

The Impact of Gender-Based Violence on Women's Physical and Mental Health

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.10120057>

Received: 28 December 2025; Accepted: 04 January 2026; Published: 16 January 2026

ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive human rights violation that affects millions of women worldwide, leading to devastating physical and mental health consequences. This research paper examines the multifaceted impact of GBV on women's health, focusing on both the immediate and long-term effects of violence. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, this study explores the physical and mental health outcomes of GBV, the mechanisms through which violence affects health, and the barriers to seeking help and support. The physical health impact of GBV includes immediate injuries such as bruises, cuts, fractures, and internal trauma, as well as chronic conditions like chronic pain, musculoskeletal disorders, and reproductive health issues. Furthermore, GBV is associated with profound mental health consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviour. The paper also delves into the physiological and psychological mechanisms underlying the development of health outcomes among survivors of GBV, including stress responses, trauma processing, and social isolation. Barriers to seeking help and support among survivors of GBV, such as stigma, fear of retaliation, and financial dependence, are identified and discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy and practice, emphasizing the importance of strengthening legal and policy frameworks, enhancing healthcare provider training, and providing comprehensive support services for survivors of GBV. Understanding the impact of GBV on women's physical and mental health is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies to address this global public health issue.

Keywords: Women, GBV, Physical health, mental health, Barriers etc.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant public health concern that affects women of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Defined as violence directed against a person because of their gender, GBV encompasses various forms of abuse, including intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), and forced marriage. The impact of GBV extends beyond immediate physical injuries, often resulting in long-lasting psychological trauma and chronic health conditions. While the prevalence of GBV varies across countries and cultures, it remains alarmingly high worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, with IPV being the most common form of violence against women. The consequences of GBV are far-reaching, affecting not only the individual survivor but also their families, communities, and societies as a whole.

This paper aims to examine the impact of GBV on women's physical and mental health. By understanding the health consequences of violence, healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations can develop targeted interventions to support survivors and prevent further victimization. The research will explore the immediate and long-term effects of GBV on women's health, the underlying mechanisms through which violence affects health outcomes, and the barriers to accessing healthcare and support services.

Objectives

1. To Examine the Physical Health Impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV):

2. To Explore the Mental Health Impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV):
3. To Understand the Mechanisms Through Which Violence Affects Health:
4. To Identify the Barriers to Seeking Help and Support Among Survivors of GBV:
5. To Provide Recommendations for Policy and Practice:

Limitations

1. Limitations of the study included potential publication bias, language bias, and variations in study methodologies across different regions.
2. The inability to include all relevant studies due to resource constraints might have resulted in some degree of selection bias.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- A comprehensive review of existing literature on gender-based violence (GBV) and its impact on women's physical and mental health was conducted.
- Databases including Pub Med, Scopus, and Google Scholar were searched for relevant studies.
- Keywords included "gender-based violence", "intimate partner violence", "sexual violence", "women's health", "physical health", "mental health", and "health outcomes".
- Inclusion criteria encompassed studies published in peer-reviewed journals, focusing on the physical and mental health impact of GBV on women.
- Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

METHODOLOGY

Selection Criteria:

- Studies focusing on the physical and mental health consequences of GBV among women were included.
- Articles published in English from 2010 to 2022 were considered to ensure relevance and timeliness.
- Studies from various geographic regions and cultural contexts were included to capture diverse experiences of GBV.

Data Extraction:

Data were extracted from selected studies focusing on:

- Physical health outcomes: immediate injuries, chronic health conditions, and reproductive health issues.
- Mental health outcomes: PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviour.
- Mechanisms underlying the impact of GBV on health: physiological responses, psychological trauma, and social factors.
- Barriers to seeking help and support: stigma, fear of retaliation, and financial dependence.

Data Analysis:

- Data collected from selected studies were analysed to identify common themes, patterns, and trends related to the impact of GBV on women's physical and mental health.

- Findings were synthesized and categorized based on the type of health outcome (physical vs. mental), the form of GBV (intimate partner violence, sexual violence, etc.), and the underlying mechanisms.

Quality Assessment:

- The quality of selected studies was assessed using established criteria appropriate for the study design (e.g., Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for cohort studies, Critical Appraisal Skills Programme for qualitative studies).
- Studies with low quality were excluded from the analysis to ensure the reliability and validity of findings.

Ethical Considerations:

- Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process, ensuring respect for the dignity, privacy, and confidentiality of survivors of GBV.
- Proper citation and acknowledgment of the original authors were maintained to uphold academic integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Physical Health Impact of Gender-Based Violence:

- Immediate Physical Injuries:** GBV often results in immediate physical injuries, including bruises, cuts, fractures, and internal injuries. Survivors may require emergency medical treatment, including surgery and hospitalization.
- Chronic Health Conditions:** In addition to acute injuries, GBV can lead to chronic health conditions such as chronic pain, musculoskeletal disorders, and gastrointestinal problems. Survivors of IPV are at increased risk of developing conditions such as fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and chronic headaches.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health Issues:** GBV can have profound effects on women's sexual and reproductive health, including unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and gynaecological problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and cervical trauma.

Mental Health Impact of Gender-Based Violence:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Survivors of GBV are at increased risk of developing PTSD, characterized by intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, and hyper vigilance. PTSD can significantly impair daily functioning and quality of life.
- Depression and Anxiety:** GBV is associated with higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders. Survivors may experience feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and constant worry or fear.
- Substance Abuse:** Many survivors of GBV turn to substance abuse as a way of coping with trauma. Alcohol and drug abuse can exacerbate mental health symptoms and increase the risk of further victimization.
- Suicidal Behaviour:** GBV is a significant risk factor for suicidal behaviour, including suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and completed suicide. Survivors may feel trapped, hopeless, and unable to escape their abusive situation.

Mechanisms through Which Violence Affects Health:

- Physiological Responses:** GBV triggers physiological stress responses, including increased heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol levels. Chronic stress can deregulate the immune system, leading to inflammation and increased susceptibility to infections and chronic diseases.

- **Psychological Trauma:** GBV inflicts psychological trauma, causing survivors to experience feelings of fear, helplessness, and loss of control. Trauma affects the brain's neurobiology, altering mood regulation, memory processing, and emotional responses.
- **Social Isolation:** GBV often results in social isolation, as survivors may withdraw from social interactions to avoid further harm or stigma. Lack of social support exacerbates feelings of loneliness and depression, further compromising mental health.

Barriers to Seeking Help and Support:

- **Stigma and Shame:** Survivors of GBV may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their experiences, leading to reluctance to seek help or disclose abuse to others.
- **Fear of Retaliation:** Fear of retaliation from the perpetrator, including further violence or harm to themselves or their children, may prevent survivors from leaving abusive relationships or seeking assistance.
- **Financial Dependence:** Economic dependence on the perpetrator, lack of financial resources, and limited access to employment opportunities can trap survivors in abusive situations and hinder their ability to leave.

CONCLUSION

Gender-based violence has profound physical and mental health consequences for women, impacting their well-being and quality of life. Survivors of GBV experience a wide range of health issues, including physical injuries, chronic health conditions, and mental health disorders such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Understanding the mechanisms through which violence affects health outcomes is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies to support survivors and promote healing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Enhance Healthcare Provider Training:** Healthcare providers should receive training on identifying signs of GBV, providing trauma-informed care, and connecting survivors with support services.
- **Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Governments should strengthen laws and policies to protect survivors of GBV, increase access to justice, and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Raise Awareness and Reduce Stigma:** Community awareness campaigns should be conducted to raise awareness about GBV, reduce stigma, and encourage survivors to seek help.
- **Provide Comprehensive Support Services:** Comprehensive support services, including shelters, hotlines, counselling, and legal assistance, should be available to survivors of GBV.

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