Gender-based violence as a sustainability problem

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Abstract

The connection between gender-based violence and sustainable development remains under-researched, despite the fact that more than 30 percent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. This article aims to address this research gap by foregrounding the connection between gender-based violence and sustainable development by examining a body of literature with a geographical focus on the Global South. To this end, it draws on two different approaches: the three dimensions of sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals. Both approaches demonstrate, directly or indirectly, that gender-based violence negatively affects the path to sustainability by reducing a person's potential, capabilities and well-being, thus hindering sustainable development.

Key words: gender-based violence, sustainable development, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 30 percent of women worldwide had experienced physical and/or sexual violence (Chatterji et al. 2020a; Chatterji et al. 2020b; World Health Organization 2019). The onset of COVID-19 has engendered a parallel pandemic of violence, especially against women and girls. According to UN Women (2020), the existing crisis of violence against women has intensified globally, particularly during lockdowns. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities around the world and has put women and girls at greater risk (Abou-Habib et al. 2020). Gender-based violence (GBV) is considered the most under-reported form of violence in the world (Khan 2016); hence, it is reasonabe to assume that even more women are affected by violence than suggested by the statistics (Westmarland/Bows 2019).

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While the COVID-19 pandemic is currently raising awareness about GBV, that awareness builds on precedent phenomena such as the #MeToo movement which has also brought the issue of sexual violence and unequal power relations to the forefront (Eger 2021). Initially used by Tarana Burke, an African-American radical justice activist, the social media hashtag #MeToo erupted in 2017 in the US entertainment industry and became a global movement, revealing the high prevalence of sexual violence worldwide (van Rijswijk 2020; Black et al. 2020). A year later, Nadia Mura and Denis Mukwege were awarded the Nobel Peace Price "for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict" (The Nobel Peace Prize 2018, 2021). These examples show that GBV has increasingly moved to the centre of public debates and that it has also been officially recognised as an issue for which the global community is accountable (Wu 2018).

The global community (e.g., nation states, political and humanitarian organisations) has begun to recognise GBV as a violation of human rights, with devastating consequences at the individual, family, community and national levels (Michau/Namy 2021), impacting people's physical and psychological health as well as their social and economic development (Tol et al. 2013; Chatterji et al. 2020a). Violence against women is also recognised in the UN 2030 Agenda, a globally negotiated reference framework for development and environmental issues that was signed by delegates from 172 countries in 2015. At the core of this agenda are the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 sub-goals, which are targeted to be achieved globally by 2030 (Pufé 2017). SDG 5 calls for equal opportunities between women and men, and sub-goal 5.2 targets the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including sexual exploitation and trafficking. Hence, the elimination of GBV is a serious concern for the global community, which acknowledges GBV as a factor hindering gender equality and sustainable development (United Nations 2015). Gender equality is achieved when women and men have equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities in all spheres of life, such as in education, decision-making, political and economic participation and health. To date, no country has fully achieved gender equality (Cavalcanti und Tavares 2016).

The UN 2030 Agenda is based on the Brundtland Report (1987) and the widely accepted three-pillar concept of sustainability – referring to its economic, social and ecological dimensions – which, however, the report does not focus on intra-generational and gender equality (Brundtland 1987; Leach 2016). Leach (2016) notes that a gendered perspective on sustainability is needed to develop gender-sensitive policies as a comprehensive pathway to sustainable development. From a feminist point of view, sustainability can only be achieved through a redistribution of wealth, power, paid and unpaid work and time (Bidegain Ponte/Enriquez 2016), i.e., gender equality. From this perspective, it can be argued that existing gender norms and power structures affect sustainable development. Similarly, the debate on GBV is invariably intertwined with the construction of gender and power as well as with the concepts of hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy (Aghtaie/Gangoli 2015; Hunnicutt 2009). Feminist scholars consider gender inequality, resulting from the subordination of women and the corresponding power imbalance, the root cause of GBV (Stern et al. 2018; Choup 2016; Oliveira et al. 2018). This highlights the need to develop a systematic perspective on the relation between GBV and sustainable development. The present article aims to address this research gap by foregrounding the under-researched connection between GBV and sustainable development by examining a

body of literature with a geographical focus on the Global South. This article investigate the aforementioned connection by elaborating on the following research question: Is GBV an obstacle for sustainable development?

The point of departure for this paper is my own research experience in Rwanda. Even though my research focused on the sustainable rural labour market, concerns of personal and structural violence were constantly raised, especially during female focus group discussions. Correspondingly, the focus of this paper is limited to the Global South, especially to resource-poor and post-conflict countries.

This paper is divided into three sections: In the first section, the theoretical background of GBV is introduced from a feminist perspective. In the second section, the links between GBV and sustainable development are analysed using two different approaches: the three dimensions of sustainability based on the Brundtland Report and the United Nations SDGs. In the concluding section, the nexus between GBV and sustainably is presented.

GBV from a feminist point of view

This section delineates the theoretical background of GBV from a feminist point of view. Such an approaches allows for discussion and reflection on power relations and power imbalances, giving voices to marginalised people and the application of an intersectional perspective, which are crucial in the field of GBV (Westmarland/Bows 2019).

Conceptualizations of violence

Violence itself is defined in multiple ways, making it a highly complex concept (Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois 2004; Body-Gendrot/Spierenburg 2009). Especially in the German-speaking world, the term *violence* is very diffuse as it is used in a multitude of contexts. In the English-speaking world, the definition of violence is less blurred: violence is defined as the problematic display of physical strength with the aim of injuring or damaging a thing/object or a human-being (Imbusch 2018, 2002). Violence is mainly conceptualised

> as physical and/or psychological harm and injury caused by direct and in some cases intentional, action through the application of vigorous or extreme physical force. It is generally agreed that violence is a means to other ends, that it is instrumental for gaining control, power, strength, or influence (Parsons 2007: 173).

Johan Galtung, a humanities scholar and peace researcher, has shaped the scientific discourse on violence (Barnett 2018). Galtung's definition extends beyond psychological and physical injuries and places the concept of violence in a broader context "as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance" (Galtung 1969: 186). This means that violence is more than physical or psychological harm to a person and that it prevents human beings from achieving their full potential (Galtung 1969). Furthermore, Galtung distinguishes between indirect (structural), direct (personal) and cultural violence. Direct or personal violence has a very clear subject-object relationship, a visible action, and a perpetrator, i.e., it is used by a person who acts, e.g.,

physical violence. In contrast, structural violence appears without an actor (depersonalised); it is invisible, embedded in the structures of a society and manifests itself as unequal power relations, e.g., unequal access to and distribution of resources (Galtung 1969). Imbusch (2018) critically reflected on the concept of structural violence. He argues that while the concept of structural violence is accompanied by a momentous dissolution of the concept of violence, as it becomes synonymous with social injustice and is able to discredit every form of domination, it is nonetheless necessary in order to depict relations of violence without a direct perpetrator (Imbusch 2018).

In the 1990s, Galtung introduced and defined the concept of cultural violence as follows:
By "cultural violence" we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic spheres of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence (Galtung 1990:291).

In that sense, cultural violence normalises the act of violence and makes it acceptable, e.g., child marriage, forced marriage due to pregnancies in evangelical communities and honour killing (Galtung 1990; Aghtaie/ Gangoli 2015). Imbusch (2018) also addresses the concept of cultural violence and explains that cultural violence makes violence acceptable through media, language, ideology, and religion. Here, he is in line with Galtung's argumentation. Furthermore, he also discusses the term *symbolic violence* based on Pierre Bourdieu. Symbolic violence is violence embedded in language and is used to glorify and euphemise power relations that are not transparent. In Galtung's interpretation of violence, the distinction between direct and indirect violence is crucial. Both forms of violence can arise on their own; however, it is important to understand that they influence and can generate each other (Galtung 1969).

The emergence of the concept of GBV

Violence was not the focus of the first wave of feminism (spanning from the French Revolution to the end of the Second World War), which was rather centred on women's suffrage. The second wave of feminism, in the 1970s, focused on women's autonomy over their own bodies, sexuality and language. This global movement was characterised by feminist activism, and the issue of violence against women (VAW) became prominent in the public sphere (Karl 2020). However, during this decade, systematic information on VAW was scarce, and feminist researchers sought to investigate the topic by identifying power relations and gender inequality as important dimensions. The challenge was to gather reliable data to amplify and extend the issue of VAW as a matter of global concern (Wu 2018). Rebecca Emerson Dobash and Russel Dobash (1979) produced accurate and reliable data on VAW in their attempt to fill this lacuna in this field of research. Their case study, published in the book *Violence Against Wives,* highlighted the relation between patriarchal structures and physical violence and the deep-rooted inequality between women and men. They identified VAW as a massive challenge encountered at all levels of society, not just at the local level (Dobash/Dobash 1979). Subsequently, other feminist researchers presented their arguments in a similar vein; i.e., the construction of gender and power is central to understanding GBV, and these two concepts are connected to patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1987; Wu 2018). The concept of patriarchy in relation

to GBV was criticised in feminist circles as "undertheorised" (Kandiyoti 1988). Gwen Hunnicutt (2009) addressed this critique and used the concept of patriarchy to theorise VAW beyond the simple "oppressor and oppressed" formula. She argued that violence must be contextualised and that patriarchy is linked to other systems of power: "Where old dominate young, men dominate women, men dominate men. White dominate people of color, developed nations dominate developing nations, and humans dominate nature" (Hunnicutt 2009: 563). Hunnicutt's analysis of the contextualisation of violence and different forms of power aligns with the theory of intersectionality (Wu 2018), which identifies multiple intersecting sites of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), an African-American legal scholar, introduced the concept of intersectionality to address a specific legal case in an attempt to highlight the multidimensional nature of oppression experienced by Black women in the US. The theoretical corpus that developed from Crenshaw's contribution presented itself as a prominent form of criticism against the second wave feminism and its exclusive focus on middle-income-class women. Crenshaw broadened the spectrum of analysis to include other social categories beyond gender, such as age, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, to accentuate the intersections of different social identities (Crenshaw 1991, 1989). According to Aghtaie and Gangoli (2015), the theory of intersectionality is crucial for analysing and understanding the root causes of GBV. In the twenty-first century, the term VAW, being a gender-specific term, attracted criticisms from theoretical, political, legal, and practical perspectives, and has now been replaced by the gender-neutral and more inclusive term GBV (Goldscheid 2015; Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015; Wirtz et al. 2020).

GBV is widely used as an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated against a person's will and is the result of gender-based power inequalities. Aghtaie and Gngoli (2015:6) of the Centre for Gender and Violence at the University of Bristol define GBV as following: "We understand GBV as primary violence against women (VAW), but also including violence against children and men, where such violence occurs as result of their ascribed gender identity". This article will use this definition of GBV. The article focuses mainly on VAW because statistically women are affected by violence much more often than men (World Health Organization 2019). However, it does not ignore that men or transgender people can also be victims of gender-based violence (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015; Wirtz et al. 2020).

Feminist researchers investigating GBV have also adopted Galtung's assumption that different forms of violence blend into one another. Liz Kelly (1988) developed the concept of a continuum of violence, arguing that sexual violence is fluid and that one form of sexual violence merges into another. Kelly, in *Surviving Sexual Violence*, cites interviews with women subjected to sexual violence and remarks that their words are used "to demonstrate the range of experiences within each form of sexual violence, the ways in which the categories shade into each other at certain points and the similarity of the dynamics in a number of forms of sexual violence" (1988: 156). Feminist researchers have also accepted the concept of a continuum for other forms of GBV. Additionally, they have observed that different forms of violence (physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm) intermingle and reinforce one another at individual, group and institutional levels (Aghtaie/Gangoli 2015; Krook 2020; Krause 2015).

Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher and pivotal scientist, has proposed another perspective on GBV through the *capability approach*. She discusses the detrimental effect of GBV on

women's capabilities and well-being by underlining the difference between the potential (what could have been) and the actual (what is). She argued that violence negatively affects numerous human capabilities and, consequently, human development and overall well-being (Nussbaum 2005). According to Nussbaum (2015), GBV diminishes a human being's capacity to work to their full potential by negatively affecting their health, resilience, and productivity, which, in turn, has a negative impact on a country's economic growth (Bowman et al. 2008; Pyles 2015).

In sum, GBV incorporates the different forms of violence that blend into and reinforce each other. Gender and power inequality, which are closely linked to patriarchal social structures, are the central concepts of GBV. An intersectional approach is thus necessary to analyse the multiple sites of GBV. A GBV perspective – especially from a feminist point of view – is absent from most debates on sustainable development but is sorely needed, as the following section seeks to demonstrate.

The linkages between GBV and sustainable development

This part analyses the links between GBV and sustainable development using two different approaches: the three dimensions of sustainability approach that are based on the Brundtland Report, and the United Nations SDGs. The primary focus of the present analysis is on the first approach, while the SDGs provide additional perspectives on the link between GBV and sustainability.

GBV and the three dimensions of sustainability

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development published a report entitled *Our Common Future,* popularly known as the Brundtland Report. It presented guidelines for sustainable development that remain highly relevant even today. The report states: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (1987: 27). Sustainable development is thus understood as the sufficient satisfaction of the needs of both the present and future generations (Pufé 2017). In addition, the report analysed global problems such as poverty and climate change and determined that only profound social change can provide solutions to these challenges. The report refers to the ecological, economic, and social spheres as intertwined dimensions that together comprise a cohesive whole and argues that sustainable development can only be achieved if none of these dimensions is neglected. This concept of three-dimensional sustainability has been widely accepted by the international community, and it is a valuable guiding principle for sustainability-related policymaking. However, although the Brundtland Report (Brundtland 1987) recommends considering the social context in relation to sustainability, it does not focus on intra-generational and gender equality or on GBV. Sachs (1999) argued that there is increasing evidence of synergies between the three spheres of sustainability and gender equality. As noted earlier, from a feminist perspective, sustainable development goes hand in hand with the redistribution of wealth, power, paid and

unpaid work and time (Bidegain Ponte/Enriquez 2016), i.e., the reduction of gender inequalities. Focusing on power relations and gender equality can therefore advance the debate on sustainability and the identification of adequate solutions to global problems (Leach et al. 2016).

As already mentioned, the concept of sustainability distinguishes three dimensions: ecological, economic, and social sustainability. The remainder of this section considers these three dimensions of sustainability from a GBV perspective. It is vital to address personal and structural violence in all the spheres of sustainability, starting with the ecological dimension. Ecological sustainability describes the use of a system in such a way that it maintains its essential functions and thus ensures its continued existence (Pufé 2017). The connections between environmental sustainability and GBV are manifold and multi-layered. Castañeda Camey et al. (2020) outlined the links between GBV and the access to or the use and control of natural resources, environmental pressure, environmental crimes, extractive industries, large-scale infrastructure projects and agribusiness, climate change and water-related disasters. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018), global warming increases extreme weather and climate events, such as drought and tropical hurricanes. These phenomena exacerbate the already existing social inequalities regarding food security and access to safe water and increase the vulnerability of the already disempowered groups, e.g., women, ethnic minorities, transgender people, and persons with disabilities

This increased vulnerability is related to pre-existing unequal power relations, leading to the observation that women are more affected by natural disasters than men (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC 2014; Castañeda Camey et al. 2020; Cappelli et al. 2021). The effects of climate change and environmental catastrophes are also reflected in GBV (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Committee 2018). It is recognised that occurrences of environmental disasters correspond with an increase in domestic violence and intimate partner violence, rape and sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and trafficking, and forced child marriage (Fisher 2010; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2015). As data from 180 countries indicate, environmental shocks are accompanied by livelihood insecurity and a significant increase in forced early marriages, as they are seen as income channels to compensate for the loss incurred due to the disaster (Carrico et al. 2020; Tsaneva 2020; Pasten et al. 2020). Furthermore, food security must also be considered from the perspective of GBV, especially regarding structural violence. Globally, more women are food insecure than men, and gender is a major factor in women's food insecurity. After accounting for economic and social factors, women are 27 percent more likely to be affected by food insecurity (Food and Agricultural Organization 2020). Patriarchal power relations also influence the allocation of food in the household: women prepare the food and serve male household members first, but they have the least access to food for personal consumption. In addition, participant observation shows that personal violence is used as a form of punishment towards women in case they make any mistakes while preparing food, such as cooking too much or too little, not serving at the right time or burning food (Bellows et al. 2015).

Food security can be assigned to the environmental sphere of sustainability on the one hand and to the economic sphere of sustainability on the other. Regarding the economic dimension,

sustainability implies decent working conditions and an environmentally and socially responsible economy (Pufé 2017). Labour markets are closely connected to the existing gender norms, relations, and stereotypes in a society. Paid and unpaid work, productive and reproductive work respectively, have to be considered when analysing economic sustainability from a GBV perspective (Huws 2012). Gender norms comprise the key underlying factors that determine whether women and men take up paid work, the kinds of paid work they are allowed to do as well as their responsibilities apart from their paid work. The gender division of labour typically assigns women to the private sphere, which involves unpaid and reproductive work (Elson 1999, 2009; Rai et al. 2019). The gender division of labour results in women having less access to employment and, above all, to decent working conditions (Rai et al. 2019; Gosh 2021). The development of the neoliberal, capitalist market economy has brought women into the labour market in greater numbers, but at the same time it has led to deregulated economies, insecure jobs, and a double burden of work for women (Gosh 2021). While both men and women are victims of violence in the workplace, women are disproportionately affected (International Labour Organization 2011). However, GBV is not only found in the workplace, as personal violence is embedded in the very structure and power dimensions of the global economy. Feminist political economy points to the link between women's lack of access to resources – such as income, employment, finance, property, and education – and women's vulnerability to GBV (True 2012). Moreover, women often experience sexual harassment at their workplace. One of the drivers of this violence is that supervisors lack leadership skills. Sexual harassment is more prevalent in settings where workers express a lack of a sense of justice and basic trust in their leaders. In addition, misaligned pay incentives and structures are also linked to sexual violence. Violence at the workplace has a negative impact on the well-being of those affected and, consequently, on the productivity of the company (International Labour Organization 2019).

Well-being is a central aspect of social sustainability, the third dimension of sustainability. According to White and Abeyasekera (2014), well-being consists of different factors: material security, a healthy environment, good personal and social relationships, meaningful activity, security, physical and mental health, positive self-esteem, and spiritual nourishment (White/Abeyasekera 2014). Schleicher et al. (2018) and Tuula and Hirvilammi (2015) found a close link between sustainable development and human well-being. They argued that well-being is at the core of sustainable development and, hence, should be the primary goal of all societies.

However, over the last decade, social sustainability has been under-researched and under-theorised in comparison to the environmental and economic spheres. This has led to an over-simplified theoretical construct and a fuzzy definition of social sustainability (Colantonio 2013; Munzel et al. 2017; V et al. 2016). Vallance et al. (2011: 342) goes as far as to designate the concept of social sustainability as a "concept in chaos". Different researchers have defined social sustainability using varied approaches: Sachs (1999) discussed the different elements of social sustainability such as employment, reasonable incomes, access to goods and services and social homogeneity. For Missimer et al. (2017: 42), a society is socially sustainable if the individuals therein face no structural barriers in terms of "health, influence, competence, impartiality and meaning-making". According to Peterson (2016), social sustainability encompasses the fulfilment of basic needs and well-being at personal, community and societal levels (Peterson 2016; Ajmal et al. 2018). The above definitions of social sustainability indicate that conflict, migration,

political participation as well as health are central elements of social sustainability. War, forced migration and discrimination of certain population groups are seen as expressions of social un-sustainability. Thus, all forms of violence are defined as sustainability problems, which relate to a reduction in human well-being (Pufé 2017). Conflict settings are characterised by an acute lack of protection for women and, consequently, GBV is rampant in these areas, with more than 70 percent of women experiencing violence (UN Women 2021). However, not all armed conflicts involve forms of sexual violence perpetrated by armed organisations; in some conflict situations, crimes of sexual violence are systematic and widespread, while in others, they are rare or non-existent (Cohen et al. 2013). Since men are commonly the perpetrators of GBV, male victims have been overlooked in conflict setting and do not receive much attention or support from humanitarian organisations. However, recent studies have broadened the notion of a dichotomy between perpetrators and victims (Peretz/Vidmar 2021). According to Dolan (2017), male civilians and military personnel can be victims and perpetrators at the same time. Also, in post-conflict settings, such as in refugee camps, GBV manifests itself in many forms and is an urgent issue. For example, owing to poor lighting in water and sanitation stations, women are placed at an increased risk of violence. Furthermore, policies that protect women are not enforced and women have extremely limited access to justice. These factors contribute to increased instances of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking in refugee settings (Price 2015).

Urban development is another area under the purview of social sustainability (Dempsey et al. 2011). For the first time in history, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas, and it is estimated that by 2050, seven out of ten people will live in urban regions. Large numbers of people settling in urban areas have social, economic, and environmental consequences (UN Habitat 2016). Moreover, cities present settings where women are at higher risk of violence by non-family members; for example, isolated parks, remote riverbanks, and sports fields have been identified as places with a high potential for women to become victims of violence. It is therefore essential that urban planners are aware of this problem and address it through sustainable urban planning (McIlwaine 2020). Furthermore, GBV commonly occurs in the public transport system in urban areas. In Sri Lanka, for example, 90 percent of female customers have been affected by sexual harassment while using public transport (UNFPA 2017).

To conclude, this section has sought to demonstrate that GBV is an important factor in all three dimensions of sustainability – ecological, economic, and social – and that it diminishes the well-being of both women and men, thus hindering sustainable development. In the next section, this paper will discuss GBV in connection with the SDGs.

The late inclusion of VAW as a Sustainable Development Goal

As already discussed, the foundation of the United Nations Agenda 2030 comprises the Brundtland Report and the three dimensions of sustainability (Brundtland 1987). As a global guiding principle to sustainable development, the Agenda 2030 requires closer inspection in the present context. Although gender equality and the prevention of VAW are key objectives of the Agenda, which includes the 17 SDGs (Agüero 2021; United Nations 2015), the matter of VAW had a long way to go before it was recognised globally. Until the early 1990s, VAW attracted little

interest from development organisations despite that feminist organisations in both the global South and North were aware that VAW was a developmental and human rights issue as early as the 1970s. In 1993, the UN General Assembly 48/104 recognised VAW as a form of human rights violation (Wu 2018). In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched, but VAW was not included as a target issue (Saavedra 2008). Due recognition was finally attributed with SDG 5 of the Agenda 2030: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." SDG 5 calls for equal opportunities for women and men in economic development, equal participation at all levels as well as the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and of early and forced marriage (United Nations 2015). The then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon declared at the launch of the Agenda 2030: "The global goals cannot be achieved without ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of women" (United Nations Web TV 2015).

The issue of violence against LGBTQI people is conspicuously absent from the Agenda 2030. Such an exclusion is suggestive of the fact that the Agenda fails to fully live up to its guiding principle of "leaving no one behind" (Vaast/Mills 2018). The Agenda's limited focus on VAW must be expanded to incorporate GBV – which also accounts for LGBTQI people. As argued above, GBV is a crucial factor in all dimensions of sustainability; hence, it follows that the eradication of GBV is an important component of all SDGs. Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme of the Agenda 2030 (United Nations 2015). Given that gender inequality persists and acts as a contributing and underlying factor of GBV, GBV must be recognised as a mainstream target in all SDGs regardless of their concrete formulation (Bowman et al. 2008; Aghtaie/Gangoli 2015). To meet the goals of the Agenda 2030 and achieve sustainable development, all 17 SDGs must be recognised and implemented from a GBV perspective. Such a shift in focus is imperative for achieving the goals of the Agenda 2030 in an inclusive manner.

Conclusion

The present paper aimed to highlight the under-researched connection between GBV and sustainable development, and it also sought to explain why GBV is an obstacle for sustainable development. To this end, two approaches were adopted: the three dimensions of sustainability and the SDGs. The primary focus was on the three dimensions of sustainability. GBV is an important factor in the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability and well-being is at the core of sustainable development. GBV harms individuals and affects people's physical and mental health, as well as their economic and social development. As well-being consists of material security, physical and mental health, and good relationships, it is evident that GBV reduces the well-being of those affected and leads to unsustainable development in all dimensions. Current events such as climate change that are closely related to the increase in environmental disasters, the deregulation of the global economy and increased urbanisation have contributed to a rise in GBV. As the examples demonstrate, different forms of violence – ranging on a continuum from personal to structural violence – mix and reinforce each other. These observations align with Kelly's theoretical approach to sexual violence as well as with the approaches of other feminist researchers. Additionally, structural violence reduces women's

food security, and this has an impact on their health and reduces their potential and well-being. This observation is consistent with Martha Nussbaum's theoretical considerations that emphasises the negative impact of GBV on potential, human capabilities, and well-being.

Nussbaum's proposition is in line with Galtung's definition of violence, which states that violence reduces a person's potential. Furthermore, the examples of climate change and child marriage show that cultural violence is used to legitimise violent behaviour, as theorised by Galtung.

The SDGs based on the three dimensions of sustainability address VAW as a sub-goal in SDG 5.2. This is a good starting point; however, as GBV impacts all dimensions of sustainability, the above arguments clearly highlight that it is a cross-cutting issue that influences all 17 SDGs. Furthermore, as discussed above, the SDG 5.2 only focuses on women and girls, leading to the exclusion of men and the LGBTQI community. Such an approach is antithetical to its guiding principle of *leaving no one behind*.

This article has sought to demonstrate that, directly or indirectly, GBV negatively affects the path to sustainability, whether the three dimensions of sustainability or the SDGs are focused on. GBV has a significant impact on personal lives in terms of health and social and economic well-being. This translates as high costs not only in monetary terms but also in terms of human capabilities at different scales, from the personal to the global level. Furthermore, GBV must be analysed from an intersectional perspective. In addition to the fact that all genders are not affected by GBV in the same way, factors such as geographical location, socio-economic status and education also have an impact on the level of structural and personal violence. Underlying factors of GBV include unequal power relations at different scales (from local to global), hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy. To reduce GBV and achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to redistribute power, wealth, and unpaid and paid work. In other words, sustainable development can only be achieved through gender equality.

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