



A2 ACTIVITIES TO REVEAL HIDDEN ISSUES

What are the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls (VAWG)?



Why use this activity?

This activity helps a group to learn and understand the root causes of VAWG, to understand the difference between causes and contributing factors, and to consider the consequences of VAWG. It is very important to understand the causes and consequences of VAWG if we are to effectively respond to it and tackle it.

This activity is intended to be used as part of a wider process or project, and not as a stand-alone tool without any follow-up. VAWG is a deeply sensitive and difficult area to work on, where harm can easily be caused if approached without care and wisdom. We strongly recommend that you receive training in facilitating and working on this issue, and that you work with, or are supported or mentored by, others with experience of working in this area. We also recommend you carry out more general gender awareness-raising activities before engaging in work on VAWG.

Along with other *Reveal* tools (please see the box at the end of this document), it will hopefully inspire communities to act to challenge and change the injustice of VAWG. We recommend that you use **Tool A1 – Why should we address VAWG?** And **Tool A1 – Men and women: listening to one another** before using this tool.



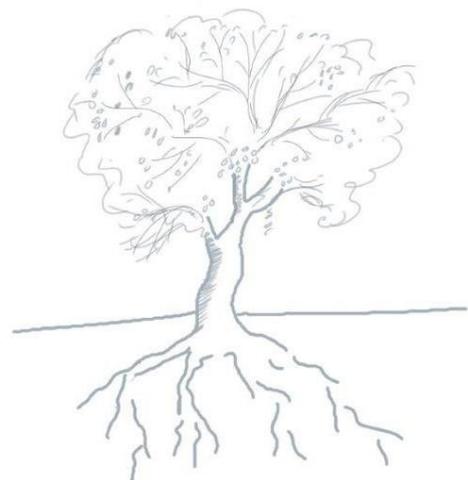
A brief description

The activity uses a picture of a tree to think about the causes of violence (roots), the different types of VAWG (branches) and the consequences of violence (leaves). It involves discussion in small groups.



You will need

- A large piece of paper with a tree drawn on it. Ensure that the tree has both branches and roots
- Small pieces of paper and pens
- Information about any local support services such as counselling for victims of VAWG





Timeline

This activity takes around 90 minutes to carry out.

Preparation: guidance for a facilitator

Please read **Tool A1: Revealing inequality between men and women** and **Tool A1 – Revealing violence against women and girls** before using this activity.

This activity raises the issue of violence and abuse within families and communities. Any discussions on issues such as these need to be managed with wisdom and sensitivity. In some situations, raising issues of gender inequality and VAWG may cause pain, tension and conflict. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't raise the issues, but that we should do so carefully and as part of a process that will have further follow-up, support and action.

Try not to go through this activity too fast. Allow everyone who wants to speak to do so and prevent one or two people dominating the discussion. You may need to suggest taking a break from the activity at certain times, and try to be aware of how people are feeling and how they are dealing with their emotions. Please see **Introductory tool: Facilitation skills** for more guidance and support on facilitating.

Please also ensure you have read the '**Common resistance reactions**' found at the end of this tool. This is a list of some of the ways that people (often men) may resist acknowledging and dealing with the problem of VAWG. It also suggests ways in which to respond and deal with such resistance.

While most abuse is carried out by men against female partners, it is important to remember that abuse can also be inflicted on men by women, as well as by women on women, and men on men. This tool, however, focuses on VAWG.





What to do

- **Ensure that you introduce this topic and tool in a sensitive and appropriate way.**
The way that you introduce this tool to the community will depend on your context and how VAWG is viewed by people within the community. You may want to start by agreeing with the community that you are going to explore a number of different topics that may be hidden and need revealing, and that VAWG is one of these. If you are not already aware of the attitudes towards VAWG in the community you are working with, you will need to spend some time exploring these and decide an appropriate way to start the discussion.
- If you have carried out other activities and are confident that there is a general awareness within your group of the need to tackle VAWG, you could start by explaining to the group the aim of this exercise – to look at the root causes of VAWG. Reassure the group that you are not looking to blame anyone, but that you are here to help people understand more about themselves and work out how they can make things better within their own community. Explain that you understand that VAWG may be a very difficult issue for some people – especially if they or their loved ones have experienced it. If you have information about local services or organisations who support women and girls who are survivors of violence, have this available to give to people.
- Ask the group to name different types of violence against women and girls. Write these down on the branches of the tree drawn onto the large piece of paper. People may initially only give examples of physical and sexual violence (for example, beatings, pushing, burning, rape, child/early marriage). Ensure that other types of violence are also mentioned, including threats, intimidation and emotional violence such as humiliation. If nobody mentions marital rape, then mention it yourself, as it is important that people understand that this is a form of VAWG.



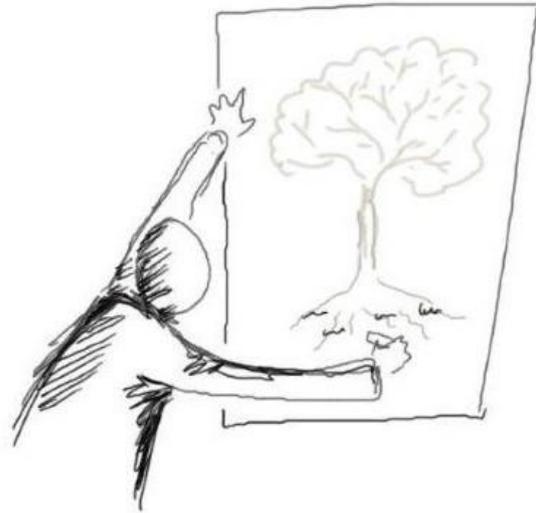
Please see **Tool A1 – Revealing violence against women and girls** for more information on the different types of violence.

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- Explain that you are now going to look at the **causes of VAWG**. Explain that it is very important for us to understand the root causes of a problem, if we are to effectively respond. You could use a simple example to explain: “*When someone is sick with a fever and they go to the doctor, the doctor will ask questions to try to find out the cause of the fever. This is so that they can diagnose what is causing it and prescribe the correct treatment to cure the illness.*”

- Divide people into small groups of 3 or 4 people. Ask them to think about the root causes of VAWG. Why does VAWG happen? Allow people to discuss in their small groups for up to 10 minutes.

- Ask the groups to share some of their answers with the whole group, and write these down on the roots of the tree.



Correct answers include:

- beliefs about men and women that have harmful consequences for both men and women
 - attitudes about men and women that have harmful consequences for both men and women
 - women and girls considered inferior to men and boys in many contexts
 - women seen as having less value than men
 - women seen as the property of their husbands
 - men exerting power, dominance and control over women’s lives.
- **Note:** while the majority of VAWG is committed by men, there are also times when women commit violence against women. For example, in some contexts women may encourage or directly control events that involve violence against women and girls such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage.
 - **Note:** some people may say things which are not actually root causes, but *contributing factors*, such as drunkenness or alcohol, poverty or anger. You could write these down on a separate piece of paper. It is important that people understand that while these are factors that may *contribute* to male violence, they are not the cause. Ultimately the choice is the perpetrator’s and he is responsible for his behaviour. **VAWG is never acceptable or excusable.**
 - Once the groups have finished discussing the causes, take some time to look at the contributing factors you have written down on a separate piece of paper.

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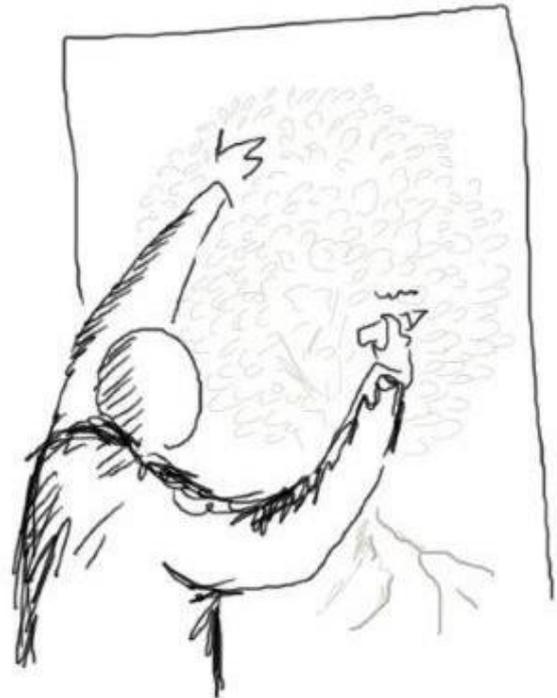
Ask “if this (eg alcohol) didn’t exist, would VAWG still happen?” Explain that it does: VAWG happens without these factors. Violence is not about anger or drinking too much. It is about **choice** – men choosing to exert power over women in harmful ways.

Note: if anyone suggests that VAWG happens ‘because of the way a girl or woman dresses or acts’, it is very important to say that this is wrong, and to lead the conversation back to harmful beliefs being the root causes. You could say something like this: “It is a common reaction to blame the victim – for the way they dress or the way they acted – but the blame for violence lies solely with the person who commits the violence. Sexual assault is never the victim’s fault. Someone has to *act* to commit violence – that is a choice. Not all men commit violence, only some do, and they choose to. And women are assaulted wearing many different types of clothing! No woman’s dress or behaviour gives someone the right to sexually assault her. VAWG happens because men can commit violence, think it is acceptable and often do not face any consequences.”

- Allow the group to spend some time reflecting on the causes of VAWG that you have written on the tree.
- You could have a short break, or do an energiser, at this point in the activity. See **Introductory tool: Facilitation skills** for ideas for energisers.

Part 2

- Explain that you are now going to spend time thinking about the **consequences** of VAWG. These will form the ‘leaves’ on your tree. Ask the group to name some of the consequences – and write these on the ends of the branches which have the different types of violence written onto them. Consequences of VAWG include: *death, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, stigma, loss of income, blame, impact on mobility, social exclusion (unable to participate in social activities), and inability to conceive*. Write each of the responses on the tree leaves. Ensure that different types of consequences have been included: emotional, economic, physical and social.



- Explain that the consequences of VAWG are many, and that therefore the response needs to be at multiple levels. Survivors of violence need our support not just to help them access healthcare or legal services, but to live without stigma, without being blamed (it is not their fault), to reintegrate back into society, and to access counselling etc. See

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Tool B: Loving the outcast for a Bible study on how Christians should respond to survivors of violence.

- There are different ways you could bring this activity to a close. You could pray and/or read out a Bible passage such as **Galatians 5: 22–23** or **1 Corinthians 13: 4-7**. What you do depends on the context and group you are working with.
- Explain the next steps you have planned in terms of other activities or Bible studies on this issue. It is important that you have thought about and planned what you will do next so you can explain to the community how things will be taken forward. This activity has raised some very difficult and painful issues – it is extremely important that you continue to support the community as they go forward from this point. We recommend that your next steps include some of the **Bible studies** in **Section B** and **Tool A2: Exploring gender roles and power**.



Notes

This tool is adapted from an activity written by Prabu Deepan and first published in Tearfund (2016) *Transforming Masculinities: a training manual for gender champions (draft)*



Finding out more

- *Restored*, an international Christian alliance to transform relationships and end violence against women – www.restoredrelationships.org
- Tearfund (2015) *Hand in hand: Bible studies to transform our response to sexual violence* http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/sexual_violence/resources_and_publications/

Related tools:

- A1 – Revealing violence against women and girls – information for facilitators [A1: Gender & sexual violence-1]
- A1 – Revealing female genital mutilation – information for facilitators [A1: Gender & sexual violence-2]
- A1 – Revealing inequality between men and women – information for facilitators [A1: Gender & sexual violence-3]
- A2 – Why should we address VAWG? [A2: Gender & sexual violence-3]
- A2 – Exploring gender and power [A2: Gender & sexual violence-5]
- A2 – Men and women: listening to one another [A2: Gender & sexual violence-6]
- B – Gender and restoring relationships (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-1]
- B – Wonderfully made (FGMC) [B: Gender & sexual violence-2]
- B – God’s view of women (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-3]
- B – God’s view of men (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-4]
- B – Men, women and God (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-5]
- B – Men, women, love and submission (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-6]
- B – Protection those vulnerable to sexual violence (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-7]
- B – Sexual violence in the Bible – the story of Tamar (Bible study) [B: Gender & sexual violence-8]

Awareness-raising
Children & youth
Climate & environment
Conflict & peace-building
Corruption & governance
Disaster risk management
Discrimination & inclusion
Food & livelihoods
Gender & sexual violence
Health & HIV
Influencing decision-makers
Migration & trafficking
Water, sanitation & hygiene

Common resistance reactions, and how to respond

Denial: saying that something is not true or not the problem

- “That is not an issue”
- “Violence is a normal part of any relationship”
- “This is a western cultural perception, women are OK with this”

Minimising: making something smaller or less serious than it is

- “I don’t know why women make such a big deal.”
- “As a man we face violence all the time”
- Making jokes about VAWG

Justification: stating something is right or reasonable

- “The Bible says women should respect men, so when they don’t respect, it’s natural to be disciplined with violence”
- “Women need to know their place and listen to their husbands. If they don’t, you can’t blame him”
- “You can’t blame the animal for acting like one, she should have been careful.”

Victim blaming: implying that the victim is at fault for the violence that she experience.

- “Well if she had listened to her husband, this wouldn’t have happened”
- “She asked for it by her behaviour or dress”
- “She shouldn’t have provoked him. He didn’t have a choice”

Comparing victimhood: changing the focus of the discussion by stating another group also experiences the same problem

- “Men experience violence too”
- “Both men and women are victims of violence”
- “Women can be abusive too”

These statements are of course all true, but they should not be used to move the focus away from the problem you are discussing which is violence by men against women and girls.

Remaining silent: choosing to keep quiet in the face of an injustice or problematic act

- Not speaking up when violence occurs
- Ignoring something or pretending it didn’t happen
- Staying silent about harmful behaviour and comments by peers

Colluding: supporting harmful behaviours and attitudes

- Agreeing with any of the above responses by verbal expression or silence
- Believing or supporting excuses and justification of violence
- Laughing at harmful comments that others make

These are some of the most common forms of resistance you will witness or experience. Here are some ways you can address them.

1. Ask for clarifications

Summarise the statement or comments and identify to yourself which common

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resistance reaction is being expressed. You can ask questions such as “So it sounds as if you’re saying Is that correct?” or “Thank you for sharing your opinion. Can you tell us why you feel that way?”

2. Seek an alternative opinion

Repeat the question or comment back to the group as an open question: “What do you all think about this comment or attitude?” or “To me this statement seems like ... (one of the common resistance reactions) what do you all think?”

If nobody has an alternative opinion, provide one yourself. Ensure you do so without being angry or lashing out, and emphasise the key messages that refute such behaviour or comments.

3. Connect back to the activity or process you are engaged in (if appropriate)

Remind the group of the learning so far. You could ask “How do you think people started thinking such things? Who taught us these messages? How does this idea reinforce some of the harmful behaviours we have discussed here?”

4. Offer facts that support a different point of view and emphasise a helpful perspective.

You can refer to statistics or laws to help you make your point.

5. You could offer to discuss the issue separately (one-to-one) if helpful.

Alternatively, if the participant is unwilling to acknowledge a different point of view, you can inform them that you are willing to make time to meet with them separately to discuss this, and for the sake of others you need to move on.

Please note that it is very unlikely that the participant will openly change his or her opinion after all of these steps, but by challenging their comments or behaviour, you have provided an alternative point of view. You have not only demonstrated your commitment to creating a safe space for learning, but also your accountability to women and girls by not tolerating harmful comments or behaviours.

Awareness-
raisingChildren &
youthClimate &
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buildingCorruption &
governanceDisaster risk
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sexual
violenceHealth &
HIVInfluencing
decision-
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hygiene