Faith, Gender & Sexuality: A toolkit

Resources for faith practitioners

Challenging sexual and gender-based violence: Overview

The purpose of this module is to broaden the understanding of **sexual and gender-based violence** (SGBV) and to explore the ways in which it **impacts people marginalised because of their gender and sexuality**. The module outlines the impact of SGBV on individuals, families and communities, and it offers insight into the ways in which gender and sexual minorities are 'policed' through violence.

- SGBV refers to all violence that is committed against a person based on their perceived or actual sex and/or gender. It is a gross violation of human rights and is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and hegemonic masculinity.
- SGBV includes physical, verbal or sexual violence, the victimisation of people because of their masculine or feminine traits or sexual orientation, and any form of violence that stems from unequal power relations.
- Violence can also be understood as a structural phenomenon, rather than a form of direct contact. Structural violence includes systemic exclusion from work, education, as well as forms of 'containment' such as imprisonment. It is often accompanied by individuals not being recognised as fully human and therefore subject to multiple forms of abuse.
- Power relations that define people's identities – gender, class, race, age, and sexuality – are can be reinforced through interpersonal and/or structural violence. The group or individual with more power uses violence and discrimination in order to uphold their power over the other group or individual. Patriarchal systems and beliefs – namely beliefs in men's superiority over women – must be challenged in order to reduce SGBV.

Gender non-comformity and LGBTI

Gender non-conformity

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is often used in **response to a perceived threat** against dominant masculine gender norms. People who do not fit into traditional gender categories are targeted, for instance those who display assertive femininity or homosexuality. In a patriarchal setting, these categories are put on a scale of acceptable gendered behaviour from 'hegemonic masculinity' at the top, and 'emphasised femininity' at the bottom. For instance, machismo and bravery are characteristics of 'hegemonic masculinity' while being dainty or shy are characteristics of 'emphasised femininity'. Those that challenge or threaten that scale are then punished, 'othered' and stigmatised. This happens when men and women don't act according to strict gender norms, but also when they cross sexuality lines – LGBTI persons in particular are victims of SGBV because they are perceived to cross both gender and sexuality lines.

Homophobia and heterosexism

Homophobia often stems from **fear or misunderstanding** about the 'threat' that LGBTI persons pose against gender and sexual norms, and often manifests itself as SGBV. Further, there is a lot of misunderstanding of the abuse that exists in lesbian and gay relationships – where abusive power relations exist beyond the victim's and perpetrator's gender. One in four lesbian or gay persons experience domestic violence in their relationships but only 1 in 200 will report the matter due to fear of discrimination, including:

- Further abuse and ridicule by the police;
- Torture by authorities;
- Abuse and blackmail by medical practitioners;
- Stigma and myths surrounding violence between partners of the same sex.

Violence against LGBTI people

Across Africa violence against LGBTI people is extremely high. SGBV committed against people who identify or who are perceived to be LGBTI is often ignored, condoned and even encouraged by policymakers and law enforcement agents – particularly in countries where homosexuality is illegal. Many men and boys are beaten and sexually assaulted to make them 'more of a man', while many women and girls suffer 'corrective rape' in order to 'convert' their sexual orientation. These are commonly defined as 'hate crimes' and are an infringement of their human rights.

A hate crime is a crime in which the perpetrator's conduct is motivated by hatred, bias or prejudice, based on the actual or perceived race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity of an individual or group of persons.

A study conducted by the Equality Project found that 74 per cent of homophobic attacks in South Africa were perpetrated against lesbians, followed by transgender people (14.3 per cent). Nearly half of all victims were black (48 per cent). It is therefore very important to understand the gendered and racial inequalities that are interlinked to homophobic and transphobic attacks.

What forms of SGBV impact sexual minorities?

Physical and Interpersonal: Corrective rape, murder, bullying, harassment, blackmailing, extortion

Structural: Job loss, imprisonment, exclusion from education and employment eviction from families and communities. Many transwomen, for instance, are forced into sex work after being fired from occupations in the formal sector.

How can faith communities address SGBV?

1. Commit to making the problem of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) a critical concern

- Emphasize the teachings, practices, and organisational structures that promote the right to be free from violence, such as teachings that support equality and respect for women and girls.
- Develop theologically-based materials that emphasize everyone's right to safety and support and a perpetrator's personal responsibility for ending the violence.
- Adopt policies developed by religious leaders that outline appropriate responses to survivors and perpetrators of violence and educate leaders about child abuse reporting requirements, the importance of confidentiality and other safety issues.
- Support local advocacy programs that provide services to survivors by encouraging faith communities to donate

time, money and other material resources.

2. Ensure that religious, spiritual, and faith-based communities are safe environments to allow survivors of violence to discuss their experiences and seek healing

- Encourage members and leaders of churches, synagogues, mosques, and other spiritual or faith-based groups to seek training on survivor experiences and on support that will restore and heal the survivor.
- Create opportunities for survivors to discuss their experiences and needs. Form support groups in collaboration with local sexual assault and domestic violence programs for women who desire faith- or spirituality-based healing.
- Encourage members to discuss sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking within their faith communities in a manner sensitive to their cultures and backgrounds.
- Create or provide materials that address survivors' concerns and offer informed referrals to various advocacy organisations.
- Encourage men, particularly leaders in the community, to speak out and use their influence to communicate intolerance for gender-based violence in all forms.
- Emphasize teachings and practices that promote equality and respect for both women and men.
- Integrate information on gender-based violence into existing activities.

3. Develop strategies to address the needs of all those exposed to violence

- Include members of specific ethnic and cultural groups in discussions of community efforts addressing violence.
- Seek advice from various age groups within communities on ways to address violence.
- Organise youth ministry and leadership groups to educate young people about the dynamics, impact, and prevention of gender-based violence.
- Inform leaders about the particular vulnerabilities of older people and people with disabilities who may be dependent on abusive partners or caregivers.
- Seek appropriate training and legal assistance before advising immigrant victims so as to avoid potentially compromising their citizenship status.

4. Develop and refine guidelines and protocols for responding to gender-based violence related to members of the congregation or community

- Encourage support for a survivor's continued inclusion in the community of her choice if the perpetrator is from the same community, including respecting emotional and physical safety considerations and no-contact orders.
- Consider the emotional and physical safety of survivors and any dependents affected by violence, including elderly relatives and children.
- Encourage youth workers to receive training on child abuse reporting requirements and local child welfare practices.
- Encourage congregations, religious community centres, and other religious institutions to adopt policies for employees, members, and participants who may be survivors or perpetrators of violence.

5. Draw on the resources of secular survivor service, advocacy, and perpetrator treatment programs to enhance community responses to SGBV

- Network with survivor service and advocacy programs to locate religious and secular allies on the local, regional, state, and national levels.
- Use the resources of other religious groups and existing SGBV survivor advocacy organisations to develop policies, protocols, and educational materials appropriate to specific traditions.
- Learn about local secular community protocols for handling SGBV.

- Make appropriate and informed referrals to local secular programs that have the expertise to help survivors or perpetrators, including the legal community, healthcare system, and child welfare system.
- Collaborate with perpetrator treatment programs to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence.

This great toolkit for integrating LGBTI issues into HIV and GBV Prevention is designed to:

- Build knowledge and skills around the rights and needs of LGBTI, with specific reference to preventing both HIV and GBV, and reducing the risk of LGBTI people to both epidemics.
- Be a tool for advocacy purposes to build policy and programme support for LGBTI within the HIV and GBV arena, at community, national and regional levels.
- Inform HIV and GBV programme and policy planning, ensuring that the rights and needs of LGBTI are considered.

Read more: Toolkit for integrating LGBTI issues into HIV & GBV prevention [1]

Activities

These two simple activities encourage discussion on sexual and gender-based violence using personal experiences.

Activity 1: LGBTI violence across Africa (40 minutes)

Using a film clip, this activity allows participants to reflect on African experiences of homosexuality. The film will encourage participants to understand the experiences of LGBTI people in Africa and the violations against their human rights that occur. The participants will be asked to share their reflections after the film is shown.

Download the pdf of this exercise [2]

Activity 2: A case study (75 minutes)

For this session you will need to find a faith leader in your community that has successfully dealt with SGBV. Discussion will cover the role faith leaders and institutions can play to combat all forms of SGBV, including the challenges and successes.

Download the pdf of this exercise [3]

Case study

Overview

A baseline assessment on the social attitudes, relations, and practices of men in relation to gender, and sexual and gender-based violence in Burundi

Tearfund believes that the Church should always be a place where social norms and attitudes can be challenged if they are causing harm. The Bible teaches that all humans should be treated with love and respect and that men and women are created equal in the eyes of God.

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world and is still emerging from a 12-year ethnic-based civil conflict. Many women and girls have experienced SGBV, but there is a lack of reliable data on its prevalence. Yet the majority of Burundians profess the Christian faith and the Church is at the heart of the community. SGBV has taken root in cultural,

religious and societal thinking, influencing the behaviour, attitudes and practices of men and women in harmful ways.

For three years, Tearfund has been working with the local Church to address the issue. They are committed to being a catalyst in ending all forms of SGBV against women and girls, and acknowledge the positive role men and boys can play in restoring society and redeeming manhood.

During August and September 2013 Tearfund commissioned a study about men, faith and masculinities within five Anglican Church parishes: Rutana, Matana, Ntaho, Bukemba and Timbura. A total of 414 people (219 men and 195 women) were interviewed through 12 group surveys and 20 focus-group discussions.

This case study is based on the Burundi Summary Report from Tearfund

Read more: Men, faith and masculinties: Burundi [4]

Summary of key findings

Despite the research results showing the challenging attitudes upheld by both men and women, most participants were not defensive about their beliefs and expressed a need to change, even when justifying actions that were harmful to their lives. This creates a unique opportunity for the Church to work within communities to transform social norms and influence culture for good. Here are some of the key findings from the research.

Gendered roles and attitudes

1. Men and women held strong attitudes on gendered roles, which informed their work, roles and responsibilities within the home and society.

2. Men and boys expressed frustration when they were unable to fulfil the expectations of their families.

3. More than two-thirds of women thought a husband should provide economically for the family.

4. A large percentage of men and women thought that a woman's primary role was cooking and taking care of the home.

5. The majority of women felt it was a mother's responsibility to care for the children. But this restricted men in their caregiving role and prevented children from having positive relationships with fathers.

6. Men and women linked their roles to the creation story in the Bible. They believed that the scriptures taught that a woman was inferior or unequal to a man, especially within marital relationships.

Decision-making and domestic duties

1. Almost 100 per cent of men and women agreed that a woman should obey her husband.

2. Almost two-thirds of men stated that the man should have the final say in all family matters.

3. Women expressed concerns and fears about their husbands abusing alcohol, engaging in extramarital relationships, polygamy and transactional sex, which were corrupting family relationships and impacting finances.

4. Decision making and control were linked to a skewed or partial understanding of scripture, many citing only part of Ephesians 5:23: 'For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church', and failing to read the entirety of the scripture which goes on to command man to respect his wife.

5. Attributes expressed in relation to 'headship' were of dominance, control and power and violence.

6. Men articulated that the economic power within the home was shifting due to male unemployment, and that women copied the controlling model of headship.

Violence, manhood and SGBV

1. 97 per cent of men and 95 per cent of women said it is manly to defend the honour of the family, even by violent means.

2. Men expressed the need to discipline their wives when they did something dishonourable or wrong. They linked this to biblical manhood and said that it was important to show this in front of children and the community to maintain respect and control.

3. 89 per cent of men and 93 per cent of women said that if a victim didn't physically fight back, it wasn't rape.

4. Women thought that a woman cannot be raped by her husband as they believed her body belonged to him according to the scriptures.

5. A skewed belief that women were inferior, and men were entitled to women as they were created as 'helpers', seemed to contribute to harmful practices which lead to different forms of SGBV.

6. A culture of shame and stigma was associated with SGBV and participants focused on the behaviour of the victim rather than the perpetrator – 77 per cent of men and 95 per cent of women were in agreement with the statement: 'some women ask to be raped by the way they dress and behave.'

Key recommendations

The research in Burundi found that the Church and religious leaders have the power to break the negative cycle of SGBV that has permeated society and culture. Based on this research, the study provided some key recommendations that can be used and adapted to other contexts where religious organisations are working to address SGBV.

Build awareness: It is crucial that the church engages with other organisations, such as civil society groups, non-governmental organisations, other faith-based groups and government service providers, to educate men, women and children on the different types of SGBV that can occur, and to promote the laws, policies and services that are available to survivors.

Provide education and training: There is a desperate need for sound theologically-based education and training for church leaders and congregation members, which will have a positive impact on society. This should cover equality and equitable relationships – particularly within the story of Creation and New Testament teachings, fair and fulfilling roles in sex, marriage and family relationships, the need to redeem an understanding of manhood and masculinity, a transformed understanding of what it means to be the head of the household and promoting relationships of mutual respect and value between husband and wife – this can be done through promoting Christ-like equitable role models.

Create safe spaces: Churches, community groups and state-run projects need to create safe spaces for men and boys, and SGBV survivors, to share ongoing vulnerabilities and heal from their own traumatic experiences of violence. This will facilitate a space for transformative masculinities and bring an end to stigmatisation.

Show leadership: The Church needs to denounce violence in all forms and publicly reject the norm that is attributing 'manliness' to violence. We need to invest in leaders who live and demonstrate equitable attitudes, based on the character, teachings and life of Christ. This will promote equitable, non-dominating, non-violent relationships at all levels.

Provide mentorship: There need to be programmes for young people on positive masculinities, and pre- and post-marriage counselling for couples, which focus on positive aspects of relationships and family wellbeing.

Reach hard-to-reach areas: The Church is the only institution accessible to people in remote areas, and it is imperative

that the Church works in partnership with local and national administrative and judicial bodies to respond to incidents of SGBV and promote an understanding of all of the above.

Create meaningful partnerships: Churches and non-FBOs (non-faith-based organisations) need to form coalitions and collaborate with other key organisations on advocacy efforts to influence national policy and practices.

- It is important that non-FBOs acknowledge that there is scope and willpower to change from within the Church, and find common ground to work together.
- Churches and non-FBOs need to form coalitions and collaborate with other key organisations on advocacy efforts to influence national policy and practices.

Further reading

There are many useful resources on this topic. We've selected a few and include a brief description of each resource under the link, so that you can see if it's something you'd like to read more about. If you have additional resources you would like to share through this toolkit, please send them to us by email at spl@ids.ac.uk

Source URL: http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexuality-gender-faith/challenging-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-sgbv

Links

[1] http://safaids.net/content/toolkit-integrating-lgbti-issues-hiv-gbv-prevention

[2] http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sites/spl.ids.ac.uk/files/module_3_activity_1.pdf#overlay-context=sexuality-gender-faith/sexuality-and-gender-diversity/activities

[3] http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sites/spl.ids.ac.uk/files/module_3_activity_2.pdf#overlay-context=sexuality-gender-faith/sexuality-and-gender-diversity/activities

[4] http://www.wewillspeakout.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Men-faith-and-masculinities-Burundi-English-FINAL.pdf