

Violence that is sexual in nature is often gender-based, specifically directed against women and affecting them disproportionately. The terms “gender-based violence” and “violence against women” are often used interchangeably. Gender-based violence comprises all of the above when committed against women but is not limited to violence that is sexual in nature.

Gender-based violence may also be physical or psychological in nature. It includes –

- Domestic or intimate partner violence (physical and psychological violence by intimate partners, including coercive or controlling behaviours).
- Forced marriage or cohabitation, including the marriage of children (child marriage) .
- Denial of the right to use contraception or to adopt other measures to protect against STIs, violence during pregnancy, and induced and forced abortions.
- All violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and obligatory inspections for virginity. FGM is defined as any procedure that involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons (WHO, 1998).
- Gender-based violence also includes forced prostitution and trafficking of people for the purpose of sexual exploitation; sexual trafficking may involve physical violence and coercion, deception, and bondage incurred through forced dept.
- In addition, sex selective abortion and the neglect or even killing of girl children within families is considered a form of gender-based violence.
- There are a number of traditional practices that are coercive, violent and gender-based, such as the custom of ngozi in Zimbabwe, whereby a girl is given to a family as compensation for a death of one of their men at the hand of a family member of the girl.
- Wife inheritance, whereby a sister is obliged to replace her sister that died in the matrimonial home.
- Other coercive or harmful traditional practices are child marriage, acid burning, dowry-related violence, and widow inheritance and cleansing with femicide or honour killings as the most extreme form of gender-based aggression.
- Other examples of violence against women that are often ignored and under-reported are “bridenapping” (the abduction, rape and forced marriage of young women) and “breast-ironing” (crushing the breasts of young girls in order to deter male attention).