

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE 101

A Transformation Hub Booklet



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Elsayed, Dalia, Natalie Kouri-Towe, Marlihan Lopez, Evelyne Marchal Ferrière. 2025. Gender-Based Violence 101. *The Transformation Hub*. A partnership of Éduconnexion, Simone de Beauvoir Institute, and Projet 10.

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Acknowledgements

This project was supported by funding from the Office of Community Engagement, Concordia University; RÉQEF: Réseau québécois en études féministes; Mitacs; and the FRQSC.

Translation support from Alexis Poirier-Saumure.

Graphic design by Lauren Kandalaft.

Who is this Booklet for?

This booklet was designed for use by community groups and organizations in Montreal, Quebec. Anyone who is interested in introductory-level information on gender and sexuality-based violence (GBV) can use this booklet. Use this guide to help you develop tools for supporting people within your community who experience GBV to determine their own pathways for reducing violence and securing their emotional and physical safety. You can also use this guide to help empower your communities to recognize the signs and causes of violence and to create non-violent alternatives.

What this booklet is not

This booklet does not outline all forms of gender and sexuality-based violence (GBV) and we don't recommend using this booklet as a final answer for how to respond to GBV. Context matters, so follow the needs and priorities of the people you're working with.

Understanding Forms of Violence

Interpersonal Violence vs State Violence and Institutional Violence

Interpersonal violence is generally understood as violence that occurs at the individual or intimate levels, such as in a friendship, an intimate relationship, a domestic situation, or within a family or workplace. State violence is violence enacted in the name of the law by agents of the government, such as police, the military, immigration and customs agents. Institutional violence describes the violence enacted by public and private institutions, such as schools, hospitals, welfare agencies, and other organizations. These different forms of violence are connected rather than separate: interpersonal violence is often permitted or shaped by state violence and institutional violence, and likewise when interacting with the state and institutions, people can experience interpersonal violence.

All violence is connected to the systems and structures that enable people to have power and control over others.

Coercive Control

Coercive control is a form of violence that is identified by a pattern of behaviour across multiple aspects of a relationship. In situations of coercive control, the behaviour of the person enacting violence (i.e. coercive, controlling, and sometimes unpredictable behaviour) results in the person experiencing harm losing their sense of freedom, autonomy, and self-determination. People who find themselves in coercive control relationships may be isolated and lacking a community of support, and often struggle to protect themselves from violence or leave these relationships. It can take multiple attempts to leave a coercive control relationship, and there is a risk of violence escalating when a victim finally leaves, so seeking expert help may be necessary.

How to support someone in a coercive control relationship:

- Offer non-judgemental support and information
- Help them break feelings of isolation and find connection and community
- Help them access support and resources from experts (e.g. domestic violence shelters, counselors and therapists who have worked with victims of domestic violence – however avoid recommending couple's counselors or therapists)
- Help them develop a safety plan in the interim, or find an expert who can help them with safety planning (e.g. who to call if things get worse, where to go to escape or hide, saving an emergency number in their phone under an alias name)

Situational Violence & Identifying the Factors that can Impact GBV

Situational violence is the most common form of GBV found in interpersonal relationships. Situational violence includes violence that emerges in contexts, rather than a part of the predominant pattern of a relationship, such as when substance use is involved or in times of high stress or crisis. Situational violence may be sporadic or spontaneous (i.e. unexpected, out of the blue, something that never happened before or doesn't happen again) or recurring (i.e. something that has happened before in a relationship and may happen again). Distinguishing between situational violence and coercive control can help you and the person you're supporting prioritize what kind of response will help them achieve more safety.

Cases of GBV where "violence is situational and/or bi-directional, or in which other related issues, such as substance use, are a key factor" (Wathen and Mantler 2022) may benefit from therapy-based support, including individual and/or couples counselling. Both people experiencing violence and enacting violence in these cases may benefit from a "trauma-informed" therapy approach. Meanwhile, in cases of coercive control, couples therapy or couples counseling can increase risks for the person experiencing violence; so use caution if you're considering suggesting counseling or therapy.

Common factors that shape experiences of situational violence:

- Financial instability (e.g. job loss, debts, gambling addiction)
- Housing insecurity (e.g. being evicted, over-crowded housing, unsafe housing)
- Addiction and substance use (e.g. violent interactions tend to happen only when substances such as recreational or prescription drugs and/or alcohol are being used)
- Lateral violence (e.g. someone who has experienced violence replicates violent behaviour with another person, sometimes a peer or other family member)

Strategies for supporting someone in situational violence:

Important Note: Always seek the consent of the person experiencing violence before reaching out to another group, organization or individual on their behalf. Prioritize helping them access tools, resources and information to make their own decisions.

- Economic and social empowerment: help identify potential sources of support to alleviate and de-escalate the factors shaping the situation (e.g. employment, childcare, financial aid, foodbanks, support groups, housing)
 - Access to social housing, co-op housing, finding affordable housing options, intergenerational family housing arrangements, identifying space needs and challenges (e.g. rooms with doors that lock from the inside so one can shelter in place)
 - Support for job searching, access to social assistance, support programs for debt relief or gambling addictions.

- Support for addiction and substance use (e.g. counselling, support groups, accessing safe injection sites, safe drug supply).
- Develop a cybersecurity and digital safety plan (e.g. identifying risks around cyber stalking, keeping information private, use of location services, etc.)
- Develop a safety plan (i.e. where to go or who to call when situations of violence escalate)
- Resist and act against GBV culture and heteropatriarchy by identifying a culture of violence where violence is encouraged, valorized, justified, dismissed, or tolerated by witnesses and help support cultural changes (e.g. men against violence against women groups, by-stander interventions).
- Encourage learning and skill building (e.g. psychosocial counseling and education, and conflict resolution skill building)
- Find communities* the person you're trying to support is already connected to, such as:
 - faith-based organizations (e.g. mosques in Muslim communities and churches in Christian communities),
 - local grassroots groups or cultural associations,
 - family members and/or friends,
 - Other service providers.

Important Note: *People who experience GBV might express hesitation about reaching out to communities they're members of for fear of reprisal and confidentiality concerns.*

Therefore, when identifying potential community supports, check to ensure they meet the needs of the person you're supporting, and that take an approach that integrates and supports the intersecting needs and identities of the person seeking support.