

Brief analysis on gender-based violence in Guyana



Gender-Based Violence (GBV) generally refers to any harmful act which is perpetrated against a person's will on the basis of their gender and more specifically as a result of socially ascribed gender norms which define how men and women should behave. It is therefore a form of discrimination and may include physical, sexual, emotional and psychological violence, as well as threats of violence, control over choices and behaviour, and restriction of resources and services.

GBV is a global phenomenon, affecting individuals across different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Although both men and women may be victims, women and girls are affected on a much larger scale, often as a result of the normalization of unequal power relationships between men and women in communities worldwide.

In Guyana, GBV remains one of the most pervasive problems which permeate all socio-economic and ethnic groups, contributing to broader social and economic problems.

Women are disproportionately affected. UNICEF reported that in 2014, at least one in three women in Guyana is a victim of GBV and 58% of child abuse cases (including physical and sexual assaults) were girls.

Deeply ingrained **gender stereotypes** and social and cultural practices directly influence GBV. Gender bias commonly assigns childrearing, household maintenance and caring for the sick and elderly as the main roles for women, who are further excluded from decision making. Men, on the other hand, are seen as the sole provider and decision-maker, yet they are often



discouraged from participation in family planning and care-related activities seen as more feminine roles.

Children are moulded into specific **gender roles** at an early age. Girls are viewed as vulnerable, in need of protection and are required to remain at home and do chores, while boys are considered independent and strong. They both often face punishment, including **shaming, ridicule and physical abuse**, if they chose to violate these norms. The consequences of gender roles are life-long. According to the World Health Organisation boys are more prone to violence, substance abuse, crime and suicide, while girls are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse and are at great risk of teenage pregnancy, early marriage and sexually transmitted infections.

Although a growing number of Guyanese women today actively participate in the public, professional and informal economy sectors, and while female students outnumber males at the tertiary education level, women and girls still face numerous gender-related barriers which hinder their social and economic empowerment.

Violence against women – particularly **domestic violence** – remains socially and culturally accepted nation-wide and is directly linked to the power control men try to exercise over women. **In 2014, Guyana recorded the third highest level of acceptance of domestic violence in Latin America and the Caribbean**, with 35.6% of poll respondents (both men and women) condoning violence against an unfaithful wife.

Sexual violence against women and girls also remains prevalent and **lack of punishment for perpetrators** further reinforces abuse, as the police often fail to take reports seriously. In 2015, only 36 individuals were arrested for sexual charges though 230 reports were made in that year in Guyana.

It is common for perpetrators of GBV to remain in pre-trial detention for years and eventually escape prosecution and conviction. Others are usually released after reports have been made and all too often victims refuse to testify out of fear of further harm and **stigmatisation**, or because the perpetrator is the sole provider for the family and if he is arrested the family will have no other means of financial support.

Additionally, family and community members often chose to remain silent on GBV, which is further reinforced by poverty and isolation. Women also deal with **victim blaming and shaming** on a daily basis, whereby they are criticised and humiliated, by men and women alike, for violating social expectations relating to dress and behaviour. This is commonly used to **discredit** women and induce guilt when they try to speak out against workplace harassment, domestic violence and sexual assault. Such negative social reaction can have a lasting impact on the psychological health and recovery of victims, and discourage them from denouncing future abuse.

