

## At-A-Glance: Gender Based Violence and Public Health

### ***Understanding and Preventing Gender-Based Violence Against Youth: A Role for All Sectors***

Gender-based violence (GBV) is increasingly prevalent among children and teenagers (Smith et al., 2018). The violence children experience has a significant negative effect on their development, which makes it more likely that these children will experience violence in the future (Wilkins et al., 2014). They are also more likely to become perpetrators of GBV, further enabling the cycle of violence (Wilkins et al., 2014).

Children who grow up experiencing trauma can be at risk for significant developmental differences (Wilkins et al., 2014). Their fight-or-flight responses can get heightened, and instead of developing more skills around anger-management and empathy, their brains develop while making connections to better protect themselves and recognize threats (Wilkins et al., 2014). Over time, the brain can remain activated in this survival response mode even during times of low-level stress, so even as adults, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can negatively affect one's health and well-being, which can impact a person's everyday activities (Anda et al., 2004). ACEs also show up in the workplace, as they can lead to poor employee performance (Anda et al., 2004). Shockingly, adults who have experienced six or more ACEs have a life expectancy that is twenty years shorter than those with zero ACEs (Brown, 2009).

**Gender-based violence** refers to damaging acts directed at an individual based on their gender identity or their biological sex. It is rooted in gender inequality, the dynamics of power and control, and harmful gender norms.

Gender-based violence includes sexual, physical, psychological and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. Threats of violence, coercion and manipulation are also manifestations of gender-based violence.

Source: Center for the Study and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence, University of Delaware

### **Strategies**

Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention highlights evidence-based strategies that can prevent GBV experienced by children under the age of 18 (Niolon et al., 2017). These programs are designed to be implemented in school settings as a way to provide education to young adults about topics such as healthy relationships and dating violence (Niolon et al., 2017). Other strategies include empowering women and girls and teaching boys and men to be allies and advocates against GBV (Niolon et al., 2017). Evidence indicated these strategies reduced aggression in relationships and harmful bystander responses (Niolon et al., 2017). Additionally, creating a safe environment in schools by increasing support and promoting healthy boundaries was found to greatly lower sexual and dating violence in schools (Niolon et al., 2017).

Preventative strategies recommended by the CDC to lower adverse childhood experiences include increasing financial security in households, parenting and family relationship programs, and rent control and inclusionary zoning (Bellzaire, 2018). Rent control sets limits on the amount of rent a landlord is able to charge. Inclusionary zoning refers to the requirement for a percentage of new housing to be affordable for lower to moderate incomes (Bellzaire, 2018). These policies make neighborhoods and housing more accessible to those with lower incomes, therefore, reducing their financial stress.



## Call to action

Organizations with different specialties and sectors can form relationships with one another to understand the impact they have on preventing GBV. Stakeholder groups can incorporate programs in their workplace settings that work to engage men as allies for gender-based violence prevention. To learn more about engaging men programs underway in Delaware, contact the [Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#). Additionally, stakeholder groups can support employees with families through financial stability coaching by working with programs like [Stand By Me](#), and can contact the [Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) to learn more about how workplace policies and practices can promote economic justice to prevent GBV. Finally, stakeholders can get involved with understanding and addressing housing inequity, such as one effort in Wilmington, Delaware called the [H.O.M.E.S.\(Housing, Opportunity, Mobility, Equity, and Stability\) Campaign](#) that develops resident-led policies and advocates for housing equity.



In October 2018, Governor Carney signed [Executive Order 24](#), making Delaware a trauma-informed state. The Executive Order directs the Family Services Cabinet Council to develop tools for training state employees and community partners on the impact of exposure to ACEs, to promote ACE awareness, and to improve services and interventions for children and families exposed to trauma.

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