrate violence issues into health care services, especially sexual and reproductive health services and provide support to victims, including through counselling and psychological support.
- Encourage coordination with other sectors, actors and stakeholders, e.g. justice and social welfare sectors and non-government organizations through coordination and referrals.
- Respect the human rights of victims of violence, including their rights to medical care and confidentiality.

