



Feminist Pocketbook

TIP SHEET #8:

Maximizing impact: Understanding the risks and benefits of coordinated efforts to address different forms of violence

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 8 explores the potential benefits and risks of coordinated efforts to address different forms of violence and the importance of promoting a feminist analysis in those efforts to ensure that joint programming does not result in a diminished focus on women and girls.

Key points

- Specialists often work in distinct areas to address different types of violence affecting different groups with limited coordination across various programming interventions.
- There are potential benefits to better coordinated approaches to violence prevention efforts; for example, creating greater impact in catalysing social change by addressing shared risk factors and maximising limited resources.
- However, there are also risks that must be considered, including that work to address other forms of violence that does not adopt a feminist analysis can reinforce gender inequality, and may contribute to — rather than reduce — violence, discrimination or exploitation of women and girls.
- Coordination efforts must be mindful that addressing other forms of violence can displace a focus on violence against women and girls. Any joint violence prevention efforts should occur in addition to, not instead of, targeted efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

What is the issue?

Over the past three decades, feminist activists have established gender-based violence (GBV) as a priority issue in international development and humanitarian spaces. Dedicated programming

that addresses gender inequality as the foundation of violence against women and girls (VAWG) has been critical to drawing attention and resources to this particular form of violence.¹ Dedicated programming remains vitally important, especially in

¹ See Tip Sheet 1 for further discussion of gender discrimination as the root cause of GBV and the importance of an intersectional approach to this work.

the current global climate where backlash against women's rights is rising.²

This does not mean that GBV programmers should always work in isolation. When done carefully and using a feminist frame, coordinating work to address GBV with programmes addressing other forms of violence (e.g. violence against children [VAC], violence based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, violence against men and boys, etc.) creates opportunities for synergies that can promote holistic, transformational programming and change. However, when not done carefully, coordination and joint programming can exacerbate gender-based discrimination and VAWG, especially when partners are not informed by a feminist agenda or women's rights and experiences.

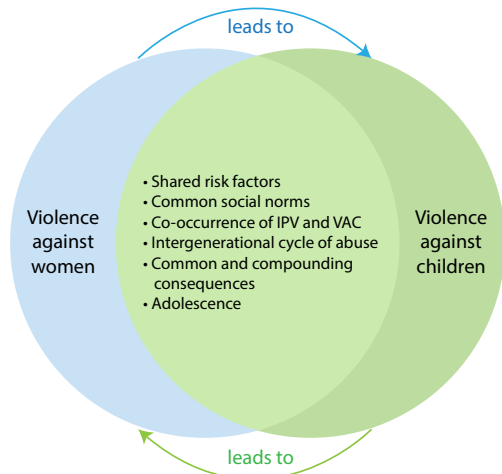
Why does it matter?

Building partnerships in work to address different forms of violence can facilitate greater progress and outcomes across multiple areas, including increasing gender equality. One example is the growing awareness of the shared risk factors for GBV and VAC, including but not limited to inequitable and hierarchical gender norms (see Figure 1). Better understanding these links is an opportunity for meaningful collaboration and cooperation to address shared issues. Joint efforts to address both violence against women and VAC at the household level, however, may risk shifting attention away from women as rights-holders to women as caregivers.

Another potentially fruitful area of collaboration – one that is underway in many parts of the world but could be supported further — is joint work between GBV specialists and specialists addressing violence against sexual and gender minorities. Hegemonic masculinity — or the practice that legitimises dominance of heteronormative males — not only justifies the subordination of women, but also leads to heterosexism and homophobia. Partnerships to dismantle rigid sexual- and gender-identity norms can support positive outcomes in multiple violence prevention fields. For example, intersectional GBV work that coordinates actively with LGBTQI activists can highlight the violence faced by lesbian, queer, bi, and trans women, and improve efforts of both groups to address gender discrimination faced by all women.

Similarly, various forms of violence against men and boys may reflect harmful gender norms or ideas

Figure 1. Links between VAW and VAC



Source: The Equality Institute (2017) adapted from Guedes et al. (2016).

about heteronormative masculinity, perhaps most evidently in the fact that men primarily experience violence perpetrated by other men.³ Although there is limited evidence regarding the drivers of violence against men, it is clear that there is a link between men's violence directed at other men (and boys) and gender norms that promote rigid masculinities based on men's exercise of power and dominance. Thus, collaborating with those who are leading efforts to dismantle harmful masculinities may be beneficial in efforts to end men's use of violence against women and girls. However, it is important to be clear about the distinct drivers of different forms of violence between women and girls and men and boys. Moreover, it is critical to avoid collaborations that purposefully or indirectly undermine work to address GBV by distracting from systemic gender discrimination as a key driver of VAWG or that eclipse GBV work in the process of collaboration.

Working collaboratively across violence prevention fields does not mean merging all interventions and programmes. Instead, there is need to (1) recognise both the shared and distinct elements of efforts to address different forms of violence; and (2) consider core approaches to collaboration that ensure mutually constructive outcomes.

Guiding principles for collaborative work to address different forms of violence

The following principles will help foster effective and safe collaboration to address different forms of violence where it may be beneficial to do so:

² See Tip Sheet 9 for information on dealing with backlash.

³ See Tip Sheet 7 for information on violence against men and boys.

- **Apply a gender transformative approach and feminist lens to all violence prevention efforts.** Gender transformative programming means actively challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes that support the acceptability of men's use of violence. A feminist lens to violence prevention means analysing unequal power structures and developing strategies that build equality and promote justice for all.⁴
- **Place accountability to women and girls at the forefront of all work to address GBV.**⁵ This is relevant when working directly on GBV in any setting and indirectly when addressing other forms of violence and inequality. Integrating GBV efforts with work to address other forms of vio-

lence does not mean conflating violence against men and boys with 'GBV', as this depoliticises the field and decentres women and girls.

- **Recognise the unique experiences, rights and needs of specific groups experiencing violence,** and consider how to incorporate these into violence response and prevention initiatives. Every person's experience of violence will be characterised by particular social factors and lead to specific support needs. Applying intersectional feminism to practice means ensuring that feminist activism and advocacy recognise the different ways in which different women and girls, and other subjugated groups, experience oppression and inequality.

What does a coordinated approach to addressing violence look like in practice?

The box below gives examples of, and rationale for, how efforts to address GBV and other forms of violence may be coordinated to accelerate social transformation and end violence, always keeping in mind that collaboration must be considered carefully and monitored to eliminate potential risks to women and girls and efforts to address VAWG.

	Rationale	Opportunities
Violence based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity	Heteronormative ideas about male dominance inform both gender discrimination against women and girls and also homophobic and transphobic violence.	Promote healthy and safe communities in ways that include efforts to prevent violence based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, e.g. addressing homophobia and transphobia in respectful relationships curricula and workshops. Address structural factors such as discriminatory laws and policies and unequal power among sexual and gender minorities that reflect patriarchal systems and cultures of oppression that also cause VAWG.
Violence against children	GBV and VAC are linked by shared social norms and other risk factors, and the co-occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and VAC in a family. Exposure to violence during childhood is a risk factor for both men's perpetration and women's experiences of IPV in adulthood. GBV and VAC can have similar, lasting consequences for women and children's physical and mental health and overall wellbeing for families and communities.	Ensure that parenting programmes and other family-based VAC interventions are grounded in an understanding of IPV. Address each form of violence by challenging men's dominance over and use of physical and other types of violence against women and children and gender stereotypes in child rearing.
Violence experienced by men and boys	Men's use of violence against other men and boys can reflect a patriarchal culture that supports the use of force to achieve power and control over others. Challenging harmful masculinities — especially through approaches that support long-term structural change — may reduce men's violence against men and men's violence against women.	Adopt whole-of-community approaches to violence prevention that engage both women and men to promote respectful relationships and non-violence. Take a gender-transformative approach that challenges institutions and the patriarchal culture of violence that supports men's use of physical force, sexual entitlement and exercise of power over others.

⁴ See Tip Sheet 1 for more information on applying an intersectional feminist perspective in work to end GBV.

⁵ See Tip Sheet 4 for guiding principles on ensuring accountability to women and girls, in particular the principle to 'do no harm' by creating additional risk of GBV.

- **Maintain distinct and specialised services for survivors.** Working with survivors of different types of violence requires particular types of services, environments and skills. For example, it is never

appropriate for male survivors of violence to be accommodated in services specifically established for GBV survivors, such as safe shelters or other spaces for women escaping or recovering from violence.

Practical tips



Practitioners, researchers, donors and policy-makers

- Link advocacy and activism on women's rights with social justice movements on other issues, and ground work in a gender-power analysis to identify interrelated forms of inequality.
- Ensure accountability to women and girls in work across all fields by partnering with women's rights organisations, and recognise the leadership and experience of women's rights and feminist activists.
- Ensure work to address GBV is focused on women and girls. Even where there are clear areas for collaboration across different types of anti-violence work, it is important to support improved and expanded work on violence experienced by women and girls; otherwise, there is a very real risk of diminished focus on women and girls' rights and needs.
- Consider how violence prevention initiatives may harm women and girls indirectly, or contribute to gender-inequitable norms and environments. At the same time, challenge the attitude that gender equality and GBV are 'women's issues' to be dealt with separately.
- Deepen coordination and shared learning across different violence prevention fields. Although joint programming may not always be desirable, greater communication and collaboration



will benefit all fields and create violence-free societies that benefit everyone.

Practitioners

- Advocate for those working on other forms of violence, such as VAC, to integrate women's rights, GBV considerations and a gender-power analysis from the outset of all violence prevention and response efforts. Ensure women are meaningfully consulted throughout design, implementation and evaluation phases.
- Articulate the necessity of specialised and targeted GBV programming. Where appropriate, support coordinated or combined approaches in addition to, not instead of, specialised GBV programming. Advocate for joint programming when such an approach will advance the rights, needs and safety of women and girls.

Researchers

- Maintain a focus on researching specific dynamics, drivers and outcomes of VAWG, while also initiating new research to further explore linkages between GBV and other forms of violence, such as VAC and violence based on women's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Share knowledge and evidence with those researching different types of violence against males to identify areas for potential collaboration.



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