

Understanding Harmful Practices and Other Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG): An Integrated Model

This model illustrates how harmful practices and other forms of VAWG are produced and sustained through the interaction of unequal gender structures, harmful gender norms, beliefs and attitudes, harmful acts and behaviours, and wider institutional, societal, digital and media influences. It can be used by multi-agency professionals to strengthen prevention, early identification, safeguarding, and system change.



Developing excellence
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Part 1: Integrated Harmful Practices and VAWG Model

This model illustrates how harmful practices and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) are produced and sustained through the interaction of unequal gender structures, harmful norms, beliefs and attitudes, and harmful acts and behaviours. Use Part 2: How to Read the Model, to explore each part of the model in more detail.



Part 2: How to Read the Model

This guide explains each part of the model and provides examples to illustrate how harmful practices and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are produced and sustained. Read alongside Part 1: Integrated Harmful Practices and VAWG Model.

3. Manifestations of VAWG: Harmful Acts and Behaviours: The top of the pyramid represents observable forms of VAWG, including harmful practices. These occur across a continuum, from non-physical abuse to lethal violence, both online and offline. Examples include – but are not limited to:

Non-physical acts and behaviours that cause psychological, emotional, and/or social harm:

- Catcalling, putdowns, and sexist jokes
- Sexual harassment
- Misogynistic trolling
- Image-based and deepfake abuse
- Coercive control

Acts and behaviours that enable, facilitate, or sustain violence:

- Patriarchal conformity or 'bargaining' in 'honour' based abuse
- Social policing and collective surveillance
- Facilitating harmful practices
- Silencing victims
- Failing to act on known risks of abuse

Acts which directly involve physical and/or sexual harm:

- Intimate partner violence
- Sexual assault
- Harmful practices such as virginity testing, FGM, breast flattening, forced marriage
- Harmful sexual behaviour

Lethal acts:

- Domestic homicide
- 'Honour' killings
- Dowry-related killings
- Harmful practices that result in killing/death

2. Underlying Drivers: Harmful Gender Norms, Attitudes, and Behaviours: The middle of the pyramid represents the beliefs, attitudes, and social expectations that shape what is considered normal, acceptable, or desirable for women and girls. These influence behaviour and normalise and sustain harmful practices and other forms of VAWG.

Examples include: misogynistic beliefs and attitudes that position women and girls as less autonomous and needing control; beliefs that harmful practices are 'protective', necessary, or justified by culture, religion, or tradition; norms that expect women and girls to conform to prescribed roles to maintain social acceptance and avoid shame, stigma, or exclusion; norms that prioritise family or community 'honour' over women's and girl's autonomy, rights, and safety; norms that position male dominance and female compliance as natural, traditional, or socially desirable; attitudes that condone or justify violence as a way of enforcing gender roles or social expectations.

1. Root Causes: Gender Inequality and Patriarchy: The base of the pyramid represents the wider systems and inequalities that shape power, opportunities, resources, and experiences in society. These include patriarchal systems, systemic gender inequality, and intersecting forms of oppression such as racism, ableism, and classism. Together, they create the conditions in which harmful practices and other forms of VAWG occur.

Examples include: patriarchal systems and gendered power structures; institutional racism including discriminatory laws; policies and institutional practices; unequal access to education; resources and opportunities; unequal pay and economic inequality; and underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making.

Digital and Media Influences: Digital and media influences operate across all levels of the pyramid. They can shape, reinforce and amplify harmful gender norms, beliefs, and behaviours, while also creating environments in which abuse occurs and spreads. Technology-facilitated VAWG is increasingly recognised as a significant form of abuse in its own right and can intersect with, enable, normalise or intensify VAWG, including harmful practices. Digital and media environments can both reflect and reproduce wider gender inequalities, extending their reach and impact.

Examples include: social media platforms; online misogynistic and extremist content (e.g. the 'manosphere'); algorithmic amplification of harmful content; influencers who promote harmful gender norms; online harassment; image-based sexual abuse; and generative AI tools and chatbots, that can reproduce or disseminate harmful content, including the use of deepfakes in facilitating 'honour' based abuse.

Institutional and Societal Influences: Institutional and societal influences operate across all levels of the model. Responses by professionals, services, institutions and wider society can either challenge or reinforce the conditions and drivers that produce and sustain harmful practices and other forms of VAWG.

Examples include: failure to identify and respond to risk, cultural relativism; language, communication, and accessibility barriers; inadequate safeguarding and protection responses, poor multi-agency working and information sharing, minimisation or normalisation of abuse, tolerance of misogyny within institutions, organisations, and wider society.



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