



Feminist Pocketbook

TIP SHEET #3:

Connecting gender-based violence, sexual harassment and everyday sexism

The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM), created in 2017 to reassert a feminist perspective in violence against women and girls (VAWG) work, is a collective of activists, academics, and practitioners working globally to end VAWG.

This Tip Sheet is part of the COFEM Feminist Pocketbook. For access to the full Pocketbook, go to: www.cofemsocialchange.org.

Tip Sheet 3 explores how gender-based violence, sexual harassment and everyday sexism are related, and discusses potential actions for a holistic approach to building gender equality.

Key points

- Everyday sexism, sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) all share a root cause — gender inequality and the oppression of women and girls.
- Feminist movements and women's collective voices show that women across the world experience multiple forms of violence throughout their lives.
- Distinguishing different forms of GBV as 'more serious' than others ignores how patriarchy and gender inequality create a culture in which violence against women and girls is accepted and normalised.

What is the issue?

For several decades, GBV¹ has been recognised as a serious global health epidemic and a breach of women's basic human rights. Over the last 20 years, a growing body of data on the scope of the problem — and evidence demonstrating how GBV is driven by gender inequality — have given greater momentum to women's rights movements and mobilised development and humanitarian agencies around the common goal of providing support to survivors and working to end GBV through the promotion of gender equality.

Recently — and at a scale never seen before — women across the globe have been publicly disclosing their experiences of violence. Personal accounts

have been shared through collective actions such as the #MeToo movement, facilitated by social media and an increasing global connectedness. This powerful movement, which has empowered many women to speak out for the first time, has provided even further evidence of the scope of GBV and resulted in increased calls for accountability. In unprecedented numbers, women are being heard and believed, and men in power are being held to account for their abuse of women, including for sexism and sexual harassment that has been overlooked or condoned historically.

Women's #MeToo stories illustrate the pervasiveness — the 'everyday' nature — of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Like other forms of GBV,

¹ See Tip Sheet 2 for more information on gender-based violence.

sexual harassment and sexism are driven by a system of power and oppression that justifies and normalises the use of control and aggression by men over women, and disrespects and disempowers women and girls. In this way, all forms of GBV are connected through their root cause — gender inequality.

Why does it matter?

How we define and frame GBV, including sexual harassment and everyday sexism against women and

girls, is important because it determines whether and in what ways these issues are addressed by individuals, communities and societies. Some people have dismissed women's #MeToo stories of sexism and sexual harassment, saying that they are not 'as serious' as women's other experiences of GBV. Some even argue that #MeToo stories reflect privilege because they deflect attention away from violence 'in other parts of the world', such as female infanticide and female genital mutilation/cutting. These responses to the #MeToo movement show that experiences of sexism and sexual harassment continue to be seen as distinct from other forms of GBV.

However, to deny or minimise sexism and sexual harassment as different from the 'real problem' of GBV ignores the male dominance and gender inequality at the root of all types of violence against women and girls. Also, distinguishing some kinds of violence as 'less' or 'more serious' than others prevents us from rejecting unconditionally all forms of violence as human rights violations. Working towards gender equality and the end of GBV requires taking 'everyday' sexual harassment and sexism seriously.

Achieving a shared understanding of the relationship between gender inequality and everyday sexual harassment and sexism is important in asserting a feminist perspective in addressing GBV and challenging the patriarchal status quo.² Along with other forms of GBV, gender inequality is the root driver of sexism and sexual harassment. Efforts to end one form of violence will not be successful without tackling all forms of violence. Thus, it is just as important to tackle the everyday sexism that women experience as it is to advocate for local, national and international actions to end other forms of GBV.

Gender inequality underpins GBV, sexual harassment and everyday sexism

Gender inequality is pervasive and entrenched across relationships, communities, organisations, institutions and structures. It shows up in many different ways, from discriminatory laws that disadvantage women, to the exclusion of women from public and private life, to attitudes and norms about women, men, girls and boys, and the relationships among them. Thus, to challenge gender inequality, we must work not just at an individual level, but at interpersonal, community and societal levels (see Figure 1 below).

Often, gender inequality has been so normalised that it goes unrecognised. For example, many will



Case study: Social movements on sexual harassment and everyday sexism

The #MeToo Movement

The #MeToo movement was initiated by U.S. civil rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006, as part of a social media campaign among women of colour who had experienced sexual assault to find and share pathways to healing. In 2017, #MeToo spread as part of a new global movement to raise awareness of the high rates of sexual harassment and sexual assault among women everywhere. The phrase and hashtag were quickly shared online millions of times, often with accompanying personal stories of sexual harassment or assault.

See: metoomvmt.org

The Everyday Sexism Project

In 2012, UK writer Laura Bates set up a website called the Everyday Sexism Project and asked women around the world to submit their stories of sexism experienced on a day-to-day basis. The website continues to catalogue and share women's stories and has established a diverse and rich database that illustrates the various ways in which women experience gender inequality, sexism and misogyny in their daily lives.

See: everydaysexism.com

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Men’s beliefs around gender and their perpetration of GBV in Asia-Pacific

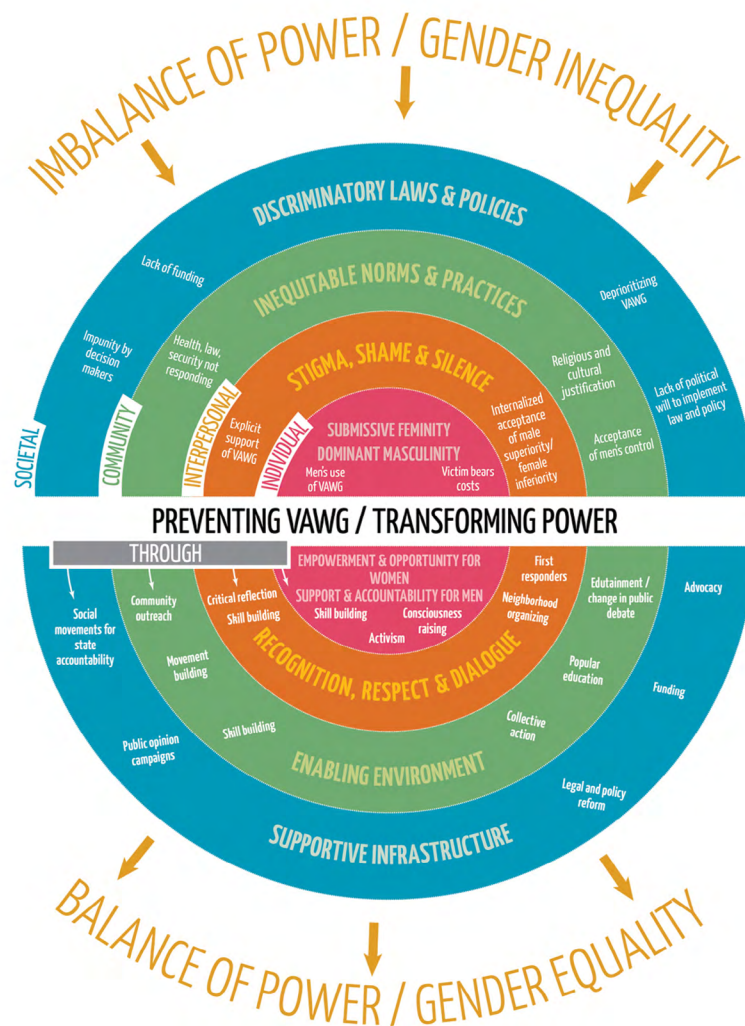
The 2013 UN Multi-country Study captured men’s perpetration of intimate partner violence and sexual violence across six countries in Asia and the Pacific. The largest cluster of factors associated with men’s perpetration of intimate partner violence were those related to gender inequality: holding gender inequitable attitudes, using controlling behaviours against a female partner, frequent quarrelling, having multiple lifetime sexual partners, and engaging in transactional sex.

The study also found that among men who reported rape perpetration, the most common motivation was sexual entitlement: men’s belief that they have the right to sex, regardless of consent.

Fulu, E., Warner, X., Miedema, S., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T. and Lang, J. (2013). Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV.

argue that ‘it’s just boys being boys’ or ‘a bit of fun’, creating the false and harmful impression that everyday sexism is harmless and acceptable. These attitudes that justify and excuse sexism and harassment also normalise men’s use of other forms of GBV and contribute to broader patterns of ‘rape culture’ — the global culture that perpetuates sexual violence against, and oppression of, women around the world.

Figure 1. Michau et al.’s socio-ecological model



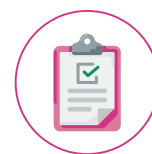
³ Michau, L., Horn, J., Bank, A., Dutt, M., Zimmerman, C. (2014), “Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice”, The Lancet, A Special Series on Violence against Women and Girls.

Feminist activism to end sexism, sexual harassment and other forms of GBV

The #MeToo movement, and other feminist activist movements such as #TimesUp, are actively calling for an end to a culture that justifies and normalises men's use of violence against women and girls. Women from all over the world are speaking out

about their experiences of violence and other forms of disempowerment they experience, such as inequality based on sexuality, race, ability, religion, class and caste. These stories and movements are a critical part of global efforts to end the oppression of women and girls and challenge the patriarchal system that underpins sexism, sexual harassment and all forms of GBV.

Practical tips



Practitioners, researchers, donors and policy-makers

- Build a strong understanding within our organisations of the connectedness of sexism, sexual harassment and other forms of GBV, and how gender inequality is the root cause of male violence against females.
- Advocate for gender-equal policies, including zero tolerance policies for GBV and gender-based discrimination.
- Speak out — as individuals, organisations and coalitions — when public acts of violence occur in our communities.
- If focusing on one type of GBV (such as sexual harassment) in your work, talk and collaborate with colleagues who focus on other types of GBV in order to foster dialogue and collective action around the common foundations of all men's violence experienced by women and girls.

- Validate and empower women to speak out against the harmful effects of all forms of violence and rights violations against them, including sexual harassment and everyday sexism.
- Support women who do speak out, especially in the context of programmes or research studies, by putting in place measures and processes to protect women from backlash.

Donors and policy-makers

- Fund and support policies and initiatives grounded in a feminist understanding of gender inequality as the root driver of all forms of GBV, including sexism and sexual harassment.
- Integrate attention to gender equality into other sectors, such as health, education and infrastructure, to create a multi-sectoral, coordinated approach to end gender inequality and GBV.

Policy-makers

- Implement policies specific to sexual harassment and the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse that integrate safe mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and investigating.

Practitioners and researchers

- Collaborate with women's rights activists in the communities where those activists work.



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