

Myths and Realities of Gender-Based Violence

Time: 30 minutes

Activity Objective:

Deconstruct the myths and realities surrounding gender-based violence and understand that gender-based violence also affects males due to gender norms.

Materials:

- Flipcharts, markers, and tape
- Printed flipchart: Myths Surrounding GBV

Activity:

1. Point participants to five flipcharts hanging on the walls throughout the room, each with a statement about GBV (in italics below). Ask the participants to stand and join you by the first flipchart. Read the statement aloud, and ask whether it's true or false. Have participants raise their hand for the response they choose. Go to the next flipchart and do the same, facilitating a brief discussion around participants' responses.
2. As the discussions around each response develop, clarify the misperceptions and beliefs about each myth with the facts detailed after each myth below.

Myths Surrounding GBV:

- *The perpetrators of violence are a minority group of men with mental health issues.*

Violence may be perpetrated by those with mental health problems, but it is by no means a behavior related only to those who are mentally ill. Violence, and GBV in particular, is a common occurrence worldwide, as we will see in our next session. It is a socially and culturally learned behavior.

- *Poverty or war leads to attacks on and abuse of women.*
Poverty and war may exacerbate levels of violence. Some studies have found these phenomena to be risk factors for gender-based violence cuts across socioeconomic levels. There are many individuals living in poverty or war who are not violent toward women, and there are many individuals in higher economic quintiles or non-conflict settings that are violent toward women.
- *Gender-based violence is caused by substance abuse such as alcohol and/or drugs.*
Substance abuse may precipitate violent behavior or make potential victims more susceptible to violence. First, it may lower inhibitions on the side of the perpetrator. For the potential victims, it may impair judgment and cause them to make decisions that put them in situations that increase their risk for abuse or prevent them from defending themselves. It is important to recognize that neither alcohol or drugs or the victim should be blamed in these situations. Violence against women is unacceptable under all circumstances.
- *Gender-based violence is an inevitable part of intimate partner relations.*

Disagreements and disputes may be inevitable parts of intimate partner relations. However, violence as a way to resolve those disputes is not. Violence is a learned behavior and can be unlearned.

- *Violence against women is an inherent part of maleness or a natural expression of male sexual urges.*

Male violence is not genetically based; it is perpetuated by a model of masculinity that permits and even encourages men to be aggressive. It is up to us as individuals, communities, and as a society to change these gender norms so that violence against women is not accepted or tolerated.

3. Close activity by explaining that all of these statements are actually myths about gender-based violence that attempt to explain it or justify it:

- Such views lead to a perception that GBV is rare or exceptional and/or that it is caused by factors outside of men's control. They are used as justifications for violence.
- These views place the onus on women to ensure that they minimize the chances of their behavior instigating violence.

Make connections where possible to statements and comments made during the "Vote With Your Feet" exercise.

4. Explain to the group that justifications for violence are frequently based on gender norms:

- Gender norms are the socially assigned roles and responsibilities of women and men.
- Cultural and social norms often socialize men to be aggressive, powerful, unemotional, and controlling. This contributes to a social expectation (by both men and women) that accepts men as dominant.
- Similarly, expectations of women are that they be passive, nurturing, submissive, and emotional. This reinforces women's roles as weak, powerless, and dependent on men.
- The socialization of both men and women has resulted in an unequal balance of power and unequal power relationships between women and men.
- In many societies, children learn that men are dominant and that violence is an acceptable means of asserting power and resolving conflict.
- Women as mothers and mothers-in-law unwittingly perpetuate violence by socializing boys and girls to accept the dominance of men and by acquiescing throughout life to men's demands.

5. Tell the group that we should keep in mind our own cultural norms and thoughts about GBV as we design projects/programs and staff these projects. They can have an impact on attaining outcomes that prevent or mitigate GBV.