

What is a **feminist-informed** approach to preventing violence against women?



What is feminism?

Feminism is the belief that women and girls have the same value and worth as men and boys; and it is a commitment to take action to change inequitable social norms and reduce the structural inequalities which prevent the advancement of women's and girls' rights. Feminism is intersectional meaning that it recognizes that women are not a homogenous group; it recognizes how our multiple and complex identities interact

and overlap to create different experiences of power, oppression, discrimination and privilege.

As a movement, feminism stands not only for gender equality but for the elimination of all imbalances in power that further marginalize women and girls based on their sex, race, age, sexual orientation, ability, religion, caste or ethnicity.

Six key reasons why a feminist-informed approach to preventing violence against women is essential.

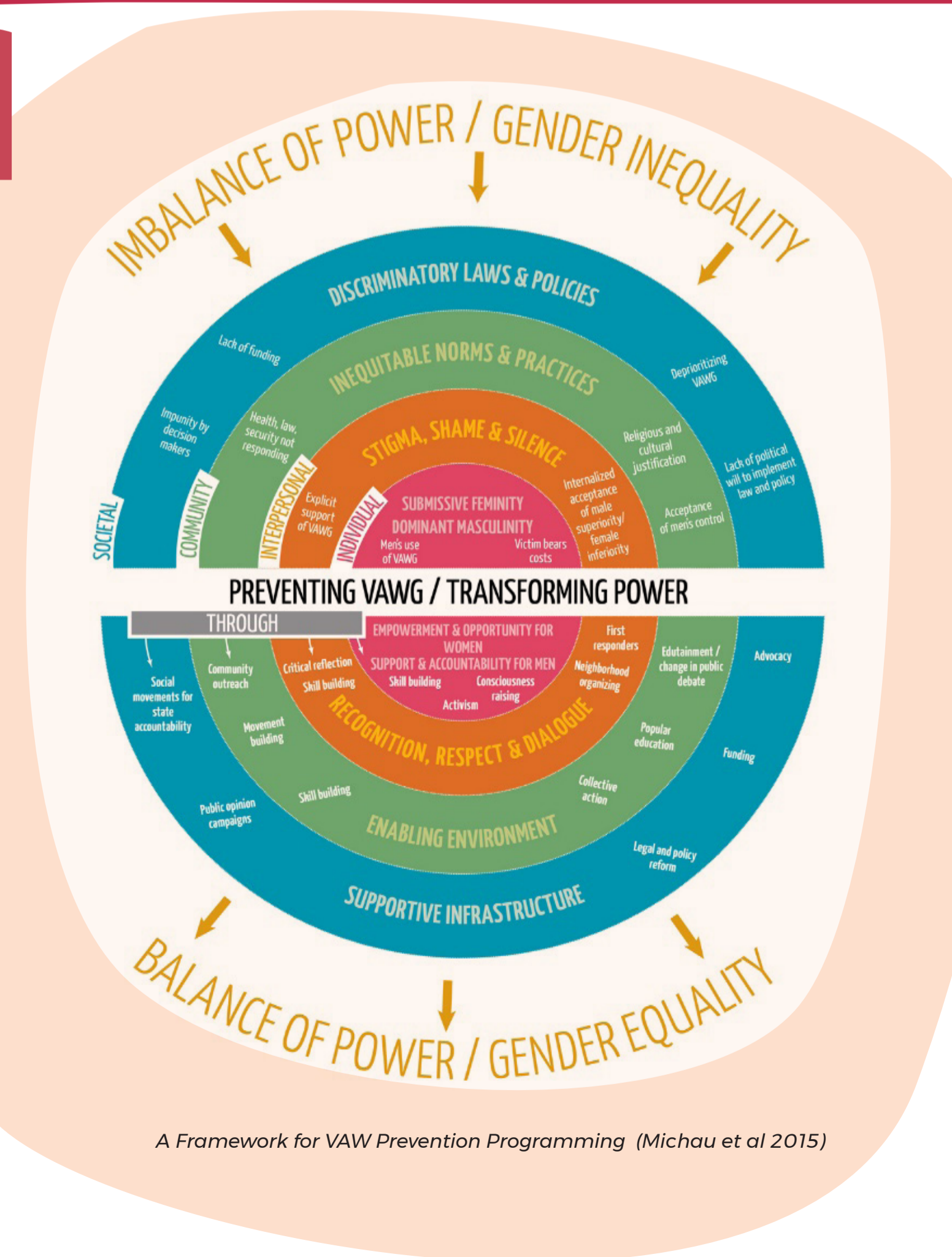
A feminist approach to violence against women (VAW) prevention...

1. is rights-based. This means that living a life free of violence is considered a fundamental human right and not a kindness or 'favor' given to women. It makes prevention of violence against women a matter of social justice and not charity, protection or benevolence to women.
2. prioritizes women and girls: women's and girl's priorities, safety, voices, needs and interests in all of our diversities are paramount in the design, implementation and monitoring of prevention programming.
3. recognizes that gender inequality is a core driver of violence against women and it seeks to address this root cause.
4. refuses to define women by their experience of violence.
5. strives to do no harm.
6. works! Evidence demonstrates that addressing gender inequitable norms and structures can effectively prevent violence against women and girls.

Visualizing a feminist VAW prevention framework

Feminist VAW prevention programming recognizes that violence is not solely an individual problem or pathology but a systemic and structural phenomenon rooted in patriarchy and injustice.

There are many examples of feminist VAW prevention programming and a common framework is provided girls'. This framework recognizes that while there can be multiple approaches which use feminist principles to prevent violence, they each share the same ultimate aim: to end gender inequality through transformational change.





Common misperceptions of feminist programming

Myth: Feminist programming excludes men.

Fact: Feminist programming often involves men. Sometimes feminist programs also recognize the need for women-only spaces where women can be free and safe to share their experiences and gain support.

Myth: Feminist programming encourages women to divorce men.

Fact: Feminist programming does not encourage divorce - it promotes the right to bodily integrity and safety in relationships, and prioritizes women's agency in making their own choices. If a woman is in a violent relationship, feminist programming supports her decision regardless of whether she decides to leave or stay.

Myth: Feminist programming breaks families.

Fact: Feminist programming works to ensure safe, happy and healthy relationships for everyone in families.

Myth: Feminist programming is anti-male.

Fact: Feminist programming is not anti-male, it is anti-violence.

Myth: Feminist programming aims to empower women such that they gain dominance over men.

Fact: Feminist programming strives toward equal power for women and men. It is not an effort to dominate men, that would be shifting the injustice that women have experienced to men. Feminism is about equal power, value and opportunities.

Myth: Feminist programming ignores other important factors of violence in relationships.

Fact: While feminist programming recognizes gender inequality as a root cause of violence, it also seeks to address other factors known to increase the risk of violence in relationships, including exposure to violence in childhood, poor communication and conflict management skills among couples and toxic masculinities, including substance abuse among men.



Checklist for feminist VAW prevention programming

- Theory of Change clearly recognizes gender inequality as a core driver of VAW, and envisages transforming rigid gender norms and power inequalities as a program focus.
- Recognizes that all women do not experience violence in the same way or have the same vulnerability to violence.
- Proactively seeks support and collaboration with feminist leaders and women's groups.
- Models women's leadership and rights at an organizational level.
- Prioritizes women and girls' right to live free of violence.
- Provides opportunities for safe, women-only spaces.
- Ensures that women-centered services (formal or informal) exist prior to programming.
- Program materials reflect women's' dignity, resilience, and validate their diverse identities.
- Analyzes program activities with a gender lens (i.e., what will this mean for women?)
- Portrays women as autonomous, dignified and capable.
- Actively rejects strategies that rely on "protecting" women or girls from harassment or abuse rather than addressing the abusive behavior of men or boys.
- Ensures women are active leaders and participants in all phases of programming.
- Ensures men and other actors are held accountable to the voices of women.
- Includes checks and continuous monitoring to assess intended and unintended consequences.

Interested in getting started with feminist programming?

Are you currently engaged in programming that isn't feminist and want to change course?

Read

Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice (2015) Lori Michau, Jessica Horn, Amy Bank, Mallika Dutt, Cathy Zimmerman, *The Lancet*, Volume 385, No. 9978, p1672-1684 [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)61797-9/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61797-9/fulltext)

How a lack of accountability undermines work to address violence against women and girls, *Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Series*, Paper No. 1, Coalition of Feminists for Social Change http://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Paper-1-COFEM.final_sept2017.pdf