Definition of Violence

According to the World Health Organization report, violence is **"The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation."**[1]

Cultural violence occurs when culture is a strong contributor to violence, and is especially prevalent for women and girls. Thus the above general definition of violence is applicable to cultural violence as well.

Risk Factors[1]

Societal and community factors contribute to the prevalence of cultural violence. These include:

- Supporting violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflict.
- Regarding suicide as a personal choice rather than a preventable act of violence.
- Prioritising parental rights over child welfare.
- Entrenched norms of male dominance over women and children (patriarchal societies)
- Supporting the use of excessive force by police against citizens.
- Supporting political conflict.
- Health, education, economic and social policies that maintain high levels of inequality between groups in society.
- Lack of stringent judicial mechanisms

Personal Risk Factors include:

- Gender
- Low socioeconomic status
- Involvement in armed conflict
- Being internally displaced or a refugee.

Types of Cultural Violence[1]

Gender-based violence occurs mostly among women and includes:

- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**—procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
- **Child Marriage**—a formal marriage or informal union of a boy or girl before the age of 18, although girls are disproportionately affected. This practice is widespread and can lead to a lifetime of disadvantage.
- **Forced Marriage**—conducting a marriage without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor and is a violation of fundamental human rights.
- **Lack of Reproductive Rights**—women are not allowed to decide when to use contraception to limit the number of pregnancies or time between childbirths.
- **Widow Cleansing**—a ritualized dissolution of the bond of the spirit of a dead man with his wife, through her submission to sexual intercourse with one of his living relatives; common in some sub-Saharan cultures.
- **Forced Abortion** and **Female Infanticide**
- **Intimate Partner Violence**—is common in cultures whereby it is socially acceptable for men to assert power over their female partner. Men may be considered socially superior and given the right to discipline socially undesirable female behaviours. This may include the rape of a man's wife**.**
- **Sexual Violence**—in many cultures, sex is a man's right in marriage and sexual activity (including rape) is a mark of masculinity.

Community Violence includes cultural intolerance, intense dislike and stereotyping of "different" groups within society such as homophobia and xenophobia.[2]

Prevention

- Social norms approach seeks to correct prevailing misperceptions by giving people a more realistic sense of actual behavioural norms, thereby reducing risky behaviour, which in turn contributes to decrease in the prevalence of violence.[2]

- Mass media interventions via social media and other campaigns.[3]

- Legislation can be a key tool in changing violent behaviour patterns and perceptions of cultural and social norms. Having laws and policies in place that make violent behaviour an offence sends a message to society that it is not acceptable and can be a powerful contributor in addressing cultural violence globally.[2]

References

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