

Economic Empowerment as a Human Rights Strategy Via Research Methodology

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is still a significant issue in the world, necessitating comprehensive and creative strategies for successful prevention and treatment. This study examines the relationship between gender justice and human rights from the perspective of economic empowerment as a tactical weapon against gender-based violence. The theoretical framework emphasizes the intrinsic connection between economic rights and the larger human rights debate by drawing on human rights principles. Using a mixed-methods research methodology, the study examines how current economic empowerment initiatives affect GBV vulnerability by combining qualitative and quantitative data. A thorough literature study addresses criticisms and gaps in the existing research while establishing the theoretical framework. The study explores the real-world applications of economic empowerment programs and evaluates how well they work to promote independence and lessen reliance on outside funding. This study intends to support a comprehensive strategy that tackles the indicators as well as the underlying causes of this widespread violation of human rights by providing insights into the creation of more efficient and rights-based GBV prevention methods.

INTRODUCTION

*"Economic empowerment is a catalyst for social change, breaking the chains of gender-based violence by providing individuals with the means to control their own destinies."*¹

Gender-based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime. The numbers are staggering:

35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.

Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. • Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.

200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting. This issue is not only devastating for survivors of violence and their families, but also entails significant social and economic costs. In some countries, violence against women is estimated to cost countries up to 3.7% of their GDP – more than double what most governments spend on education. Failure to address this issue also entails a significant cost for the future. ²

¹Rasmane Ouedraogo & David Stenzel, *HOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A THREAT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT* IMF (2021), <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2021/11/24/how-domestic-violence-is-a-threat-to-economic-development> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

Violence against women, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

World Bank Group, *GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS)* WORLD BANK (2023), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

Numerous studies have shown that children growing up with violence are more likely to become survivors themselves or perpetrators of violence in the future.

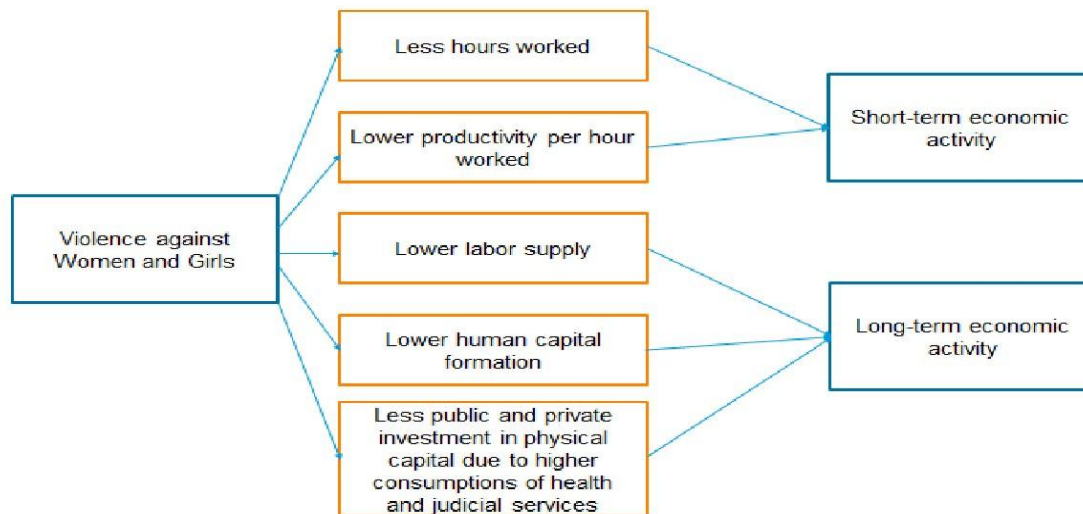
Gender-based violence is a phenomenon that transcends social and economic barriers, impacting women and girls from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. As such, it is a matter that requires attention in both developed and developing nations.

Reducing violence against women and girls necessitates a multifaceted, community-based strategy as well as ongoing interaction with numerous partners. The most successful programs deal with the underlying causes of violence, such as gender roles and the acceptance of violence in society.³

A significant number of women have been prevented by economic violence from attaining financial independence and a stable life for themselves and their dependents.

First, economic violence results in deepening poverty due to women's diminished access to independent means of livelihood. Unfortunately, poverty violates the human rights of women and their children by denying them education, food, health, housing, participation in political and public life, and freedom from violence⁴.

Figure 1: Violence against Women and Girls and Economic Growth: Transmission Channels



Source: Authors based on Duvvury et al (2013)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Rights and Economic Empowerment

In the scheme of the U.N. Charter, human rights and economic development are distinct but closely related concepts. The preamble of the Charter states that the peoples of the United Nations are determined "to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples" in order to accomplish, among other things, the reaffirmation of faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, [and] in the equal rights of men and women."

Article 55 thus clearly establishes the nexus of human rights and economic development as twin foundations of peaceful and friendly relations among nations.

The close relationship between economic and social development has been emphasized in several decisions of the United Nations organs.

The General Assembly in 1952 expressed the view that "action to promote social development and technical assistance in social matters should go hand in hand with action to promote economic development and technical assistance in economic matter."⁵

Economic Dependence and GBV:

The relationship between economic dependence and gender-based violence (GBV) is a central topic in the discussion of economic empowerment and human rights. Different types of violence against women and girls are frequently sparked by an imbalance in economic autonomy. Research confirms that having a job increases one's susceptibility to gender-based violence. Women's capacity to escape violent circumstances is hampered by their inability to obtain independent financial resources, which feeds the cycle of violence and entrapment. The relationship between economic disempowerment and the prevalence of GBV is demonstrated by the ways in which economic coercion and control are used as tools of subjugation and dominance. This is what we mean by economic empowerment — a solution to problems that doesn't involve charity, but is truly sustainable. If we can ensure that women have access to a full suite of financial products and services, we can have a multiplier effect for improving the well-being of the whole family for generations.⁶

Moreover, the relationship between financial standing and resource availability has a significant influence on the intensity and frequency of GBV incidents. Due to financial limitations, women in difficult financial positions frequently face increased hazards and are unable to seek help, legal action, or secure shelter.

Access to Education and Employment:

Education and employment emerge as fundamental avenues in the pursuit of economic empowerment and GBV prevention. Educational opportunities play a pivotal role in breaking cycles of violence by equipping women and girls with the tools to navigate socio-economic landscapes autonomously.

Studies consistently highlight the correlation between increased education levels and reduced vulnerability to GBV. Education not only enhances awareness of rights but also cultivates critical thinking, empowering individuals to challenge societal norms and resist subjugation.

Moreover, access to gainful employment acts as a pivotal factor in mitigating economic dependence and reducing the risk of GBV. Employment opportunities provide financial independence, allowing women to exert agency over their lives and reduce susceptibility to coercive control within intimate relationships.

Addressing the nexus between education, employment, and GBV demands comprehensive policies and interventions that dismantle barriers to education and foster inclusive employment practices. Strategies focused on educational parity and economic opportunities hold immense potential in disrupting cycles of violence and advancing the cause of gender equality.

The multifaceted relationship between economic dependence, education, employment, and GBV underscores the imperative for holistic approaches in crafting interventions that not only address immediate vulnerabilities but also foster long-term economic empowerment and social transformation.

The Global Scope of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) represents a widespread and multifaceted issue that reverberates across nations, transcending geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers. Its prevalence remains a stark testament to the systemic challenges impeding global gender equality and human rights.

Statistics underscore the profound impact of GBV: with approximately 35% of women worldwide experiencing physical or sexual violence from intimate partners or non-partners at some point in their lives, this phenomenon permeates communities across diverse contexts. However, the true prevalence might be higher due to underreporting stemming from cultural stigma, fear, and structural barriers inhibiting disclosure and seeking support.

GBV takes myriad forms, extending beyond physical violence to encompass emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. The cultural variations in recognizing and responding to these different forms of violence present challenges in establishing uniform reporting mechanisms and implementing comprehensive interventions.

Cultural norms, gender inequalities, and social constructs significantly influence the manifestation and acceptance of GBV globally. In some regions, entrenched patriarchal systems perpetuate and normalize violence against women, reinforcing power imbalances and inhibiting access to justice and resources.

The impact of GBV extends beyond individual suffering to encompass broader societal implications. It obstructs social and economic development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and hampering progress towards achieving the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest reverse in poverty since the Second World War. The UN estimates that at least 388 million women and girls were living in extreme poverty in 2022.

Climate shocks are increasing in frequency, with disproportionate impacts on women.²

Addressing the global prevalence of GBV requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges cultural nuances, challenges deeply embedded societal norms, and emphasizes cross-sectoral collaboration. Comprehensive initiatives should encompass prevention, response, and support mechanisms that are culturally sensitive, survivor-centered, and rights-based. Furthermore, recognizing the intersectionality of GBV—how it intersects with race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other factors—is paramount in formulating inclusive interventions that address the diverse needs of marginalized communities.

A coordinated international response is required to address GBV, and this response must include legislative frameworks, legal reforms, educational initiatives, and community engagement activities. In order to address GBV holistically, exchanging best practices, information, and resources across international borders is essential.

The groundwork for focused, evidence-based interventions and policy is laid by an understanding of the global prevalence and subtleties of GBV. It acts as a loud cry for communities, countries, and organizations all around the world to band together in the fight to end GBV and guarantee that everyone lives in a world free from prejudice and violence.

Economic Empowerment as a Solution

Some of the most important tactics in the battle against gender-based violence (GBV) is economic empowerment, which provides those impacted by structural injustices with a road to resilience and autonomy. In order to lessen the dangers and effects of GBV, this section examines the various facets of economic empowerment. Initiatives for economic empowerment give women the tools to become financially independent in an effort to end the cycle of dependency. Through the promotion of resource accessibility, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy, these programs enhance individuals' ability to provide for their family and themselves, hence mitigating their vulnerability to economic coercion and control in abusive relationships. Research continuously confirms that poverty and GBV exposure are strongly correlated. Economic disempowerment increases the likelihood of violence by putting people in harsh situations since they have fewer options and resources. Programs for economic empowerment break these cycles by giving people the chance to create stable livelihoods and lessen their dependency on abusive spouses for financial assistance.

Economic empowerment includes access to social support networks, legal assistance, healthcare, and education in addition to revenue generation. Access to these resources is facilitated by initiatives that provide people the tools they need to overcome obstacles, building resilience and lowering reliance on systems that support GBV.

When it comes to increasing low-income people's access to finance, particularly for low-income women, India is a global leader. Financial services businesses now have the chance of engaging their clients as the access barrier is almost resolved. Public Sector Banks (PSBs) are uniquely positioned to effect a pronounced positive impact on customers with simplified accounts, called Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts, by increasing awareness of account features, providing opportunities for gaining experience using financial services in a low-risk environment, connecting account use to income-generating activities, and building a rapport with customers.³

As detailed in Cameron and Tedds (2020), while basic income has received more public and policy attention in recent years, there are growing calls for the introduction of universal basic services schemes— a policy idea that is rooted in the notion of in-kind benefit provision we describe above. Universal basic services proposals advance the idea that the best path to poverty reduction is through a strengthening and extension to all—regardless of one's identity, work status, or ability to pay—of essential services such as shelter, education, sustenance/food, health care, transportation, legal and

²Report: Reaching financial equality for women (2023 edition), WOMEN'S WORLD BANKING (2023), <https://www.womensworldbanking.org/insights/report-reaching-financial-equality-for-women-2023-edition/> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

³From access to use: Insights on serving women banking customers in India, WOMEN'S WORLD BANKING (2023), <https://www.womensworldbanking.org/insights/from-access-to-use-insights-on-serving-women-banking-customers-in-india/> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

democratic services, childcare, and adult social care, rather than simply providing cash transfers with which people can then navigate the private market to secure essential services.⁴

Initiatives aimed at entrepreneurship and employment are essential components of economic empowerment. In addition to offering financial security, gainful employment improves social integration, self-worth, and agency while lowering vulnerability to gender-based violence. Entrepreneurship challenges established power systems by providing opportunities for economic independence and leadership, especially for excluded populations. Economic empowerment tactics must include policy frameworks that encourage childcare assistance, equal pay, parental leave, and gender equality. By removing obstacles to women's full economic involvement, these policies promote fair opportunities and lessen their susceptibility to gender-based violence. Understanding intersectionality—the ways in which different identities interact and exacerbate vulnerabilities—is essential to developing programs for economic empowerment that work. Programs designed to meet the needs of diverse populations take into account the ways in which gender intersects with race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and other variables to shape people's experiences of economic empowerment and vulnerability to gender-based violence. Financial independence, resource accessibility, policy advocacy, and intersectional perspectives all play a part in the multidimensional answer that is economic empowerment. Initiatives aimed at promoting holistic economic empowerment act as triggers for societal transformation, opening the door to a more just society free from the constraints of violence against women.

Legal and Policy Implications

The framework of laws and policies greatly influences how GBV is addressed as well as how economic empowerment is encouraged. To advance the rights of those impacted by GBV and develop effective interventions, it is imperative to comprehend the legal and policy ramifications. Strong legal frameworks are essential for both promoting economic empowerment and preventing GBV. Legislation that designates some types of violence as crimes, such as sexual assault, domestic abuse, and coercion, provide a foundation for legal defense, prosecution, and prevention. Economic empowerment initiatives are further supported by legal laws that guarantee equal rights to property, inheritance, and financial resources. Justice systems must be responsive and easily accessible for laws to be implemented effectively. Access to justice is improved by ensuring survivor-centered legal processes, reasonably priced legal aid, and courts or tribunals that are attentive to GBV cases.

In addition to legal interventions, support services including shelters, counseling, and healthcare provisions play a crucial role in providing survivors with all-encompassing aid. Financial inclusion, gender equality in the workplace, and economic empowerment are all important policies for reducing GBV vulnerabilities. By leveling the playing field in terms of income, equal pay legislation, maternity leave, childcare assistance, and flexible work schedules enable people to manage their personal and professional lives without fear of prejudice or pressure. It is imperative that legal and policy frameworks acknowledge intersectionality. Inclusive and equitable solutions are produced by policies that accommodate the varied needs of marginalized communities, taking into account factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and other intersecting identities. The use of intersectional approaches guarantees that responses from laws and policies take into account the many experiences of GBV and economic disempowerment. In order to address GBV and advance economic empowerment, guidelines and standards are provided by international accords and regional bodies. Adherence to the ratification of regional treaties and international agreements like CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) strengthen pledges to uphold human rights, influence legislative reforms, and promote cross-border cooperation.

Policy Recommendations:

Promote comprehensive legislation with severe penalties and provisions for survivor support that criminalizes all types of GBV, including economic abuse. Make sure that laws are gender-responsive and ensure that women and other marginalized groups have equitable access to resources, property rights, and financial independence.

Create and provide funding for dedicated GBV response centers that provide healthcare, legal assistance, counseling, and housing while guaranteeing survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate services. Increase survivors of GBV's access to high-quality, reasonably priced healthcare, including mental health support, by incorporating these services into established healthcare systems. To encourage women's economic engagement without prejudice or pressure,

⁴GUIDELINES INTEGRATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTIONS IN ...,

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-03/IASC%20Guidelines%20for%20Integrating%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20Interventions%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action%2C%202015.pdf>
(last visited Nov 22, 2023).

laws that support equal pay, workplace gender equality, maternity leave, and accessible childcare should be put into place. Encourage financial inclusion by implementing initiatives that support vulnerable groups by offering credit access, entrepreneurship assistance, vocational training, and job placement chances. Incorporate thorough GBV prevention and gender equality education into school curricula to question accepted beliefs, encourage civil discourse, and increase awareness at a young age. Run extensive awareness programs that emphasize community involvement and engagement, debunk preconceptions, boost reporting, and destigmatize GBV using a variety of media channels. Adhere to and uphold international treaties and accords that advance human rights and gender equality, enabling cross-border cooperation and resource sharing. Create channels for international exchange of resources, data, and best practices to hasten the fight against gender-based violence and promote economic empowerment worldwide.

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life -including the right to vote and to stand for election -- as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms⁵

Create intersectional policies that take into account racial, ethnic, sexual, handicap, and socioeconomic status in order to acknowledge and address the many experiences of GBV. Invest in reliable data gathering systems to compile granular information on economic indicators and GBV incidences, enabling evidence-based policies and focused interventions.

Critiques and Challenges

While efforts to address gender-based violence (GBV) and promote economic empowerment have made significant strides, several critiques and challenges persist, hindering progress in achieving lasting change. **Legislative Implementation:** Despite robust legal frameworks, enforcement remains a challenge due to inadequate resources, limited training for law enforcement officials, and societal biases affecting the handling of GBV cases. **Policy Implementation:** Policy recommendations often face delays or inconsistencies in implementation, undermining the intended impact due to insufficient funding, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of political will. **Deep-Seated Norms:** Societal norms and traditional attitudes perpetuate and normalize GBV, hindering efforts to eradicate violence. Cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes continue to undermine the acceptance and effectiveness of interventions. **Stigma and Reporting:** Fear of stigma, shame, and retaliation discourages survivors from reporting incidents of GBV, leading to underreporting and hindering access to support services and justice. **Persistent Economic Inequalities:** Economic disparities, unequal access to resources, and limited opportunities for marginalized groups exacerbate vulnerability to GBV, undermining efforts toward economic empowerment. **Lack of Financial Resources:** Inadequate funding and resource allocation for economic empowerment programs limit their reach and sustainability, especially in resource-constrained settings. **Neglecting Intersectional Realities:** Policies often overlook the intersectional experiences of individuals, failing to address the unique challenges faced by diverse communities based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, or other identities. **Inclusivity in Interventions:** Interventions might not effectively cater to the diverse needs of marginalized groups, leading to exclusion and perpetuating disparities in access to services and support. **Limited Data Availability:** Challenges in data collection, especially on hidden forms of GBV and economic indicators, hamper evidence-based policymaking and hinder the evaluation of interventions. **Research Gaps:** Insufficient research on the long-term impact and effectiveness of economic empowerment programs in mitigating GBV limits the understanding of best practices and impedes informed decision-making.

DISCUSSION

The discourse surrounding gender-based violence (GBV) and economic empowerment underscores the intricate interplay between systemic inequalities, societal norms, legal frameworks, and policy interventions. This discussion encapsulates the nuanced complexities, advancements, and persistent challenges in addressing GBV while advocating for economic empowerment.

Recognizing intersectionality stands as a cornerstone in formulating holistic strategies. Acknowledging diverse experiences based on intersecting identities allows for targeted interventions that cater to the specific needs of marginalized groups. Embracing inclusivity ensures that policy and programmatic approaches do not inadvertently perpetuate disparities but rather actively work to bridge gaps and eliminate barriers.

⁵CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ...,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

Legal frameworks and policies play pivotal roles in safeguarding rights and shaping societal responses. While significant progress has been made in establishing robust laws and recommendations, challenges in implementation and enforcement persist. Strengthening implementation mechanisms and addressing gaps in enforcement remains imperative to realize the intended impact of these interventions.

Economic empowerment emerges as a transformative force in the fight against GBV. Empowering individuals through access to resources, education, employment, and entrepreneurship not only breaks cycles of dependency but also fosters resilience and autonomy. However, economic interventions need to be accompanied by supportive structures that address systemic inequalities and create an enabling environment for sustainable change.

Deep-seated societal norms and cultural attitudes continue to pose significant challenges. These norms often perpetuate gender inequalities, normalize violence, and hinder the acceptance of interventions. Engaging in transformative approaches that challenge these norms and promote gender equality from grassroots to policy levels is vital for sustainable change.

The importance of robust data collection, research, and evaluation cannot be overstated. Addressing gaps in data availability, conducting in-depth research on the effectiveness of interventions, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation are essential. Evidence-based approaches provide insights into successful strategies and inform the design of targeted interventions.

Effective solutions require collaborative efforts across sectors, involving governments, civil society organizations, international bodies, communities, and individuals. Collaboration fosters the exchange of best practices, resource sharing, and the amplification of voices, ultimately driving systemic change and fostering a collective commitment to ending GBV and promoting economic empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

"In the pursuit of human rights, economic empowerment is the key that unlocks doors to equality and justice, dismantling the barriers that perpetuate gender-based violence."

In the pursuit of a world free from gender-based violence (GBV) and characterized by economic empowerment, the discourse culminates in a resounding call for comprehensive, intersectional, and collaborative approaches. The amalgamation of legal frameworks, policy interventions,

¹¹ Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response: Basic Page, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (2023), <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/reducing-gender-based-violence> (last visited Nov 22, 2023).

economic empowerment initiatives, and societal shifts emerges as a transformative force. It underscores the imperative of challenging deep-seated norms, fostering inclusivity, and advocating for justice and equality. As we navigate persistent challenges and embrace collective action, the vision for a future where every individual, irrespective of gender or identity, enjoys safety, autonomy, and economic agency remains resolute. This aspiration fuels our commitment to continuous learning, adaptation, and unwavering collaboration, steering us towards a world where the eradication of GBV and the realization of economic empowerment herald a future of dignity, resilience, and equitable opportunities for all.

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