

## Unit 3 Gender-based violence and the emotional, health and social impact of gender-based violence

All violence is harmful to individuals and the community. It creates feelings of mistrust, fear, anger and depression. It is important to understand why some people commit acts of violence so that we can protect ourselves and prevent further acts of violence. We need to work towards a society that is free from violence.

### Defining gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is when males or females are physically harmed and treated with force and aggression because of their sex or gender. Acts of violence include being hit, pinched, punched, pushed around, beaten and sexual violence, such as rape.

Women and girls are more vulnerable because they are often dependent on men economically, are more likely to lack access to education, and are more exposed to poverty, sexual exploitation, intimidation and rape. They are often not as physically strong as men. Many girls and women are often too scared to tell anyone when they have been abused.

Acts of violence that take place within the home are called *domestic violence*. Statistics show that there is a high likelihood that one of your friends comes from a home where a parent or child is being abused.

Almost every day we read articles, hear on the radio, or see on television, about abuse. While some *perpetrators* of these acts of violence are strangers to the victims, in most instances, victims know the person abusing them. These acts of violence can even take place at school or at home, which means that victims don't feel safe wherever they are.

Whether gender-based violence is the result of poverty, lack of work and finances, levels of frustration and anger, alcohol and drugs, neglect, the influence of violence in the media, discrimination or other social and environmental factors, this terrible abuse of human rights needs to be eliminated. Gender-based violence must be removed from our society if we intend to become strong, healthy, empowered and productive people.

### Emotional, health and social impact of rape and gender-based violence

The emotional, physical and mental *trauma* of rape and gender-based violence leaves many boys and girls, men and women damaged for life. Remember, a rapist or abuser could be anyone, for example, a neighbour, a family friend, a relative, a person in authority or even a person's own father or grandfather. Rape is not about sexual desire; it is about causing harm. This violent act destroys people.

## Emotional impact of rape and gender-based violence

Many people live in fear of being victims of a violent attack. This fear can prevent you from living a normal life. Fear may make you avoid certain places or may leave you feeling so terrified that you refuse to leave your home or a place of safety. Some victims feel guilty and humiliated about an attack. They think about things that they could have done to change the situation and blame themselves for getting into the situation. It is important to remember that a victim of rape or gender-based violence is never responsible for, or deserving of, an attack.

The victim of abuse often feels helpless and that there is nothing worth living for. He or she will probably experience anger, which they may express by being mad with everyone around them, not only the abuser. Often victims feel alone and that there is no one who understands what they are going through. They might become depressed and even suicidal.

Sometimes the victim's family and friends experience these emotions, too, as they come to terms with what happened and their inability to protect the victim from pain and suffering. Some people may also experience denial where they pretend that it never happened to try to carry on living a normal life.

It is important, whether you are a victim or you know of someone who has been raped or attacked, to get help. You will learn more about where to get help in Unit 4, but you should contact:

- the police: all rapes and gender-based violence should be reported.
- a hospital, clinic or doctor: they will be able to take evidence, if needed, and help to clean any wounds.
- a counselling centre or someone you can trust, such as Lifeline, Rape Crises or POWA.

## Health impact of rape and gender-based violence

Your body goes through trauma during an act of violence. You need to see a doctor or nursing sister as soon as possible after a rape or attack so that they can assess your condition.

Immediate effects include shock. When you are in shock, your body does certain things to cope with trauma, including feeling cold, faint, shaky and nauseous. If you are in shock, you may vomit.

Other health impacts include bleeding from any cuts or wounds, being sore where there is bruising or any broken bones, headaches and body pain. The risks of unprotected sex in the instance of rape include pregnancy, and HIV or STD infections.

Long-term effects include crying more than usual, struggling to concentrate, having flashbacks or nightmares and not being able to sleep properly or feeling very sleepy all the time. Some people struggle to eat.

## *Social impact of rape and gender-based violence*

Rape and gender-based violence destroy our society. They make people fearful, angry and resentful. Some people suffer from eating disorders, sleeping disorders and depression as a result of abuse, leaving them unable to live normal, productive lives. Rape and gender-based violence disempower and break down the nation.

We need to prevent such abuse and encourage survivors to believe in themselves so that they are strong enough to overcome the abuse. Survivors are worth more than how they were treated by their abusers.

Real men and women do not abuse and harm other people. Real men and women try to make positive changes in their communities.

## **South African rape survey shock**

From BBC News, 18 June 2009

One in four South African men (of 1 738 questioned in a survey) said they had raped someone, and nearly half of them admitted more than one attack. The study, by the Medical Research Council (MRC), also found three out of four who admitted rape had attacked for the first time during their teens.

The research was conducted in both rural and urban areas and included all racial groups. Using an electronic device to keep the results anonymous, the study found that 73% of those who admitted rape said they had carried out their first assault before the age of 20. Almost half who said they had carried out a rape admitted they had done so more than once.

Professor Rachel Jewkes of the MRC, who carried out the research, told the BBC's *World Today* programme: "We have to change the underlying social attitudes that, in a way, have created a norm that coercing women into sex is on some level acceptable. We know that we have a higher prevalence of rape in South Africa than there is in other countries. It's partly rooted in our incredibly disturbed past and the way that South African men over the centuries have been socialised into forms of masculinity that are predicated on the idea of being strong and tough and the use of force to assert dominance and control over women, as well as other men."

The study found that one in 10 men said they had been raped by other men. Some 3% of the men interviewed said they had coerced a man or a boy into sex. The participants were also tested for HIV and AIDS and the authors of the survey were surprised that men who had raped were not more likely to test positive for the virus.

A recent trade union report said a child was being raped in South Africa every three minutes, with the vast majority of those cases going unreported.

## Calven

Calven is struggling to concentrate on his school work. He's been feeling confused a lot lately and doesn't know who to talk to. He used to get on really well with his dad and was able to tell him anything. So, when Calven started having feelings for a boy in his class, he confided in his dad to ask him whether it was normal and to ask for his advice. Calven's dad started shouting at him, using words that hurt Calven's feelings – words that he knew were discriminatory towards gay people. When Calven tried to interrupt his dad, his dad hit him and spat in his face.

Calven is scared to talk to his dad again and knows that his mom will side with his dad. Calven knows that when his mom disagrees with his dad, his dad sometimes pushes her around, but he'd always thought that was how married people treated each other. He can't ignore what he's feeling, but he's scared he might be beaten up if he brings it up again.

You have to be careful and sensitive in dealing with this issue. There might be people in your class who may have been raped, or are being sexually abused. Respect the feelings of your peers. Remember that silence and secrecy allow any form of abuse to continue. It is up to you to break the silence.

1. Define "gender-based violence" and provide examples of violent acts. (3)
2. Say whether the following statements are true or false.
  - a) Only women are victims of rape and gender-based violence. (1)
  - b) Gender-based violence disempowers communities. (1)
  - c) Gender-based violence has short-term effects only.
  - d) It is important to understand that it is not necessary to keep any secrets an abuser or rapist has told you to keep. Tell someone that you feel you can trust. For example, if someone shows you pornographic pictures, tell an adult you trust. (1)
  - e) Trust your instincts. Run away to a safe area or to where there are groups of people if you feel your safety is being threatened in any way. (1)
3. Refer to the newspaper article "South African rape survey shock" on page 170.
  - a) Break down Professor Jewkes's thoughts on the reasons for the high rape statistics in South Africa into two bulleted points to show that you understand what she means.
  - b) Are you surprised by the findings of this study? Give a reason for your response. (2)
4. Read through the case study about Calven again. What advice would you give Calven? (4)

Total: 16 marks