

Gender-Based Violence and its Impact: The Omniscient Global Pandemic

Opinion

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Opinion

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has been a prominent topic, initially in the discipline and field of health communication, but it has become a key concern within multiple others over the past few decades since its impact on all aspects of society has been recorded and published prolifically. GBV is defined as any kind of verbal, emotional, psychological, financial, physical or sexual abuse perpetrated against another person because of their gender. This definition encompasses the abuse of other-gendered persons [1]. Despite volumes of research and intervention programmes aimed at addressing GBV across the globe, evidence of its elimination is scarce. In fact, the advances in technology, among other things, has exacerbated online child sexual abuse as well as human trafficking and specifically child sex trafficking, which has become one of the fastest-growing industries in the world [2], and is predicted to overtake the drug trafficking industry soon.

Paradoxically, regardless of the statistics and facts pertaining to GBV, which are widely reported and accessible, it is perpetuated through victims', perpetrators' and bystanders' silence due to the stigma that envelops it across all sectors of society. It is also generally known that most victims of GBV remain in abusive relationships because they are financially dependent on the perpetrators. This appears to be the case across all sectors of society. The most prevalent forms of GBV are Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Domestic Violence (DV) and Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). It has been estimated that as few as 7% of cases are reported to authorities and hence victims rarely receive any kind of support. During the Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa, for example, it was reported that 934 girls between 10 and 14 years old, some as young as 10 and 11 years old, gave birth to babies [3]. To date, there are no records available on the prosecution of the perpetrators of these obvious cases of child sexual abuse.

A general misconception about GBV is that it occurs mainly among non-white, poor, or less educated members of society. The reality is that it occurs among all members of society proportionately, affecting the poor far more adversely because of their limited access to resources and support services. In South Africa, for example, 81.4% of the population is black and as many as 18 million people live in extreme poverty [4]. Hence, GBV appears to be more prevalent among black people. For this reason, addressing GBV as an issue that also affects employees in the private sector has been a challenge. The report published by [Davis, Kuhudzai and Dalal 5] shows that most of the

employees who participated in the study indicated that GBV should be addressed in the workplace and that they required support. This makes sense, as [Davis 6] points out that in most cases, GBV occurs within the family.

Even though the financial impact of GBV on the economy has been conservatively estimated at up to R42.2 billion annually [5], the plea for employers to acknowledge and address GBV as an issue that affects workplace productivity has apparently not been heard clearly enough as there has been little or no evidence of policies or interventions to address GBV as an employee well-being issue in the private sector. There have been many developments in both local and global legislation to address the shortcomings and limitations that have prohibited the successful prosecution of GBV perpetrators in recent years.

However, changing laws and allocating resources will be to no avail if the key drivers of GBV are not addressed at community level, as shown in the report by [Matodzi, et al. 7] who show that the majority of GBV prevention and intervention work is being done by non-government organisations, which receive little or no funding from government. These key drivers include patriarchy that is still rife, cultural norms that protect perpetrators, religion that endorses subordination of women and children and, above all, the stigma associated with GBV, as mentioned earlier. The consequences of GBV for society at large have always been clear, but the persistence and increase in its occurrence clearly indicates that more needs to be done to facilitate successful collaboration among all stakeholders.

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