



## Causes and Effects of Gender-Based Violence

Running Time: 3 hours

Materials: Flipchart and flipchart stand/chalkboard, markers;  
Handout A: Effects of Gender-Based Violence  
Handout B: Social Responses to Gender-Based Violence

Target audience: can be used for awareness-raising with various audiences/participants

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### Introduction:

**Facilitator:** The principal characteristic of gender-based violence is that it occurs against women precisely because of their gender. Gender-based violence involves power imbalances where, most often, men are the perpetrators and women the victims. During this session we will explore in detail the causes and contributing factors of gender-based violence, various effects of gender-based violence on victims and their families, perpetrators and the society as a whole, as well as examine a variety of possible social responses to the phenomenon.

### Learning Objectives:

**Facilitator:** At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- List common myths that are used to justify gender-based violence.
- Distinguish between causes of, and contributing factors to, gender-based violence.
- Discuss effects of gender-based violence on women, women's families, perpetrators, and society as a whole.
- Identify integrated social responses to gender-based violence.

### Activity 1: Exploring Causes of Gender-Based Violence

1. Facilitator leads brainstorming session to create a list of common justifications for various types of gender-based violence. Facilitator asks each of the participants to share their ideas randomly or in turn.
  - ❖ *Write down each idea as they are offered on a flipchart without any comments, notes or questions for 5-7 minutes. After discussing the ideas, post the list on the wall so it is visible through the training workshop.*
2. Facilitator summarizes the result of the brainstorming and highlights the following concepts:
  - ♦ Justifications for violence frequently are on based gender norms – that is, social norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women. These cultural and social norms socialize males to be aggressive, powerful, unemotional, and controlling, and contribute to a social acceptance of men as dominant. Similarly, expectations of females as passive, nurturing, submissive, and emotional also reinforce women's roles as weak, powerless, and dependent upon men. The socialization of both men and women has resulted in an unequal power relationship between men and women.
  - ♦ According to the International Labor Organization, "...in general, the orientation of a culture, or the shared beliefs within a sub-culture, helps define the limits of tolerable behavior. To the extent that a society values violence, attaches prestige to violent conduct, or defines violence as normal or legitimate or functional behavior, the values of individuals within that society will develop accordingly. Attitudes of gender inequality are deeply embedded in many cultures and rape,

domestic assault and sexual harassment can all be viewed as a violent expression of the cultural norm." Source: Chapell D. and Di Martino V., 1998. *Violence at Work*, Geneva, ILO.

- ◆ There are many myths about gender-based violence that attempt to explain or justify it. Common myths include:



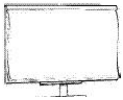
*Prior to the exercise, prepare a flipchart with the myths written on it for the participants' reference*

- ✓ The perpetrators of violence are a minority group of mentally ill men;
- ✓ Poverty or war lead to attacks on and abuse of women;
- ✓ Violence against women is caused by substance abuse, such as drugs and alcohol;
- ✓ Violence against women is an inevitable part of male-female relations;
- ✓ Violence against women is an inherent part of maleness, or a natural expression of male sexual urges.

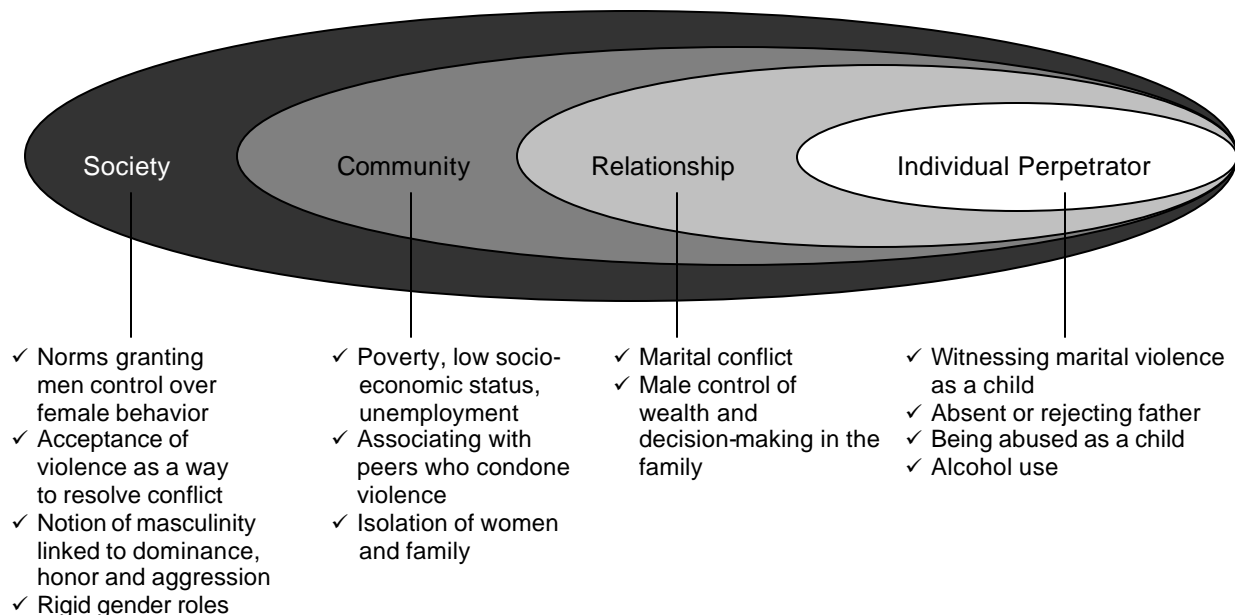
- ◆ Such views lead to a perception that gender-based violence is rare or exceptional, and/or that it is caused by factors outside of men's control. They place onus on women to ensure that they minimize the chances of their behavior instigating violence.

3. Facilitator gives a mini-lecture on causes of gender-based violence emphasizing the following ideas:

- ◆ What causes violence against women? Increasingly, researchers are using an "ecological framework" to understand the interplay of personal, situational, and sociocultural factors that combine to cause gender-based violence (*Population Reports/CHANGE, Volume XXVII, No. 4, December 1999*). In this model, violence against women results from the interaction of factors at different levels of the social environment.



*Prior to the exercise, prepare a flipchart with the ecological model of factors associated with gender-based violence. Refer participants to the flipchart while explaining the model.*



Source: Heise, L. *Violence Against Women: An integrated, ecological framework*, 1998, cited in *Population Reports/CHANGE*, Volume XXVII, No. 4, December 1999, available at <http://www.jhuccp.org/pr/111edsum.stm>.

- ♦ The model can best be visualized as four concentric circles. The innermost circle represents the biological and personal history that affects an individual's behavior in his/her relationships. The second circle represents the immediate context in which gender-based violence takes place— frequently the family or other intimate or acquaintance relationship. The third circle represents the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal, in which relationships are embedded— neighborhood, workplace, social networks, and peer groups. The fourth, outermost circle is the economic and social environment, including cultural norms.
- ♦ A wide range of studies suggest that several factors at each of these levels, while not the sole *cause*, may increase the likelihood of gender-based violence occurring (studies cited in *Population Reports/CHANGE*, Volume XXVII, No. 4, December 1999):
  - ❖ At the *individual level* these factors include the perpetrator being abused as a child or witnessing marital violence in the home, having an absent or rejecting father, and frequent use of alcohol.
  - ❖ At the *level of the family and relationship*, cross-cultural studies have cited male control of wealth and decision-making within the family and marital conflict as strong predictors of abuse.
  - ❖ At the *community level* women's isolation and lack of social support, together with male peer groups that condone and legitimize men's violence, predict higher rates of violence.
  - ❖ At the *societal level* studies around the world have found that violence against women is most common where gender roles are rigidly defined and enforced and where the concept of masculinity is linked to toughness, male honor, or dominance. Other cultural norms associated with abuse include tolerance of physical punishment of women and children, acceptance of violence as a means to settle interpersonal disputes, and the perception that men have "ownership" of women.
- ♦ An ecological approach to gender-based violence argues that no one factor alone "causes" violence but rather that a number of factors combine to raise the likelihood that a particular man in a particular setting may act violently toward a woman.
- ♦ In the ecological framework, social and cultural norms—such as those that assert men's inherent superiority over women— combine with individual-level factors— such as whether a man was abused himself as a child— to determine the likelihood of gender-based violence. The more risk factors present, the higher the likelihood of violence.
  - ❖ *Facilitator should be aware of the distinction between causes and contributing factors and articulate this to participants (i.e. low economic status, alcohol, narcotics all contribute to gender-based violence but themselves are not causes)*
- ♦ It is important to remember that psychological explanations for gender-based violence (i. e. witnessing marital violence as a child, having an absent or rejecting father, or being abused as a child) often fail to appreciate the role of wider inequalities in the relations between women and men, and the need to transform these. It is not simply the case that if one sees or experiences violence as a child, one will in turn abuse others. Studies emphasize that girls are three to six times more likely to experience sexual abuse than boys, yet the vast majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by male, not female, adults (e.g. Francine Pickup, in *Ending Violence Against Women: A Challenge for Development and Humanitarian Work*, Oxfam GB 2001).
- ♦ At the other extreme, the explanation of violence against women solely as the result of men's experience of external factors (i. e. poverty, conflict, rapid economic or political change), fails to

take into account that gender-based violence cuts across socio-economic boundaries. While evidence from women themselves in many different contexts indicates that poverty and crisis exacerbate violence against women, in particular domestic violence, poverty is not in itself the cause of violence against women. Rather, it is one of main factors that may aggravate or increase the violence that already exists. The fact that not all men in poor households are violent indicates that poverty is an insufficient explanation of violence. Exaggerating the role of poverty, in fact, negates people's agency in making choices about the way they react to factors outside of their control.

Likewise, conflict and rapid social or economic change affect the extent of gender-based violence in a society, but they do not cause it. Existing rates of violence against women do often increase during times of social instability, and new patterns of abuse can be triggered. Situations like men's unemployment and women's entry into the workforce during times of economic restructuring, or the lack of opportunities for demobilized soldiers after a war, may pose a challenge to men's sense of themselves as powerful. In contexts where individual men feel their sense of masculinity and power is threatened, and gender-based violence is condoned in law or in custom, such violence may increase in intensity and frequency, as men struggle to maintain a sense of power and control.

- ◆ The gender perspective on violence against women shows us that the root cause of violence lies in the unequal power relations between women and men, which ensure male dominance over women, and are a characteristic of human societies throughout the world.

## **Activity 2: Exploring Effects of Gender-Based Violence**

1. Facilitator introduces the activity with the following statement:

- ◆ While women are usually the immediate victims of gender violence, the consequences of gender violence extend beyond the victim to the society as a whole.
- ◆ Gender violence threatens family structures; children suffer emotional damage when they watch their mothers and sisters being battered; two-parent homes may break up, leaving the new female heads of household to struggle against increased poverty and negative social repercussions.
- ◆ Psychological scars often impede the establishment of healthy and rewarding relationships in the future. Victims of gender violence may vent their frustrations on their children and others, thereby transmitting and intensifying the negative experiences of those around them. Children, on the other hand, may come to accept violence as an alternative means of conflict resolution and communication. It is in these ways that violence is reproduced and perpetuated.
- ◆ During the exercise that we will conduct next, you will have an opportunity to examine the various effects of gender-based violence.

2. Facilitator forms small groups of 4-6 participants, distributes flipchart sheets and markers and gives them the following task:

- ◆ Discuss and identify effects of gender-based violence in terms of:
  - Impact on women's health:
    - Physical
    - Psychological
  - Economic and social impact on women
  - Impact on women's family and dependants
  - Impact on the perpetrators of violence
  - Impact on society



Write the above list on a flipchart sheet so the groups can refer to it.

- ◆ Each group will be assigned a separate category (or two categories) for discussion. You will have 25 minutes to complete this task.
3. After 25 minutes facilitator reconvenes the entire group and discusses their work using the following process:
    - a. Have one group to report the results of their discussion for the first category of effects, impact on women victims of gender-based violence.
    - b. Ask the other groups to add any items they discussed that did not appear on the reporting group's list.
    - c. Repeat steps *a* and *b*, alternating groups until each category has been discussed; end with adding any items missed by all the groups. See [Handout A](#) for a comprehensive list.
  4. Facilitator distributes the **Handout A** to the group and closes the exercises asking if there are any questions.

### Activity 3: Examining Social Responses to Gender-Based Violence

1. Facilitator introduces the idea of various social responses to GBV:
  - ◆ Over the last few decades, gender-based violence has been recognized and discussed as a public, rather than a private problem. As a result, a multitude of potential responses has been identified within the state and civil society.
  - ◆ There is a variety of approaches to gender-based violence (i.e. human rights, health, development) and they are being integrated to address the problem. Through participation of multiple sectors and entire communities in addressing gender-based violence, it is possible to achieve effective prevention and create social networks with ensure that victims of gender-based violence receive the care and protection they need.
  - ◆ The Pan American Health Organization points out that creating these networks involves integrating gender-based violence prevention and care into existing systems and services, as well as designing new responses. Social responses to gender-based violence fall under several categories:



Refer the participants to the flipchart prepared prior to the exercise, which lists the following social responses:

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#### Social Responses to Gender Based Violence

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ✓ health care services                      | ✓ education                                 |
| ✓ victim assistance services                | ✓ legal responses                           |
| ✓ working with perpetrators                 | ✓ community interventions                   |
| ✓ exploring masculinities                   | ✓ faith-based programs                      |
| ✓ media information and awareness campaigns | ✓ international conferences and conventions |

-- Pan American Health Organization, *Women, Health and Development Program*, Fact Sheet, available at <http://www.paho.org/English/HDP/HDW/socialresponsesgbv.pdf>.

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2. Facilitator divides participants into small groups or pairs that represent each social responses category or 2-3 categories (or the most applicable ones). Then the facilitator describes/ distributes a scenario about an individual victim, her abuser and her family, and asks the groups to brainstorm possible appropriate responses/activities from the perspective of their category/categories that would help the victim. Facilitator allows participants 25 minutes to complete the task.
3. After 25 minutes, facilitator reconvenes the entire group and they discuss their work through the following process:
  - a. Groups report back on responses/ activities, taking turns. Facilitator writes down the answers on the flipchart, under their respective category and adds items that have been missed by all groups. See [Handout B](#) for ideas.
  - b. Guided discussion in the large group follows.
4. Facilitator distributes **Handout B** and ends the exercise emphasizing the following points:
  - ♦ We have just identified many activities under various categories of social responses to gender-based violence that could be undertaken to address the problem more effectively. The handout you just received contains a complete list and description of social responses.
  - ♦ Effective violence prevention as well as the appropriate protection and support of victims require interdisciplinary and inter-institutional cooperation as well as a common understanding of the nature and causes of gender-based violence. Prevention, the protection of victims, work with perpetrators and informing the public therefore go hand in hand.
  - ♦ In order to create networks between different levels of intervention and to link a complementary range of services in the legal, political, psycho-social and medical domains, measures at the political, institutional and civil society levels must be coordinated and there must be agreement about the nature of gender-based violence.

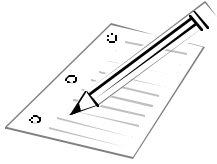
### **Summary and Closing:**

Facilitator closes emphasizing the following points:

- ♦ The root cause of gender-based violence lied in unequal power relations between women and men. However, a variety of factors on the individual level, the family level, and at the level of community and society, often combine to raise the likelihood of violence occurring.
- ♦ The effects of gender-based violence are far-reaching and extend beyond the individual survivor, to the family and society as a whole.
- ♦ Potential social responses to gender-based violence are most effective when there is a common understanding of the nature and causes of gender-based violence and it is addressed from all angles, through the participation of multiple sectors and entire communities.

### **Questions and Comments:**

Facilitator should end the session by asking if there are remaining questions or comments related to this material. Keeping track of feedback will allow the facilitator to make useful changes to future presentations.



## HANDOUT A

### Effects of Gender-Based Violence

The effects of violence on women vary widely. It depends on the nature of the particular incident, the woman's relationship with her abuser, and the context in which it took place. Gender-based violence typically has physical, psychological, and social effects. For the survivors, these are interconnected.

#### ⇒ **The impact on gender-based violence on women's health:**

Gender-based violence has been linked to many serious health problems, both immediate and long-term. These include physical and psychological health problems:

##### ➤ *Physical*

- ✓ injury,
- ✓ disability,
- ✓ chronic health problems (irritable bowel syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, various chronic pain syndromes, hypertension, etc.)
- ✓ sexual and reproductive health problems (contracting sexually transmitted diseases, spread of HIV/AIDS, high-risk pregnancies, etc.)
- ✓ death

##### ➤ *Psychological*

Effects can be both direct/ indirect

- ✓ Direct: anxiety, fear, mistrust of others, inability to concentrate, loneliness, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, etc.
- ✓ Indirect: psychosomatic illnesses, withdrawal, alcohol or drug use.

#### ⇒ **Economic and social impact:**

- Rejection, ostracism and social stigma at community level;
- Reduced ability to participate in social and economic activities;
- Acute fear of future violence, which extends beyond the individual survivors to other members in community;
- Damage to women's confidence resulting in fear of venturing into public spaces (this can often curtail women's education, which in turn can limit their income-generating opportunities);
- Increased vulnerability to other types of gender-based violence;
- Job loss due to absenteeism as a result of violence;
- Negative impact on women's income generating power;

#### ⇒ **The impact on women's family and dependants:**

##### ➤ Direct effects:

- ✓ divorce, or broken families;
- ✓ jeopardized family's economic and emotional development
- ✓ babies born with health disorders as a result of violence experienced by the mother during pregnancy (i.e. premature birth or low birth weight);
- ✓ increased likelihood of violence against children growing up in households where there is domestic violence;
- ✓ collateral effects on children who witness violence at home (emotional and behavioral disturbances, e.g. withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares, self-blame, aggression against peers, family members, and property; increased risk of growing up to be either a perpetrator or a victim of violence)

➤ Indirect effects:

- ✓ Compromised ability of survivor to care for her children (e.g. child malnutrition and neglect due to constraining effect of violence on women's livelihood strategies and their bargaining position in marriage)
- ✓ Ambivalent or negative attitudes of a rape survivor towards the resulting child.

⇒ **The impact of violence on the perpetrators:**

- sanctioning by community, facing arrest and imprisonment;
- legal restrictions on seeing their families, divorce, or the break up of their families;
- feeling of alienation from their families;
- minimizing the significance of violence for which they are responsible; deflecting the responsibility for violence onto their partner and failure to associate it with their relationship;
- increased tension in the home

⇒ **The impact of violence on society:**

- burden on health and judicial systems
- hindrance to economic stability and growth through women's lost productivity
- hindrance to women's participation in the development processes and lessening of their contribution to social and economic development.
- constrained ability of women to respond to rapid social, political, or economic change.
- breakdown of trust in social relationships
- weakened support networks on which people's survival strategies depend.
- strained and fragmented networks that are of vital importance in strengthening the capabilities of communities in times of stress and upheaval

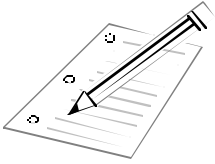
Sources:

*Population Reports/CHANGE*, No. 4, Volume XXVII, December 1999, available at <http://www.jhuccp.org/pr/l11edsum.stm>

Pickup, F., Williams, S., Sweetman, C. *Ending Violence Against Women: A Challenge for Development and Humanitarian Work*, Oxfam GB 2001

OutLook: *Violence Against Women: Effects on Reproductive Health*, Vol.20, No. 1 September 2002, available at [http://www.path.org/files/EOL\\_20-1.pdf](http://www.path.org/files/EOL_20-1.pdf).





## HANDOUT B

### Social Responses to Gender-Based Violence

- ❑ **Health Care** - Training health care providers to recognize and respond to gender-based violence is one of the most important ways of identifying and assisting victims. Not just obstetrician/gynecologists but all health care professionals must learn to recognize the signs: hospitals (especially emergency room staff); public and private health clinic staff; general/family practitioners; internists; pediatricians; psychiatrists; nurses and the staff of family planning clinics. More information: <http://www.ippf.org/resource/gbv/ma98/>
- ❑ **Victim Assistance Services** - These are services created or incorporated to respond to gender-based violence, such as: battered women shelters; homeless shelters; financial assistance programs; women's police stations or services; victim advocacy programs; rape crisis, domestic violence and suicide prevention hotlines; legal services; runaway programs; social welfare programs; psychological support services (including individual counseling and support groups) and teen sexuality programs/health services. More information: <http://www.ncadv.org/community/shelter.htm> and <http://www.sdn.org.gy/hands/crisiscntre.html>
- ❑ **Support Groups** - While support groups can fall under the heading of victim assistance services, they merit special mention because they are not always externally organized services. Support groups can be a important way for victims themselves to organize pro-actively and take charge of their own situation. Beyond emotional support, group members can also provide one another with a sense of security and even, if needed, a place to go. More information: <http://www.paho.org/english/hdp/hdw/lessonsfinal.pdf> (see section on support groups).
- ❑ **Working with Perpetrators** - Working with the perpetrators of violence (batterer-intervention programs) has been a controversial and occasionally successful response. While victim assistance services are a useful band-aid to address an existing problem, this approach targets efforts at the source of the problem, attempting to change violent men's behavior. More information: <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/vaw.asp#A101090200>
- ❑ **Exploring Masculinities** - Programs which address masculinities attempt to explore what "makes a man". The central idea is to educate boys from the earliest age that violence (against anyone) is wrong, that the prevailing definition of masculinity in any society is not the only alternative, and that even though they are physically different, girls are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as men. More information: <http://www.un-instraw.org/mensroles> and <http://www.puntos.org.ni> and <http://www.oneworld.org/cantera/>
- ❑ **Media Information and Awareness Campaigns** - The media is a key conduit for making GBV visible, advertising solutions, informing policy-makers and educating the public about legal rights and how to recognize and address GBV. Newspapers, magazines, newsletters, radio, television, the music industry, film, theatre, advertising, the internet, posters, leaflets, community notice boards, libraries and direct mail are all channels for providing information to victims and the general public about GBV prevention and available services. More information: <http://www.mencanstoprape.org/info-url2698/info-url.htm>
- ❑ **Education** - School systems are instrumental to stopping GBV before it starts. Regular curricula, sexuality education, school counseling programs and school health services can all convey the message that violence is wrong and can be prevented, suggest alternative models of masculinity, teach conflict-resolution skills and provide assistance to children/adolescents who may be victims or perpetrators of violence. Integrating GBV as a subject into psychology, sociology, medicine, nursing, law, women's studies, social work and other programs enables providers to identify and tend to this problem. More information: <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/courses.asp> and <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/educ.asp>
- ❑ **Faith-Based Programs and Services** - Religious counseling, support groups, education programs, study groups and assistance programs can address GBV with their participants/worshippers. Most religions emphasize the importance of peace and tolerance. Framing a discussion of GBV in the context of religious tenets is one way to foster awareness and discussion of the problem. It may also be a way to identify and assist victims who do not feel comfortable talking to a health care provider or police officer. More information: <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/rel.asp>
- ❑ **Legal Responses** - The criminalization of all forms of GBV - domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, psychological violence etc. has been an important step in eliminating it. What remains is the consistent application of these laws, the implementation of penalties, and a greater focus on rehabilitating convicted perpetrators. Other legal responses to GBV have included: legal aid services; training of police and judicial personnel; women's police stations; legal advocacy and lobbying; training of family, criminal, immigration and juvenile court lawyers and bar association advocacy. More information: <http://www.ilj.org/dv/>

- ❑ **International Conferences and Conventions** - The international community has come together to address gender-based violence through a variety of conferences, conventions and agreements. Though these do not have the same binding force as domestic law, international conventions such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women can be demonstrative of a state's willingness to acknowledge the problem of GBV and seek solutions. International conventions also hold states accountable to an international and externally monitored standard. International conferences on GBV bring together groups and actors from all over the world, giving them the opportunity to share their own experiences, and learn from others. DEVAW in English: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm> and in Russian: <http://www.un.org/russian/documen/declarat/violence.htm>
  
- ❑ **Community Networks and Interventions** - A number of studies have shown that involving entire communities in recognizing, addressing and working to prevent GBV is one of the surest ways of eliminating it. To be optimally effective, community networks must bring together all of the responses outlined above, integrating members from all sectors of the community: families; businesses; advocacy groups/civil society; public services such as police, fire fighters and medical examiners; social services such as welfare, unemployment, public housing and health; education; the media and officials from national, state/provincial and local/municipal governments. Community interventions must send a clear message about what gender-based violence is, the different forms it can take, why it is wrong and how to prevent it. More information: <http://www.ncadv.org/community/profile.htm>

Source: Pan American Health Organization, Women, Health and Development Program, Fact Sheet: *Social Responses to Gender-Based Violence*, available at <http://www.paho.org/English/HDP/HDW/socialresponsesgbv.pdf>.