Gender Competencies for Service Providers Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls in the Caribbean

Implementation Guidance for Educators, Health Workers, Police and Social Workers

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What is the Spotlight Initiative?

The Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative of the United Nations which has received generous support from the European Union. Its aim is to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Launched in 2017 with a seed funding commitment of €500 million from the European Union, the Initiative represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality and women’s empowerment as a precondition and driver for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Within the Caribbean region, the Spotlight Initiative works to establish gender competencies across various organizations engaged in policy-making related to family violence (FV), collaborating closely with governments, civil society organizations, and regional institutions such as CARICOM, OECS, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Caribbean Court of Justice and the Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers to integrate prevention, protection, and essential services responses to FV survivors into regional plans.
Gender-based violence: Umbrella term that encompass harmful acts based on socially ascribed gender differences, affecting individuals against their will. This term emphasizes that gender-based power differences place females at risk for various forms of violence.

Gender competency: Gender competencies encompass a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that individuals need to ensure their work is responsive to gender-specific issues, especially in preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV).

Protective factors: Protective factors are characteristics that reduce a risk factor’s impact, or protect individuals such that there is a lower likelihood of a negative outcome.

Revictimization: Revictimization refers to the experience or phenomenon when someone is victim to a crime, and then is made victim again, often through processes of access to justice and other essential services which may call upon the victim to relive their trauma or blame them for instigating the crime.

Survivor/Victim: A person who has experienced gender-based violence, with “victim” commonly used in legal and medical contexts and “survivor” in psychological and social support settings.

FV: Family Violence
GBV: Gender-Based Violence
HFLE: Health and Family Life Education
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
VAC: Violence against Children
VAW: Violence against Women
VAWG: Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against children (VAC): Harmful interpersonal violence occurring during different developmental stages. Types include maltreatment, bullying, youth violence, intimate partner violence (among adolescents), sexual violence, emotional/psychological violence, and witnessing violence.

Violence against women (VAW) and girls (VAWG): Any gender-based violence causing physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women, encompassing violence in families, communities, and state-perpetrated violence. Includes various forms such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and trafficking.
Introduction

This Implementation Guidance serves as a call to reevaluate the current paradigm of service provision, which often prioritizes technical knowledge and skills while overlooking the influence of attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of these technical aspects. It builds upon a series of competencies developed by UNICEF for frontline workers in Latin America and now adapted to the Caribbean, encompassing both General Gender Competencies and Specific Competencies tailored to health providers, police, and teachers. Additionally, it introduces a new competency set designed for social workers, another profession recognized by Caribbean stakeholders as crucial to deliver gender-responsive services that combat violence against women and girls (VAWG). The report builds off of these competency sets to present a comprehensive learning agenda and roadmap for the Caribbean region. This agenda aims to standardize the progressive development of gender competencies among service providers, ensuring that their actions align with the specific needs of women and girls.

What are competencies?

Competencies are a conceptual shift from the traditional concept of "intelligence" and have been widely adopted since the 1970s. They are defined by the United Nations as a set of abilities, knowledge, and attitudes that directly contribute to successful job performance, and UNICEF has extended this definition to include "beliefs" (see Figure 1). These competencies encompass what you know, who you are, and what you can do effectively in various contexts. They offer a flexible and adaptable approach, ensuring the ability to perform well even in unforeseen circumstances. Competencies are not only observable but also verifiable, and can be used to define and certify the core elements of outstanding performance across diverse sectors and professions.

Figure 1: Components of competencies

What are gender competencies?

Gender competencies encompass a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that individuals need to ensure their work is responsive to gender-specific issues, especially in preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV). This approach goes beyond mere gender sensitivity, recognizing that it takes more than awareness to promote gender equality and transformative change. Gender competencies combine gender-related knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs along with the necessary resources, enabling individuals to perform their professional duties efficiently and creatively. These competencies focus on upholding rights, equal opportunities, non-exclusion, non-discrimination, and non-violence while also contributing to overall well-being, human development, and fostering changes that advance societal transformation. They include the ability to recognize and comprehend a society’s norms, roles, expectations, power dynamics, opportunities, and constraints imposed on individuals based on their gender, which can then pave the way to meaningful action.

Caribbean Gender Competency Profiles for Service Providers Addressing VAWG

General gender competencies

Service providers play a pivotal role in addressing VAWG by acting as potential agents of change, guaranteeing human rights, influencing gender norms, and sensitizing communities. To excel in these roles, service providers require specific gender competencies, which encompass knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that enable them to effectively carry out their transformative functions in combating VAWG. The three main general gender competencies are:

- **Guarantee human rights:**
  Ensure fair and equitable treatment of boys, girls and adolescents and respect their rights at all ages (see Figure 2).

- **Transform gender norms and eliminate harmful stereotypes:**
  Reflect and act on own capacity to transform oneself and one's environment. Requires reflexive capacity as well as interpersonal and communication skills (see Figure 3).

- **Engage in intercultural and community practices:**
  Acknowledge and appreciate the local context and culture, respect differences, and be alert toward possible triggers of gender inequality, supporting transformative changes within communities (see Figure 4).

Below, we provide a detailed description of each general gender competency.

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**Guarantee human rights**

**Knowledge**

- Knows gender responsive analysis and intervention tools that are relevant and applicable for service providers.
- Knows the different forms of violence against women and children, and understands the intersections between VAC and VAW as well as the protocols, attention routes and other prevention and response mechanisms.
- Knows the national and local laws and policies on gender in his/her sector and broadly, as well as international commitments related to the rights of women, children and adolescents.
- Knows his/her role and responsibilities as a guarantor and protector of women’s and children’s rights.
Attitudes and Beliefs

- Understands the differentiated needs and experiences of girls, boys and adolescents affected by GVB, as well as harmful gender norms, roles and power relations.

- Develops his/her own position on gender equality, and is able to navigate confrontations on gender issues.

- Treats women, children and adolescents in an appropriate manner, without discriminating by gender or reproducing biases or stereotypes.

- Identifies gender equality as a key determinant for women’s and children’s wellbeing and sustainable development.

- Recognizes how his/her behaviour may reproduce GBV, and changes this behaviour to eliminate VAWG, gender inequality and violations of the rights of girls and adolescents, through safe and ethical service provision.

- Recognizes that gender norms may be manifested in service delivery and VAWG casework, and that they should be transformed.

- Is aware of how her/his beliefs and values may bias her/him negatively in attending women and girls.

- Considers adult women, girls and adolescents, to be of equal value to men, boys and adolescents.

- Can negotiate within her/his work environment to change gender norms in favor of women, girls, boys and adolescents’ rights.

- Systematically applies gender analysis tools in service provision.

- Takes action to protect the rights of victims of GBV.

- Implements ethical protocols that include issues related to confidentiality, right to privacy, data safety, and other ethical measures relevant to the protection of victims of VAWG.

- Is able to effectively coordinate responses to protect the rights of women, children, and victims of violence.

Images: Freepik.com
Transform gender norms and eliminate harmful stereotypes

**Attitudes and Beliefs**

- Creates positive changes in service provision to transform gender norms for girls, boys and adolescents in favour of gender equality.
- Recognizes and prevents all forms of violence and abuse against women and girls influenced by gender norms.
- Reviews his/her own beliefs and customs based on gender, including religious and/or other social and cultural norms that limit the rights and opportunities for women and girls.

**Skills**

- Challenges harmful social norms, biases and gender stereotypes, and promotes changes in attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and practices among women, girls, boys and adolescents towards gender equality and the eradication of GBV.
- Promotes positive parenting models and non-violent family relationships in mothers, fathers and guardians.
- Prevents cases of VAWG by promoting protective factors. Raises awareness about the unacceptability of GBV.
- Reflects on his/her sexist beliefs and harmful gender biases.
- Comprehensively addresses each woman’s, adolescent’s or child’s needs, considering potential gender biases and gaps in service provision.
- Proposes alternatives and solutions to address gender needs and issues of women, girls, boys, and adolescents.
- Promotes attitudes and practices of non-violent and positive masculinity among men, boys and adolescents.
- Promotes women, girls, boys and adolescents’ empowerment, and the development of gender awareness that allows them to question traditional gender roles.
- Identifies and does not reproduce gender biases in service delivery.
Engage in intercultural and community practices

Knowledge

- Understands the different forms of GBV that take place in specific contexts, including for vulnerable groups and complex situations, and their specific protection and attention needs.

- Knows how to analyze gender relations in its cultural context.

- Understands the different forms of violence against women, girls, boys and adolescents, and the cultural beliefs and practices that sustain violent practices in these contexts.

- Prioritizes and promotes the needs and interests of women, girls, boys and adolescent victims of violence over any other consideration or interest.

- Shows receptivity and proactiveness towards innovative solutions to increase non-discrimination and gender equality for women, girls, boys and adolescents.

Attitudes and Beliefs

- Shows willingness to make visible and, if possible, denounce cases of abuse and gender violence against women, girls, boys and adolescents, within the legal framework in the country.

- Promotes knowledge sharing on service provision and the protection of women, children, and victims of GBV.

- Helps resolve conflicts from the position of responsibility, solidarity, respect, acceptance of diversity and the right to live in a safe and violence-free society.

- Promotes and practices respect for differences and demonstrates equal value and care for girls, boys and adolescents through service provision, taking into account the family and cultural context.

- Promotes the safe use of social networks, and optimizes the use of available information and communication technologies, to improve interaction with women, girls, boys and adolescents.

Skills

- Safely handles communication on taboo or stigmatized topics on gender and/or age, and uses inclusive and non-discriminatory language.

- Contributes to understanding diverse perspectives and resolving differences of opinion.

- Is able to influence the knowledge, attitudes and practices of parents and families, peers, professionals and other stakeholders in favor of gender equality and the eradication of GBV.
Specific competencies by professional group

Each professional group should develop specific competencies based on their roles and capacities, as explained below in Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Knowledge

- Knows existing conceptual frameworks on gender as a determinant of health.
- Recognizes the differences and inequalities in health, access and treatment of men, women, girls, boys and adolescents.
- Knows and identifies specific tools to apply the gender lens in the provision of health services.
- Identifies the different forms of VAWG, its health consequences, and the effects of limited or late access to health services.
- Carries out disease prevention and health promotion activities with a gender-transformative, generational and culturally-sensitive approach.
- Gathers data and information from the user with a gender-responsive and rights-based approach, considering characteristics, risk factors and/or social conditions.
- Is aware of the specific health and VAWG-related ethical protocols, including the request for informed consent.
- Detects when his/her patient is experiencing GBV and refers him/her to the relevant services.
- Detects, alerts and contributes to removing barriers that hinder equal access to health services based on gender.
- Provides attention to victims and survivors of VAWG, following existing norms, protocols and referral systems.
- Takes situations of special risk and protective factors based on gender into account when providing care.
- Gives pregnancy and childbirth counseling to pregnant adolescents, appropriate to their age.
- Informs patients without gender bias on issues and rights related to health in general and sexual and reproductive health in particular.
- Provides personalized treatment with a gender lens and provides follow-ups in health services for women, boys, girls and adolescents.

Attitudes and Beliefs

- Recognizes that caring for one’s health is not a weakness or luxury, but a right and responsibility for men and women.
- Recognizes the right of women, girls, boys and adolescents to control, make decisions and enjoy their own bodies.
- Applies warmth, sensitivity and empathy, particularly with the most excluded and/or vulnerable groups.
- Is aware of and ensures no interference of personal

Skills

- Promotes shared knowledge, empathy and co-responsibility among adolescents in their sexual and reproductive health, working to shift gender norms.
Knowledge

- Knows the national legislation on gender violence, protocols of action, and routes to care for survivors, with emphasis on women, girls, boys and adolescents.
- Knows the rights of the child, protection protocols and international agreements, as well as theoretical frameworks and tools for gender analysis.
- Identifies the relationship between gender and violence and the different forms of violence.
- Identifies gender norms, biases and stereotypes in access to justice and among law enforcement officers.

Skills

- Analyzes the role of gender in violence against women, girls, boys and adolescents.
- Informs women, girls, boys and adolescents on issues and rights related to access to justice without any gender bias.
- Detects GBV cases and implements current protocols to investigate cases and provide assistance and support to victims.
- Avoids gender biases in police reports.
- Removes gendered barriers that hinder the equal access of girls, boys and adolescents to law and justice services.
- Coordinates the response to protect the rights of women and girls with other law and justice sector actors, as well as other sectors responding to gender-based violence.
- Takes protective factors and situations of special risk based on gender into account when providing care.
- Considers biological, psychological and social factors of the provision of care when attending to survivors of violence.

Attitudes and Beliefs

- Ensures dignified, humane treatment in care for women, girls, boys and adolescents without gender bias, including through the ethical, respectful treatment of their testimonies, ensuring privacy and preventing revictimization.
- Recognizes unequal power relations as a key factor in gender-based violence.
- Reviews his/her own cultural or gender patterns that may hinder him/her from effectively implementing the principles of gender equality and empowerment, non-discrimination, victim/survivor centeredness and perpetrator accountability.
- Is aware of gender norms that influence social judgments and justifications for gender-based violence.
Knowledge

• Knows the national normative framework on VAWG, for family and child welfare, as well as the programs, initiatives and the response route for victims of GBV.
• Knows the principles and practices of non-sexist education.
• Knows the protocols for attention/response to GBV cases.
• Knows the protocols for dealing with cases of adolescent pregnancy, and acts accordingly.
• Knows about the negative impacts of physical and emotional punishment in education.
• Knows about the sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents.
• Knows about gender inequalities in access to the education system and retention rates.

Skills

• Uses and applies different protocols and options for students who experience violence or harassment.
• Involves the entire educational community to promote joint actions towards gender equality and VAWG prevention.
• Promotes reflection and unlearning of harmful gender norms.
• Promotes diverse educational opportunities without bias.
• Integrate a gender perspective in curricula they teach.
• Supports the implementation of the full Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) curriculum, including the module on sexuality and sexual health.
• Detects GBV cases and acts according to existing protocols.
• Analyzes discriminatory gender outcomes and addresses any unintended biases or gender gaps in education.
• Identifies and combats practices of gender-based harassment, bullying and violence among students, taking into account underlying gender norms.
• Implements gender-responsive and culturally-sensitive measures to prevent teenage pregnancy and related dropout rates.
• Empowers students to discuss their life plans without fear.
• Promotes violence-free spaces for girls.

Attitudes and Beliefs

• Promotes positive masculinities.
• Considers that traditions, cultural and religious beliefs are respectable as long as they do not promote or condone any form of violence against women and girls.
• Addresses adolescent pregnancy from a human-rights perspective.
• Reflects on own beliefs and acts to change harmful norms.
• Participates in community initiatives that promote gender equality and GBV prevention amongst students and the educational community.
• Promotes co-responsibility to prevent GBV and teenage pregnancy amongst students, the school community, and the education sector.
• Thinks that gender should not be a limitation for adolescents when deciding their future.
• Practices values of equality, solidarity, and co-responsibility, among others.
• Ensures a protective environment in situations where a GBV case has been detected.
Social workers

Knowledge

• Identifies the cycle of violence against women and girls and knows the available programmes, protocols of action and referral pathways for survivors.
• Identifies gender norms, biases and gaps in programming and services.

Skills

• Detects cases of GBV in women, girls, boys and adolescents, and implements available protocols.
• Informs women, girls, boys and adolescents without gender bias on issues and rights related to access social protection.
• Acts to remove all barriers that hinder equal access for women, girls, boys and adolescents to social services on the basis of their gender and/or age.
• Avoids gender biases in data collection.
• Provides a comprehensive approach that considers biological, psychological and social factors in programming and service delivery.
• Actively seeks to be gender- and context-sensitive, to empower women and girls who have experienced any form of violence.

Attitudes and Beliefs

• Consciously works to eliminate any potential gender and/or age bias in the effective implementation of the guiding principles.
• Takes into account the context and individuals’ situations without judgment, gender bias, or exercising any violence.
• Is aware of the risk of revictimization and asks to prevent any experiences of revictimization.
• Is aware of gender norms that influence society-wide judgments and justifications for gender-based violence.
Learning agenda

1. The first crucial step involves **sensitizing regional and national decision-makers to the importance of gender competencies for service providers dealing with VAWG**. This awareness-raising not only disseminates the understanding of gender competencies, but also lays the foundation for service providers to be put into practice. This step aims to create an enabling environment that fosters the integration of gender competencies into VAWG response services, ultimately enhancing both the quality and reach of these services.

2. As key stakeholders in this process, **adolescents and young people play a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of gender competencies**. Regional and national-level youth councils should actively engage in this effort, alongside women's rights organizations. To ensure effective monitoring, it is imperative that adolescents fully understand the purpose and content of the gender competencies. They also will need robust monitoring mechanisms and tools to collect evidence regarding the status of implementation. Furthermore, platforms for high-level dialogue and advocacy channels will be fundamental to transform this evidence into actionable insights, such as informing policy decisions and facilitating knowledge-sharing opportunities.

3. The third phase of the agenda focuses on **identifying, motivating, and training a cohort of champions who will act as advocates or trainers to drive the dissemination and adoption of these competencies**. Champions, representing diverse backgrounds and sectors within each country, will be chosen based on their ability to advocate, train others, and inspire national teams. These champions will contribute to the flexible and contextualized development of competency assessments, as well as complementary learning routes and training programs.

4. Finally, **pilot implementations of these competency profiles in select areas and sectors** should be carried out and accompanied by robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning strategies, to ensure that the services provided are of high quality, strengthen responses to VAWG, and promote transformative practices. The national Community of Practice will play a pivotal role by facilitating adaptations of the agenda to meet the specific needs of each country, to help effectively address violence against women and girls.