



Where We Stand Position Paper: Violence Against Women and Girls

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Position Summary:

- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to any act of gender-based violence (GBV) that results in, or is likely to result in, harm or suffering to women and girls. While GBV can affect anyone, this paper specifically addresses the disproportionate impact of VAWG.
- VAWG is one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations globally. Rooted in gender inequality, this violence limits the ability of all women and girls to reach their full potential and fully participate in society.
- VAWG occurs worldwide, cutting across all generations, nationalities, communities, societal spheres, and digital spaces, irrespective of age, ethnicity, disability, or other background, making it a universal issue that requires inclusive solutions.
- As the world is still not free from VAWG, there is a universal need to increase efforts across all sectors. Governments, private partners, and civil society must collaborate to create lasting change and fulfil the obligations of Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 5.

Where Things Stand...

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) refers to any act of gender-based violence (GBV) that causes, or is likely to cause, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls in all their diversity, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, in public or private life, in person or online. This encompasses a range of harmful practices, including domestic violence, sexual assault, femicide, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking, economic abuse and more. VAWG stems from gender inequality, discriminatory social structures, stereotypes and attitudes that systematically disadvantage and devalue all women and girls.

While GBV can affect anyone, VAWG addresses the disproportionate impact on all women and girls. GBV includes violence against any person based on their gender or gender identity, whereas VAWG focuses on the systemic and pervasive nature of violence specifically targeting all women and girls. This distinction is crucial; according to recent data, 1 in 3 women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, with over 25 per cent subjected to intimate partner violence between the ages



of 15 to 49. Girls under 15 are also vulnerable, especially in contexts where child and early marriage is prevalent, exposing them to lifelong cycles of violence and control.

VAWG in specific contexts, such as domestic violence, technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV), and climate- or conflict-related violence, requires focused attention. Domestic violence is a prevalent form of VAWG that occurs within families, domestic units, or between intimate partners; in 2021, more than five women or girls were killed every hour globally by a partner or family member. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis, leading to global surges in domestic violence reports driven by economic stress, isolation, and reduced access to services, while resources were diverted to combat COVID-19, straining preventative and response services.

TFGBV, including online stalking, harassment, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (“Revenge Porn”), causes significant emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical harm. The prevalence of commercially produced pornography often intersects with TFGBV, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and normalising violence against women, this contributes to a broader culture of exploitation and misogyny, both online and offline. Recent data shows 85 per cent of women globally have witnessed online VAWG, with 38 per cent experiencing it personally. UN Women notes that TFGBV has surged since the COVID-19 pandemic, as women increasingly work, study, and socialise in online spaces.

Conflict-related and climate-induced VAWG are also concerns. Conflict-related sexual violence affected at least 3,688 people in 2023, most of whom were women and girls. The impacts include severe trauma, social stigma, and economic marginalisation of survivors. Climate change further exacerbates gender inequalities, with women comprising 80 per cent of climate-displaced individuals; in climate-stressed areas, women and girls are up to 14 times more vulnerable to harm, including child, early, and forced marriages, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence. Conflict and climate-related VAWG both inflict immediate harm and hinder long-term development.

The impact of VAWG is far-reaching, affecting survivors' physical and mental health, educational and economic opportunities, and quality of life. Additional repercussions include increased medical expenses and disruptions to studies or employment, limiting opportunities and making financial independence harder to achieve. The psychological toll, including lowered self-esteem, can further reduce the likelihood of survivors pursuing better employment or educational opportunities.

The broader social and economic consequences of VAWG are extensive, with an estimated global cost of at least USD 1.5 trillion annually, approximately 2 per cent of the global GDP. These financial burdens, including healthcare, legal costs, and lost productivity, hinder national development and strain public resources. Socially, VAWG



reinforces harmful norms and perpetuates gender inequality, limiting women's participation in economic, political, and social spheres. The impact extends across generations, normalising violence and creating persistent social challenges. By perpetuating cycles of poverty and restricting women's opportunities, VAWG significantly hinders individual and societal development.

Global progress toward addressing VAWG has been supported by several key frameworks advancing women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which acknowledge VAWG as a form of discrimination. The Istanbul Convention further reinforces this, as the first legally binding treaty to recognise VAWG as a form of gender-based violence (GBV), setting comprehensive standards for prevention, protection, and prosecution. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) enshrines global efforts to protect children, from violence and exploitation. Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality), provide a framework for global action, with target 5.2 focused on eliminating all forms of VAWG. These mechanisms are complemented by the Human Rights Council's appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, to monitor and advocate for global efforts to eliminate VAWG.

Many countries have strengthened their legal frameworks to address VAWG. As of 2024, 162 countries have passed domestic violence laws, 149 countries have criminalised marital rape, and 120 countries have prohibited child marriage. Additionally, 141 have enacted legislation to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value, reducing economic violence and promoting financial independence. Regarding TFGBV, the Budapest Convention has been instrumental in addressing internet and computer crime through harmonised laws and international cooperation. Some nations are integrating climate-related VAWG into their National Adaptation Plans, acknowledging the increased vulnerabilities women face during climate-related disasters. Other milestones include the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which addresses the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on all women and girls, as well as Resolution 1820, which recognises and condemns sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Where things need to go...

All women and girls have the right to live free from violence. Achieving this requires a global effort to promote equality and fulfill all women and girls' fundamental human rights. This must begin with comprehensive education programmes, integrated into school curricula and community initiatives, that challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes from an early age, engage men and boys, and address intersectionality to meet the specific needs of marginalised groups. Strengthening response mechanisms



and investing in evidence-based prevention programmes that address the root causes of VAWG are essential steps in ending violence. Moreover, building a culture of mutual respect and cooperation is key to preventing and eliminating VAWG.

Accountability for perpetrators is also critical for prevention. Robust legal frameworks must be enforced to prosecute violence in public, private, and digital spaces, as well as during conflict and other emergencies. Strengthening judicial systems, training law enforcement, and ensuring survivor-centric legal processes are vital, while prioritising the dignity, safety, and autonomy of survivors. Simultaneously, governments and stakeholders must invest in comprehensive data collection to understand the scope and scale of VAWG, informing evidence-based policymaking and programme development.

TFGBV and other emerging forms of VAWG demand immediate action as more women and girls engage with digital spaces. Governments and tech companies must collaborate to create stronger laws and regulations that hold perpetrators accountable and ensure online platforms remove harmful content swiftly. Educational campaigns that focus on digital literacy and online safety must also be prioritised to empower women and girls to protect themselves from TFGBV. Ensuring safe online spaces is integral to allowing all women and girls to fully participate in the digital world without fear.

The COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, and ongoing conflicts underscore the urgent need to integrate VAWG response into emergency planning. During crises, all women and girls are often at heightened risk of violence, making it crucial to ensure that support for survivors - such as medical care, psychological support, legal assistance, and shelters - remain accessible. Expanding these services, particularly in rural, conflict-affected, and underserved areas, is essential to effectively protect and support those most vulnerable.

Addressing VAWG requires global and local partnerships, with governments, international organisations, civil society, and community groups collaborating on cohesive strategies. Sharing best practices, resources, and expertise can enhance the effectiveness of interventions and ensure that efforts are sustainable and impactful.

Fundamental Action:

Soroptimist International calls on all UN Member States to:

- Ratify and implement, without reservation, all international conventions and treaties addressing VAWG, including CEDAW, CRC, the Istanbul Convention, and



International Labour Organisation Convention 190, while actively engaging in their accountability mechanisms and ensuring that national policies align with these human rights commitments;

- Invest in long-term prevention efforts, including education campaigns that challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes, and promote gender equality from an early age through school curricula and community programmes;
- Enact or reform legislation without delay to criminalise all forms of VAWG and rigorously enforce these laws, ensuring multidisciplinary approaches and appropriate prevention, protection, and prosecution of perpetrators and coordinated policies. This includes harmonising formal and customary laws and rejecting any differentiation between the public and private spheres as a justification for VAWG;
- Establish robust legal frameworks and judicial systems that hold perpetrators of VAWG accountable, providing access to justice for survivors. This includes providing training for law enforcement and judicial personnel on VAWG-related issues to ensure that survivors' rights are protected throughout the legal process;
- Ensure that all women and girls have access to essential services, such as medical care, psychological support, legal assistance and safe shelters. These services must be available during crises, including climate emergencies, conflict situations and pandemics, with special attention to underserved and rural areas;
- Recognise that certain groups, including but not limited to migrants, refugees, Indigenous women and girls, those living with disabilities, HIV-positive women and girls, and those facing multiple forms of discrimination, are at heightened risk of VAWG. Solutions must be rights-based and survivor-centred; and
- Ensure that VAWG is never used as a weapon of war and that all women and girls in conflict-affected areas are fully protected, with accountability for those who perpetrate such violence.

Additional Action:

- Encourage research into causes, nature, seriousness, consequences and effective measures to implement and redress VAWG;



- Ensure robust systems for collecting reliable, disaggregated data on violence against all women and girls, safeguarding the safety and confidentiality of those providing data and using it to inform evidence-based policies and programmes;
- Invest and collaborate with all sectors, including civil society, to design and develop gender-sensitive national support systems that provide well-funded shelters as well as medical, psychological and other counseling services and free or low-cost legal aid to enhance self-advocacy, empowerment, and dignity for all women and girls subjected to violence;
- Assign core resources to perform due diligence in independent oversight, regular reviews and monitoring of all VAWG to implement legal, policy and education reforms that promote social transformation; and
- Integrate VAWG response into emergency planning to ensure support services remain accessible even during crises.

Where Soroptimist International Stands:

Soroptimist International is committed to ending all forms of violence against all women and girls in all their diversity. Soroptimist International will continue to:

- **Educate** members and the wider public on the causes, impacts, and forms of VAWG, equipping them with the knowledge to challenge harmful norms and advocate for the rights and safety of all women and girls;
- **Empower** communities to stand against VAWG by fostering leadership, providing resources, and supporting advocacy efforts at local, national, and international levels, enabling all women and girls to be changemakers in their own lives and societies;
- **Enable** access to vital services, quality, lifelong education, and opportunities for all women and girls affected by VAWG, ensuring they have the tools and support needed to rebuild their lives and achieve their full potential.

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