

Gender ROI™ Insight Series



18 Survivor-centred prevention and response to gender-based violence and harassment

Business leadership role highlighted in growing momentum to counter violence against women and girls

Physical and sexual violence against women is a horrendous issue yet corporate leaders and investors have been slow to treat it as a major risk and mitigate accordingly. That's changing fast, with growing regulatory pressure and awareness of the cumulative costs of such violence.

The headline World Health Organisation statistic is staggering. Around the world, one in three women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence, harassment or abuse in their lifetime.

Perpetrators of such gender-based violence (GBV) include intimate partners and work colleagues or bosses. The violence ranges from aggressive language and financial coercion to physical injury and sexual assault. The spike in GBV levels during the Covid-19 pandemic shows that for too many women, home is a dangerous place.

The equally staggering health, social and financial impacts of GBV are well-documented. UN Women has put the global cost of violence against women at US\$1.5 trillion, or two per cent of global gross domestic product – more than the costs of homicides or civil war.

From a government policy perspective, violence against women has pernicious long-term and multi-generational effects on women, children and other vulnerable groups in terms of health, education levels and labour force participation.

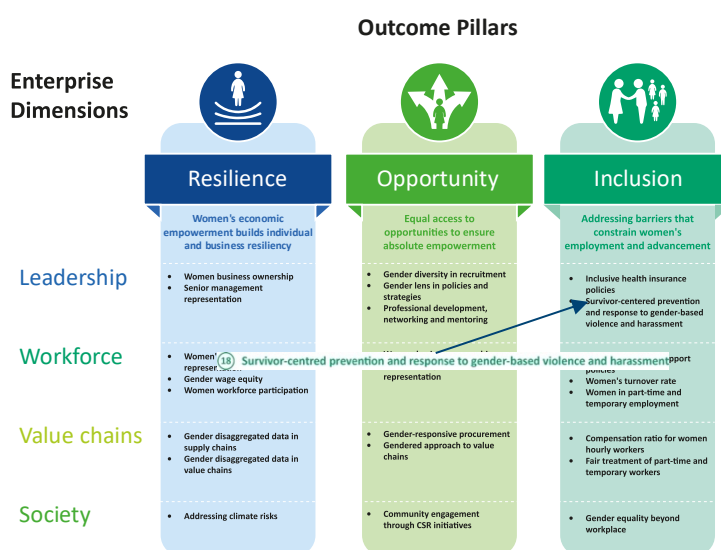
A survivor-centred approach to GBV seeks to empower survivors by prioritising their rights, needs and wishes.

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- World Health Organisation

This means ensuring survivors can access what they need – quality healthcare, security, legal and support services – when they need them.

Governments are moving to tackle GBV through awareness campaigns and industry-specific measures and procurement processes that prioritise suppliers with gender-positive policies, such as paid domestic violence leave.

For Sweef Capital Managing Director, Ms Jennifer Buckley, corporate leaders, donors and investors have both moral and practical imperatives to prioritise women's wellbeing and address GBV in their operations and portfolios.



Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ indicator matrix



The Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ identifies gender equality and diversity gaps and informs interventions to build resilience, equal opportunity and inclusion. This Insight Series explores how each indicator contributes to delivering social, financial and economic returns: <https://sweefcapital.com/gender-roitm/>

“Domestic violence and sexual harassment interfere with women’s ability to fully and equally participate in the workforce,” Ms Buckley says. “The research is clear: any actions or comments that create a hostile or unsafe work environment for women and other vulnerable individuals are unacceptable, and that has implications for leaders and how they run their enterprise.”

Organisations increasingly play a critical role in preventing and responding to GBV experienced by employees and their families. Programs include prevention initiatives that target the root causes and contributing factors

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of GBV, and response strategies to address consequences or outcomes of violence against women.

While the wellbeing and career impacts on survivors are immense and life-altering, GBV also takes an economic toll on enterprises, negatively affecting business productivity, employee morale and market reputation.

In Australia, the publicly listed National Australia Bank (NAB) is taking a high-profile stance to support survivors of financial abuse and domestic and family violence through its Online Assist program. NAB’s program includes measures to stamp out financial abuse, grants to support customers fleeing unsafe circumstances, no-interest loans for ongoing support and referrals to support services. NAB has also changed its terms and conditions to allow bankers to “cut off” customers identified as committing financial abuse. The program has not only benefited thousands of individuals, but also saved the bank millions in costs related to loan defaults.

For Ms Tia Subramanian, Gender-based Violence Program Director at international think tank Criterion Institute, NAB’s approach exemplifies practical interventions leaders, donors and investors can take to counter GBV in their sphere. The institute recently launched a new curriculum to demonstrate to investors the connections between finance and GBV and the actions they can take from impact and risk mitigation perspectives (see breakout).

“Gender-based violence is ubiquitous and complicated and grounded in fundamental power dynamics related to how gender is operating in any specific context,” Ms Subramanian says. “It’s nuanced – it’s not as simple as having a hotline for perpetrators. People often don’t realise that at an enterprise level, you’re being impacted not just by violence in the workplace, but also violence people are experiencing outside, in their homes. Both types of violence impact how individuals are able to show up and function in the workplace. Addressing both is beneficial to the enterprise.”

Incentives to act range from commercial self-interest to direct government intervention.

Legal frameworks are emerging that require more action and accountability from organisational leaders, including taking steps to prevent violence, protect survivors through emergency response measures and support, and develop explicit reporting and grievance procedures.

“Our work on gender has always been about understanding the underlying power dynamics of intersectional gender inequity and how to address those to get to better outcomes,” Ms Subramanian says. “GBV is an incredibly urgent issue that we felt has many more links to systems of finance and investment than people realise.”

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Sweef Capital spearheaded a global collaboration to develop a new diagnostic tool, the Sweef Capital Gender ROI™, which includes a specific indicator on GBV. While the tool focuses on enterprise processes and activities, Criterion Institute’s approach focuses on strategic risks and spans geographies, asset classes and investor types.

“Most people are looking at specific things, such as instruments to address hardships faced by survivors or company-level policies and practices,” Ms Subramanian says. “Our approach is to take a macro view; market risk, public markets, private market solutions. What are the different intersections of all these?”#

About the contributors



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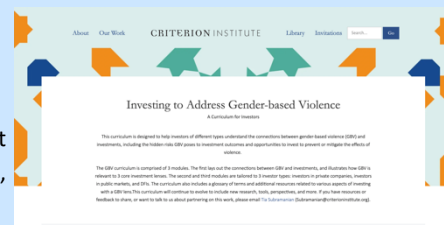
Sign up [here](#) for the Insight Series and for updates on Sweef Capital news and events, including Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ forums and activities. We’re keen to hear your feedback about the series and the Gender ROI™. Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) to keep in touch.



Criterion Institute – equipping investors to lead change on GBV

While the human toll of gender-based violence (GBV) is well-known, Criterion Institute is trading new ground by helping investors understand how the significant economic impacts of GBV translate into material investment risks.

The international think tank recently launched a new research-based curriculum to educate investors about the links between GBV, investor decision-making and investment risk, opportunity and impact. Applying a risk lens opens the door to conversations about a topic that can be seen as too remote, taboo or simply irrelevant to finance, according to Criterion Institute’s Gender-based Violence Program Director, Ms Tia Subramanian.



“We’ve focused a lot on the risk case, on the ways in which gender-based violence poses risks to finance and investments, because that’s underexplored,” Ms Subramanian says. “We believe that doing analysis of gender-based violence is core to the investment opportunity lens. It’s core to the investment risk lens, and its core to an impact lens.”

Developed for development finance institutions and investors in private companies and public markets, the curriculum outlines the relevance of GBV analysis for each investor group. Key risk categories are operational, regulatory, reputational and political. “Gender-based violence is happening in different forms everywhere,” Ms Subramanian says. “But what turns it into a reputational risk is not necessarily just the presence of the violence, which might have been happening for a long time, but changes in culture; is the behaviour becoming less acceptable?”

The program also provides tools and resources to help investors integrate a GBV lens across their processes and practices. A longer-term ambition is to help investors embrace opportunities to use finance and investments to have an impact on GBV. “Everything related to gender is always grounded in culture and norms that can be hard to measure and hard to shift,” Ms Subramanian says. “But building awareness, engaging investment capital holders, that’s a whole new audience, a different sort of lever within a movement creating the will for change.”#

For more about Criterion Institute’s investor program, visit: <https://www.criterioninstitute.org/gbv-curriculum>

For its GBV due diligence guides, visit: <https://www.criterioninstitute.org/resources>



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