

Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Addressing the Impact of Gender-Based Violence on Women's Economic Participation

Chefor Ngwenyi Meungwe

Introduction

For societies to thrive, every citizen must have equal rights, be able to safely exercise their own voice, and live free from intimidation, harassment, discrimination and violence. Preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) around the world is a matter of human rights, justice, equity, and equality. Gender based violence encompasses a spectrum of harmful behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, specifically targeted at individuals based on their gender (Vyas et al 2023). Despite substantial progress in acknowledging and addressing this issue, Gender-based violence (GBV) persists as a significant barrier to achieving economic growth, and with the scale tilting to the side of the females as the highest victims, economic participation of these ones remains a fairy tale. Gender-based violence refers to harmful behaviors directed at individuals based on their gender, manifesting in various forms, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Jones et al 2020).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive human rights violation that affects millions of women and girls worldwide. Beyond its devastating physical and emotional consequences, GBV also has significant economic implications, hindering women's ability to participate in the economy and achieve economic freedom. This paper highlights the impact of GBV

on women's economic participation, presents the current situation, and provides recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to address this critical issue.

Challenges and Brief Situational Analysis of GBV

GBV can limit women's economic participation in several ways:

1. **Reduced labor force participation:** Women who experience GBV are more likely to miss work, quit their jobs, or experience reduced productivity, resulting in lost income and economic opportunities. A study by the World Bank found that women who experience violence are 10% less likely to participate in the labor force (Vyas et al 2023).
2. **Limited access to education and training:** GBV can disrupt women's education and training, reducing their chances of acquiring skills and qualifications necessary for economic empowerment. According to UNESCO, 60% of women who experience violence report that it affected their education (Impe 2019).
3. **Decreased entrepreneurship:** Fear of violence can discourage women from starting their own businesses or participating in entrepreneurial



Source : Care

activities, limiting their economic autonomy. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor found that women entrepreneurs who experience violence are 20% less likely to start a business (Elam et al 2019).

4. Increased healthcare costs: GBV can lead to physical and mental health problems, resulting in increased healthcare costs and reduced economic productivity. The World Health Organization estimates that the cost of intimate partner violence alone is approximately \$8.3 billion annually in the United States (WHO 2013).
- Globally, 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (Garcia et al 2019). This means that approximately 35% of women worldwide have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence, which can have severe and long-lasting effects on their physical and mental health, relationships, and overall well-being. This violence can take many forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and harassment, and can be perpetrated by family members, partners, or strangers. The prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) is a clear indication of the deep-seated gender inequalities and power imbalances that exist in societies around the world.

It is a violation of women's fundamental human rights and a major obstacle to achieving women's economic participation and empowerment.

- In developing countries, GBV is a significant barrier to women's economic empowerment, with 70% of women experiencing violence in their lifetime (Cepeda et al 2022). This statistics highlights the critical intersection of gender-based violence and economic inequality. Women who experience violence are more likely to be trapped in poverty, as they often have limited access to education and job opportunities, and thus face significant obstacles in achieving economic independence, talk less of economic participation (Sardinha et al 2022). The prevalence of GBV in developing countries is often exacerbated by factors such as lack of access to education, limited economic opportunities, and weak legal and social protections for women. Addressing GBV is essential to promoting women's economic empowerment and achieving sustainable development in these countries. It requires a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening laws and policies, providing access to education and economic opportunities, and challenging harmful gender stereotypes and social norms that perpetuate violence against women.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen laws and policies: Governments should enact and enforce laws and policies that protect women from GBV, including providing access to justice and support services for survivors.
2. Increase access to education and training: Governments and organizations should increase, reinforce and include female empowerment courses to their curricula, as this could help emancipate and instill in young girls the spirit of independence from a young age. Governments should, thus, reinforce their engagement in awareness-raising campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.
3. Support entrepreneurship and economic empowerment: Governments and organizations should provide resources and support for women entrepreneurs, including access to capital, mentorship, and networking opportunities.
4. Provide healthcare and support services: Governments and organizations should ensure access to healthcare services, including mental health support, for survivors of GBV.

Conclusion

The shackles of gender-based violence must be broken to unlock the full potential of women's economic participation and empowerment. The far-reaching consequences of GBV are a stark reminder that the struggle for gender equality is not only a moral imperative, but an economic one. By perpetuating a culture of fear, GBV stifles innovation, entrepreneurship, and productivity, ultimately hindering economic growth and development.

However, by adopting a comprehensive approach that engages governments, organizations, and individuals, we can create a seismic shift in the status quo. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this policy brief, we can dismantle the barriers that have held women back for far too long. We can create a society where women are free to pursue their passions, start businesses, and contribute to their communities without fear of violence or discrimination. All of these will encourage women to be more empowered, productive and hence contribute to the economic growth of the country.

References:

1. Cepeda, I., Lacalle-Calderon, M., & Torralba, M. (2022). Measuring violence against women: a global index. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(19–20), NP18614–NP18638.
2. Elam, A. B., Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G., Baumer, B., Dean, M., Heavlow, R., & Global Entrepreneurship Research Association. (2019). Women's entrepreneurship report 2018/2019.
3. Garcia-Moreno, C., & Amin, A. (2019). Violence against women: where are we 25 years after ICPD and where do we need to go?. *Sexual and reproductive health matters*, 27(1), 346–348.
4. Impe, A. M. (2019). Reporting on violence against women and girls: a handbook for journalists. UNESCO Publishing.
5. Jones, C., Skinner, T. S., Gangoli, G., Smith, O., & Fenton, R. (2020). Gender-based Violence Among UK University Students and Staff: A Socio-Ecological Framework. The SCuLE Centre Working Paper, 21(21–2)
6. Sardinha, L., Maheu-Giroux, M., Stöckl, H., Meyer, S. R., & García-Moreno, C. (2022). Global, regional, and national prevalence estimates of physical or sexual, or both, intimate partner violence against women in 2018. *The Lancet*, 399(10327), 803–813.
7. Vyas, S., Meinhart, M., Troy, K., Brumbaum, H., Poulton, C., & Stark, L. (2023). The economic cost of violence against women and girls in low-and middle-income countries: a systematic review of the evidence. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(1), 44–55.
8. World Health Organization. (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. World Health Organization.



Chefor Ngwenyi Meungwe

Research Assistant,
Small Business &
Entrepreneurship Center
(SBEC)