

## What is Gender-Based Violence?

*Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on their actual or perceived:*

- Biological sex;
- Gender identity;
- Gender expression;
- Sexual orientation; or
- Difference from social norms related to masculinity or femininity

*GBV can include physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and emotional abuse. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, coercive control, and power imbalances.*

*Perpetrators can be government officials or organizations, individuals including family members, religious leaders, others you may know, or strangers. GBV such as arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence, and forced marriage may also be used as a tactic of war or during periods of societal instability.*

## Who Is Affected by GBV?

*Those of any age, socio-economic status, culture, gender identity or expression, sexual identity or orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion can experience or perpetrate GBV. Women of color (particularly American Indian/Alaska Native/ Indigenous women and Black women), immigrant women (especially those without lawful status), impoverished women, minors, individuals with disabilities, and sexual minorities (i.e., individuals whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority) often face increased vulnerability and barriers to accessing resources.*

## Confidential Help Is Available in Your Language

If you are experiencing domestic abuse or violence, stalking, or dating violence, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233, 800-787-3224 (TTY for people who are deaf or hard of hearing), or at [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org).

If you have experienced sexual violence, call the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-4673. You can also visit their website for more information at [hotline.rainn.org](https://hotline.rainn.org).

If you have experienced or are at risk of experiencing a forced marriage, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888, or contact the Tahirih Justice Center's Forced Marriage Initiative at 571-282-6187. You can also email [FMI@tahirih.org](mailto:FMI@tahirih.org).

If you have experienced, are at risk of, or know someone who may be at risk of FGM/C, child abuse, or neglect, call 800-4-A-CHILD (800-422-4453). You can also email the End FGM/C Network at [info@endfgmnetwork.org](mailto:info@endfgmnetwork.org) or visit their website for more information at [endfgmnetwork.org](https://endfgmnetwork.org).

Information on immigration options available to victims of GBV or human trafficking can be found on the website at [www.uscis.gov/humanitarian](https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian). Additional information and resources for victims of human trafficking is available at [www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign](https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign).

These resources can help you identify safety, legal, financial, and immigration options that may be available to you.



**Homeland  
Security**

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)



*Available in other languages*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
**COUNCIL ON COMBATING  
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**



## Examples of GBV

*Some examples of GBV include, but are not limited to: domestic violence, dating violence, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C), stalking, forced marriage, and sexual violence, including sexual abuse, assault, and harassment.*

### Domestic Violence

**A pattern of behavior in a relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over a partner, parent, or child. Domestic violence can involve physical, sexual, emotional, financial, immigration-related or psychological abuse or threats. For example, the perpetrator:**

- Treats you as their property or a sexual object.
- Exhibits extreme jealousy and possessiveness.
- Isolates you from friends or family.
- Restricts and monitors your communication with the outside world.
- Denies, minimizes, or blames their violence on you, using stress, a “bad day,” alcohol or drugs, a medical condition, or other circumstances as justification.
- Controls all finances, and uses threats and intimidation to prevent you from going to work or attending school; controls personal choices such as what you wear or other aspects of your appearance.
- Makes threats or intimidates you about your ability to obtain immigration status.
- Controls your access to important documents including financial, identity, immigration or other important paperwork.

### Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C)

**All procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.**

- FGM/C can occur outside a medical setting with improper, unsterilized instruments and without anesthesia; however, FGM/C is also increasingly occurring in medical settings such as health care clinics and being carried out illegally by health professionals.
- FGM/C can be inflicted more than once and is often carried out between birth and age 15.
- FGM/C may be done in preparation for marriage in some communities.
- FGM/C can directly impact emotional and physical health immediately and over the long term.

### Stalking

**Repeated behavior that would cause a reasonable person to fear for their own or others' safety or to suffer substantial emotional distress. The perpetrator could be anyone, including a current or former partner or a stranger. You may be experiencing stalking if the perpetrator is:**

- Following or surveilling you at your home, school, work, place of worship or another location;
- Harassing your friends, family, or employer for information on your whereabouts;
- Calling and sending you unwanted voice, text, or electronic messages; or
- Monitoring or contacting you online, for example, through social media.

### Forced Marriage

**A marriage in which one or both parties do not or cannot consent, and in which one or more elements of force, fraud, or coercion is present. It can also be both a cause and a consequence of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, or stalking. Perpetrators are often those closest to you including family or**

**community members. People of all ages can experience forced marriage. You may be experiencing forced marriage if:**

- You feel you do not have a choice regarding whom or when to marry;
- You, or someone close to you, such as a family member or other loved one, experience or are threatened with abandonment, isolation, denial of access to education, economic hardship, loss of freedom of movement, or physical or emotional abuse;
- Your travel documents, identification, communication devices, or money/financial support were taken away from you to force you to marry or remain in a marriage you did not consent to; or
- Your communication through technology or other means is closely monitored to prevent you from seeking help or support.

### Sexual Violence

**Includes sexual harassment, sexual abuse, assault, incest, rape or other non-consensual sexual acts. It primarily impacts women, girls, and transgender and non-binary individuals.**

- Sexual violence can take place in many contexts as a form of intimidation or punishment, including during wartime conflict, as a tactic of violent extremism, or within your family, school, or workplace.
- Belief systems and societal norms can increase your vulnerability to sexual violence. For instance, almost half of all transgender or non-binary individuals have been sexually abused or assaulted in their lifetime.
- Perpetrators may be your current or former partners, relatives such as siblings, cousins, parents, aunts and uncles, or grandparents, classmates, government officials or strangers.