

## DEBATE

# It's not about the gender binary, it's about the gender hierarchy: A reply to “Letting Go of the Gender Binary”

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Ms. Jeanne Ward is an internationally recognized expert on gender-based violence (GBV). With a primary focus on humanitarian settings, she provides technical leadership, training, assessment and monitoring support to United Nations agencies, international NGOs, NGOs/CBOs and government partners in developing and improving GBV-related research, policies, systems, programmes and community-based practices. She is the author of numerous publications on GBV, and has developed globally disseminated tools and guidelines, most recently the global IASC *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action* (2015).

*The “Debate” section of the Review aims to contribute to the reflection on current ethical, legal, or operational controversies around humanitarian issues.*

*In its issue on “Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict” (Vol. 96, No. 894, 2014), the Review published an Opinion Note by Chris Dolan entitled “Letting Go of the Gender Binary: Charting New Pathways for Humanitarian Interventions on Gender-Based Violence”. In light of the review process for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (GBV Guidelines), Dolan argues for a shift in the conceptualization of gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian settings from an emphasis on gender equality to an ethos of gender inclusivity. This, he*

*suggests, is essential to improving the situation of victims, furthering social justice and changing agendas.*

*In this issue, the Review presents the view of Jeanne Ward, one of the lead authors of the revised GBV Guidelines. For Ward, attempts to shift away from a focus on gender equality in GBV programming represent a regression rather than an advancement for the GBV field, as a dedicated spotlight on the rights and needs of women and girls continues to be hard-won in humanitarian contexts. Instead, she suggests retaining a focus on women and girls in GBV work, while moving forward in partnership with those who wish to accelerate programming directed to men and LGBTI communities broadly.*

**Keywords:** violence against women and girls, women's rights, GBV, gender equality, gender inclusivity, humanitarian response, IASC, LGBTI.

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## Introduction

Despite the long and evident history of atrocities against females in humanitarian emergencies, a focus on violence against women and girls in humanitarian action is relatively new, with programming only scaling up from the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Since then, considerable progress has been made in bringing the critical issue of violence against women and girls to the fore of humanitarian concerns. There is now agreement at the highest levels of the United Nations (UN) and many donor governments about the importance of addressing violence against women and girls through specialized gender-based violence (GBV) programming.

One measure of this progress is the recent revisions to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action* (GBV Guidelines). These update the first IASC GBV Guidelines, published in 2005, with significantly more detail, and according to changes over the last ten years in humanitarian architecture and agreements on humanitarian coordination, leadership, accountability and partnership.<sup>2</sup> As with other guidelines that receive IASC endorsement, they are essential to the humanitarian toolbox.

1 For a summary of the history of GBV programming in humanitarian settings, see: [www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/1472-historical-timeline.html](http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/1472-historical-timeline.html) (all internet references were accessed in December 2016).

2 Aimed primarily at those who do not work in specialized GBV programmes or have a specialist background in GBV, the revised IASC GBV Guidelines seek to assist humanitarian actors and communities affected by armed conflict, natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies to undertake measures to prevent and mitigate GBV across all sectors of humanitarian response. The introduction to the Guidelines lays the groundwork in terms of framing the problem of GBV and describing the international commitments that oblige the entire humanitarian community to address GBV. The remainder of the Guidelines provide specific sectoral guidance across the humanitarian

Given their importance to humanitarian action, a "Task Team" of sixteen organizations with extensive experience in addressing GBV in humanitarian settings was formed to oversee the revisions to the 2005 GBV Guidelines.<sup>3</sup> A strenuous process of consultations was undertaken over the course of two and a half years, in which inputs were solicited at both the global and field levels through:

- broad-based consultations, inputs and feedback from national and international actors both at headquarters and in-country, representing most regions of the world. This included four global reviews of evolving draft versions of the Guidelines, with an estimated 200+ global reviewers providing feedback at various stages of the process;
- direct dialogue with over 100 individuals representing GBV experts working in humanitarian settings; all clusters and areas of responsibility; all cross-cutting areas; twenty-six international non-governmental organizations (INGOs); eleven UN agencies and other entities (e.g. Red Cross/Red Crescent); and four donor agencies;
- two surveys distributed globally in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Arabic) to approximately 160 individuals and organizations and eight inter-agency distribution lists, resulting in 428 completed responses from sixty-six countries; and
- ten field visits to first review preliminary content and then provide pilot trainings on the Guidelines, reaching approximately 1,000 further individuals across UN, INGO and government agencies in nine locations in eight countries.

In September 2015, UNICEF and UNFPA hosted the first launch of the GBV Guidelines for friends and colleagues attending the Sexual Violence Research Initiative's biennial conference in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> As lead author of the revised Guidelines, it was a privilege for me to join a few members of the Task Team at this initial launch and share in the field's excitement about this long-anticipated tool. Coinciding with this first launch, a colleague brought to my attention Chris Dolan's Opinion Note, published in the Summer 2014 issue of the *International Review of the Red Cross*, entitled "Letting Go of the Gender Binary: Charting New Pathways for Humanitarian Interventions on Gender-Based Violence". A major focus of the article is a critical review of elements of the 2005 GBV Guidelines, which the author uses as an entry point for advocating for changes in the 2015 GBV Guidelines.

programme cycle and within a framework of each humanitarian sector's existing mandates, responsibilities and capacities.

3 The Task Team included representatives of the global GBV Area of Responsibility co-lead agencies – UNICEF and UNFPA – as well as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Women, the World Food Programme, expert NGOs (including the American Refugee Committee, Care International, Catholic Relief Services, ChildFund International, Interaction, the International Medical Corps, the International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, Plan International, Refugees International, Save the Children and the Women's Refugee Commission), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and independent consultants with extensive GBV experience.

4 Launches have since been held in Geneva, Washington, DC, New York and Canada.

At first glance, it might seem like the changes in the 2015 GBV Guidelines that are being advocated for in Dolan's article are mainly articulated around the question: "What about men, boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) populations?" For those who share concerns about attention to these groups in humanitarian action, they might well be pleased with how the 2015 Guidelines acknowledge the problem of sexual violence against men and boys in conflict-affected settings and make recommendations about addressing it (incorporating in some instances Dolan's own feedback, received as part of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) review of the Guidelines), along with the recognition that men and boys can be agents of change when working alongside women and girls to reduce GBV. The 2015 Guidelines also highlight LGBTI issues of concern throughout. In fact, the revised Guidelines acknowledge the protection rights and needs of many groups, even if their concerns are not explicitly related to *gender-based* violence. It could be argued that these are among the most inclusive Guidelines in the history of humanitarian action.

At second glance, however, Dolan's article is evidently getting at something more than a recognition of the rights and needs of men and boys and LGBTI victims of sexual violence within the revised GBV Guidelines and in humanitarian action. The arguments presented in the article speak to a broader agenda – one that is aimed at reframing the GBV field, so that "understandings of GBV shift from an emphasis on gender equality towards an ethos of gender inclusivity".<sup>5</sup> Several interlinked claims seem to dominate in the promotion of this shift towards a "gender-inclusive" approach. The first is that those who would continue to prioritize women and girls in GBV work are operating with outdated models that do not represent what Dolan implies is the current *lingua franca* of gender, which is framed around gender sensitivity rather than gender equality. The second is that the definition of GBV needs to be radically rewritten, in order to reproblematicize it away from an emphasis on gender discrimination as it informs violence against women and girls and, in effect, refocus GBV programming. The third is that emerging evidence – or even the lack thereof – is grounds for this overhaul. To ignore these issues, Dolan's Opinion Note suggests, would be to betray the principles of impartiality that drive humanitarian work.

Dolan is not alone in pushing for an expansion of the focus of GBV programming. Indeed, it is because Dolan's comments represent a set of concerns percolating in a few humanitarian corners that it seems worth addressing them at length. Because even as Dolan's arguments derive, in part, from recent gains by, and theoretical approaches of, LGBTI activists, they nonetheless echo familiar challenges to the GBV field; arguments against centring women and girls within GBV language and programmes have been floating around in various guises

5 Chris Dolan, "Letting Go of the Gender Binary: Charting New Pathways for Humanitarian Interventions on Gender-Based Violence", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 96, No. 894, 2014, p. 486, available at: [www.icrc.org/en/download/file/12231/irrc-894-dolan.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/12231/irrc-894-dolan.pdf).

almost since humanitarian programming on GBV began.<sup>6</sup> They were brought to the discussion table (again) during the drafting of the revised Guidelines.

Dolan's particular critique provides an opportunity not only to reflect on the issue of reframing GBV theory and practice, but also to highlight some important conceptual elements of the revised GBV Guidelines and GBV work generally – timely given that the rollout of the GBV Guidelines is under way. The three claims in Dolan's article that I have identified above are used in this response as points of departure for sharing decisions taken regarding the revised content of the Guidelines. I also present some reflections that link those decisions to larger issues within the GBV field.

Concerning the first theme that the GBV field should be refocused, I highlight below that a dedicated spotlight on the rights and needs of women and girls continues to be hard-won in humanitarian contexts. Attempts to shift away from a focus on violence against women and girls and gender equality in gender and GBV programming represent a regression rather than an advancement for the GBV field. As such, the revised GBV Guidelines purposefully centre on women and girls, and reinforce linkages between GBV prevention and gender equality programming.

In relation to the second theme around revising the GBV definition, I describe how the language of GBV is meant to articulate a gender hierarchy between males and females, and while all violence may arguably be said to have a gendered element, not all violence is reflective of this hierarchy. The revised Guidelines highlight that "GBV" is most commonly used to emphasize the links between systemic inequality experienced by females and their exposure to multiple forms of violence.

Regarding the third theme related to data, I briefly discuss the fact that the three pages of data included in an annex of the revised Guidelines illustrate what we already know: women and girls suffer sexual violence (conflict-driven and within the home and community) at greater rates than males in conflict-affected settings. I then speak to what I consider a more important issue: Dolan's argument that data is "used and abused" to draw attention away from the problem of violence against men and boys and LGBTI populations broadly is incorrect. In fact, data is used

6 At the most basic level, some argue that GBV programming is not the purview of humanitarian action. The first global assessment report on GBV was published only in 2002. As the author of that report, I tracked several programmes that had been introduced in different regions of the world – most only a few years old – and concluded that there were "significant gaps in policy, programming, coordination, and protection" related to GBV in humanitarian settings globally. During research for the report I was often told by interviewees – particularly men in dominant positions within the humanitarian response architecture – that to address violence against women and girls was to meddle in culture and therefore outside the scope of humanitarian intervention. See Jeanne Ward, *If Not Now, When? Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Refugee, IDP and Post-conflict Settings*, Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium, 2002. It is routine amongst many GBV actors to discuss experiences of pushback against a focus on women and girls that arise at all levels of humanitarian action and across all settings. However, these challenges are often not captured in articles or guidelines, in part because of fears linked, in the words of one GBV expert, to "rising above the parapet" and risking a hostile response that undermines what support there is for GBV programming. This is discussed in more detail later in the article.

to draw attention to the particular issues facing women and girls, and the urgent need to attend to those issues.

Finally, I conclude with a recap of the importance of retaining a focus on women and girls in GBV work, while moving forward in partnership with those who may wish to accelerate programming directed to males and LGBTI communities broadly.

## **Prioritizing women and girls in GBV theory and practice remains important and necessary**

Dolan's article maintains that a model of GBV that is used to conceptualize females' vulnerability to violence as a function of their subordinate status in relation to males is "unidirectional and static".<sup>7</sup> This understanding of GBV is said to reflect a "partial narrative" that sidelines males and LGBTI populations.<sup>8</sup> Dolan goes so far as to suggest that a female-centred approach to GBV programming is to men what patriarchy is to women, insofar as it replaces "one form of discrimination [male to female] with its almost equally unsatisfactory mirror image [female to male]".<sup>9</sup> The clear message that emerges in this critique is that it is high time GBV programming progressed beyond centring on women and girls to a focus on men, women, boys and girls as well as LGBTI populations writ large.<sup>10</sup>

### **What the 2015 GBV Guidelines say**

There was robust agreement by reviewers that women and girls should remain the principal focus of the revised Guidelines given females' vulnerability to particular forms of violence and the need for specialized guidance to address that violence. In concordance with the global evidence base on violence against women, reviewers also agreed that the Guidelines should support actions to promote gender equality as central to the prevention of GBV.<sup>11</sup> Inevitably, there were a

7 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 493.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 500.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 500 (the internal brackets are mine).

10 Throughout this paper, I refer to "LGBTI populations broadly" or "writ large" or "generally". I do this in order to differentiate work that is focused on shared LGBTI concerns related to sexual orientation and gender identity from work on GBV that strives to meet the needs of all female survivors and those at risk, including lesbians and transgender women. However, in using terms such as "broadly", I do not wish to wrongly imply that the LGBTI community is necessarily holistic or homogeneous. There is a tendency in Dolan's article to link men and LGBTI populations together as an excluded group, the generality of which I do not wish to replicate.

11 The IASC *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*, 2006, p. 1, defines gender equality as "equality between women and men". The *Handbook* identifies addressing GBV as a critical targeted action necessary to achieving gender equality. Available at: [www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Gender%20Handbook.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Gender%20Handbook.pdf). See also Liz Wall, "Gender Equality and Violence against Women: What's the Connection?", Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault Research Summary, 2014, available at: [www3.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/researchsummary/ressum7/ressum7.pdf](http://www3.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/researchsummary/ressum7/ressum7.pdf); Kathryn L. Falb, Jeannie Annan and Jhumka Gupta, "Achieving Gender Equality to Reduce Intimate Partner Violence against Women", *The Lancet Global Health*, Vol. 3, No. 6, 2015, available at:

few outliers.<sup>12</sup> The Task Team deliberated carefully on recommendations that were inconsistent with the norm or represented particular flashpoints, including the definition of GBV and the extent to which the Guidelines should target men and boys and LGBTI populations as victims or as being at risk of GBV.

While all the Task Team members agreed that all survivors of sexual and other forms of violence in humanitarian settings should receive care and support, many understand the framing and approaches to violence against men and boys and LGBTI populations generally as necessarily different than for women and girls – not only because the drivers of the violence are different, but also because the socio-political and personal impacts of the violence are different. Several Task Team members worked together on an “Essential to Know” box in the introduction to the Guidelines that captures the rationale for the Guidelines’ focus on women and girls:

Women and girls everywhere are disadvantaged in terms of social power and influence, control of resources, control of their bodies and participation in public life – all as a result of socially determined gender roles and relations. Gender-based violence occurs in the context of this imbalance. While humanitarian actors must analyse different gendered vulnerabilities that may put men, women, boys and girls at heightened risk of violence and ensure care and support for all survivors, *special attention should be given to females due to their documented greater vulnerabilities to GBV, the overarching discrimination they experience, and their lack of safe and equitable access to humanitarian assistance.*<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the Guidelines – as with GBV work itself – recognize and respond to the particular relation that females have to a system of gender inequality that favours males over females. Violence against women and girls supports and affirms this structural discrimination. Sexual violence is but one manifestation,<sup>14</sup> intimate

[www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(15\)00006-6/abstract?cc=y](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(15)00006-6/abstract?cc=y); Rachel Jewkes, Michael Flood and James Lang, “From Work with Men and Boys to Changes of Social Norms and Reduction of Inequities in Gender Relations: A Conceptual Shift in Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls”, *The Lancet*, Vol. 385, No. 9977, 2014, available at: [www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)61683-4/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61683-4/abstract).

12 In order to ensure transparency, feedback from the global review was catalogued and responded to in writing during the revisions process, and shared with all those who reviewed the Guidelines as well as any other interested parties.

13 Inter-agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*, 2015 (GBV Guidelines), p. 6 (emphasis in original). The Guidelines and other materials can be downloaded at: [www.gbvguidelines.org](http://www.gbvguidelines.org).

14 Although not the focus of this article, it is worth noting that a decision was taken when drafting the 2005 GBV Guidelines to focus on sexual violence in the emergency stages of humanitarian intervention, due in part to the appalling failure to address sexual violence against women and girls in Darfur occurring at the time the first GBV Guidelines were drafted. This focus on sexual violence in the 2005 Guidelines appears to have contributed to a misunderstanding by some that sexual violence is separate from or exceptional to other forms of GBV, driven purely by the conflict rather than existing on a continuum of violence to which females are exposed often multiple times throughout their lifespan, in peacetime as well as humanitarian emergencies. The UN Security Council’s attention to sexual violence as a feature of conflict (starting in 2008 with UNSC Res. 1820) may also have contributed to this misunderstanding, insofar as sexual violence rapidly became virtually the sole wartime violation of women’s and girls’ rights on which the



partner violence, child and forced marriage, and forced and/or coerced prostitution – along with multiple other forms of violence against women and girls – are each key sites of male domination that the revised GBV Guidelines target. Issues of class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and other factors can compound for different women and girls to contribute to “situations of double or triple marginalization”.<sup>15</sup> The Guidelines recognize that it is both the nature and the scope of their gender-based disadvantage – still evident in every society in the world – that warrants specialized guidance and programming for women and girls. Yet, as discussed further below, attention to women and girls is still a challenge in many humanitarian settings, and attempts to shift from a focus on gender equality to gender inclusivity risk increasing, rather than decreasing, those challenges.

## Ensuring attention to women and girls has been and continues to be hard-won

In Dolan’s article, it is claimed that a focus on the male–female binary in gender equality programming is “anachronistic”,<sup>16</sup> and that the “pursuit of gender equality by way of GBV interventions has been at the cost of humanitarian principles”.<sup>17</sup> While these assertions appear to be linked, at least in part, to a loose reframing of “gender” (discussed further below) that has emerged particularly in queer theory, they are striking in their lack of recognition of the historic and ongoing struggle to hold duty bearers accountable to the problem of violence against women. They also overlook the responsibility of the humanitarian community to attend specifically to the rights and needs of women and girls; the importance of no longer deferring social justice for women and girls in humanitarian contexts; and the imperative to reduce violence against females and promote gender equality in order to achieve sustainable solutions to humanitarian crises.<sup>18</sup> In fact, these assertions echo thinking and approaches that

Council focused, squeezing out not only other abuses but also attention to women’s agency as actors involved in conflict. This victim focus also suffered from the Council’s narrow focus on conflict alone – conflict-related sexual violence was treated as separate from other forms of GBV. This misunderstanding is reflected in Dolan’s Opinion Note when it is suggested that there is now “increasing acknowledgement ... that sexual violence is not the only form of gender-based violence” (C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 485). In fact, there has been acknowledgement amongst GBV experts since the very beginning of this work that GBV comprises a spectrum of violations of which sexual violence is only one, and programming in the field often reflects this. The revised GBV Guidelines reflect this reality. See also, International Rescue Committee, *Private Violence, Public Concern: Intimate Partner Violence in Humanitarian Settings*, Practice Brief, 2015, available at: [www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC\\_PVPC\\_FINAL\\_EN.PDF](http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC_PVPC_FINAL_EN.PDF).

15 UN Special Rapporteur, *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective*, E/CN.4/2005/72, 2005, p. 8.

16 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 496.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 499.

18 On the last point about State fragility and its link to gender inequality, see, for example, Donna Lee Bowen, Valerie M. Hudson and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, “State Fragility and Structural Gender Inequality in Family Law: An Empirical Investigation”, *Laws*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2015, available at: [www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/4/4/654](http://www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/4/4/654).



required activists to mobilize in the first place to bring attention to violence against women in conflict zones. Decades of rubrics that broadly addressed "all people" or "all humanitarian crimes" resulted in no action on behalf of the specific rights and needs of women and girls.

Only by developing policies, standards and guidelines that targeted their particular concerns was attention paid to women and girls in humanitarian settings. In the wake of the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, the first working group on refugee women was convened to advocate for the needs of women affected by conflict. The working group's lobbying activities resulted in the 1989 appointment of a Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women to UNHCR. In 1990, UNHCR adopted a policy on refugee women's protection, from which evolved UNHCR's 1991 *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*. By highlighting the general protection needs of women affected by conflict (as distinct from men), the guidelines set the stage for standardizing programming that serves women and girls. Although the guidelines explicitly acknowledged exposure to sexual violence as a vulnerability of refugee women and called upon the humanitarian community to address this issue within its protection mandate, it took considerable time for the humanitarian community to support GBV programming for women and girls. A handful of individual GBV projects were funded in refugee and displaced population settings in the 1990s, but the global humanitarian GBV field did not begin to coalesce until the mid-2000s, and particularly after 2008, when the first coordination body for humanitarian response to GBV – the GBV Area of Responsibility – was established at the global level.<sup>19</sup>

Relative to the almost total absence of female-focused humanitarian programming twenty-five years ago, there are now projects in a preponderance of emergency-affected settings that are explicitly directed to women and girls.<sup>20</sup> This targeted attention is key to advancing women's and girls' agency – a critical element of any efforts to address GBV. In fact, a global study undertaken recently found that autonomous feminist activism is the single most important factor in driving improvements in women's rights, underscoring the importance of organizing by and with women – separately – to support lasting solutions to women's and girls' exposure to GBV.<sup>21</sup> And this isn't done just for expediency;

19 The majority of global tools to support attention to violence against women and girls in humanitarian action have been developed since the 2000s. Many are available on the GBV Area of Responsibility website, available at: [gbvaor.net](http://gbvaor.net).

20 The IASC Gender Marker is one way to measure this. It is a tool used to assess the extent to which humanitarian programmes ensure equal benefits to males and females, and/or support gender equality. Despite progress, a 2015 review found that many humanitarian response plans lack a gender perspective. See IASC, *Gender Equality in the 2015 Strategic Response Plan: Results and Evolution of the IASC Gender Marker*, 2015, available at: [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gender\\_equality\\_in\\_the\\_strategic\\_response\\_plan\\_2015.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gender_equality_in_the_strategic_response_plan_2015.pdf).

21 Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3, 2012, available at: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8675829&fileId=S0003055412000226>.

in the context of global patriarchy, women as a subjugated group *should* be leading their own emancipation.

Despite progress in attention and support to women and girls affected by emergencies, much remains to be done. For those to whom it now looks as if women and girls are hogging the spotlight of humanitarian response, it's worth taking a second glance. Women's voices, rights and needs are still often overlooked. In a telling example of the ongoing invisibility of female-specific concerns in humanitarian settings, women constituted only 13% of persons interviewed or spoken about in media in fifteen transitional and conflict countries in 2015.<sup>22</sup> GBV programming is one of the few areas within the humanitarian response structure where women's rights and needs are explicitly acknowledged and addressed, yet these programmes continue to be grossly under-resourced. In 2013, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) published a discussion paper for which it reviewed appeals for five emergencies – three flash appeals and two refugee response plans – and found that GBV programmes accounted for less than 1–2% of requested funding in each.<sup>23</sup> In a 2015 follow-up report, the IRC found that the 2014 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Iraq, for example, only fulfilled 5.2%, 20.9% and 5.5%, respectively, of what was requested for GBV programmes, representing minuscule percentages of the total HRP in each country.<sup>24</sup> The same low level of investment appears to have befallen gender equality programming: the share of humanitarian funding allocated to programmes focusing primarily on, or contributing significantly to, gender equality fell from 22% in 2013 to 12% in 2014.<sup>25</sup>

This low level of funding is a marker of the persistent failure in humanitarian action to make a real difference in the well-being of women and girls. In the same 2015 report, the IRC goes on to describe lack of humanitarian leadership around attention to GBV as another major contributor to the humanitarian community's failure to adequately meet the needs of women and girl survivors and those at risk – basic programmes for survivors were wholly inadequate in all countries assessed. In another case example, Refugees International found that humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan, which struck the Philippines in 2013, “failed to fully incorporate gender and GBV

22 See: <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2015-reports>.

23 International Rescue Committee, *Lifesaving, Not Optional: Protecting Women and Girls from Violence in Emergencies*, 2013, p. 2, available at: [www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Ref\\_Doc\\_Lifesaving\\_Not\\_Optional\\_-\\_Discussion\\_Paper\\_Feb2013.pdf](http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Ref_Doc_Lifesaving_Not_Optional_-_Discussion_Paper_Feb2013.pdf).

24 International Rescue Committee, *Are We There Yet? Progress and Challenges in Ensuring Life-Saving Services and Reducing Risks to Violence for Women and Girls in Emergencies*, 2015, available at: [www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/664/ircarewethereyetwebfinalukspell.pdf](http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/664/ircarewethereyetwebfinalukspell.pdf).

25 Global Humanitarian Assistance, *Funding Gender in Emergencies: What Are the Trends?*, 2014, p. 3, available at: [www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Gender-briefing\\_humanitarian\\_19092014.pdf.pdf](http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Gender-briefing_humanitarian_19092014.pdf.pdf). Also see Lydia Alpizar Durán, “20 Years of Shamefully Scarce Funding for Feminists and Women's Rights Movements”, AWID, May 2015, available at: [www.awid.org/node/3317](http://www.awid.org/node/3317).

dimensions into the early phases of the response, which affected each clusters' ability to effectively assist its target population".<sup>26</sup>

The response to Typhoon Haiyan illustrates that even when the problem of GBV is acknowledged, addressing GBV and gender inequality continues to be considered a "later stage" intervention by some humanitarian actors, too complex to forefront during emergency interventions. Dolan's article makes reference to this position when suggesting that addressing the foundations of GBV (e.g. gender-based discrimination and inequality) may not be relevant or possible "when people are in crisis".<sup>27</sup> The fact that priority actions to build respect for women's rights and agency, promote gender equality and reduce GBV are often postponed in humanitarian action as being low-priority reflects the too common reality that "[l]ater" is a patriarchal time zone"<sup>28</sup> in which delays serve to maintain the status quo.

A series of reports recently released by the Women's Refugee Commission relating to the refugee crisis across Europe tell the ongoing story of how many humanitarian actors on the ground do not perceive GBV to be a significant problem, and programmes are not in place to assist survivors. These reports illustrate how far we have to go until the rights and needs of women and girls are taken seriously enough to be fully integrated into humanitarian action.<sup>29</sup> It would be entirely premature to dismantle women- and girl-centred GBV programming when the humanitarian system is not yet fully acting on its commitments and so many women and girls worldwide have yet to benefit.

## Gender inclusivity represents a regression to male dominant language and practice

What Dolan's critique does underscore is how the language of gender is being reinterpreted, often with the effect of undermining a women's rights orientation in both gender equality and GBV prevention and response work. When arguing that gender and GBV framing should shift from an emphasis on gender equality to gender inclusivity, Dolan suggests this will "allow gender to recover its analytical, practical and political potential".<sup>30</sup> This subtly (and incorrectly) implies that gender – in theory, studies and programming – was at one time focused on "gender inclusivity" but is no longer because it has been co-opted by

26 Marcy Hersh, *Philippines: Emergency Response Fails Women and Girls*, Refugees International Field Report, 2014, p. 1, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Philippines%20GBV%20New%20Approach%20letterhead.pdf>

27 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 486.

28 Cynthia Enloe, cited in Nadine Puechguirbal, "The Cost of Ignoring Gender in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations: A Feminist Perspective", *Amsterdam Law Forum*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2012, p. 15.

29 Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), *No Safety for Refugee Women on the European Route: Report from the Balkans*, January 2016, available at: [www.womensrefugeecommission.org](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org). In a series of four assessments from November 2015 through May 2016, the WRC found that opportunities to protect and empower refugee women are systematically squandered. Also see: [www.buzzfeed.com/jinamoore/women-refugees-fleeing-through-europe-are-told-rape-is-not-a-vhm0wBJJ3x](http://www.buzzfeed.com/jinamoore/women-refugees-fleeing-through-europe-are-told-rape-is-not-a-vhm0wBJJ3x).

30 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 501.

a discriminatory feminist project. In fact, the reverse is occurring. The language of gender has been central to women's rights activism and to work on violence against women as an articulation of the reality of women's subordination within the prevailing gender order. Now, however, gender is increasingly being used to talk of women's and men's roles, a shift that effectively masks the problems of male privilege and women's oppression.

Using the "gender" language was not intended to replace attention to women's experiences in this way. When many women's studies programmes in universities shifted to gender studies programmes in the 1990s, they did so not because they were no longer focusing on women's issues, but because they sought to clearly frame women's issues within a larger social, economic and political problem of patriarchy, such that their work could no longer be ignored or derided by male peers as irrelevant to the body politic. Now many of those same programmes are struggling against institutional pressure to focus on women and men equally because of the "gender" emphasis. Similarly, gender mainstreaming emerged from the 1985 Third World Conference on Women and was introduced as a strategy for working towards gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Still fundamental to feminist activism, now gender mainstreaming is too often misunderstood to be addressing the socially and politically differentiated needs of men, women, boys and girls, without attending to the inequality underpinning these differentials. As such, gender mainstreaming's transformative agenda of challenging gender-based injustice and a direct focus on empowering women is increasingly obscured.<sup>31</sup>

The ebb away from centring women and girls in gender and GBV isn't only reflected in the halls of academia and the sometimes complex theoretical discussions about our work. There are, every day, practical implications for humanitarian action. At the global level, for example, Iceland announced in October 2014 that it would co-host a UN conference on gender, including gender equality and violence against women, to which only males were invited.<sup>32</sup> In a summit on sexual violence in conflict held in London in 2014, one of the few non-governmental panels allowed above "The Fringe" – the room where activists and programmers showcased their work on display boards – was dedicated to sexual violence against males.<sup>33</sup> UNHCR held a panel in December 2015 for the 16 Days

31 See, for example, Kirsty Milward, Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Franz F. Wong, "Gender Mainstreaming Critiques: Signposts or Dead Ends?", *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2015, available at: [www.readcube.com/articles/10.1111%2F1759-5436.12160](http://www.readcube.com/articles/10.1111%2F1759-5436.12160); Mary Daly, "Gender Mainstreaming in Theory and Practice", *Social Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2005, available at: <http://sp.oxfordjournals.org/content/12/3/433.abstract>; Anu Pillay, "Gender Praxis in Emergencies: 20 Years after Beijing", United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, April 2015, available at: [www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/newsview.nsf/\(http://News\)/2D7805628CBE469FC1257E1B0058AE9E?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/newsview.nsf/(http://News)/2D7805628CBE469FC1257E1B0058AE9E?OpenDocument).

32 In response to concerns expressed by women's rights advocates to this approach, Iceland's foreign minister agreed that women would be able to participate in the meeting, while also stating that this "Barbershop Conference" was oriented towards creating a scaled-up space for men to speak to one another, as they might do in an actual barbershop. The meeting was held in January 2015. See: [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49808](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49808).

33 Feminist thinkers and women's rights activists also expressed concerns that the summit focused away from gender issues and towards war as the explanation for conflict-related sexual violence. For

of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign in which three of the four panellists were male.<sup>34</sup>

Engaging men in conversations about violence against women, or showcasing the problem of sexual violence against men in conflict at a global conference, are not problematic actions in themselves – indeed, they are of critical importance. Rather, the issue is whether and how these conversations represent what some rights activists refer to as “phallic drift”<sup>35</sup> – a tendency to revert towards a male point of view and attention to males, with the concomitant diminishment of feminist voices, approaches and attention to women’s needs and experiences. In 2013, the US Institute for Peace held an international symposium on “Men, Peace and Security”. Whether it was the intent of the symposium or not, the implication of the title is a shift in focus from the Women, Peace and Security mandate to a focus on men; one of the objectives for the symposium was engaging men in peacebuilding and security, as if they are somehow excluded from it.<sup>36</sup> In reality only 4% of signatories in thirty-one major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 were women; 2.4% of chief mediators, 3.7% of witnesses and 9% of negotiators were women.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the 2014 MenEngage global conference listed violence as one conference topic among seven others, under which violence against women was a subset; whereas the original purpose of “engaging men and boys” was to address men’s violence against women and girls, much of the work of this community appears to be shifting to a men’s movement focused around men’s issues and perspectives, with a questionable degree of accountability to women.<sup>38</sup>

At the field level, particularly in many of the highly patriarchal settings in which much of the world’s current conflicts are taking place, it can be a daily struggle to ensure attention to the problem of violence against women and girls,

thoughts on the summit, see Anne Marie Goetz, “Stopping Sexual Violence in Conflict: Gender Politics in Foreign Policy”, Open Democracy, 20 June 2014, available at: [www.opendemocracy.net/5050/anne-marie-goetz/stopping-sexual-violence-in-conflict-gender-politics-in-foreign-policy](http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/anne-marie-goetz/stopping-sexual-violence-in-conflict-gender-politics-in-foreign-policy). Goetz argues: “Advocacy language suggesting ‘it’s not about sex/women/gender, it’s about war’ may have helped to convince the Security Council that this was a subject requiring their attention, but may also have unwittingly downplayed the importance of the feminist emancipatory projects of empowering survivors, and ensuring that protection and recovery efforts contribute to transformation in gender relations.”

34 See: [https://gallery.mailchimp.com/6e94daee6b3fa3110e869bf47/files/UNHCRLAW\\_Panel\\_Agenda.pdf](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/6e94daee6b3fa3110e869bf47/files/UNHCRLAW_Panel_Agenda.pdf).

35 For the origination of this term, see Ronni Sandroff, “Beware of Phallic Drift”, *On the Issues: The Progressive Women’s Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1994, p. 2.

36 See: [www.usip.org/events/men-peace-and-security-symposium-agents-of-change](http://www.usip.org/events/men-peace-and-security-symposium-agents-of-change).

37 UN Women, *Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence*, 2015, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03AWomenPeaceNeg.pdf>.

38 For information about the MenEngage Global Symposium, see: [www.menengagedilli2014.net/symposium.html](http://www.menengagedilli2014.net/symposium.html). For further feminist reflection about the MenEngage work, see Shamim Meer, *Struggles for Gender Equality: Reflections on the Place of Men and Men’s Organisations*, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2012, available at: [www.eldis.org/go/home&id=70513&type=Document#.VpnzADY65-U](http://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=70513&type=Document#.VpnzADY65-U). Also see Michael Flood, “Work with Men to End Violence against Women: A Critical Stocktake”, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 17, 2015, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1070435>. It is important to note that some in the MenEngage community are concerned about issues of accountability to women and girls and have introduced related standards and guidelines. See MenEngage Alliance, “Accountability Standards and Guidelines”, 2014, available at: <http://menengage.org/resources/menengage-accountability-standards-guidelines/>.

as described above. In the midst of these struggles, even some of the strongest women-targeted programming appears to be at risk. The IRC, for example, recently merged its Women's Protection and Empowerment Unit into a larger department that addresses protection concerns generally, despite calls from several donors and others to maintain a separate unit.

Gender experts have suggested that subsuming the problem of GBV within a broad protection frame can lead to "protectionist" thinking and approaches that may reinforce gender inequality.<sup>39</sup> While Dolan hails UNHCR's adoption of its Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) approach as "radical" and a "noteworthy example of an institutional effort to go beyond a focus on women and girls",<sup>40</sup> it might be argued that AGDM's generalist protection frame risks concealing, rather than advancing, the specific needs and rights of different populations, in this case those of women and girls.<sup>41</sup> In particular, asserting the value of an "inclusive" approach fails to recognize that females are routinely excluded from male spaces, and also devalues and undermines women's rights and access to their own spaces.

It is likely that attention to gender relations as a means of addressing the causes of violence against women and girls served to awaken interest in the problems of violence against males and against LGBTI populations generally – which many of us in the GBV community initially understood to be a positive outcome of our work, opening the door for others with appropriate expertise to address these issues through the development of an evidence base for their theory and programming. There is a lot of untapped opportunity for synergies between work that aims to address male violence and work that aims to prevent violence against women. That said, examination of the problem of violence against men or against LGBTI communities generally, however welcome, should not be at the expense of efforts to understand and address violence against women and girls.

We could hardly have foreseen the possibility that the language of gender would be appropriated and neutralized to such an extent as to underpin the argument that males and females are equally affected by "gender" issues and that men have been excluded from programming around gender.<sup>42</sup> Nor did those of

39 See, for example, Anu Pillay, "Gender and Men in Humanitarian Action", paper written for master's in humanitarian affairs, University of York, 2015, p. 6. The author describes the protectionist approach as one that "while recognising differences, seeks to curtail or curb women's activities or freedoms with the rationale that the aim is to 'protect' women from harm or wrongdoing. This approach does not challenge gender discrimination, but reproduces it in the guise of protecting women."

40 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 488.

41 For a discussion of this, see Alice Edwards, "Transitioning Gender: Feminist Engagement with International Refugee Law and Policy 1950–2010", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2010, available at: <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article-abstract/29/2/21/1531885/Transitioning-Gender-Feminist-Engagement-with>. Edwards suggests that "a further shift away from a focus on women and women's rights under the AGDM agendas to the concerns and needs of men and boys, or human beings more generally, could undermine the goals of sexual equality and social justice, in particular by downplaying the power dynamics at issue".

42 See, for example, Susan Somach, *The Other Side of the Gender Equation: Gender Issues for Men in the Europe and Eurasia Region*, Final Report, USAID, 2011, available at: [www.ineesite.org/en/resources/resource\\_db\\_the-other-side-of-the-gender-equation-gender-issues-for-men-in](http://www.ineesite.org/en/resources/resource_db_the-other-side-of-the-gender-equation-gender-issues-for-men-in). Also see Daniel Neumann,



us struggling to bring attention to the problem of GBV anticipate how shifts in the gender language would be used in attempts to reframe GBV work away from a focus on women and girls, as explored further below.

## The GBV definition is a cornerstone to framing work on violence against women and girls

Here we arrive at another key contention in Dolan's critique: that the definition of GBV should be rewritten to more heartily embrace various forms of violence against men and boys and LGBTI groups. Just as Dolan has suggested that a feminist frame for gender is "anachronistic", his article also suggests that the 2005 GBV Guidelines definition "arises from a particular moment in the history of addressing women's needs and concerns" which "asserts a unidirectional causal relationship between being a woman, having subordinate status and being correspondingly vulnerable to violence".<sup>43</sup>

### What the 2015 Guidelines say

What has been inaccurately characterized as a particular moment in history lives on: the agreed definition of GBV for the 2015 Guidelines is the same one that was included in the 2005 Guidelines. It emphasizes that violence is "based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences *between* [emphasis added] males and females" and highlights that the term "GBV" is most commonly used "to underscore how systemic inequality between males and females – which exists in every society in the world – acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls".<sup>44</sup>

It is accurate, however, to suggest that the definition of GBV arose within the women's rights movement and that it is used to articulate women's exposure to violence in the context of patriarchy. In fact, without that movement we would not have the language of "GBV". Whereas the 2005 Guidelines did not explicitly mention the provenance of the term, recommendations from several Task Team members led to the inclusion within the 2015 Guidelines of reference to the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), wherein GBV was first codified in an international declaration, and which defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women".<sup>45</sup>

Ann Chang and Otim Patrick, *Gender against Men*, Refugee Law Project – Video Advocacy Unit, May 2012, available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJSl99HQYXc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJSl99HQYXc).

43 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 493.

44 GBV Guidelines, above note 13, p. 5.

45 As a notable indication of the extent to which advocacy for gender neutrality shifts us away from well-established feminist theory, a request was made in the Guidelines reviewer feedback that "this paragraph on the CEDAW [*sic* – the reference was actually to DEVAW] definition add: 'this definition has been developed in the context of eliminating violence against women and girls while it is increasingly acknowledged that men and boys face gender based violence as well. The current CEDAW [*sic*] definition needs to be revised to include all those at risk of gender based violence with reference



The Guidelines also acknowledge that some actors use the term GBV to describe select forms of violence against men and boys – particularly select forms of sexual violence in conflict – as well as specific forms of violence against LGBTI groups broadly. There was tension among some Task Team members about including these points because of concerns that such definitional compromises could be exploited in order to draw attention away from the problem of violence against women and girls in GBV theory and practice.

In his article, Dolan captures these types of definitional compromises in the 2005 Guidelines when he identifies some inconsistencies around the framing of GBV. For example, the 2005 Guidelines primarily talk about women and girls as those affected by GBV, but they occasionally reference “women and children”, and they allow that “men and boys may be victims of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence”.<sup>46</sup> This lack of precision in the framing of GBV has been a persistent problem. In one example from the field, the GBV coordination mechanism in Afghanistan added “men and boys” throughout GBV documents that use the DEVAW definition of violence.

While many of us working in the field have been clear within our own community that GBV speaks to the problem of violence against women and girls, we appreciate the need for all survivors of violence to receive services, and this may be one reason for inexactness in our language.<sup>47</sup> Another is that we have responded to pressure to make minor adjustments in the interpretation of the term “GBV” in order to secure support from various constituencies – particularly those with a resistance to the project of equality between men and women. One colleague has described this tendency as a pragmatism that is necessary to gain sideways attention to women and girls in the male-dominated environments in which we work;<sup>48</sup> she

to violence against women, girls, men and boys based on gender and unequal power relations.” The Task Team declined to include a recommendation within the Guidelines that DEVAW be revised.

46 2005 GBV Guidelines, p. 7.

47 There is undoubtedly room for specialists working on the problem of sexual violence against males to improve knowledge and capacity of service providers in order to meet male survivor needs sensitively and ethically. It may be useful to highlight, however, that although the argument has been made by some non-GBV specialists that male victims of sexual violence are actively excluded from clinical services that GBV programmes support, this does not reflect reality – in humanitarian settings where it exists, clinical care is meant to be available for any sexual assault survivor, in accordance with global guidance. See World Health Organization (WHO), UNFPA and UNHCR, *Clinical Management of Rape Survivors: Developing Protocols for use with Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons*, revised ed., 2004. The GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) captures sex- and age-disaggregated data on survivors’ access to services, including men and boy’s access to clinical care for sexual assault. For more information about the GBVIMS, see: [www.gbvims.com/what-is-gbvims/gbvims-background/](http://www.gbvims.com/what-is-gbvims/gbvims-background/).

48 It is worth noting that in 2016, despite concerted efforts by women’s activists, the UN Secretary-General appointment was a male, as all previous appointments have been. In November 2016, all incoming humanitarian coordinators were male, despite women being underrepresented in these positions globally. See Ayla Black, “Women in Humanitarian Leadership – Where Are They?”, *Humanitarian Advisory Group*, November 2016, available at: <http://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/women-in-humanitarian-leadership-where-are-they/>. Importantly, male-dominated environments include not only international institutions, on which the cited article focuses, but also humanitarian settings themselves, many of which are among the lowest in the global gender inequality index. See: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>.

concludes, however, that efforts towards pragmatism can "trap us into validating the patriarchal perspective".<sup>49</sup>

In any case, while concessions are still evident, the 2015 Guidelines are more explicit about how violence against males, as well as violence against LGBTI groups, is *different* from violence against women and girls.<sup>50</sup> Several Task Team members articulated it this way during the Guidelines drafting process: examining and addressing the ways in which hegemonic masculinity can be used by some men (and, in rarer cases, some women) as a way to cause harm to some other men is in theory and in practice very different from examining and addressing the ways in which patriarchy leads to "the domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women" (as articulated in DEVAW).<sup>51</sup>

### It's not a binary, it's a hierarchy

The accusation that the GBV field employs a "simplistic" male–female binary misses – or chooses to ignore – a key point that DEVAW underscores: it is not a binary, it is a hierarchy. In this way, there is not an equivalence of violence for males and for females that can be captured in the same overall framing of violence, nor is there an equivalence in the case of trans- and homophobic violence against LGBTI populations. While there may be areas of intersectionality and commonality in some determinants, the drivers of violence, and the experiences and consequences of it, are different for each group in fundamental ways.

In broad terms – and in case this point has not already been made sufficiently – the theory and practice related to violence against women problematizes the issue of patriarchy, or men's and women's comparative place in the *gender hierarchy*. The fact of this subordination is universal, applying to the experience of all women and girls. The violence is more often perpetrated against females by men they know intimately, and it is likely to happen multiple times in different manifestations over a woman's lifespan. The violence men both experience and perpetrate against other men is not only more likely to be between strangers or acquaintances, but it is also not represented in a lifelong pattern of diverse and systematic forms and violence driven by the same foundational issue, and neither causes nor contributes to the subjugation of men as an entire – and defining – social category of people.<sup>52</sup>

49 Nadine Puechguirbal, "I Speak Fluent Patriarchy, But It's not My Mother Tongue: Perspectives of a Feminist Insider within International Institutions", Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, Colloquium: "Who Knows? Circulation of Feminist Knowledge on Development and Gender Experts", Geneva, 19–20 November 2015, p. 13.

50 The revised GBV Guidelines suggest that "certain forms of violence against men and boys – particularly sexual violence committed with the explicit purpose of reinforcing gender inequitable norms of masculinity and femininity ... [are] based on socially constructed ideas of what it means to be a man and exercise male power". GBV Guidelines, above note 13, p. 5.

51 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, UNGA Res. 48/104, 20 December 1993.

52 Analyzing evidence across 654 countries from 1982 to 2011, WHO estimated that as many as 38% of female homicides globally were committed by male partners, while the corresponding figure for men

Therefore, understanding and addressing male victimization tends to focus more on incident types rather than a gendered political economy of violence. To the extent that nascent theory does find commonality in some forms of violence against men that occur *because the victims are men* (rather than because the victims are poor, or of a particular race, religion, etc.), it often problematizes the issue of masculinity, or the negative effects on men related to largely heteronormative, male-determined and primarily male-enforced *gender roles*. Queer theory can also be said to problematize gender roles, but with a particular focus on how those roles restrict freedoms and rights around sexual orientation and *gender identity*. Concerns linked to gender roles and gender identity are different from those linked to gender discrimination, which the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) points out when it highlights that “lesbians and transgender women are at particular risk because of gender inequality and power relations with family and wider society”.<sup>53</sup>

### All violence may be gendered, but not all violence is based on gender discrimination

Arguments such as Dolan’s would have us understand that violence should be categorized as gender-based if the violence “is informed by gendered assumptions about masculinity and femininity”.<sup>54</sup> It is worth asking how this categorization clarifies the experiences of different groups – in this case males, females, and LGBTI populations generally. Virtually every type of violence has a gendered

was 6%. WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and South African Medical Research Council, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence*, 2013, p. 26, available at: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf?ua=1). In its *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention*, WHO further concluded: “Whereas males are disproportionately represented among victims of violent death and physical injuries treated in emergency departments, women and girls, children and elderly people disproportionately bear the burden of the nonfatal consequences of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, and neglect, worldwide. They also suffer a host of negative health and social consequences from these acts of violence that often last a lifetime and that are not captured in official statistics.” WHO, *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention*, 2014, p. 8, available at: [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/status\\_report/2014/en](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/status_report/2014/en). Also see WHO, *World Report on Violence and Health*, 2002, p. 89, available at: <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/9241545615.pdf>. Here WHO concludes that “[o]ne of the most common forms of violence against women is that performed by a husband or an intimate male partner. This is in stark contrast to the situation for men, who in general are much more likely to be attacked by a stranger or acquaintance than by someone within their close circle of relationships. The fact that women are often emotionally involved with and economically dependent on those who victimize them has major implications for both the dynamics of abuse and the approaches to dealing with it .... Most women who are targets of physical aggression generally experience multiple acts of aggression over time.” For a comprehensive overview of the causes and impact of violence against women that includes these and other references, see UN Women’s Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls, available at: [www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/300-causes-protective-and-risk-factors-.html](http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/300-causes-protective-and-risk-factors-.html).

53 OHCHR, *Discriminatory Laws and Practices and Acts of Violence against Individuals Based on Their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, 2011, available at: [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/A.HRC.19.41\\_English.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/A.HRC.19.41_English.pdf).

54 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 497.

component when we apply the term "GBV" to reference gender roles and norms related to masculinity and femininity. Dolan acknowledges this when he says that if, as his article advocates, "attention to sexual forms of GBV [against males and LGBTI groups] is extended to non-sexual forms, then this list will inevitably become somewhat lengthy".<sup>55</sup> In a preliminary aspirational brainstorm, Dolan's article includes sexual violence against men, purposeful emasculation, sex-selective massacres, violence against men and boys by landmines, abduction/military conscription, being forced to commit atrocities against others, and evictions from accommodations and denial of work for LGBTI individuals.<sup>56</sup> An immediate reaction is to ask what forms of violence would *not* fit in this list. It is facetious to add: what about gang violence? Bar brawls? Any concept that is expected to cover so vast and diverse a list of instances of violence is simply unusable.

Taking one of the above types of male violence as an example, let us consider how sexual violence against men in conflict is framed by some as a problem of gender-based violence. This is probably the most common type of violence used when speaking of GBV against men and boys in humanitarian contexts. And indeed, this violence often has a "gendered" aspect, to the extent that it is strategically enacted in order to "emasculate" men – that is, deprive them of their "masculinity". But the link between this type of violence against men and GBV against women and girls ends there. Men aren't being sexually assaulted in conflict situations as an expression and reinforcement of gender norms that understand all men as the lesser and exploitable sex; this violence against men is about men in positions of power relative to other men (determined in these cases not by gender, but rather by guns or other sources of control) seeking to consolidate their power by targeting specific groups of men, typically because of political, ethnic and/or religious affiliation. The GBV we reference in relation to women and girls is about them being targeted by men based on their subordination to men according to patriarchal rules, institutions and practices. Ironically, "emasculating" men would not be so successful if male domination over women weren't so universally accepted – restoring a sense of "masculinity" essentially means restoring men to a confident position of not being women.

Another example might be massacres in which boys and men are the ones targeted to be killed, tortured, sent to concentration camps, etc. This is a powerful example of the problems that occur for some men who are on the wrong end of the patriarchal system at a given moment in time. Men are responsible for the militarization and institutionalization of violence, and this type of violence is an outcome of that. Again, this is not about men being targeted because of broad-based discrimination against them for being men; it is about men in particular social groups being targeted in order for their opponents to win wars.

Dolan himself highlights just how different his frame for violence against men is from the established frame for violence against women. Protesting that the

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

current conception of GBV “assumes that it is subordinate status in society that creates vulnerability to violence”, he suggests that the inverse can be true: men can be targeted for violence because they have a higher social status; men’s assumed greater strength can make them more likely targets of military recruitment and abduction and sex-selective massacres; men’s greater freedom to move makes them more vulnerable to landmines. Thus, men’s power and control is a risk factor for the GBV that Dolan describes.

Rather than representing sound theory, it appears as if this is an opportunistic attempt to insert attention to men and boys under the GBV umbrella – and whether intentional or not, it is at the expense of women and girls. Dolan – and he no doubt has support for this analysis – concludes that GBV programmes fail to recognize that “men too can be rendered vulnerable by virtue of their gender”.<sup>57</sup> It’s not a failure in understanding. To articulate these concerns within the same theoretical frame of “GBV” is not only confusing, it threatens to reverse progress made in understanding and addressing the distinct determinants of violence against women and girls. According to former Special Rapporteur Rashida Manjoo,

violence against men does not occur as a result of pervasive inequality and discrimination, and ... it is neither systemic nor pandemic in the way that violence against women indisputably is. ... Attempts to combine or synthesize all forms of violence into a “gender neutral framework” tend to result in a depoliticized or diluted discourse, which abandons the transformative agenda. A different set of normative and practical measures is required to respond to and prevent violence against women and, equally importantly, to achieve the international law obligation of substantive equality, as opposed to formal equality.<sup>58</sup>

In a move that appears to substantiate the concerns of women’s rights activists that GBV work is being usurped and transformed by men in order to give heightened consideration to men’s rights and needs, Dolan’s critique avoids any specific discussion – or even acknowledgement – of how patriarchy informs violence against women and girls – unless one takes into account the assertion that “excluding” men and boys from GBV programming is itself a replication of the discrimination that women experience in the context of patriarchy.<sup>59</sup> This line of reasoning suggests that a focus on gender equality for women and girls actually leads to gender inequality for men and boys. How could that be? The very definition of gender inequality understands women as a disadvantaged group in comparison to males.

One tenable argument for the need to “go beyond” a focus on women and girls in GBV programming might be that the system of patriarchy which causes violence

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>58</sup> Rashida Manjoo, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, A/HRC/26/38, May 2014, p. 17, available at: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Pages/ListReports.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Pages/ListReports.aspx).

<sup>59</sup> C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 500.

against women no longer exists; thus we need to re-examine the framework. However, neither Dolan nor anyone else can make this argument. We have only to look at the data to understand that the patriarchal system is in full swing the world over.

### **Data affirm what we already know: that women and girls suffer sexual violence at higher rates than men and boys. But this is not the central point**

Finally, we arrive to the third main theme I identify in Dolan's article: challenges linked to data. Data included in the 2005 Guidelines are identified as lacking insofar as several examples of rates of violence against women and girls were only estimates, "offered in a way that implies that they are clear and consistent enough to merit no further investigation".<sup>60</sup> Dolan's article also criticizes the 2005 Guidelines for presenting a global statistic on violence against women (one in three) as illustrative, even though, somewhat confusingly, the same is done in the Dolan critique with US and UK national statistics on sexual violence against boys.<sup>61</sup> In any case, the argument is also made that the phenomenon of underreporting creates an "unstable empirical foundation".<sup>62</sup>

The critique then shifts to what seems to be Dolan's primary concern related to the use of data: something referred to as "majoritarian"<sup>63</sup> thinking, in which the contention that women and girls are the primary victims of, for example, sexual violence results in funding and other support to services for females but not for males:

The manner in which this assumed majority status of female victims becomes both the beginning of an extensive exploration of that victimhood and the end of any analysis of the impacts on and needs of the assumed minority of victims is extraordinary; no serious social scientist, no donor, and no committed humanitarian should allow so much action to be premised on such shaky empirical foundations.<sup>64</sup>

### **What the 2015 Guidelines say**

At the time the 2005 Guidelines were published, there were limited data available on the scope of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict-affected settings.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 494.

61 On p. 494 of his article, Dolan suggests that the 2005 Guidelines "draw on a global figure and apply it unquestionably to humanitarian emergencies". However, in a footnote on p. 492, Dolan similarly cites statistics from the United Kingdom and United States to illustrate the problem of sexual violence against boys: three in twenty and one in six respectively. Note also that the violence against women data cited to produce the one in three statistic comes from, among other places, settings that have been affected by conflict or disasters. For a review of data on violence against women, see WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research *et al.*, above note 52.

62 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 495.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 495.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 495.

Ten years later, the 2015 Guidelines include three pages of data from a total of twenty-one countries. The data come from a variety of sources, serving to round out a picture that the 2005 Guidelines was only beginning to draw. The problem of violence against women and girls is widespread in humanitarian emergencies – and it is not limited to, or even primarily, sexual violence. Intimate partner violence, trafficking for sexual exploitation and abuse, child and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting are likewise problems revealed in the data. The Guidelines also include data on sexual violence against men.

In prevalence studies where male/female comparisons can be drawn, the evidence confirms that women are at significantly higher risk for sexual violence by a non-partner (e.g., more than twice as likely in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); almost twice as likely in Côte D'Ivoire), and that they may also be exposed to high levels of intimate partner sexual violence (e.g., 45% in the DRC; 24% in Côte D'Ivoire).<sup>65</sup> Dolan concedes that the data “tend to confirm that overall more women than men are affected”<sup>66</sup> by sexual violence – and not by small margins. Compound that with the multiple other forms of violence which women and girls experience not only in the context of humanitarian emergencies but throughout their lives, and you have a global health and human rights crisis.

And yet, the 2015 Guidelines attempt to make clear that this is not a numbers game when it comes to attending to the needs of survivors or undertaking prevention efforts. As with the 2005 Guidelines, the humanitarian community is advised in the current Guidelines to “assume GBV is occurring and threatening affected populations; treat it as a serious and life-threatening problem; and take actions based on sector recommendation in these Guidelines”.<sup>67</sup> The 2015 Guidelines (as well as key tools such as the World Health Organization's Clinical Management of Rape Survivors protocols) also set standards for service providers that support interventions for any victim, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, ability, etc.

## GBV programming focuses on women and girls, so that's what the data focus on

The problem is not that data misrepresent females as the primary victims of sexual violence: the data do not. Women and girls are indeed primary victims of this violence. Nor is there any question that the humanitarian community should not overlook the problem of sexual violence against males because they are a minority of victims. As the 2015 Guidelines underscore, no victim should go unassisted. The issue is that this type of argument distorts the way many in the GBV community use data.

65 See GBV Guidelines, above note 13, Annex 5, pp. 327–330.

66 C. Dolan, above note 5, p. 492.

67 GBV Guidelines, above note 13, p. 2.



Data – or conversations related to the data – have not been used in the Guidelines, or more broadly in the field, to argue for the exclusion of men. Instead, data have been used to bring attention to the particular problems of women and girls *because that is what our focus is*. When the GBV community talks about women and girls being “principally” or “disproportionately” affected by certain forms of violence, this is not to monopolize for them the benefit of care or to marginalize men. It is to do our job in bringing attention to the historically – and continuously – overlooked concern of violence against women and girls, and the social, structural and systemic dynamics of gender inequality that frame and make possible this violence.

Importantly as well, and as mentioned several times previously, GBV data confirm that the phenomenon of violence against females is different from the problem of violence against males. The data expose a global reality in which females are harmed by men repeatedly and in multiple ways because they are females, sexual subordinates in the gender relationship, with less power, less participation, less education, less livelihood, less money, less property, less recourse, less justice than males. This problem of gender inequality is often exacerbated in conflicts and can therefore heighten women’s and girls’ risk. Thus, it is not about numeric majorities versus numeric minorities linked to specific types of violence that the data suggest; it’s about the need for support, care and justice for half the world’s population who experience a specific and debilitating social problem.

## Conclusion

The 2015 IASC GBV Guidelines accord attention to LGBTI populations and to men and boys, both as survivors of sexual violence and as agents of change. Nevertheless, the Guidelines focus largely on the problem of violence against women and girls, as this is at the heart of GBV work. While it is a positive development that the needs of male survivors and LGBTI populations in humanitarian settings have been brought into sharper focus as a result of the human rights approaches that underscore GBV interventions, it is a misrepresentation of GBV theory and practice to claim that males and LGBTI groups should attract equal focus in GBV programming. Vitiating the gender and GBV language in order to refocus the field towards attention to the needs of males and LGBTI populations is not likely to serve any of these groups effectively, least of all women and girls.

Instead, what is required in both spirit and deed is partnership by those whose focus is on the needs of men and boys and/or LGBTI populations generally with those working on violence against women and girls. Separate and specific work on violence against men – and on men’s experience in patriarchy – is not only important in terms of addressing the needs of men, but can also add an important dimension to understanding how to create a more peaceful world for all. Separate and specific work on homophobia and violence against gender non-conforming people is also critical to supporting improved rights for all. True

partnership among different specialists can facilitate examination of the intersections and commonalities of different types of violence and survivor groups, to the potential benefit of everyone.

In this process, however, the GBV community's commitment to addressing violence against women and girls must not be undermined, but rather supported in its value and importance. And, similarly, the decades of feminist scholarship that inform our work must be respected and recognized, not ignored, denied or dismissed. It is well past time for a women-centred agenda to be received as legitimate, and those focusing on that agenda must not be subject to a replication of the gender-based discrimination against which they work. Only with this understanding can it be assured that we may all move forward towards complementary goals.