

# From Policy To Practice: Examining The Role Of Gender-Responsive Frameworks In Addressing Gender-Based Violence

**Mr. N. Yathinthar**

*Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education (Deemed to be University) Krishnankoil Mail id: yathinthardon@gmail.com*

**Dr. M. Maria Antony Raj**

*Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Social Work, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education (Deemed to be University) Krishnankoil Mail id: antony.buddha@gmail.com*

## Abstract

The current study examines how gender-sensitive approaches address global issues related to gender-based violence. Based on an extensive analysis of twenty-three pivotal research papers, this study explores the complex dimensions of gender-based violence, identifying various underlying factors contributing to it, as well as different forms such as physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse across multiple contexts including societies, cultures, and institutions. This study underscores the significance of integrating holistic strategies encompassing educational initiatives aimed at prevention, legislative changes for protection, and collaborative social service programs across various sectors, and active participation in local communities. Studies show that although efforts like CEDAW, RESPECT, and UNCRPD have contributed significantly towards reducing violence against women globally, implementation remains difficult due to obstacles faced by vulnerable groups and changes brought about by digital advancements. The document highlights the importance of specific measures aimed at eliminating unfair societal expectations regarding genders, fostering equality, and boosting support for victims as well as those who witness injustices. It is recognized that constraints related to geographical scope, variability in available datasets, and successful execution of policies exist. In conclusion, this evaluation demands steadfast governance, sufficient funding, as well as inclusive approaches aimed at tackling both acts of aggression alongside broader social frameworks contributing to gender discrimination.

## Introduction

Violence is a widespread issue across the world, transcending religious, cultural, and societal norms. Among its various forms, gender-based violence (GBV) affects individuals regardless of their gender identity. Recognizing the critical need to address this issue, the United Nations has designated gender equality as one of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving gender equality is essential for fostering inclusive and equitable societies. Implementing diverse interventions and strategic approaches can play a crucial role in advancing gender equality while simultaneously eradicating gender-based violence, which remains a significant barrier to its realization.

## Gender

The Qualities and characteristics considered for men and women, constructed socially are referred to as gender. Gender encompasses interpersonal relationships, and the norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy. It is a socially constructed concept that varies across cultures and evolves. (1) Gender influences individuals' actions, interactions, self-perception, and perceptions of others, as well as the distribution of power and resources within society. The roles individuals and groups adopt, the societal expectations imposed upon them, and how they engage with others contribute to the complex

social construction of gender. These factors shape the diverse ways in which individuals and groups interpret, experience, and express gender within different social contexts. (4).

### **Gender-Based Violence**

The discussion of gender-based violence, which is defined later, begins with an exploration of the concept of violence against women. According to the Declaration of United Nations Declaration of Violence against Women, the term "violence against women" means 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 in private life. (2) Gender-based violence initially focused primarily on women and girls. However, over time, its definition has evolved to recognize that violence can be perpetrated against individuals of all genders, because of their gender.

The European Institute for gender equality defines Gender-based violence as violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls.(3). There are several types of Gender -Based violence.

### **Categories of Gender-Based Violence**

- Physical Violence
- Sexual Violence
- Emotional and Psychological Violence
- Socio-Economic Violence

#### **Physical Violence**

Any act which causes physical harm as a result of unlawful physical force. Physical violence can take the form of, among others, serious and minor assault, deprivation of liberty, and manslaughter. (3) It is the act of Physical but not sexual. Hitting, slapping, choking, grabbing, shoving, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, knowingly transferred STI, and denial of medical care are the common forms of physical violence.

#### **Sexual Violence**

Any sexual act performed on an individual without their consent. Sexual violence can take the form of rape or sexual assault. (3). Sexual violence includes both completed and attempted sexual acts committed against an individual who is unable to provide consent.

**Rape** is defined as the non-consensual penetration of any part of the body (including the vagina, anus, or mouth). Forced sodomy is also considered as a rape act. It can have severe physical, psychological, and social consequences, including unintended pregnancy, transmission of HIV/AIDS, and other health complications.

**Sexual assault** refers to non-consensual physical contact that does not involve penetration. This includes acts such as unwanted kissing, fondling, inappropriate touching of a person's body, attempted rape, and practices like female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).

**Sexual exploitation** refers to the actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes. This includes deriving monetary, social, or other benefits from the sexual exploitation of another person. Forced prostitution is an example of sexual exploitation.

**Sexual harassment** refers to unwanted and unwelcome sexual comments, advances, or requests for sexual favours that humiliate, threaten, or embarrass an individual. It can

manifest in various forms, including unsolicited touching, sexually explicit remarks, and verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

### **Emotional and Psychological Violence**

It refers to the intentional infliction of mental or emotional distress or harm. This form of violence is non-physical and is intended to instil fear, intimidate, terrorize, humiliate, manipulate, hurt, blame, or psychologically injure an individual.

Verbal abuse and humiliation refer to non-sexual verbal mistreatment that involves insults, degradation, and demeaning language. This form of abuse may include forcing the survivor into humiliating acts in public or private, denying basic financial support for family and survival, and undermining an individual's self-worth and self-esteem.

Isolation and confinement are forms of psychological abuse. These involve restricting a person's freedom, limiting their social interactions, and controlling their movements to exert power and control over them. Such tactics can lead to emotional distress, dependency, and a loss of autonomy.

### **Socio-Economic Violence**

The denial of access to employment, social opportunities, education, exclusion, discrimination, and the refusal of property rights are common forms of socio-economic violence. These acts systematically restrict an individual's ability to achieve financial independence, social mobility, and equal participation in society, thereby reinforcing economic and social inequalities.

Making or attempting to make a survivor financially dependent is a form of economic abuse. This includes controlling financial resources, restricting access to money or employment, and deliberately creating financial instability to limit the survivor's independence and decision-making power.

### **Rational of the study**

According to the World Bank, GBV is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women all over the world.

- 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.
- Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner.
- Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.
- 200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting.(5)
- 55%-95% of the women survivors of violence do not disclose or seek any type of services.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) annual report highlights a concerning rise in crimes against women in India. In 2022 alone, a total of 4,45,256 cases were registered, averaging approximately 51 FIRs per hour. This marks a significant increase compared to 2021 and 2020. The crime rate against women stood at 66.4 per lakh population, while the charge-sheeting rate in such cases was 75.8%, as documented in the NCRB's annual report, *Crime in India 2022*. (6)

Addressing gender-based violence requires comprehensive and effective interventions to eradicate it globally. The report reflects only the recorded cases, highlighting the severity of the issue. However, considering the vast number of unreported incidents, the need for urgent action becomes even more critical. Strengthening legal frameworks, promoting awareness, and ensuring survivor-centric support systems are essential in the fight against gender-based

violence. The study also shows that Violence against women and girls is preventable. To prevent violence, mitigate the risk factors and amplify the protective factors.(18)

## Methods

A systematic literature review was employed as the research methodology to identify various interventions and approaches addressing gender-based violence. Key search terms included "Gender-Based Violence," "Gender-Responsive Policies," "Interventions on Gender-Based Violence," and "Violence Prevention through Gender Education." These terms were used to retrieve and analyse relevant literature to gain insights into effective strategies for combating gender-based violence. Based on the selected 80 papers connected with the keywords, 60 papers were filtered after reviewing their relevance to the topic and findings. From these, 23 papers were finalized based on their availability, accessibility, and connectivity to the systematic literature review.

## Findings Of The Study

Gender-based violence (GBV) impacts individuals across various contexts, necessitating comprehensive care, protection, and justice for survivors. For effective interventions against Gender-Based Violence (GBV), it is important to have a conceptual understanding of the risk factors and protective factors associated with it. These factors can be analysed across four dimensions: individual, interpersonal, community, and societal.

- Individual Level
    - Risk factors: Childhood experiences of violence or exposure to family violence, mental health disorders, and attitudes that condone or justify violence as normal or acceptable.
    - Protective factors: non-exposure to family violence, access to secondary education for both women and men, reduced disparity in education levels between genders, and socialization of both men and women into gender-equitable attitudes.
  - Interpersonal Level
    - Risk factors: High levels of inequality in relationships, male-controlled partnerships, dependency on partners, men's multiple sexual relationships, and men's use of drugs or harmful alcohol consumption.
    - Protective factors: Intimate relationships characterized by gender equality, shared decision-making, and equitable distribution of household responsibilities.
  - Community Level
    - Risk factors: Harmful gender norms that uphold male privilege and restrict women's autonomy, high levels of poverty and unemployment, high rates of violence and crime, and easy availability of drugs, alcohol, and weapons.
    - Protective factors: Community norms that support non-violence, promote gender-equitable relationships, and empower women.
  - Societal Level
    - Risk factors: Discriminatory laws related to property, marriage, divorce, and child custody; low levels of women's education and employment; weak enforcement of laws addressing violence against women; and institutional gender discrimination (e.g., in police, judiciary, or health systems).
    - Protective factors: Laws and policies that promote gender equality, women's access to education and employment, and strong frameworks addressing violence against women.(17)
- Andrew Morrison explores policies aimed at preventing, protecting, and combating GBV. His discussion emphasizes three key dimensions Enhancing access to justice for GBV survivors, providing support to those affected by violence ,implementing preventive measures to reduce

GBV. The first dimension focuses on offering protection to women from ongoing and political aggressions by strengthening laws and policies, mobilizing communities to defend women's rights, and increasing awareness of women's rights to live free from violence. The second dimension emphasizes providing redress for women by strengthening institutional responses to gender-based violence (GBV). This includes improving legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement mechanisms, and ensuring effective support systems for survivors. Improving survivors' access to judicial services requires comprehensive judicial system reforms that address systemic challenges such as corruption, procedural delays, lack of transparency, and the absence of formal judicial infrastructure in both urban and rural areas. Without these structural improvements, justice for survivors remains inaccessible.

### **Role and the Impact of Trainings**

Additionally, human rights training should be provided to key stakeholders, including:

- Prosecutors to ensure fair legal proceedings.
- Social service workers to enhance survivor-centered support.
- Public defenders to advocate for survivors' legal rights.
- Pathologists and forensic workers to strengthen evidence collection and investigative processes.

Such measures would contribute to a more effective, transparent, and survivor-focused judicial response to gender-based violence.

### **Role and the Impact of Survivors support Policies**

The third dimension focuses on increasing the consequences for perpetrators of GBV. This involves implementing stricter legal penalties, promoting accountability, and fostering societal norms that discourage and condemn violence against women (7). Villardón-Gallego, L. emphasizes the importance of providing high-quality, survivor-centered gender-based violence (GBV) response services. These services should comprehensively address key areas, including healthcare, psychological support, shelter, economic assistance, and legal aid, ensuring that survivors receive holistic and effective support. (8) Support for survivors of violence plays a crucial role in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Effective intervention requires the implementation of national plans and policies that include government commissions and legal frameworks dedicated to combating GBV. A study shows that inheritance and asset ownership policies and interventions have demonstrated promising outcomes, with evaluations indicating significant reductions in violence in low- and middle-income countries (18).

Enhancing social services for survivors is essential in a survivor-centered approach. Key support mechanisms include:

- Telephone hotlines for immediate assistance.
- Emergency shelters providing safe spaces.
- Legal assistance to help survivors navigate justice systems.
- Counselling services for emotional and psychological support.
- Child welfare services to protect vulnerable children.
- Psychological care to aid in trauma recovery.
- Support groups to foster community healing and resilience.

Empowerment counselling interventions and psychological support, including advocacy to facilitate access to services, as well as the provision of hotlines, shelters, one-stop crisis centres, and women's police stations, have demonstrated improvements in intermediate outcomes related to violence. (18)

A comprehensive, multi-sectoral response is necessary to ensure that survivors receive the care, protection, and justice they deserve.(7). Various improving policies and laws are there in addressing the gender-based violence. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a result of thirty years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, has led to numerous declarations and conventions aimed at eliminating discrimination against women.(9) Additionally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outlines four fundamental rights essential for the well-being of all children, including girls. These rights include:

1. Right to Survival – Ensuring basic needs such as healthcare and nutrition.
2. Right to Development – Access to education and personal growth opportunities.
3. Right to Protection – Safeguarding children from abuse, exploitation, and harm.
4. Right to Participation – Allowing children to express their views and be involved in decisions affecting them.(10)

### **Role and the Impact of Education and Awareness**

GBV is rooted in the power balance between men and women. The communities with the rigid definitions of gender roles often holds the high rates of GBV. (17). So, the crucial factor is Creating awareness and education is a crucial intervention in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). A key focus should be on shifting societal attitudes toward GBV, as deeply ingrained gender norms and cultural practices often lead to its normalization and acceptance, particularly among women. Younger men and women should be key advocates in fight against gender-based violence.

A global multisectoral approach aims to prevent violent behaviours against girls and women by addressing their underlying causes and strengthening the response mechanisms. Evidence shows that such an approach can effectively reduce the vulnerability of girls and women.(16). It also highlights that successful prevention of violence against women (VAW) requires strong political commitment and leadership, the implementation of laws and policies that promote gender equality, investment in women's organizations, and the allocation of adequate resources for prevention. Furthermore, it is essential to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women. Leela Visaria, in her study, highlights that 75% of women cited protecting their husband's and family's honour as the primary reason for remaining silent about violence. This underscores the need for targeted awareness campaigns, community engagement, and education programs to challenge harmful norms and empower individuals-especially women-to recognize and reject GBV. (11) Research also shows that increase in risk of experiencing IPV due to factors such as low education ,exposure to violence in childhood, unequal power in intimate relationships, attitudes and norms accepting the violence and gender inequality (18).

Reinforcing damaging gender and sexuality stereotypes continues to sustain gender-based violence (GBV) and societal inequalities. Therefore, educating individuals on the fundamentals of gender, prevailing gender norms, and stereotypes is essential to challenging these biases. A key focus should be on educating younger generations, enabling them to critically question gender norms and expectations that contribute to discrimination and violence. Community-based education plays a vital role in shifting societal attitudes toward GBV by fostering awareness and encouraging open discussions.

Engaging men in such activities is not such an easy task. A study shows that half and three quarters of men who ever first rape as teenagers. It also shows that after marriage or dating some men use physical, emotional, financial, or sexual violence against a wife or girlfriend and violence often persists throughout the relationship. Here, it is important to understand that

men are not only the perpetrators but also the victims of such violence. It also shows that boys who are exposed to abuse in early childhood become prone to aggression, impulsivity, lack of empathy and remorse, and are more likely to perpetrate violence(15).

Additionally, empowering individuals to speak up against inequalities, promoting gender equality in daily practices, and building self-esteem and autonomy in girls are essential steps toward lasting change. Schools and educational institutions must also play an active role by integrating gender-sensitive curricula and providing training for teachers on comprehensive sex and relationship education. Strengthening these educational interventions can contribute to dismantling harmful stereotypes and fostering a culture of equality and respect. Involving men in interventions includes multiple approaches such as targeting men and boys through workshop-based interventions directed at individuals, programs for men in relationships, bystander interventions, school- and dating-based interventions, perpetrator programs, and social norms change interventions(15).

But this is not an easy one, since men are part of a patriarchal society and are bound by societal gender norms and regulations. For example, over 50% of college-age men in a U.S. sample stated that they would not support or attend a voluntary education opportunity regarding sexual assault prevention because it did not apply to them specifically as men, or as people who were not, themselves, engaged in violent behaviour (12). Adherence to traditional ideas about masculinity may further exacerbate this disconnect. Endorsing traditional masculinity is not only associated with risk for violence perpetration, as noted above, but is also correlated to a lack of confidence in taking actions that could interrupt or prevent violence among men in the U.S (13). Consistently engaging them in the violence preventions is necessity.

As a study shows that 50% of men of a group of 392 attended a violence prevention event or become involved in GBV prevention work. Over half of the men in this sample reported being encouraged to initiate involvement by someone close to them. Hearing a moving story about domestic or sexual violence (59%) and hearing a disclosure of abuse from someone close to the participant (55%) were also among the more commonly selected motivations. (14). Group-based workshops with women and men that promote egalitarian attitudes and relationships have shown promising outcomes. Evaluations indicate significant reductions in violence in low- and middle-income countries, whereas in high-income countries they demonstrate improvements in intermediate outcomes related to violence. Similarly, empowerment training for women and girls—including life skills development, safe spaces, and mentoring—has also produced promising results, with evaluations showing notable reductions in violence in low- and middle-income countries and improvements in intermediate outcomes in high-income countries.(18)

A collaborative approach between health professionals, psychiatrists, and social service providers is essential for effectively addressing GBV (17). Health care providers often serve as the first point of contact for survivors of violence, which enables early identification and timely intervention. Partnerships between social service providers, psychologists, social scientists, and health care personnel ensure that survivors receive comprehensive support, including social and psychological counselling, legal assistance, and medical care. This integrated model of care significantly improves outcomes for survivors.(17).

The RESPECT framework for policymakers which is proposed by Department of Reproductive Health and Research World Health Organization, has proven effectiveness in preventing violence against women. It focuses on interventions and programs aimed at both prevention and response to VAW. RESPECT stands for Relationship skills strengthened,

Empowerment of women, Services ensured, Poverty reduced, Environments made safe, Child and adolescent abuse prevented, Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norm.(18).

When examined through a queer lens, gender-based violence (GBV) also includes domestic violence and intimate partner violence, often taking the form of physical and emotional abuse within relationships. Such violence typically follows a repeated pattern or cycle, where one partner seeks to gain or maintain power and control over the others. Here unlike the other survivors LGBT people faces homophobia. In same-sex relationships, abusers may exert control over their partners by threatening to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to others. Such threats can have severe consequences, as survivors may face incarceration, social ostracization, or even execution in contexts where diverse identities are criminalized or stigmatized (15).

### **Discussions**

Various evidence-based interventions have been proposed in different studies, demonstrating positive effects in promoting gender equality and reducing the vulnerability of women and girls. To begin with, the definition of gender-based violence (GBV) initially focused primarily on violence against women and girls (VAW) (19), which also resulted in neglecting the experiences of gender non-conforming (GNC) individuals, LGBTQIA+ persons, and even men. In practice, the terms GBV and VAW are often used interchangeably (17).

However, in 2013, the definition of GBV was expanded to include violence experienced by GNC individuals, the LGBTQIA+ community, and violence between or against men, particularly in relation to societal expectations of masculinity. Research further highlights that attacks on people due to their sexual orientation or gender identity are often driven by a desire to punish those perceived as defying gender norms. Such attacks are now widely recognized as a form of GBV (21).

Homophobic and transphobic violence has been reported in all regions of the world. It ranges from aggressive, sustained psychological bullying to physical assault, torture, kidnapping and targeted killings. Sexual violence has also been widely reported, including so-called “corrective” or “punitive” rape, in which men rape women assumed to be lesbian on the pretext of trying to “cure” their victims of homosexuality.(22). Interventions should also place a strong emphasis on creating awareness of gender, gender norms, and broader gender-related concepts. Sensitizing communities to these dimensions can have a significant impact, as it encourages shifts in how individuals perceive and express their gender identity and gender expression. Furthermore, promoting tolerance through gender inclusion and fostering acceptance of fluidity in gender roles contributes to long-term social change.(23). Such approaches not only reduce rigid stereotypes but also create an enabling environment for individuals across the gender spectrum to live with dignity and equality. The frameworks are available in limited to do such interventions also the policy level changes to be done.

### **Limitations**

The review primarily relied on published scholarly literature and selected international reports. This may have led to the exclusion of relevant but unpublished or region-specific studies (grey literature), potentially narrowing the diversity of perspectives. Many of the interventions and policies discussed are drawn from studies conducted in low- and middle-income countries, with fewer examples from high-income or non-Western contexts. This imbalance may limit the generalizability of findings across different cultural, legal, and socio-political environments. While the paper highlights that GBV definitions are expanding to

include men, boys, and LGBTQIA+ persons, much of the available evidence still disproportionately centres on women and girls.

Consequently, the interventions reviewed may not fully reflect the needs of gender-diverse or non-binary populations. The studies included differ widely in methodology, evaluation rigor, and measurement of outcomes. Some rely on qualitative insights, while others use quantitative indicators, making it challenging to compare results systematically. Some of the policy frameworks and interventions discussed (e.g., CEDAW, UNCRC, RESPECT framework) were developed in specific historical contexts. Their effectiveness may not fully account for recent shifts in digital spaces, emerging forms of online GBV, or changing socio-cultural dynamics. Although the literature identifies several legal and policy measures, there is limited evidence on how these policies are implemented in practice, particularly in resource-constrained settings. This gap restricts the ability to assess long-term sustainability and effectiveness. While the review acknowledges intersecting forms of discrimination (e.g., class, caste, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation), not all included studies adequately addressed these dimensions. This may underrepresent the compounded vulnerabilities faced by certain groups.

### **Conclusion**

This review of existing research looks at the policies, actions, and structures aimed at dealing with gender-based violence (GBV) in different places and situations. The results show that a thorough, multi-layered approach is key to dealing with GBV effectively. This includes making sure people can access justice, providing support that puts survivors first, and working on prevention. The review also shows that while discussions about GBV have often focused on violence against women and girls, there is now more recognition of the experiences of men, boys, and LGBTQIA+ people. This highlights the need for approaches that are inclusive and consider the different ways people experience inequality and discrimination. Even though there have been improvements in laws, services, and awareness, there are still big challenges in making sure policies are actually put into action, breaking down deep-rooted barriers, and helping those who are already left behind.

Strong beliefs about gender, traditions, and unfair systems continue to keep violence happening. In summary, the study shows that reducing GBV needs ongoing support from leaders, enough resources, strong organizations, and active involvement from communities. Future work and actions must focus on strategies that are inclusive, centered on survivors, and tailored to specific situations. These strategies should not just deal with violence but also change the attitudes and power structures that cause it.

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