Chapter 12
Understanding Costs of Violence Against Women and the Need for Contextualisation

Manasi Bhattacharyya

12.1 Violence Against Women and Girls: Prevalence

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global issue. Women are exposed to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence irrespective of their age, education or income groups. Prevalence data[1] suggests that worldwide one in three women have reportedly experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner at least once in their lifetime. Nearly one-fifth of them have experienced such violence in the past 12 months. The rates of lifetime intimate partner violence vary across the regions, with women in the Least Developed Countries, Oceania, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa regions,[2] at the greatest risk.[3] The prevalence rate is the highest in the least developed countries (37%) and three sub-regions of Oceania (around 40% and above).[4] South Asian countries have significantly high prevalence rates of intimate partner violence (35%). More than half of the women (54%) in Bangladesh have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.[5] In India, as per the NFHS-4[6] data, about one-third of ever-married women reported experiencing some form of violence during their lifetime, while 27% reported violence in the past 12 months. In Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence rate of lifetime intimate partner violence (33%) followed by Northern Africa (30%). In contrast, the estimated rates are below average in Latin America, the Caribbean and Northern America (25%),

[1] WHO (2021).

[2] As per the UN SDG Classification of the regions.

[3] WHO (2018).

[4] Melanesia (51%), Micronesia (41%), Polynesia (39%).

[5] UNFPA (2014).

[6] Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (2015–16).

M. Bhattacharyya (✉)
Freelance Consultant On Gender & Development, Via Cassia 903, 00189 Rome, Italy

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Australia and New Zealand (23%) and Europe (23% in Northern Europe and 16% in Southern Europe). Prevalence rates are relatively lower in Southeastern (21%), Eastern (20%) and Central Asia (18%) also.

12.2 Definition and Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls

VAWG is a major violation of a woman's human rights and fundamental freedom.[7] The United Nations defines[8] VAWG 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."

UN defines the forms of VAWG as follows[9]:

- Physical violence: "Intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause physical harm, injury, disability, and in the most severe cases death".
- Sexual violence: "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion by any person regardless of the perpetrator's relationship to the victim or the setting".
- Psychological abuse: "behaviour that is intended to intimidate and persecute and takes the form of threats of abandonment and/or abuse, surveillance, constant humiliation, verbal aggression, and others".
- Economic violence: "Acts that deny a woman access to and control over basic resources or 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".

Women and girls are at risk of different forms of violence at all their life stages. As the diagram demonstrates, while sexual violence affects women of all ages, different environments at home, in school, at work and within the community expose women and girls to specific forms of violence during each phase of their life, as depicted (Fig. 12.1).

[7] *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, UN Doc A/RES/48/104, 20 December 1993.

[8] As per the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by General Assembly in 1993.

[9] UN Women (2018).

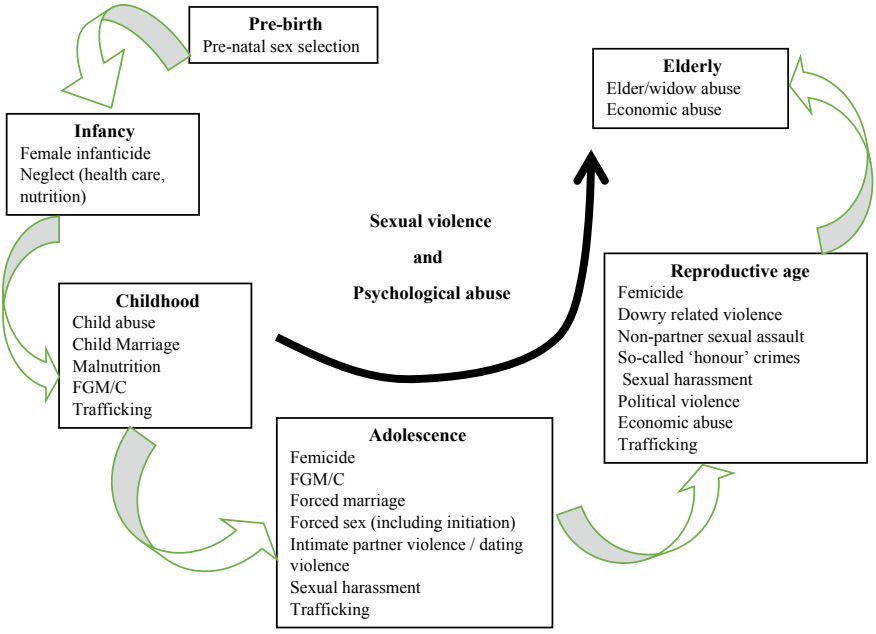

Fig. 12.1 Life Cycle of Violence against women and girls[10]

12.3 Consequences and Cost of Violence Against Women and Girls

The definition of VAWG reveals the complexity of the issue. Violence can be experienced by women in multiple ways/contexts, which implies that its costs and consequences are pervasive. Violence against women has immediate and long-term physical, sexual and psychological consequences. In extreme cases, it can be lethal, resulting in death.

Consequences and the costs of VAWG can be analysed at three levels: individual/household, community and national. Cumulative socio-economic impacts of VAWG at the individual/household and community levels contribute to the nation's social and economic costs. Additionally, at the national level, the government bears the expenditure to prevent and mitigate the impacts of violence for safeguarding citizens' fundamental human rights.

At the individual/household level, health consequences of violence can be immediate or long-lasting and sometimes even fatal. The impact of VAWG on women's physical and mental health depends upon the severity of the abuse. The consequences are more severe when more than one form of violence (e.g. physical and sexual) is endured simultaneously.

[10] Adapted from Ellsberg and Heise (2005), Watts and Zimmerman (2002), Shane and Ellsberg (2002), 2 as cited by UN Women (2010).

VAWG has a range of physical and sexual consequences such as injuries, disabilities, long-term health problems, unwanted and early pregnancies, STDs, including HIV/AIDS and femicide. Physical and sexual violence against women and girls are associated with mental health complications including anxiety, depression and suicide attempts.

Violence also has negative consequences for the children. Research findings demonstrate that exposure to violence at home may have a range of severe and lasting effects on the children's psychological well-being and cognitive function. They may suffer from mental health issues such as depression or severe anxiety and "exhibit violent, risky, or delinquent behaviour" (UNICEF, 2006).[11] These children may also have limited social skills and a higher probability of experiencing child abuse.[12] Child marriage also exposes girls to violence and poses serious threats affecting the sexual, reproductive and mental health of child brides. Globally, more than one-fifth (21%) of young women (aged 20–24) were married as children.[13] The practice is most common in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.[14] Child marriage often isolates the girls from their families and peer networks. The significant age gap between a child bride and her spouse often makes her more vulnerable to domestic abuse. Young girls married to older men are more likely to justify wife-beating.[15] These young girls lack the ability to negotiate safe sex, and are more vulnerable to HIV and/or other sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancy. WHO data[16] suggests that globally, perinatal mortality is 50% higher among babies born to adolescent mothers as opposed to those born to mothers aged 20–29 years.

Violence has a significant impact on women's economic participation and care work. The impact of VAWG on women's care work has a detrimental effect on overall household well-being. A recent ICRW study in Ghana[17] reveals that about 15% of IPV survivors and 10% of survivors of non-partner violence have reportedly missed care-giving activities. As an impact of (any form of) VAWG, 14% of women had to skip care work on an average for 23 days annually. Women experiencing violence also reported that their children missed school due to the violence experienced by their mothers.

Women and girls around the world also experience sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces. A recent study[18] conducted in Maputo, Mozambique, reveals that the majority of the women and girls (60%) have reportedly experienced some forms of harassment and violence in public spaces, and girls constitute the most vulnerable group. Fear of violence negatively impacts women's and girls' freedom of movement and their ability to participate in public life. It

[11] Brown and Bzostek (2003), UNICEF (2013).

[12] World Health Organization (2002).

[13] UNICEF (2018).

[14] UNICEF (2014a).

[15] UNICEF (2014b).

[16] WHO (2008).

[17] ICRW (2019).

[18] Mariano et al. (2020).

also curbs their "access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational activities", impacting their overall well-being (UN Women).

Globally, progress on eliminating VAWG has been slow. A lot needs to be done to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender equality and the particular target (5.2) on eliminating violence against women and girls[19]. Although monetary value cannot be attached to human dignity, estimation of the expenditure that the state could save by adopting the preventive measures to combat VAWG would help demonstrate the magnitude of the problem. The costing exercise fosters an understanding that VAWG is not a domestic issue and the consequences of VAWG, and the economic cost associated with it is borne not only by the women but also by their families, society and the nation. It should be prioritised as a human rights and development issue. VAWG costing serves as a tool for highlighting the issue in policy discussions and emphasising its significance as a key pillar of the post-2015 development agenda.[20] VAWG costing efforts that analyse current VAW-related budgetary provisions can reveal funding gaps (if any) in services and also highlight inadequate allocation of resources. A recent report suggests that government spending on gender is stagnant on average and falling in most countries as a percent of GDP or budget.[21] For instance, in India, the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (2005) is impacted by the inadequacy of the budgetary provision.[22]

Various studies have attempted to estimate the economic and social costs of VAWG. Costs are incurred in three areas, namely[23] anticipation or preventative services, consequence and response.

Direct and indirect costs can be categorised as follows[24]:

Direct tangible costs are the "actual expenses paid". They include medical fees, cost of legal action, etc. incurred by the survivors, fines and legal fees borne by the perpetrators, expenses of preventive and support services extended by the government and non-government actors, cost of lost productivity and advocacy cost for the formulation and execution of laws and policies.

Indirect tangible costs are "loss of potential" due to the incident of violence, which can be measured in monetary terms, although "they involve estimating opportunity costs rather than actual expenditures". These costs include lower earnings and profits resulting from reduced output and productivity.

Direct intangible costs include psychological loss and pain directly associated with VAWG, which cannot be quantified in monetary terms.

Indirect intangible costs are an indirect outcome of VAWG. The adverse emotional impact of domestic violence on children is an example of this cost.

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[19] SDG 5.2: "To eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation".

[20] UN Women (2013).

[21] Development Finance International and Oxfam (2013).

[22] Jhamb (2011).

[23] Oliver et al. (2019).

[24] UN (2005).

Research underscores the significant economic cost associated with violence against women, which is estimated to be around 2% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). The monetary value is equivalent to US$1.5 trillion, almost the size of the Canadian economy.[25] In Bangladesh, the economic burden of domestic violence was estimated at US$2.3 billion for the year 2010, which was equivalent to the national health and nutrition budget in that year.[26] In Zambia, the estimated cost of gender-based violence was US$473 million in 2016, which was equivalent to the health budget for the country in that year.[27] As per the 2012 Justice Canada report,[28] the total cost of intimate partner violence in that year was estimated at CAD 7.4 billion (€5.1 billion) per year, which also includes estimates for pain and suffering. Yearly direct costs are computed as CAD 1.9 billion (€1.3billion). These studies have revealed significantly high social and economic costs of VAWG. However, it is noteworthy that these costs are underestimated in many cases, as significant costs are missing from the estimations due to underreporting of incidents of violence.

12.4 Preventive Strategies and Policy Formulation—Need for Contextualisation

Women are not exposed to violence because of any inherent vulnerability. Men are the major offenders of VAWG, and research suggests that it is helpful to use the theories of masculinities to better understand the underlying causes of violence inflicted by men. Exploring masculinities helps to shed light on the links between men, gender, power relations and violence. As feminist literature has suggested, masculinities are socially organised, and vary over time, across and within cultures and geographic regions. It has also been argued that there is often a "hierarchy of masculinities", in which one (or more) form of masculinity is influential while others are marginalised. The dominant form of masculinity embodies the socially respected ways of being a man that influences other men.[29] A UN multi-country study on men and violence in Asia and the Pacific reveals that violence is associated with "narratives of masculinities that justify and celebrate male strength, the use of violence, men's control over women and heterosexual performance" (Fulu et al., 2013). Research findings demonstrate that intimate partner violence is justified by the majority of men, and in several cases by women themselves, primarily because of social acceptance of men's controlling behaviour. A study conducted in North-Indian villages[30] reveals that while most of the men (80%) justified violence and viewed it

[25] UN Women (2016).

[26] Siddique (2011).

[27] Zulu et al. (2017).

[28] Department of Justice Canada, An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada (2009).

[29] Crenshaw (1994).

[30] Bhattacharyya et al. (2011).

as a "pedagogical tool to discipline women for various transgressions", half of the women also justified it. Women viewed violence as an "outlet for male stress" and a "burden they need to bear as part of marriage responsibilities".

Men's perpetration of sexual violence is motivated by their perception of sexual entitlement. However, men's use of violence is associated not only with patriarchy. It is an outcome also of a complex interplay of a range of interconnected factors at the individual, community and societal levels. Gender is involved with other social structures, and it constantly intersects with other structural factors. So, violence against women cannot be eliminated by addressing the individual-level factors alone. Research reveals that men's perpetration of violence against women is found across all socio-economic groups. However, it is more common among less powerful men who are subject to social inequalities, and experience social stresses related to their lower socio-economic status and alcohol or substance abuse.[31] On the other hand, women's experience of violence is constructed by gender, race, sexuality, legal status, class, culture and religion. By intersecting with each other, these multiple identities shape women's social experience. The intersectional approach underlines all the axes of subordination that women experience simultaneously, not only patriarchy (Crenshaw, 1994). Women's experience of violence and men's violent masculinity and practices are situated in a broader environment of structural inequality. Formulation of the preventive strategies to address VAWG calls for structural reforms and the eradication of gender stereotypes that perpetuate violence against women.

However, a preventive strategy needs to take into account specific environmental drivers associated with the perpetration of violence. Studies suggest that these specific factors vary widely across regions/sites, and it is crucial to understand the difference between various experiences constructed in different socio-cultural, political, economic and historical contexts. For instance, economic inequality/stress reflected in food insecurity and low levels of education are some of the drivers of violence against women in the context of least developed/developing countries. Alcohol/substance abuse has been found to be a trigger for intimate partner violence in several contexts across the globe,[32] but it is not a major factor in Muslim majority settings. The dowry system, a deeply embedded socio-cultural practice that perpetuates gender inequality and subordination of women, is one of the critical drivers of intimate partner violence in South Asia. Non-observance of purdah by women can also trigger violence in certain settings in this region. The custom of purdah is related to family honour, which is a significant issue in some cultures. The majority of the incidents of violence against women and girls and femicide in the Arab states region are associated with family honour, which is primarily linked to the sexual conduct of the women.[33] In some African cultures, polygyny is practiced, and it has often been found to be associated with intimate partner violence.[34] It is imperative to unpack and understand these contextual factors.

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[31] Fulu et al. (2013).

[32] World Health Organisation, *Intimate Partner violence and Alcohol Fact Sheet.*

[33] Kulwicki (2009).

[34] Ahinkorah (2021), Ebrahim and Atteraya (2020).

Apart from these specific environmental factors related to VAWG, humanitarian contexts such as the wake of a natural disaster and conflict also further exacerbate women's and girls' vulnerability, as they are away from their family and community. Sexual violence is common in humanitarian situations. In many conflicts, rape is often used as a tactic of humiliation (UNFPA).[35] Incidences of child marriage also increase in humanitarian settings[36] as a negative coping strategy. In the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, Syrian refugee families marry off their daughters to protect family honour. Marriage is seen as a means to keep their daughters safe from sexual violence.[37] In Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, adolescents are extremely vulnerable to child marriage.[38] Refugee families marry off their adolescent daughters to create new households since food and non-food assistance is household-based.[39] Most of these girls are married to much older men and are at an increased risk of experiencing violence within those relationships. As per the emerging data and reports, all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, have intensified since the outbreak of COVID-19. The drivers are not the virus itself or the resulting economic crisis but a structural inequality and an imbalance of power and control.[40] To address VAWG, it is crucial to focus on prevention. In order to formulate strategies to prevent VAWG, it is critical to assess the context and the specific risk factors. Contextual assessment needs a thorough review of current laws, policies and practices to identify the gaps if any. Only a comprehensive and contextually relevant strategy addressing gender inequality and other structural factors can prevent VAWG.

12.5 Conclusion

Violence against women and girls is an outcome of complex dynamics of multiple and intersecting forms of structural injustices, including gender inequality, which deprives women of their fundamental human rights and freedom and also hinders human development. Women's equality and empowerment (SDG 5) is central to all dimensions of sustainable development, and achievement of SDG 5 is necessary for the achievement of all the SDGs. The social and economic costs of violence against women are critically high. For addressing violence against women, it is crucial to focus on prevention. Preventive strategies to eliminate VAWG must assess the individual, community, organisational and societal structures, laws and policies, social norms and practices that perpetuate harmful constructions of masculinities, gender inequality and other forms of social injustices that intersect with gender

[35] UNFPA (2014).

[36] Humanitarian settings include natural disasters, conflict, and complex political emergencies.

[37] UNICEF (2019).

[38] UNICEF (2020).

[39] Melnikas et al. (2020).

[40] UN Women (2020).

inequality. It is also imperative to identify context-specific triggers to formulate effective preventive strategies.

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