



Terminology 101

The SVRI Forum recognises the power of words. Language can directly and indirectly include, exclude, or ignore people. We encourage attendees to be thoughtful and intentional with their language. This document discusses and provides some terms that might be used throughout the SVRI Forum 2022, with some of the ways that people currently use them.

There is no settled consensus on the terminology used to discuss violence against women or gender-based and sexual violence more generally. The terms different colleagues use originate from various disciplines and conceptual backgrounds, and they continue to evolve. Definitions of the most used terms vary culturally, and some terms remain sensitive and contentious. The definitions we share here have been informed by a range of sources, but predominantly, come from Violence Against Women Key Terminology – kNOwVAWdata.¹ Where possible, United Nations definitions have been presented. We encourage researchers and activists to be open to and to initiate conversations about these definitions that help everyone as a community stretch our understandings toward greater transparency, accountability, dignity, and inclusion in our work to document, heal from, and end experiences of violence.²

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1. Umbrella Terms

Violence against Children (VAC)

Violence against all persons aged under 18 years. Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. Most violence against children involves at least one of six types of interpersonal violence: maltreatment, bullying, youth violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, emotional or psychological violence. When directed against children because of their

¹ Dr Henrica A.F.M. (Henriette) Jansen, *Measuring Prevalence of Violence Against Women: Key Terminology*, (UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, August 2016).

² From Generation Five, *Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse and Other Forms of Intimate and Community Violence* (June 2007, page 38): "The process of naming can open a conversation about defining what child sexual abuse is to that community. In opening this conversation, it is important for the Collective to balance cultural and community relevance with clear lines about which behaviours are abusive and not acceptable. This is not an either/or but finding a process within the cultural context that names and confronts collusion with abusive behaviour. Creating a collective definition of child sexual abuse can itself be a transformative process. Coming together to collectively define child sexual abuse creates the opportunity to challenge and transform harmful norms. This is because defining child sexual abuse requires an exploration of shared understandings of sexuality, abuse, age of consent, and notions of childhood. These conversations are not only important in setting community standards but also in shifting conditions that allow for child sexual abuse towards those that promote safety and empowerment for children and youth. ...At the same time, the Collective must recognize that processes of jointly defining child sexual abuse take place in the confusing context of widespread denial and panic about child sexual abuse."



perceived sex and/or gender identity, any of these types of violence can also constitute gender-based violence.³

Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women (VAW) is defined by the United Nations as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.’ This includes violence against cisgender and transgender women. This term should not be used to describe violence against transgender or nonbinary people assigned a female sex at birth who do not currently identify as women.

It encompasses, but is not limited to:

- physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital or partner rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women;
- intimate partner violence and violence related to exploitation;
- 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 and forced/coerced sex; and
- physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) as defined by UNHCR is: “Gender-Based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.”⁴

The term GBV acknowledges the importance of the social constructions of gender and gender roles, including sexism, misogyny, and male supremacy. Gender-based violence is often understood to be driven by socially (and sometimes legally) codified gender roles and rules about what is and isn’t acceptable behaviour. The term GBV acknowledges that violence may be used to perform and reinforce gender-related social norms in a given context and sanction or victimize people who deviate from them. Such gender norms typically overlap with and reinforce homophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, cissexism, and other social ideas rooted compulsory heterosexuality and the idea of unchanging binary genders. Thus “GBV” as a term extends more easily to explicitly include not just violence against

³ World Health Organization, *INSPIRE Handbook Action for Implementing the Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*, (Geneva: WHO, 2018).

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/gender-based-violence.html#:~:text=Gender%2DBased%20violence%20refers%20to,threatening%20health%20and%20protection%20issue>



cisgender⁵ women and girls, but also violence against transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid and gender non-conforming adults and youth.

VAW, VAWG or GBV?

While the terms 'gender-based violence' and 'violence against women' and 'violence against women and girls' are frequently used interchangeably in literature and by advocates, the term 'gender-based violence' highlights the gender dimension, in other words, the relationship between (1) subordinate status (of women, queer/trans people, and others who do not occupy the dominant identity of cisgender heterosexual males) in society and (2) increased vulnerability to violence because of unequal power relations and gender roles. The use of the term 'gender-based violence' provides a context to examine and understand the phenomenon of violence against women and other people whose gender identity or expression is persecuted, marginalized, excluded or invisibilized. It shifts the focus from women as victims, to gender and unequal power relationships created and maintained by rigid gender norms that violate (and permit violating) safety, dignity, and identity for people on the basis of their gender identity or expression as female, nonbinary, and/or gender non-conforming. This framework also acknowledges that women can be victims of gender-based violence perpetrated by other women to reinforce the patriarchal order, as for example from their own mother or their mother-in-law.

The GBV frame is also often useful for scholars, advocates and activists approaching an intersectional analysis, as gender roles and thus the manifestations and impact of GBV within a given context may differ by race, culture, language, or religious groups and may also differ by level of education, income, and other markers of socioeconomic status. Gender norms and GBV may also impact very differently on people with disabilities.

Some people also use the term GBV to include the idea that men and boys may also be victims of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence perpetrated by other men and/or violence directed at men and boys who are gay, effeminate, or otherwise deviating from idealized masculinities.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence (DV) refers to abusive behaviour (physical, sexual, emotional violence and neglect) that occurs within the private, domestic sphere, generally between individuals in the same household who are related through blood or intimacy. In most contexts, 'intimate partner violence' (IPV) – further explained below - is the main type of domestic violence, but in some societies violence by in-laws can also be a dominant form. The term 'domestic violence' should be used carefully to avoid confusion, since (1) it overlaps with 'intimate partner violence,' VAWG, and GBV and (2) experience of domestic violence is not confined to women. Domestic violence also includes child abuse and elder abuse in the domestic sphere.

⁵ Cisgender refers to people whose current gender identity matches the sex (male, female, or intersex) they were assigned at birth – typically as listed on a birth certificate. "Cis" originates from Latin and means "on the same side". "Transgender" refers to people whose current gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. "Trans" from the Latin means "across".



Legal definitions of domestic violence vary among countries; they often include violence against domestic workers who live in the same household.

Intimate Partner Violence

‘Intimate Partner Violence’ (IPV) is violence against a current or former spouse or other sexual/romantic partner. It includes a range of assaultive and coercive behaviours, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, by a current or former intimate partner. IPV often involves multiple overlapping violent behaviours that occur repeatedly over time. It can occur within heterosexual or same-gender relationships and regardless of whether either or both partners are cisgender or transgender. IPV does not require sexual relations. Garcia-Moreno *et al* define intimate partner violence as “behaviour in an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.”⁶

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence occurs when someone is forced, coerced, and/or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity. It includes rape, attempted rape, and sexual assault; child sexual abuse and incest; intimate partner sexual assault; any unwanted sexual contact or touch; sexual harassment; sexual exploitation; showing one’s genitals or naked body or masturbating in front of another person without consent; watching someone in a private act without their knowledge or permission⁷. Sexual violence can be perpetrated by anyone regardless of their relationship to the victim, and in any setting, including at home, at work and in public space. While sexual violence most often occurs along or reinforces gendered power dynamics and/or other social hierarchies, the term “sexual violence” includes all acts above regardless of the perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics of either the victim or the perpetrator.

The term “sexual abuse” is commonly used when talking about the sexual assault of children and youth, although it may also be used in the context of describing acts of intimate partner violence. ‘Sexual assault is an umbrella term that includes a wide range of victimizations which may or may not involve force or be illegal.’⁸ The terms “sexual violence,” “sexual assault,” and “sexual abuse” are sometimes used interchangeably, though it may be more common to hear one term versus another in certain circumstances.

⁶ Garcia Moreno C, Jansen HAFM, Ellsberg M, Heise L and Watts C, *WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses*, (Geneva: WHO, 2005).

⁷ Adapted from the US National Sexual Violence Resource Center

⁸ Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, a US-based program with over 40 years of experience supporting survivors and promoting policy and action for prevention.

2. Types of Gender-Based Violence

Physical Violence

‘Physical violence’ refers to the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, injury, or harm.

Sexual Violence/Abuse

Sexual violence refers to any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act, or unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, that are directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion by anyone, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including at home and at work.

Psychological Violence/Abuse

‘Psychological violence’ (often also referred to as ‘emotional violence’) refers to any act or omission that damages the self-esteem, identity, or development of the individual. It includes, but is not limited to, humiliation, threatening loss of custody of children, forced isolation from family or friends, threatening to harm the individual or someone they care about, repeated yelling or degradation, inducing fear through intimidating words or gestures, controlling behaviour, and the destruction of possessions.

Economic Violence/Abuse

‘Economic violence’ includes denying a person access to and control over basic resources.⁹ It causes, or attempts to cause, an individual to become financially dependent on another person, by obstructing their access to or control over resources and/or independent economic activity. It includes acts such as the denial of funds, refusal to contribute financially when obligated to do so, denial of food and basic needs, and controlling access to health care or employment.

3. Gender and Sex

Sex

The term ‘sex’ refers to the label of ‘male, female or intersex,’ that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on external anatomy.¹⁰ It can also refer to other biological characteristics, such as internal reproductive organs or sex chromosomes, noting that all such characteristics have a range of variations in humans that are neither clearly ‘male’ nor ‘female’.

Gender Identity

‘Gender identity’ is ‘one’s innermost concept of self as a woman, man, nonbinary person, or other gender identity – it describes how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. A person’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.’¹¹

⁹ United Nations General Assembly, *In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/61/122/Add.1, (New York: United Nations, 2006).

¹⁰ Human Rights Council Glossary of Terms.

¹¹ Human Rights Council Glossary of Terms.



Gender Expression

'Gender expression' refers to the 'external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behaviour, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.'¹²

Gender Roles

Gender roles are learned, changeable over time, and vary widely both within and between cultures. Gender roles are affected by age, class, race, ethnicity, religion, and ideology, and by the geographical, economic, and political environment. Changes in gender roles often occur in response to changing economic, natural, or political circumstances, including development efforts or macro-economic policies, or other forces both national and international. The gender roles of men and women within a given social context may be flexible or rigid, similar or different, and complementary or conflicting.

Gender Norms

These are social expectations that define what is considered appropriate behaviour for women, men and any other recognised gender. The expected roles and behaviours of females and males, and of children as well as adults, are shaped and reinforced by gender norms within society.

Masculinities

This refers to the different notions of what it means to be a man, including ideals about men's characteristics, roles, and identities, which are constructed based on cultural, social, and biological factors and which change over time.

Femininities

This term is less used than masculinities. It refers to the different notions of what it means to be a woman, including ideals about women's characteristics, roles, and identities, which are constructed based on cultural, social, and biological factors and which change over time.

LGBTQI+

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, plus other people with diverse gender and/or sexual identities.

SOGIESC

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and/or Expression and Sex Characteristics.

SOGIESC or LGBTQI+?

LGBTQI+ is the most frequently and widely used acronym and one that many people are comfortable using. LGBTQI+ is rooted in the Global North and makes specific assumptions of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression and does not hold space for specific cultural third-gender groups. SOGIESC is a more inclusive term that recognises sexual orientation and gender identity cannot always

¹² Human Rights Council Glossary of Terms. Available at: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>



be neatly labelled. We suggest you listen for and respect a person or a community's self-identified terminology. Remember, this is not a research topic for theoretical discussion but an identity. LGBTQI+ issues are human rights issues.¹³

Gender Pronouns

All languages uses pronouns such as he/him, she/her, or they/them to refer to people when not using their name. In many languages, the pronouns use change based on the person's gender identity. In the English language, women and girls are usually referred to as she/her while men and boys are usually referred to as he/him. In English, people with nonbinary gender identities may use they/them in their singular meaning or neopronouns such as ze/hir or e/em to describe themselves. You should always refer to someone using the pronoun they ask you to use, just as you would use their name.

¹³ Edge Effect, *42 Degrees Glossary and Lexicon*, (Melbourne: Edge Effect, 2020).