



Addressing Gender-based violence in Black, South Asian and Arab Communities

A Transformative Consciousness Framework

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Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit—Jawaharlal Nehru

If the society today allows wrongs to go unchallenged, the impression is created that those wrongs have the approval of the majority—Barbara Jordan



From a humanistic and universal rights perspective, everyone has the right to live free from violence or abuse. However, many individuals around the world continue to face violence daily due to their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender. This constitutes gender-based violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) is indeed rooted in patriarchal values and power imbalances rather than being solely a cultural phenomenon. Patriarchal systems uphold male dominance and control over women, which perpetuates various forms of violence and discrimination against women and gender minorities. This systemic issue transcends cultural boundaries and is prevalent across different societies and communities.

Acknowledging the patriarchal foundation of GBV is crucial for effectively addressing and combating this issue. It requires challenging and dismantling the structures of power and privilege that enable gender-based violence to persist. By advocating for gender equality, promoting education and awareness, and implementing policies that protect and empower survivors, we can work towards eradicating GBV and fostering a more equitable and just society.

The impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on individuals is profound and multifaceted. Some of the detrimental effects include:

1. **Serious physical injury:** GBV can result in severe physical harm, including bruises, fractures, internal injuries, and in extreme cases, death.
2. **Mental health concerns:** Survivors of GBV often experience significant mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other trauma-related disorders. These conditions can have long-lasting effects on a person's well-being and quality of life.
3. **Substance abuse:** Many survivors turn to substance abuse as a way to cope with the trauma and emotional distress caused by GBV. This can lead to addiction and further exacerbate mental health issues.
4. **Social and interpersonal difficulties:** GBV can damage survivors' trust in others and their ability to form healthy relationships. It can also result in social isolation, stigma, and discrimination, further impacting their mental health and overall functioning.



5. **Economic consequences:** GBV can have significant economic repercussions for survivors, including loss of income, employment opportunities, and housing instability. Economic dependence on abusers may also make it difficult for survivors to leave abusive situations.
6. **Long-term health effects:** GBV has been linked to various long-term health problems, including chronic pain, reproductive health issues, and increased risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and autoimmune disorders.
7. **Mortality:** In the most severe cases, GBV can result in death, either directly through homicide or indirectly through suicide resulting from the trauma and despair experienced by survivors.

It's important to recognize the full extent of the harm caused by GBV and to provide comprehensive tailored support and resources to survivors to help them heal and rebuild their lives. This includes access to medical care, mental health services, legal assistance, culturally sensitive community services, shelters, and social support (formal and informal) networks. Additionally, efforts to prevent GBV and promote gender equality, equity are essential to addressing the root causes of this pervasive issue.

While violence affects all people, certain individuals and groups are at a higher risk due to structural violence and barriers, societal norms, and practices. Racism, a socially constructed factor, contributes to violence against individuals in Western countries, particularly to racialized newcomers and those identifying as LGBTQ+. While both men and women experience violence, studies have shown that women, especially racialized and newcomer women, are more likely to experience GBV (Statistics Canada, 2021).

From a cultural and functionalist perspective, this framework endeavors to utilize socio-cultural principles (namely Afrocentric, Lifetime Spiral, Kapwa and Ubuntu principle) to address gender-based violence through an equity lens.

This framework can be universally applied by service providers working with GBV victims and survivors to eradicate GBV from our communities. The framework incorporates both lived experiences and professional expertise ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing gender-based violence



(GBV). By drawing from existing literature, as well as insights gained from individuals who have directly experienced GBV and professionals working in the field, service providers can leverage interventions and strategies from this framework that are evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the diverse needs of survivors. The involvement of individuals with lived experiences ensures that the framework reflects the realities and challenges faced by survivors, as well as their strengths, coping mechanisms, and preferences for support. Their input help identify gaps in existing services and inform the development of more effective and survivor-centered interventions.

Their expertise has help validate the findings from the literature review, provide practical guidance on implementation, and ensure that the framework aligns with best practices and ethical standards in the field. By integrating these diverse perspectives, service providers can create a more holistic and effective approach to addressing GBV, ultimately working towards the eradication of violence in our communities.

The Afrocentric Theoretical Lens

The role of culture in gender-based violence cannot be understated. In studies of diverse groups and populations, researchers advocate for employing the Afrocentric approach when working with individuals of African descent. In this context, Afrocentricity pertains to individuals of African descent throughout the diaspora (Davis et al., 2010).

Afrocentricity, as defined by Asante (1987), entails viewing a practice from the standpoint of the people (Africans) who are subjects of the study. This approach emphasizes considering the history, culture, knowledge, and experiences of Africans regarding the practice under investigation. While primarily used in African studies, this approach can be applied globally to gain deeper insights into individuals and their cultures. Culture profoundly influences people's worldviews and social actions.

Service providers should cultivate cultural awareness and integrate the culture of service users when providing support. Through cultural humility, service providers seek to understand how culture affects service user's coping mechanisms, their understanding of abuse, and the importance of social support in their lives.



Service providers should learn and understand the culture of service user to offer culturally attuned services, even when approaching them from a Westernized perspective.

Additionally, maintaining confidentiality and being mindful of power dynamics and social location are essential to maintaining a strong relationship with service users. Through a strength-based approach, service users should be empowered to be independent and advocate for themselves rather than being in a passive position when seeking support.

The Elmwood Community Resource Centre (ECRC) utilizes the culturagram model to support service users by understanding their cultures and providing appropriate services. Additionally, the center employs a diverse staff from various cultural backgrounds to support service users, fostering hope and rapport.

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Abuse

The Lifetime Spiral of Gender Abuse illustrates the potential for violence across the female lifespan. From infancy to adulthood, racialized women may experience numerous abuses and oppressions. While some abuses may be confined to specific life stages, others persist throughout their lives, resulting in enduring trauma. This model reveals patterns of victimization, identifying different abusers throughout their lives. For instance, a father may assault his daughter, a husband may abuse his stepdaughter, or a college student may assault a classmate. This model not only uncovers past histories but also anticipates potential instances of abuse based on past violence. By utilizing this model, service providers can account for the various types and levels of abuse a woman has experienced since childhood. ECRC applies this model to gain an understanding of racialized women's experiences of abuse and provide appropriate support. Using this model, service providers delve into victims' and survivors' histories of GBV to understand their experiences, including the causes and effects of violence, coping mechanisms, and potential interventions to prevent future abuse and trauma.



Kapwa Concept

Kapwa serves as the foundation of the Filipino value system, shaping not only individuals' personalities but also their very personhood. Without Kapwa, one ceases to be fully Filipino and human, according to scholars like Enriquez (2013; Reyes, 2015). Incorporating the principle of Kapwa in working with those at risk or survivors of GBV offers a powerful framework for healing and support.

Kapwa, which translates to "Fellow Human" in Filipino culture, emphasizes interconnectedness and shared identity among individuals. It underscores the moral imperative to treat others as equal fellow humans, regardless of social status, and opposes exploitation for self-gain. By embracing Kapwa in their work, service providers can create a sense of solidarity, empathy, and mutual respect among GBV survivors and those at risk. This approach fosters a supportive community where individuals feel valued, understood, and empowered to heal and advocate for themselves and others. In essence, Kapwa offers a holistic and culturally relevant framework for addressing GBV, rooted in the fundamental values of interconnectedness, equality, and human dignity. This can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of service providers interventions, ultimately contributing to the collective strength and resilience of individuals and communities affected by GBV.

Ubuntu Concept

Ubuntu is an African philosophy emphasizing 'being human through other people.' It encapsulates the idea that 'I am because of who we all are' (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu, originating from the Nguni and Bantu languages of Africa, symbolizes humanity, compassion, and interconnectedness. It underscores communal living, respect, and acknowledging our collective social responsibility. Ubuntu values life, dignity, compassion, harmony, and reconciliation. Although rooted in sub-Saharan Africa, its principles are applicable worldwide and can be applied in various contexts. Similar to the 'nnoboa' concept in Ghana, Ubuntu promotes communal living, respect, and supporting one another during challenging times. Integrating Ubuntu into GBV services entails becoming each other's keeper and providing unconditional support to prevent and address GBV incidents. While governments have developed policies to



combat GBV, community-level action is crucial. Ubuntu calls for collective support to prevent violence and assist victims in finding healing.

Service providers should incorporate Ubuntu principles into their interactions with community members, encouraging them to call out abusive behavior and assist those experiencing abuse. The ECRC encourages clients and community members to develop safety plans and supports them in addressing abusive behaviors in their families and communities.

Transformative Consciousness

Adopting a transformative consciousness approach in the healing journey for GBV victims and survivors is essential for fostering empowerment, healing, and social change. This approach recognizes and honors the unique experiences and identities of survivors while also envisioning a future free from violence and oppression. By promoting collaboration, shared power, and dialogue, service providers can create safe and supportive spaces where survivors feel empowered to share their stories, insights, and needs. This not only helps survivors feel heard and validated but also allows them to contribute to the collective understanding of GBV and its impact on individuals and communities. Encouraging participation and accountability within the healing process enables survivors to take an active role in their own recovery and advocacy efforts. Service providers can offer resources, support, and guidance while also respecting survivors' autonomy and agency.

Integrity and truth are central to the transformative consciousness approach, emphasizing the importance of honesty, transparency, and ethical conduct in all interactions and interventions. This includes acknowledging and addressing power imbalances, biases, and systemic barriers that may affect survivors' access to support and justice.

Overall, by centering the principles of transformative consciousness in their work, service providers can create a more inclusive, empowering, and effective approach to supporting GBV survivors and working towards a world where violence is no longer tolerated or accepted.



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