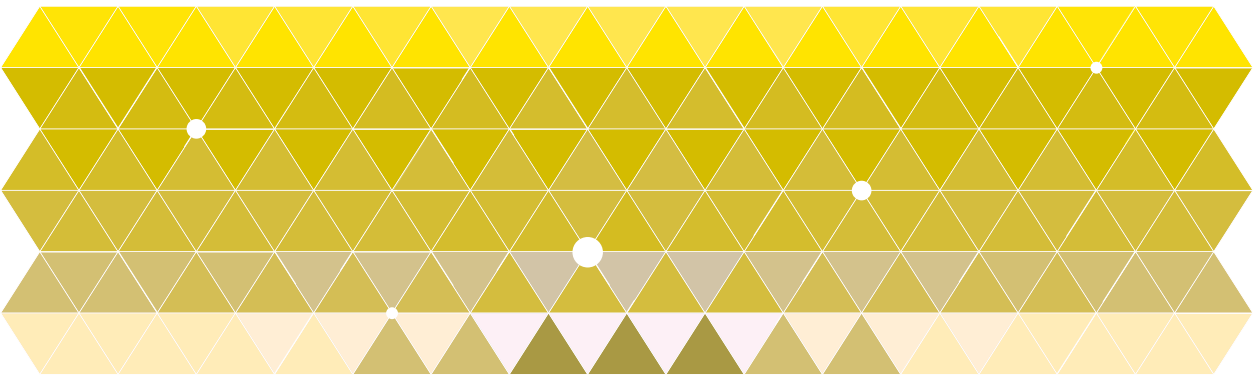


GUIDELINES FOR DEBATE

WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?






BY MARIÁN GULÍAS OGANDO

In this edition of *Guidelines for Debate*, we will be defining the concept of Gender-Based Violence, examining how it is manifested and analyzing some of its causes. Furthermore, we will offer activities to understand and debate the issue, and through these generate ideas that will help to prevent and eradicate the problem.

The aim of the series GUIDELINES FOR DEBATE is to influence the formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies through guidelines that foster the debate of ideas from a progressive approach. The collection features a cool exchange of data and theoretical and methodological tools for analysis and action aimed at emerging political generations.



OFF WE GO WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

Violence is the intentional exercise of power in an abusive manner that causes harm, either self-inflicted or directed at others. Violence can manifest itself at distinct levels: directly, structurally and culturally.¹

A) DIRECT VIOLENCE: This is physical or verbal aggression between individuals. Typically, it is easily identifiable, however, in some cases, it can be expressed very subtly. (For example, insults, a hit, offensive rumors.)

B) CULTURAL VIOLENCE: This is exercised against individuals or groups due to the fact that they possess certain characteristics (homosexuals, indigenous people, people living with HIV, women, people who use drugs, people who practice a religion, sex workers, etc.) Thus, these people are denied or obstructed the full practice of their rights (e.g. to kill newborn girls because boys are more highly valued or when a person with tattoos is denied work.)

C) STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: This occurs when there is an imbalance of power, reflected in the institutional framework, that allows better opportunities to be presented to certain people or groups, while denying them to the rest, and so violating their rights (e.g. laws that criminalize the legal termination of a pregnancy; when a woman who was violated is denied a legal process to penalize the crime because it is considered that “she provoked the rapist”; when homosexuals are denied being able to give blood donations.)

Furthermore, there exist distinct types of violence: physical, psychological, economic, patrimonial and sexual.

LET'S GO OVER SOME EXAMPLES IN ORDER TO CLARIFY THE CONCEPTS:

TYPES OF VIOLENCE

- Physical
- Economic
- Psychological
- Patrimonial
- Sexual

EXAMPLES

- A student hits his classmate
- A nurse threatens to reveal the serological status of a patient living with HIV
- A father denies his daughters their alimony
- A woman who deprives her daughter of official documents belonging to the daughter
- An adult who masturbates in front of his 10 year old niece

THE FOLLOWING CHART SHOWS THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT LEVELS AND TYPES OF VIOLENCE:



ACTIVITY 1

Prepare colored cards and in each one **DESCRIBE A PERSON**. The description can include whatever information you think is necessary. The following are some examples: A domestic worker, primary school student, secretary, police man, homosexual woman, indigenous girl, a man who uses drugs, an elderly person, a female teacher, a director of a health center, a pregnant woman living with HIV, a young person living in the street, a heterosexual female lawyer, a catholic priest, a female member of Parliament, a female doctor in a private hospital.

Ask each participant to choose a card **AT RANDOM** and afterwards, to group together into pairs or groups of three. Ask each team to **THINK ABOUT THE TYPES OF VIOLENCE** that could be directed at each of the given people.

Following this, ask the participants to voluntarily **SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS** with the rest of the group.

BELOW WE SUGGEST SOME QUESTIONS WITH WHICH YOU CAN STEER THE DISCUSSION:

- What situations can lead to violence?
- Can different types of violence be exercised at the same time?
- How could violence be prevented?

ON WE GO WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

Gender-based violence can manifest itself in any of three levels or as any of the five types of violence previously described. The first definition of this phenomenon was outlined by the United Nations (UN) as: “[...] all acts of violence based on the fact that a person is of the female sex that have or can have a harmful result or bear physical, sexual or psychological suffering on the woman, including threats of such acts, coercion, or deprivation of her liberty, whether in the public or private life.”²

Traditionally, the term gender-based violence has been used as a synonym of violence against women. However, adhering to a broader definition: gender-based violence is exercised when a person, independent of their sex, gender-identification or sexual orientation, does not conform to traditional gender roles or his/her gender mandate.³ The main populations who face this type of violence are women and people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, transvestite and intersexual communities (LGBTITI), although they are not the only ones.

WHO'S WHO? HERE ARE SOME USEFUL DEFINITIONS:

BISEXUAL

A person who feels sexually attracted to both men and women.

HETEROSEXUAL

A person who feels sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.

HOMOSEXUAL

A person is homosexual if they feel sexually attracted to a person of the same sex.

GAY

An English term used to refer to homosexual people; generally used for homosexual men.

LESBIAN

A homosexual woman, i.e. a woman who is sexually attracted to other women.

INTERSEXUAL

A person born with a combination of sexual and/or reproductive organs that does not correspond with what is considered "male" or "female" (e.g. a baby born with a large clitoris, a baby born with a scrotum divided in such a way that it is formed like labia).

TRANSVESTITE

Those who dress and behave in ways that are considered of the opposite sex. Their sexual orientation is not necessarily homosexual.

TRANSSEXUAL

Those who feel that their sexual characteristics do not correspond with their identity and so look to change their body.

TRANSGENDER

Those who do not make any changes to their sexual anatomy, but have physical, behavioral and even hormonal traits contrary to their sex.

ACTIVITY 2

Organize a **DEBATE** among the participants. If you think it is necessary, further clarify the definitions presented above, so that everybody understands and there is no confusion.

BELOW WE SUGGEST SOME QUESTIONS FOR THE DEBATE:

- Do you know a person who does not have the characteristics that, according to society, correspond to their sex? In what way can their rights be violated?
- Do you think the violence that can be exercised against these groups is the same or similar to violence against women? Why?
- Must gender be considered synonymous with women?
- Are there only two genders?⁴

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In some cases, international treaties and laws speak of the concept of gender-based violence strictly as a synonym of violence against women. This happens because “it is acknowledged that the experiences women and men have of violence are different and that violence against women is a manifestation of a historical inequality of the power relations between the man and the woman, and of discrimination against the woman.”⁵ Due to this, many legal instruments have been created focusing on women leaving aside that men can also suffer from gender-based violence. As explained before, the concept of gender does not mean women alone. However, given that men, as a group, have had more power than women as a group,⁶ the laws have focused on women and the particular situations they live.

THE UN⁷ CONSIDERS THAT THE FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ARE:

- Intimate partner violence of any kind (physical, sexual, patrimonial, psychological and/or economic)
- Harmful traditional practices (forced marriage, genital mutilation, disfiguration by acid)
- Femicide: gender-based murder of women
- Sexual violence (harassment, rape)
- Trafficking (the transporting of people under their consent, generally, with the goal of migrating to another country) and sex trading (receiving or transporting under threats or deception for the purpose of exploitation) of women.
- Violence perpetrated or condoned by the State through public servants, public policy or by way of omission on their part (e.g. forced sterilizations, laws against abortion)
- Violence in situations of armed conflict (displacement, sexual violence as a war tactic)

ACTIVITY 3

Before the workshop, create a **MEMORY GAME** using cards of the same color and size. In a group of cards write down **EXAMPLES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**, and in the other group write down the corresponding definitions. The participants may play memory in the traditional way, identifying the concepts as they play.

BELOW WE SUGGEST SOME EXAMPLES:

- **SEXUAL ABUSE:** Any type of sexual activity (penetration, physical touching, forced masturbation, exhibitionism, child pornography, exposure to sexually explicit material) that occurs without the consent of each person.
- **HARASSMENT AT WORK (MOBBING):** Exercise of power through subordination of the victim who is harassed in a work or school setting. Can be carried out verbally, physically or sexually.
- **HARASSMENT (STALKING):** When a person follows another, spies on them or attempts to contact them through any means without the other's consent. All forms that are a violation of the privacy of that other.
- **RAPE:** Vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a person without their consent.
- **FEMICIDE:** Hate crime against women. The progression of violent acts (mistreatment, physical violence, torture, rape, sexual harassment, etc.) and any policy, tolerated by the State, that result in the deaths of women.
- **STATUTORY RAPE:** When an adult sexually abuses a minor through deception or abuse of confidence.
- **HOMOPHOBIA:** Discriminatory behavior of a hateful, rejective or prejudiced nature against people of a homosexual orientation.

- **SEXUAL BULLYING:** All acts done in order to sexually manipulate, blackmail or coerce another. For example, asking for sexual favors, kisses, caresses, glances, jokes and contact without consent. It generally occurs in a work or school environment.
- **LESBOPHOBIA:** Hatred, prejudice and discrimination directed towards homosexual women.
- **PSYCHOLOGICAL MISTREATMENT:** Screaming, contempt, humiliation, punishments, threats of abandonment.
- **TRANSPHOBIA:** Hatred, prejudice and discrimination towards transsexual or transgender people.
- **SLAVE-TRADING OF PEOPLE:** The action of capturing, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving people by means of threats, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, situation of vulnerability, grant payments or benefits in exchange for control of the life of the victim for the purposes of exploitation. This can be sexual, forced labor, slavery or the removal of organs.
- **CONJUGAL VIOLENCE:** When a member of a couple forces the other to have sexual activity by the fact that they are married or a couple.

AT THE END OF THE ACTIVITY, those who wish to may comment on their thoughts. It's important to know if the group was familiar with these terms, if they have identified these situations as violent and if they can now **RECOGNIZE THEM** with greater ease.

ACTIVITY 4

Create a **LIST OF SITUATIONS** where gender-based violence occurs. Invite the participants to **FORM GROUPS** of two or three. Each group will discuss **FIVE** of the examples that, in the end, they will present to the other participants. The purpose is to distinguish whether the examples are of gender-based violence or of violence in general. Finally, **DISCUSS TOGETHER** what changes in attitude or values are needed to prevent these violent situations.

BELOW WE SHOW SOME EXAMPLES:

- My father insists that my sisters prepare dinner for me because I am a man.
- I am a transsexual but am not allowed to process my credentials in order to vote.
- A mother hits her 5 year-old son.
- My father won't let me study engineering because I am a woman.
- My partner left me because I am a man and did not believe that I had been raped.
- My husband won't accept it when I do not want to have sexual relations.
- Two sisters scream and hide things from one another.
- My son was insulted at school because he cried with fear after an earthquake occurred.
- I was told in church that I must not use contraceptive methods.
- I am a domestic worker and my boss forces me to give him oral sex.
- My boyfriend made me leave work because I am a woman and I was earning more money than him.

- Students spread rumors about a teacher.
- I am a sex worker and my partner hits me if I do not have sexual intercourse with him.
- The taxi-driver had been touching my leg, but I could not defend myself.
- In work everyone avoided me after they found out I am gay.
- My boyfriend won't allow me to have male friends because he believes that friendships can't exist between men and women.
- My father hit me after he discovered condoms in my bag.
- My husband made me give up my job because I'm a woman and I was earning more money than him.
- I am a woman and my husband cannot accept it when I don't want to have sexual intercourse.

ACTIVITY 5

If there is sufficient time and resources, **WATCH A MOVIE** to provide examples of the issue. We've suggested some below that expose situations of gender-based violence in distinct contexts:

- Iron Jawed Angels
- TransAmerica
- Ma Vie en Rose
- Billy Elliot
- The Help
- Revolutionary Road

BELOW ARE SOME QUESTIONS THAT CAN HELP TO GUIDE REFLECTIONS ON THE MOVIES:

- Can you identify violent situations?
- What type of gender-based violence occurs?
- At what level does the violence occur?
- Can you identify people constructed in ways that conform to gender stereotypes?
- What aspects of society, in each movie, help or hinder the people who suffer gender-based violence?
- What situations of gender-based violence depicted in the movie also occur in your community?

At the end of the activities,⁸ ask if anybody wishes to share their personal experience of the workshop, ask if there are any doubts or questions, and whether or not the information provided makes them feel more capable of identifying when a situation is violent, and if they think that they can now recognize the difference between violence and gender-based violence.

1. Martha Isabel Leñero Llaca, *Equidad de género y prevención de la violencia en secundaria*, Mexico, sep-unam-pueg, 2011, pp. 52 – 53.
2. Unifem, http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/ViolenciaDomestica_LAC_spn.pdf, November, 2012.
3. "Gender is a historical and cultural construction, learned and internalized through socialization, which dictates the attributes assigned to men and women. Therefore, it determines a series of roles, attitudes and behaviors based on sexual difference, as well as structuring power relations." (Guidelines for Debate: What is the Gender Perspective? Available at: <http://www.espolea.org/2/post/2012/03/gpd-qu-es-la-perspectiva-de-gnero.html>)
4. In order to carry out this activity it is suggested that you use some visual aids (drawings, photographs, magazine articles, etc.). It is important to take care that the images used do not stereotype behavioral or gender roles.
5. UN, "Ending violence against women: from words to action. Study of the Secretary-General. Executive Summary", Available at: [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/handbook/Handbook-for-legislation-on-VAW-\(Spanish\).pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/handbook/Handbook-for-legislation-on-VAW-(Spanish).pdf), December 18, 2012.
6. It is necessary to note that each person is crossed by different power structures, and one of these, is gender. However, factors such as age, social class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, level of education, etc., allow some people better access to benefits, services and rights than others. This means that the imbalance of power between people does not just occur simply due to the fact of being a man or a woman, but also due to the particular configuration of the aspects of a person's life. For example, a Christian, heterosexual Finnish woman of forty years of age probably has more power than an indigenous adolescent male from Bolivia. When we consider all the features that make up a person's identity in order to establish how accessible rights and opportunities are to them, this is called intersectionality.
7. UN, *Manual of Legislation on Violence Against the Woman*, New York, 2010, p. 26. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/launch/english/v.a.w-exeE-use.pdf>, December 18, 2012.
8. It would be very useful before giving the workshop, to familize yourself with local services which aid in case of gender-based violence as, in the situation that somebody requests it, you would be able to offer them information in this respect.

The views expressed in the text, as well as the analyses and interpretations contained therein, have not been subjected to editorial review and are the sole responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views and stance of Espolea A.C.

Espolea A.C.

Mazatlán 154A-1, Col. Condesa, 06140, México, D.F. Tel. +52(55) 6265-4078

www.espolea.org info@espolea.org

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