

**EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SRI
LANKAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a phenomenon that exists worldwide and yet is rarely acknowledged openly. As defined by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW), “Gender Based Violence is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” and “includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty” (CEDAW 1992). This definition serves as an umbrella term capturing the multitude of violence that can be perpetrated against women. The reason that makes GBV an issue in need of public attention and remedy is its staggering rate of prevalence.

According to a study conducted by the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMC) in 2011, the prevalence of GBV in Sri Lanka ranges between 20% - 60%. The same study also shows different forms of violence present in the Sri Lankan context such as incest, rape, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), dating violence. The settings in which they occur, namely are industrial sector, plantation sector, garment industry, public transport and among internally displaced persons due to war and tsunami (SLMC 2011).

‘Broadening Genders’ is a study done in four districts in Sri Lanka to measure GBV prevalence and related masculine attitudes. It found that:

Thirty-six percent of ever-partnered men reported perpetrating physical and or sexual violence against a female intimate partner. Six percent of all men perpetrated sexual violence inclusive of rape against a non-partner woman and 17 percent perpetrated sexual violence inclusive of rape against any women (de Mel, Peiris and Gomez 2013, p. 3).

GBV is also a grave concern within the local University system, especially in the forms of dating violence; coerced sexual relations, verbal abuse and physical abuse (Gunawardena et al. 2011) that colludes with ragging and is overlooked by the authorities (University Grants Commission, Federation of University Teachers' Association and CARE 2015). This report states that it "may well provide university-sanctioned opportunities for the practice of GBV..." (p. 21).

In order to provide a solution to the issue of GBV from a psychological perspective, it is important to identify the underlying thought processes (cognitive factors) that contribute to such behaviours. Attitude is one such factor that exists in two forms; explicit and implicit. Explicit attitudes are consciously held attitudes formed through conscious processing while implicit attitudes are those that are held unconsciously, formed through automatic processing. These automatically processed attitudes are created through learning. In the case of GBV, it is often linked to some cultural norms. A meta-analysis conducted by the SLMC (2011) explains this phenomenon aptly:

In many societies where GBV is prevalent, society itself enforces cultural norms that condone and accept violence. Women in such societies, who are victims of GBV, are seen to then normalize and accept violence in their lives without seeking interventions (p.16).

Many studies conducted in Sri Lanka incorporate measures of explicit attitudes in the form of self-report questionnaires to identify tendencies for GBV, (de Mel, Peiris and Gomez 2013; SLMC 2011). However, since research has not been conducted to explore the role played by implicit attitudes regarding GBV, even though implicit measures have the capacity to help assess and understand such violent behaviours, the researcher designed this study as an attempt to bridge this gap.

The participants of the study were undergraduates whose age ranged from 21-25 years. The study targets the assessment of both implicit and explicit attitudes towards GBV. Although, measuring implicit attitudes is of equal importance, this has not been used in previous local studies. Hence an Implicit Association Test (IAT) that international research utilises often as a standard measurement tool was used. The explicit attitudes are measured through self-report measures, including

assessment of all forms of violence instead of focusing on a single form. The study aims to provide information on the explicit and implicit attitudes among female and male participants, in terms of the type of attitude (pro-GBV or anti-GBV) and any differences between the explicit and implicit attitudes in order to highlight the need to explore the cultural practices which are deemed to provoke pro-violent practices.

The sample consisted of 141 undergraduates, 48% from Colombo (University of Colombo, Sri Jayawardenapura, Kelaniya and private universities such as SLIIT and ANC) and 52% representing Kandy (belonging to University of Peradeniya, private universities such as SLIIT). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic snowball sampling became the feasible technique. The quantitative measurement of attitudes was conducted by an online questionnaire. This included the Gender Equitable Men's Scale (GEM Scale) by Pulerwitz and Barker, reactions to hypothetical violent and ambiguous scenarios and a five block IAT that measured pro-GBV attitudes and anti-GBV attitudes using good/bad words and violent/non-violent image combinations. The qualitative data was collected through a structured interview conducted using eight participants from both districts. All materials used for the study were translated to Sinhala. A pilot test was also conducted using ten participants.

The quantitative findings of the study (see Table 1) highlighted the presence of anti-GBV attitudes at both explicit and implicit levels. However, there was a significant difference between the explicit and implicit anti-GBV attitudes in the t-test used ($t = -7.175, p < .001$), signifying that at the implicit level egalitarian notions may not be as strong as it exists at the explicit level. The qualitative data suggested that gendered tasks cater to differences between the two genders, which promote certain behaviours among men while restricting certain behaviours among women such as participation in student union activities.

Table 1: Mean scores from the self-reported questionnaire and IAT

Measure	Mean scores for Colombo		Mean scores for Kandy		Description
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
GEM Scale	37	37	37	38	Denoted moderate levels of equity (score range 24-47)
Violent scenarios (cognition)	28	29	27	29	Higher tendencies of reaction to given pro-GBV situation (score range 21-30)
Violent scenarios (emotion)	30	39	32	41	Moderate tendencies of reaction to given pro-GBV situation (score range 31-40)
Violent scenarios (behaviour)	33	36	35	32	Moderate tendencies of reaction to given pro-GBV situation (score range 31-40)
Ambiguous Scenarios (cognition)	11	10	11	11	Higher tendencies of supporting anti-GBV situation (score range 11-15)
Ambiguous Scenarios (emotion)	19	17	18	18	Moderate tendencies of supporting anti-GBV situation (score range 16-20)
Ambiguous Scenarios (behaviour)	18	16	16	17	Moderate tendencies of supporting anti-GBV situation (score range 16-20)
IAT pro-GBV attitude (reaction time)	1416ms	1656ms	2200ms	1774ms	Reaction time is greater indicating less association to pro-GBV attitudes
IAT anti-GBV attitude (reaction time)	1303ms	1201ms	1168ms	1274ms	Reaction time is less, indicating high association to anti-GBV attitudes

Participants of the study demonstrated moderate implicit and explicit attitudes towards GBV. Yet the responses highlighted their attitudes as mostly shaped by some cultural and social norms that enforce gender disparities despite the level of education received. Therefore, this study emphasizes utilisation of tools to measure implicit attitudes instead of singularly focusing on explicit attitudes on GBV, as this can help to explain the schematic structuring of certain attitudes that can be used to enhance the quality of GBV prevention strategies.

References

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