

Questions and Answers
Learning Event: The Economic Cost of Gender-Based Violence
March 4, 2021

The USAID/GenDev women's economic empowerment fund Community of Practice (CoP), which has 250+ USAID and external members, continues to grow. The CoP has virtual learning events; feedback surveys so that discussions and evidence are most useful to members; and a monthly update highlighting technical tools, resources, and events.

The CoP is currently addressing question five in the [Fund Learning Agenda](#), which focuses on legal and regulatory systems, employer practices, and social norms barriers including gender-based violence (GBV).

On March 4, 2021, the CoP hosted a virtual learning event on the ***Economic Cost of Gender-Based Violence*** in recognition of Women's History Month and International Women's Day. In case you missed the event, here is the [recording](#) and [slide deck](#).

The event was moderated by Wade Channell, Senior Economic Growth Adviser for Gender (DDI/GenDev), and featured expert panelists Linda Scott, Emeritus DP World Chair for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, author of the Double X Economy, and Founder of the Global Business Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment; and Robin Runge, Co-Director, Equality and Inclusion Department from the Solidarity Center.

We didn't have time to get through all the great questions asked during the event. To keep the dynamic conversation going, below are responses to some of your questions!

Questions and Responses

- **What are we learning in relation to how to effectively calculate and collect remedies for survivors of violence and harassment in the workplace? Resources, tools?**

Conducting worker-led research into the scope and incidence of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the world of work is an effective tool for garnering support from employers and brands to address it, as effective as cost analysis. Evidence of high rates of GBVH in a particular workplace makes it impossible to ignore and has led to financial commitments from brands to address it.

- **Can you comment on cost of early/child marriage?**

A three-year research project conducted by the International Council for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank (2017) estimated costs of child marriage. The synthesis report is [here](#) and the analytical, empirical support papers are [here](#), which includes country-level papers for Ethiopia, Nepal, and Niger. A [Berkeley Economic Review post](#) on the economic costs of child marriage offers a good, short explanation of the factors contributing to the cost of child marriage. Notice that the implied causality goes both ways, from poverty causing child marriage and from child marriage causing poverty. It's a circular phenomenon; though the Berkeley post shows a World Bank/ICRW diagram that only draws the connection from child marriage to poverty direction, it is plain from the explanation that the implied causality runs both ways.

The [World Bank/ICRW report](#) includes an elaborate breakdown of possible cost estimates, but not a total. From an overview perspective, the report says that child marriage costs "trillions." The study looks at five domains of impacts of child marriage: (i) fertility and population growth; (ii) health, nutrition, and violence; (iii) educational attainment; (iv) labor force participation, earnings, and productivity; and (v) decision-making and other areas. Within the report, however, there are estimates of the costs that accrue *annually* from the impact on fertility (\$22 billion), the impact on under-five mortality (\$42 billion), and the impact on under-five stunting (\$9 billion). Since fertility and stunting, for instance, have effects that last for years, the true cost would have to be the sum of annual costs over a given period of time, so the

report also gives estimates for what would be saved by 2030 if child marriage were reduced. The report further includes estimates for other effects, for instance, the cost associated with lost education, but only for a subset of countries. The result of all these numbers being reported, but not summarized in an overall figure, is that there are many different estimates of the cost of child marriage “floating around” on the internet and attributed to the World Bank that are accurate, but in truth refer to only one bit of the estimates in the report.

A widely cited figure is that the cost of child marriage to poor countries is about [1% of their earnings](#) base.

- **Are there any estimates of cost of gender-based violence to a country economy (i.e., loss of GDP)? Perhaps that could attract the attention of policymakers?**

There is a global cost estimate that [circulates widely](#), attributed to [the United Nations](#), that says the global cost of GBV is \$1.5 trillion, or 2%. The original report is not available. A [previous UN report](#) delineates the types of costs that should be covered in an estimate; this report is useful, though it does not provide an estimate, because it demonstrates how far-reaching the costs are.

There are specific country- and region-level estimates, including [Vietnam](#), the [United Kingdom](#), the [United States](#), the European Union, and [Papua New Guinea](#).

A [study by the Copenhagen Research Centre](#) put the total cost of intimate partner violence *alone* at 5% percent of GDP.

- **Are we beginning to see investors incorporate the risk of gender-based violence and harassment into their investment decisions? Any good examples?**

While mostly anecdotal, there are stories of changes in policies due to risks of lawsuit by victims. The #MeToo movement made it clear that when victims come forward, the company may pay either settlements, in lost revenue due to public outcry, or both.

Some of the more general work on gender equality and women’s empowerment also has a positive overflow impact regarding violence and harassment. The advent of Gender-Lens Investment has promoted greater accountability for improved gender balance in private-sector firms. Occasionally this may bring direct attention to sexual harassment policies and practices, but indirectly, the increase of women in higher level positions tends to change the work environment for the better, with less sexual harassment overall. Institutional investors are promoting greater gender balance, and, thanks to the #MeToo movement, lawyers are promoting better approaches to dealing with sexual harassment.

The [Criterion Institute](#) has a number of resources on investment and gender-based violence, including this report on [Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Kenya Through Targeted Investments](#).

- **Is there any evidence about cost savings or increased productivity in countries that have lower levels of violence against women or reducing levels of violence against women?**

There is some research coming out of the U.S. showing that it is more expensive to ignore gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work than to address it:

- See Au, Shiu-Yik and Dong, Ming and Tremblay, Andreanne, How Much Does Workplace Sexual Harassment Hurt Firm Value? (August 19, 2020). Available at SSRN: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3437444>
- Elyse Shaw, Ariane Hegewisch, and Cynthia Hess, *Sexual Harassment and Assault at Work: Understanding the Costs* (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2018) available at https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/IWPR-sexual-harassment-brief_FINAL.pdf
- Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace, Report of Chairs Chai R. Feldblum & Victoria A. Lipnic (June 2016) available at <https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace>

- See also 'Workplace Sexual Misconduct Hurts Company Value, New Data Shows' at <https://www.marketplace.org/2020/08/21/workplace-sexual-misconduct-hurts-company-value-new-data-shows/>
- **Are there any studies that show the influence of the MeToo movement in the rest of the world?**

Last year, the *Washington Post* recognized international Women's Day with [a survey of opinions](#) looking at the state of #MeToo in the U.S. and abroad. [Human Rights Watch](#) credits #MeToo as the driving force behind the adoption of the [International Labor Organization's Convention on Violence and Harassment at Work, 2019 \(C-190\)](#). It has had a significant impact globally, yet there has also been much pushback.

The movement needs to continue; #MeToo needs to engage the full continuum of denigration, disrespect, and disregard that women experience in our cultures globally.

- **Could it be possible to identify (or add to) the economic cost of GBV not just for the main victims, but the associated cost to the negative impact on their relatives (the victims of GBV may include other people that are close to those violence circles)?**

The difficulty with agreeing on an estimate for the cost of gender-based violence does derive from the fact that the ripple effect on it is huge. Usually, though, the calculations are based initially on the victims (as the base number). So, these numbers usually don't include potential impact on others, except insofar as lost workdays affect business and the economy and so forth. However, it's not hard to think about ways in which a violent act against one woman could affect others, and therefore costs. For instance, if a young woman is raped on her commute, it might influence her younger sisters to decide not to go to work, but marry early instead. In that case, the country would lose the economic benefit of their labor but also suffer the costs of early marriage.

The following questions were also asked during the event and will be addressed in a Landscaping Study being conducted on Learning Question 5.

- Different age-based interventions addressing gender-based violence at different ages (i.e. younger women facing gender-based violence at school vs. women in the workforce)?
- Leveraging the gender-based violence "cost" data (i.e., Center for Disease Control) has driven public policy in the U.S. - do we have examples and learnings from other countries that we may draw upon when designing development programming?
- Can you talk about what different interventions you have seen for gender-based violence at different ages (i.e. younger women facing gender-based violence at school vs. women in the workforce)?
- Can you extrapolate on the questions of accountability, how do we effectively calculate remedies? Do you have resources, tools?
- Do you have more resources on power dynamics

Key Resources

Research on women's economic empowerment has grown dramatically over the past decade. To help manage this vast amount of knowledge, USAID compiled a [Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality \(WEEGE\) Resource Index](#) - a curated, open-source list of resources published by reputable institutions in the last five years.

Key USAID resources

- New MarketLinks [USAID Women's Economic Empowerment & Gender Equality \(WEEGE\) Wiki](#), flagging the new [WEEGE Technical Guide](#), [The Gender Digital Divide](#), and [WEEGE in Trade Facilitation](#)

- [USAID Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality in Trade Facilitation: The Role of Customs and Border Service](#)
- [USAID Gender-based violence and Environment Linkages: The Violence of Inequality](#)
- [USAID Gender Digital Primer](#)
- [USAID Toolkit for Integrating GBV Prevention & Response into EG Projects](#)
- [USAID Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Gender-Based Violence Interventions along the Relief to Development Continuum](#)
- [USAID Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality Dashboard](#)
- [USAID Delivering Gender Equality Best Practices Framework](#)
- [USAID Engendering Utilities](#)
- [USAID Gender-based violence and Environment Linkages: The Violence of Inequality](#)
- [USAID MarketLinks Women's Economic Empowerment](#)
- [USAID Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy](#)
- [USAID Sexual Harassment Policy](#)

Gender-Based Violence (non-USAID)

- [ILO Convention C-190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019](#)
- [Copenhagen Consensus](#)
- [World Bank Gender-Based Violence](#)
- [UN Women: RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence Against Women](#)
- [The Prevention Collaborative](#)
- [What Works to Prevent Violence](#)
- [The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming](#)
- [Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory](#)
- [Why Sexual Harassment Programs Backfire](#)
- [Intimate Partner Violence Is a Workplace Issue](#)