

Commentary

The cross-generational impact of gender-based violence on children health

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DESCRIPTION

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue that significantly affects the health and well-being of individuals and communities. It encompasses any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender, and it manifests in various forms including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence.

GBV has severe immediate and long-term consequences on physical health. Physical injuries are among the most direct and visible impacts. These injuries can range from bruises and cuts to fractures, chronic pain, and disabilities. For instance, survivors of physical assault often sustain injuries that require medical treatment and can lead to long-term physical impairment. Sexual violence, a prevalent form of GBV, leads to additional physical health issues such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV, unintended pregnancies, and gynecological complications. The trauma from these physical injuries can also result in chronic conditions such as gastrointestinal disorders, headaches, and cardiovascular issues, which persist long after the initial violence. GBV also has a negative impact on reproductive health outcomes. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) puts women at risk for reproductive coercion, which can result in unintended pregnancies and difficult pregnancies and deliveries. Maternal health is particularly compromised, as stress and physical harm can result in miscarriage, preterm labor, and low birth weight infants. These problems can be made worse by the interruption of maternal health services brought on by stigma and fear, which decreases the chance of receiving appropriate prenatal and postnatal treatment.

GBV has an equally severe psychological impact that frequently results in persistent mental health issues. Survivors of GBV are at an increased risk of developing depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other trauma-related disorders. The constant threat and reality of violence create an environment of fear and stress, which can degrade mental well-being over time. Anxiety, dreadful events and hallucinations are common symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is often caused by physical and/or sexual abuse.

Additionally, GBV significantly affects cognitive functioning and can lead to difficulties in concentrating, memory problems, and

impaired decision-making. The psychological stress of living in an abusive environment can disrupt daily functioning and academic or professional performance, leading to social and economic consequences. Substance abuse is another important concern since some survivors use drugs or alcohol as a therapeutic method, which makes their health issues worse and makes rehabilitation more difficult.

GBV disturbs social relationships and can lead to social isolation and stigma. Survivors often face significant barriers in seeking help due to fear of not being believed, shame, and societal norms that perpetuate victim-blaming. In terms of behavior, GBV survivors might engage in risky activities as a coping strategy or as a result of abuser pressure. These actions can involve risky sexual relations, drug misuse, and food disorders, all of which are harmful to an individual's health. The economic impact of GBV is substantial, affecting the survivor's ability to achieve economic stability and independence, which in turn impacts health. The costs associated with healthcare for treating injuries and psychological conditions are significant, and many survivors encounter financial obstacles to accessing necessary care. Lost productivity due to physical and mental health issues also contributes to economic instability, further exacerbating health disparities. Survivors often miss work or are unable to maintain steady employment, leading to financial dependence on the abuser or on inadequate social support systems.

Healthcare providers play an important role in identifying and supporting survivors. Training healthcare professionals to recognize signs of GBV and provide appropriate care and referrals is essential. Creating safe and confidential environments where survivors feel comfortable disclosing abuse is a key component of effective intervention. Integrated care models that combine physical health, mental health, and social services can provide comprehensive assistance to survivors, addressing the multifaceted impacts of GBV. Preventive measures are equally important. Public health campaigns that raise awareness about GBV, challenge societal norms that allow violence, and promote gender equality can help prevent GBV and mitigate its health impacts. Community-based programs that engage men and boys in discussions about gender norms and violence can also be effective in changing attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate GBV.

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