

A-Z Sexual and Gender-based Violence Glossary

Abuse is behaviour used to intimidate, harm, isolate, dominate, or control another person and may be an isolated incident or a pattern. The abuse can be sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, financial, or psychological in nature. Abuse can affect anyone, of any age, race, class, gender, or sexual orientation.

Accountability is when perpetrators face consequences for conduct that violates laws or societal expectations and are answerable to an authority.

Agency/Autonomy is the freedom to make decisions regarding personal opinions, beliefs, choices and actions. Expressions of agency include freedom from the risk of violence, the freedom of movement and the ability to have a voice in society. Autonomy is limited by laws to ensure no one individual's rights infringe on another person's rights.

Allies are people who work to dismantle a structural form of oppression that gives them privilege. They are guided by the individuals and communities affected by the oppression.

Bullying is characterized by acts of intentional harm, repeated over-time, in a relationship where an imbalance of power exists. It includes physical actions, verbal actions, and social exclusion.

Catcalling, or street harassment, involves verbal abuse such as derogatory comments, whistling at or making kissing sounds at women walking past.

Coercive control is an act or acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This behaviour is designed to isolate someone from support, deprive them of independence and regulate their behaviour.

Compassion fatigue is a state of profound exhaustion and dysfunction as a result of prolonged exposure to secondary traumatic stress. It most commonly affects those working with trauma victims.

Confidentiality means providing assurances to victims and witnesses that their identity and any identifying information will not be shared with anyone except those meant to receive such information, and will be protected from accidental leaking. A breach of confidentiality can result in re-traumatisation, the risk of reprisals and security issues.

Consent is the will of participants to engage in sexual activity voluntarily and without coercion and must be ongoing. Consent cannot be inferred through past behaviour and must be expressed by a person considered capable of consenting (see Informed consent).

Consent culture aims to centre the prevailing narrative of sex on bodily autonomy and mutual consent. Consent is the ongoing, voluntary, and informed will of the participants to engage in sexual activity.

Criminal harassment is deliberate, repeated conduct that is psychologically harmful to others and occurs over a period of time. It may not necessarily result in physical injury; however, it causes targets to reasonably fear for their safety and may be a precursor to violent and/or lethal acts.

Cyber-misogyny describes the diverse forms of online harassment and abuse directed toward women and girls using digital technology which can be anonymously perpetrated and committed from any location. It is cyberbullying with specific patterns of sexist, racist, homophobic, or transphobic behaviour. Common examples include cyberstalking, gender-based hate speech, hacking, surveillance, spamming, and malicious distribution. Technology-related violence creates new forms of abusive behaviour which erodes the target's sense of security.

Deepfakes involve the production of non-consensual fake sexual videos using advanced technology. The production of deepfakes requires photos or videos that could be taken in-person, from social media, or otherwise found online.

Discrimination is behaviour that results from prejudiced attitudes by individuals or institutions and results in unequal outcomes for persons who are perceived as different. Discrimination includes the denial of equal treatment, opportunities and access in spheres such as education, accommodation, employment etc.

“Do no harm” principle recognises that sexual and gender-based violence can result in lasting trauma for victims and witnesses and therefore subsequent action or intervention by authorities, civil society or humanitarian organisations must ensure the safety and dignity of the victims and prioritise their needs to avoid causing further harm.

Emotional abuse is the repetitive use of controlling and harmful behaviours by a perpetrator to control a victim. A victim may alter their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to avoid further abuse. It includes verbal abuse, stalking, isolation, threats, intimidation, sexual and financial abuse and is the greatest predictor of physical violence.

Exploitation is the actual or attempted abuse of a position of power or trust for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Forced nudity is a form of sexual violence which involves forcing another person to undress partially or completely, or perform movements while in a state of nudity. It does not require physical contact.

Gaslighting is an attempt by a perpetrator to undermine the victim's self-trust and judgment, to neutralize the victim's ability to criticize or disagree and to thereby maintain

control over them. The gaslighter uses manipulation and deception that specifically relies upon their victim's trust in them as a peer or authority.

Gender is a social construct based on the roles, behaviours, and attributes assigned to women and men, and to girls and boys. Gender is a result of a personal identification with being a man, a woman, or neither.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is any violence perpetrated against someone based on their gender, particularly sexual assault, and is a violation of the personal autonomy of its victims. The term seeks to recognize that this violence occurs within the context of a societal power imbalance between genders.

Gender-based harassment is any behaviour that reinforces traditional heterosexual gender norms to get people to follow traditional sex stereotypes (e.g., dominant males and subservient females). Gender-based harassment is a bullying tactic using hostility to make the target feel unwelcome in their environment.

Gender bias is the intentional or unintentional difference in attitudes or perceptions when dealing with men and women.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to all genders and providing strategies and measures to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that have kept women from enjoying equal opportunities. Equity accommodates the specific needs of individuals or groups, and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

Gender equality entails a principle of impartiality and equal treatment and access to the same resources and opportunities for all people without considering individual or group diversities or previous history.

Gender norms are expectations and stereotypes about behaviours and roles for women and men within particular cultures or societies. The social norms related to gender can contribute to power imbalances and gender inequality at home, at work, and in communities but can also vary over time.

Harassment is persistent, ongoing behaviour that conveys negative attitudes towards an individual or group to make them feel intimidated, unwelcome or humiliated. Harassment is an exercise of power and includes verbal or physical abuse such as slurs, insults, threats and graffiti.

Informed consent requires that individuals are legally capable of consenting and that all relevant information has been provided in a language that is fully understood. This helps to ensure that the victim, or source maintains full control and power over their own experiences, life and body.

Impunity is when perpetrators of crimes or violations do not fear consequences for their conduct, which contributes to the repetition of these crimes and violations and denying victims their rights to redress.

Marginalisation prevents certain groups or individual from having access full access to social, economic, cultural and political institutions. Marginalisation can occur as a result of poverty, race, gender, or a lack of education.

#MeToo Movement provides a platform for women to call for meaningful change by demonstrating the extent of sexual assault and harassment across society and the solidarity of participants.

Microaggressions are the common intentional and unintentional verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities and invalidations that are experienced daily by a target person or group. Microaggressions communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults.

Misogynoir describes an amalgamation of anti-Black racism and misogyny directed at black trans and cis women in popular media and culture.

Misogyny is primarily a property of social environments where women are liable to encounter hostility due to the enforcement of patriarchal norms and expectations such as male dominance.

Objectification is a power dynamic when one views someone as an object and treats them accordingly for the satisfaction of one's desire. Objectification translates into a real-world expectation that someone should conform to an ideal.

Patriarchy is a social system in which men are the primary authority figure, are central to social organization, and hold authority over women, children, and property.

Perpetrators are individuals who have been determined to have caused or knowingly allowed the maltreatment of another individual. Perpetrators of violence come from various age, socio-economic, cultural, sexual orientation, ethnic, and religious demographics.

Physical abuse is the intentional infliction of pain or injury by hitting, shoving, punching, strangling, kicking, stabbing and/or shooting. Using a weapon or other objects to threaten, hurt or kill is the most obvious kind of GBV.

PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) is a neurobiological and psychological survival mechanisms that are universal consequences of extreme stress such as sexual trauma. Women who have experienced trauma can develop symptoms of PTSD which may last indefinitely without adequate care and support. Signs and symptoms include intrusive flashbacks and traumatic nightmares are vivid recollections of the trauma; avoidance of things or situations associated with the trauma; and hyper-arousal where individuals may constantly feel on edge, restless or suffer from insomnia.

Power is the capacity of an individual, group or institution to influence the behaviour of others, even despite opposition or resistance. This capacity may be exercised through individual interactions such as authority or coercion; or through the leverage afforded by social institutions, policies, or ideologies.

Quid Pro Quo is when a job benefit is made conditional on a victim submitting to some form of sexual behaviour.

Rape is an act of power and control, in which the victim is humiliated and left with feelings of intense shame, guilt, and anger. Rape is defined in most countries as an act of penetration occurring with coercion, or in a coercive context and/or without the consent of one or more individuals involved. Rape remains under-reported and inadequately investigated, creating a culture of impunity as perpetrators are frequently not held accountable.

Rape culture describes the many prevailing societal attitudes which justify, minimize and even normalize sexual violence against women and girls. These persistent attitudes are integrated with rape myths, stereotypes, and oppressive beliefs.

Reprisals are when a person who has authority or power denies you something important, punishes or threatens you for refusing a sexual request or reporting the inappropriate sexual behaviour or comments.

Revenge porn, or “non-consensual sexual videos”, are pornographic materials produced and/or distributed with the intent to humiliate an individual. This constitutes a form of sexual violence. Women are particularly vulnerable to humiliation when their private sexual life is made public.

Sexism is any idea, act or practice based on the assumption that one gender is inherently superior to another which results in unequal treatment. Sexism may be evident within institutional structures, or within the thoughts and behaviour patterns of individuals. Usually sexism manifests as attempts to enforce male dominance and female subordination which creates hostile social or work environments for women and may result in expressions of GBV.

Sexting refers to sending sexual messages, pictures and/or videos that are meant to be sexually exciting through text, email, or social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.).

Sexual abuse is any form of non-consensual, unwanted sexual activity. This can include rape, forced pornography, sexual harassment and any unwanted sexual activity including kissing, fondling, touching, oral sex or threatening to do any of these things.

Sexual aggression is the offenders’ act to impose their sexual will over a non consenting person using threats, intimidation, drugs, or physical force. Sexual aggression may be experienced by any person regardless of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation or education.

Sexual assault is any unwanted touching of a sexual nature. This ranges from touching of genitals to penetration. Sexual assault is a crime of violence because the victim is subjected to the aggression of the assailant asserting dominance and control over the victim. It is both a physical and emotional violation which may also affect a person's sense of safety and personal control. The feelings experienced by victims of sexual assault include intense shame, disgust, humiliation and powerlessness.

Sexual coercion is unwanted sexual activity that happens when perpetrators of sexual violence exert power and aggression over victims to force them into having sexual contact with someone. Methods of coercion include physical force; intimidation and threats; alcohol or other substances; authority or status; or being worn down by someone who persistently and repeatedly asks for sex.

Sexual harassment is an abuse of power that can be subtle or coercive in nature and is often used as a way of controlling or intimidating someone. Some examples of sexual harassment include catcalling, threats and intimidation, cyber-harassment, and sharing sexist media. Such conduct may interfere with an individual's work performance and create a hostile work environment if submitting to such conduct is a condition of employment or promotion.

Sexual violence is a form of GBV that includes any act of physical or psychological violence that is carried out through sexual means or targets gender or sexuality. It is about exerting power and control over another person and includes sexual abuse, assault, aggression, and any sexual activity committed without genuine consent. It is a violation of an individual's physical, sexual, gender and psychological integrity and personal autonomy.

Social barriers are social obstacles such as institutions, policies or beliefs that prevent or limit a person from accessing various opportunities, spaces or resources that are available to other members of society.

Stalking is repeated pattern of unwanted attention that causes a person to fear for their personal safety or for the safety of someone they know. For example, waiting outside a person's home or work, physical or electronic surveillance, damage to property and various kinds of unwanted communication or romantic advances that make the person feel unsafe, despite not including threats of physical harm.

Stigmatisation is an inherent consequence of almost every incident of sexual violence. Instead of receiving support, victims are often blamed, humiliated or rejected by their family, friends, or community. This often prevents victims from reaching out for psychological, medical or legal assistance.

Survivor is used as a term of empowerment when referring to someone who has experienced some form of sexual and gender-based violence and is going through a recovery process. There is no rule as to whether it is best to use the term "survivor" or "victim" to refer to such individuals. The terms may be used in different contexts, for example, "victim" is commonly used in a legal context.

Toxic or hypermasculinity refers to a range of characteristics and behaviours associated with traditional Western expressions of masculinity, particularly when they manifest in harmful ways. For example, including violence and recklessness as an expression of manliness. Please note that “toxic masculinity” does not refer to men or masculinity as inherently toxic.

Transmisogyny is an intersection of transphobia and misogyny. Transwomen may be subject to both transphobic and misogynistic discrimination in the workplace.

Trauma refers to the lasting emotional response or traumatic stress that results from traumatic events that may involve actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threat to physical integrity. The traumatic stress may manifest in physical or psychological harm and affect a person’s sense of safety, sense of self, their ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships, as well as their sexual and reproductive health. The trauma associated with sexual violence is often aggravated by stigmatisation and social ostracization that victims may experience.

Victim-blaming occurs when the victim of a crime or an accident is held partly or entirely responsible for the crimes that have been committed against them. This is a widespread phenomenon affecting victims of sexual and gender-based violence at all social levels and contributes to a culture of impunity for such crimes by preventing victims from reporting sexual violence. Victims of sexual and gender-based violence are never to blame for the violence they were subjected to and the responsibility should fully lie on the perpetrators.

Additional Glossaries

* Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) in the Faculty of Education at Western University, Canada – [SGBV Glossary](#)

* International Federation for Human Rights – [Sexual and Gender-base Violence Glossary](#)