

Language Guide Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) undermines the autonomy, dignity, health (mental and physical), and security of its victims; it also has devastating social and economic effects on communities and is a major public health problem and impediment to gender equality. Sexual violence, one form of GBV, can result in serious sexual and reproductive health consequences, such as unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), and traumatic fistula (UNFPA 2021). Women, girls, young people, and other marginalized individuals are particularly vulnerable—indeed, one in three women globally will experience GBV during their lifetimes (World Bank 2019). Thus, EngenderHealth works to strengthen response mechanisms for sexual violence in clinical settings and to prevent all forms of violence at the community level, as part of our commitment to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. Supporting our vision of a gender-equal world where all people achieve their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reflecting our overarching **Principles of Language Use**—all EngenderHealth language related to GBV should be (1) current and technically **accurate**, (2) consciously nonjudgmental and **destigmatizing**, and (3) deliberately and explicitly **inclusive** of the diversity of our partners and impact populations.

Defining GBV

GBV includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological, economic and educational abuse, coercion, and threats directed at an individual based on their biological sex or gender identity.

Core Principles

Our core principles related to GBV include the following:

- All people have the right to maintain relationships and live lives free from violence.
- GBV victims and survivors have the right to confidential, respectful, safe, and unbiased care.
- Addressing and preventing GBV are essential to improving health outcomes and healthcare providers play a critical role in identifying and supporting GBV victims and survivors as part of multi-sectoral prevention and response efforts.
- Survivors bring lived experience to designing GBV programs and services to meet their needs. Their inputs are key for ensuring programs offer comprehensive, effective, and responsive care that does not result in any harm or other negative consequences.
- Transforming harmful gender norms, including through engaging men and boys, is critical to preventing GBV and supporting survivors.

Recommended Language

The table below provides examples of accurate GBV messaging—as well as common myths to avoid.

Note: “Victim” is the legal term for a person who has suffered harm (e.g., due to GBV). Some individuals self-identify as a victim and some who experience GBV do not survive. However, as appropriate, we prefer to use the term “survivor” to reflect that people can heal from and regain their agency and power after experiencing GBV, and we respect and support them in their journeys.

✓ Say this...	✗ Not that!
All people, regardless of sex or gender, can be victims and survivors of GBV.	Only women and girls can be victims and survivors of GBV.
GBV includes physical, sexual, and emotional and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation.	GBV always involves physical violence <i>and</i> there are always physical evidence of GBV.
Fear and lack of resources and support prevent many survivors from leaving abusive situations.	Leaving an abusive situation is easy and those who remain are at fault for staying.
GBV occurs in all types of economic and social settings.	GBV occurs only in poor communities and households.
Anyone—regardless of age, sex, gender identity, economic or educational status, etc.—can be a perpetrator of GBV.	Adult men are responsible for perpetrating GBV.
Sex workers can experience and be negatively affected by sexual violence—but they have the right to work without being subject to any form of violence.	Violence is a risk sex workers accept for engaging in sex work.



Understanding Forms and Types of GBV

The table below explains some of the most prevalent forms and types of SGBV.

Explanations of Common Forms and Types of GBV
Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to any behavior perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner or spouse that causes emotional/psychological, physical, or sexual harm. IPV occurs in opposite- and same-sex relationships.
Domestic violence (DV) is violence is perpetrated by spouses, partners, or family members. DV includes <i>IPV</i> , but also encompasses <i>violence against children</i> and violence perpetrated by other family members and caretakers, including incest (i.e., sexual intercourse between persons of close familial relations, which is illegal).
Sexual violence , also called sexual abuse and sexual assault , includes (1) engaging in non-consensual sexual acts with a person, (2) causing someone to engage in non-consensual sexual acts with a third person, or (3) causing someone to non-consensually simulate or witness sexual acts.
Sexual exploitation is the coercion or attempted coercion via an abuse of power or trust in exchange for sexual favors, for instance, by offering (or threatening to withhold) food, money, shelter, or other economic, social, or political resources or services. This includes sex trafficking, which involves recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, and/or obtaining another person for a commercial sex act, including prostitution or pornography.
Rape refers to non-consensual anal, oral, or vaginal penetration of a person by a person's body part or object. Sexual intercourse with a minor (definition of which varies geographically) is referred to as statutory rape.
Sexual harassment includes any form of unwanted verbal or nonverbal conduct of a sexual nature that violates the dignity of a person by creating a degrading, hostile, humiliating, intimidating, or offensive environment.
Physical abuse and violence is any unwanted act attempting to cause, or resulting in, pain, injury, or death. This includes beating, biting, burning, disfiguring, hitting, kicking, stabbing, and strangling.
Emotional and psychological abuse and violence involves non-physical behaviors that aim to or result in emotional or psychological harm, including verbal insults and threats; acts of intimidation, humiliation, and shaming; controlling behaviors (e.g., confinement, exclusion, isolation, and withholding); and destruction of property.
Financial and economic abuse involves controlling a person's ability to acquire, use, and/or maintain financial resources, including by preventing them from working or denying access to or withholding funds earned.
Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) includes formal and informal unions in which one or both parties are under the age of 18, regardless of local laws, and unions that occur without the full and free consent of one or both parties.
Female genital cutting (FGC) , also known as female genital mutilation (FGM) , refers to the partial or total removal of or injury to external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Note: Use FGC/M rather than female circumcision.
Forced and coerced pregnancy, abortion, and sterilization are all forms of reproductive violence and violations of reproductive rights which undermine a person's bodily autonomy and safety.
Conflict-related sexual violence includes all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, rape, and sexual enslavement as well as forced marriage, pregnancy, abortion, sterilization, or similar acts that are directly or indirectly related to conflict.
School-related GBV refers to instances of sexual, physical, or psychological violence that occur in or near schools, perpetrated against individuals based on their sex or gender identity.
Violence against children (VAC) refers to all forms of violence against people under the age of 18, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect perpetrated by parents and other authority figures.
Violence against women (VAW) refers to any act of physical, sexual, or emotional harm directed at women.

Resources

- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2021. "Gender-Based Violence." New York: UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-based-violence#readmore-expand>.
- World Bank. 2019. "Gender-Based Violence (Violence against Women and Girls)." Washington, DC: The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>.

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