**Domestic Violence (DV)**

**Personhood and Women**

Personhood, which may refer to a [natural person](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_person) or [legal personality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_personality), dictates certain rights, protections, privileges, responsibilities, and legal liability, and acknowledges the freedom of choice, agency, self-awareness, possession of rights and duties, free will, human volition, of an individual human person. However, when a girl child is born in traditional societies like Ethiopia, she is automatically ***disqualified at birth*** from the natural rights of personhood.

Her violation starts at home, perpetrated by her father, brother, relatives, house workers, etc., and is reinforced through language, such as ‘she cannot or would not’, ‘girls do not do this or that', or ‘she must behave like that or this’ because she is a girl. She grows up following in the footsteps of her mother - with her head down and her mouth shut. Thus, she is prepared to become an appropriate ‘woman’.

When she marries, subordination follows her as a sanctioned state of violence at the hands of her husband and his family. The nature and prevalence of the violence often intensify at this pivotal moment in her life.

Thus, gender-based violence (GBV), and in particular, domestic violence (DV), is part of a woman’s life ***from cradle to grave***.

1. **What is Domestic Violence?**

DV is used to describe the acts and omissions that occur in different private relationships, for the most part, at home. It can come in the form of physical attacks or psychological and emotional violence. Physical attacks may range from bruising to killing the victim, whereas psychological and emotional violence include undermining a person's sense of self-worth and agency through constant criticism, demeaning, scolding, name-calling, silent treatment, making and breaking promises, instilling fear through intimidation or threats to the victim or others close to her. By and large, DV is perpetrated by men against women.

In most parts of the world, DV is considered a private, family affair where the husband has the right to punish or reprimand his wife because women’s inferiority is accepted as a societal norm. Women are conditioned to accept victimhood as their natural state of being and their fate.

1. **Types of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence comes in many forms:

* Physical violence such as slapping, kicking, beating, biting, burning, maiming, and in extreme cases, killing.
* Sexual violence such as rape, sexual assault, and incest.
* Psychological abuse such as shouting, insulting, degrading, demeaning personal agency, scolding, and down talking.
* Economic abuse intended to make women dependent and powerless, including denial of necessary financial support and permission to work outside the home, taking personal money and property, and denying common property ownership and means of production, such as land.

1. **Who are Victims of Domestic Violence?**

Although domestic violence may occur against either gender, by and large, men victimize women. In their roles as wives, intimate partners, girlfriends, mothers, sisters, children, elders, sisters, stepdaughters, daughters-in-law, and sisters-in-law, women are battered.

1. **Who are Perpetrators of Domestic Violence?**

Domestic violence usually occurs in a household environment within a relationship between a man and a woman, with the abuser acting in his capacity as a husband, boyfriend, father, son, stepson, brother, son-in-law, brother-in-law, etc.

1. **Effects of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence has negative impacts on women, children, and society at large.

**Effects on Women**

Domestic violence frequently results in severe physical injury, at times even culminating in death, of the battered woman. Those that survive are left emotionally shattered; they are frightened, insecure, degraded, angry, and unsure about where to turn for help. Anxious and depressed, they face severe economic constraints and social challenges.

Ironically, it is at home, the ‘woman’s place’, that women are most unsafe.  In this isolated domestic location, they are physically segregated, disenfranchised, and faced with brutality. Studies conducted around the world indicate that domestic violence is the largest cause of death for women, ages 15-44, taking more lives than even AIDS, TB, or malaria.

**Effects on Children**

Children in families where there is DV run the risk of being injured or even killed by the abuser. Those who witness DV frequently may leave their homes for the street to escape violence become victims of a different kind on the street. They are at risk of becoming aggressive, anxious, depressed, losing self-esteem and engaging in dangerous and unlawful activities. They may even go on to repeat the violent patterns they witnessed in their own families; sons grow up to be abusers and girls choose partners who are violent.

**Effects on Society**

There is always a possibility of a victim of domestic violence retaliating. On rare occasion a battered woman may harm her husband in return. A household in a constant state of DV can disturb neighbors, which may result in disturbance of the community. DV fosters fear and anxiety and its ripple effects compromise the harmony and the quality of life in a community. The family being the fundamental unit of the society, DV has direct consequence on the wellbeing of the society. It also limits the capacity of victims to fully and productively engage in the community and to contribute to the development of the country.

**6. How Do Women Respond to Domestic Violence?**

Women often believe domestic violence is a normal and acceptable act in a relationship and suffer silently. Many stay in abusive relationships because they still care about their partners and their children. They may also feel ashamed or guilty as if it is their fault. Due to economic abuse, they may have nowhere to go and no financial means of caring for themselves and their children.

1. **Is Domestic Violence a Crime?**

Yes, DV is a crime. In the case of Ethiopia, it is punishable by up to 15 years of rigorous imprisonment.

1. **What Can Be Done to Contribute to the Protection of Women and Children from Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence?**

* Women should have **personhood** (natural attributes of a person) just like men - at home or anywhere else. Government and non-governmental organizations must develop strategies to mobilize communities, intensively sensitize them about women’s human rights protection, and to help enforce the law.
* Women’s human rights and equality are enshrined in the constitution, as well as in all legal and family laws, including in the International Conventions, Resolutions, and Protocols where Ethiopia is a signatory. These instruments must be cascaded down and enforced by those duty bearers.
* Women must be educated about the existence of the laws and available means of protection.
* Universities, research institutions, and CSOs must undertake research on DV to assist and encourage policy makers to formulate focused and effective laws to combat DV.
* Governments must promote and encourage the establishments of organizations and centers that provide free legal aid and counseling, particularly marriage and family counseling services to women and couples, with coverage in rural areas.
* Those individuals, associations, and legal organizations must help and provide free legal aid to women who may not know about their rights or have the financial means to take their cases to justice.

A wife is a legal person who has equal rights and responsibilities, just as her husband does. She is a partner by choice to her husband and not his object of abuse. As a citizen, she deserves the full protection of the law, and government has the obligation to ensure her safety and security and that of her children.

When a woman is violated, it is not only the perpetrator who is at fault, but also the society that normalizes violence against women.

Female children, as all human beings, have aspirations, desires, and visions for their future; they plan, work hard to fulfill their objectives, and to be active citizens that contribute to the growth and development of their countries. It takes the concerted effort of everyone concerned, particularly parents, teachers, and the state, to ensure that female ***children are not disqualified from their natural rights at birth***.

***What female children need are opportunities; every child is born with mental, emotional, intellectual, physical capacities, and the potential to be great.***

Violence Against Women is Violence Against All of Us- The Society.