5. UNDERSTANDING GENDER
Key Concept 3

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1. INTRODUCTION. KEY CONCEPT 3

- Gender is not just a biological matter (male/female), but a social construct–a complex social construction that deeply influences personal, cultural, and structural dynamics in any society. Far from being a simple biological difference, gender is shaped by social norms, cultural expectations, and assigned roles that vary over time and across different contexts.

Society defines what it means to be a ¨man¨ or a ¨woman¨ in different historical and cultural settings.

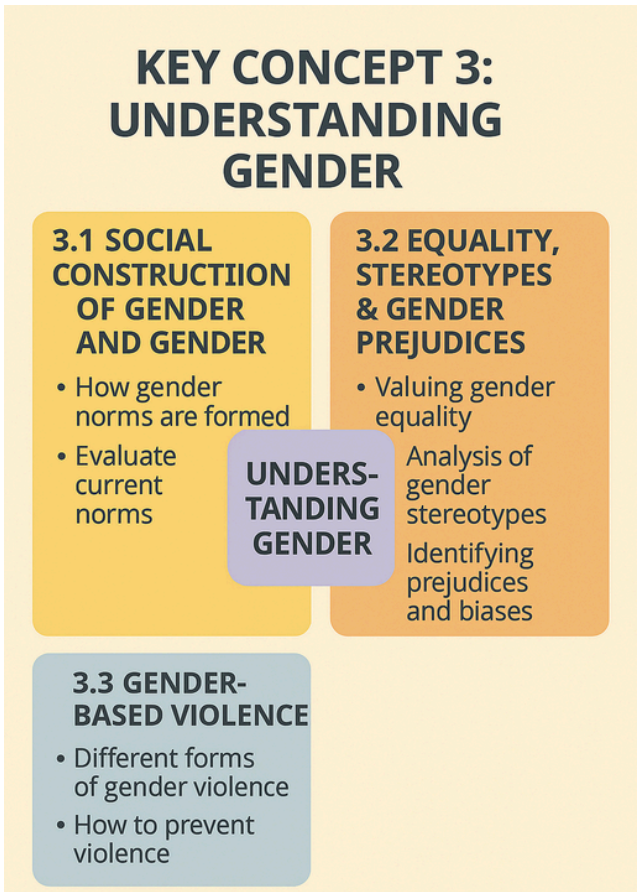
Within this framework, KEY CONCEPT 3 invites us to critically reflect on three fundamental aspects:

- The social construction of gender and gender norms, which examines how ideas about what is "feminine" and "masculine" are learned and reinforced from early childhood.
- Gender equality, stereotypes, and prejudice, which explores the cultural and institutional barriers that perpetuate gender inequality.
- Gender-based violence, which represents one of the most extreme and destructive expressions of these inequalities.

Understanding these concepts is essential to fostering a more just society, where all individuals can live free from discrimination, prejudice, and violence based on their gender identity.

<u>It is divided into the following topics:</u>

- **The Social Construction of Gender and Gender Norms**
- **Gender Equality, Stereotypes and Bias**
- **Gender-based Violence**



1.1 SKILLS TO DEVELOP

- Understand the concept of gender as a social construct, distinguish it from the biological notion of sex, and analyze how gender norms are developed and maintained across different cultural and historical contexts.

- Identify and critically examine gender stereotypes and prejudices, assessing their impact on everyday life, opportunities, and the reinforcement of social inequalities.

- Recognize different forms of gender-based violence, their structural causes and social consequences, and understand the importance of prevention and reporting.

- Promote attitudes of respect, equity, and social responsibility, encouraging a culture of gender equality and the rejection of all forms of discrimination or violence based on gender.

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2. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND GENDER NORMS

2.1 BASIC NOTIONS REGARDING GENDER

BIOLOGICAL SEX

características fisiológicas con las que nacemos. Sexo asignado al nacer.

GENDER

una construcción social y cultural ,se atribuyen características segun sexo biologico.

GENDER IDENTITY

vivencia interna e individual del género de cada persona, que puede o no corresponder con el sexo asignado al momento del nacimiento,

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Atracción emocional, romántica, sexual o afectiva hacia otras personas.

SEX and GENDER are not synonyms. SEX is a physical characteristic, while GENDER is cultural
IN SUMMARY:

- Biological sex is what is assigned at birth based on the body.
- Gender is what society expects based on that sex.
- Gender identity is how a person feels internally.
- Sexual orientation is about who someone is attracted to.
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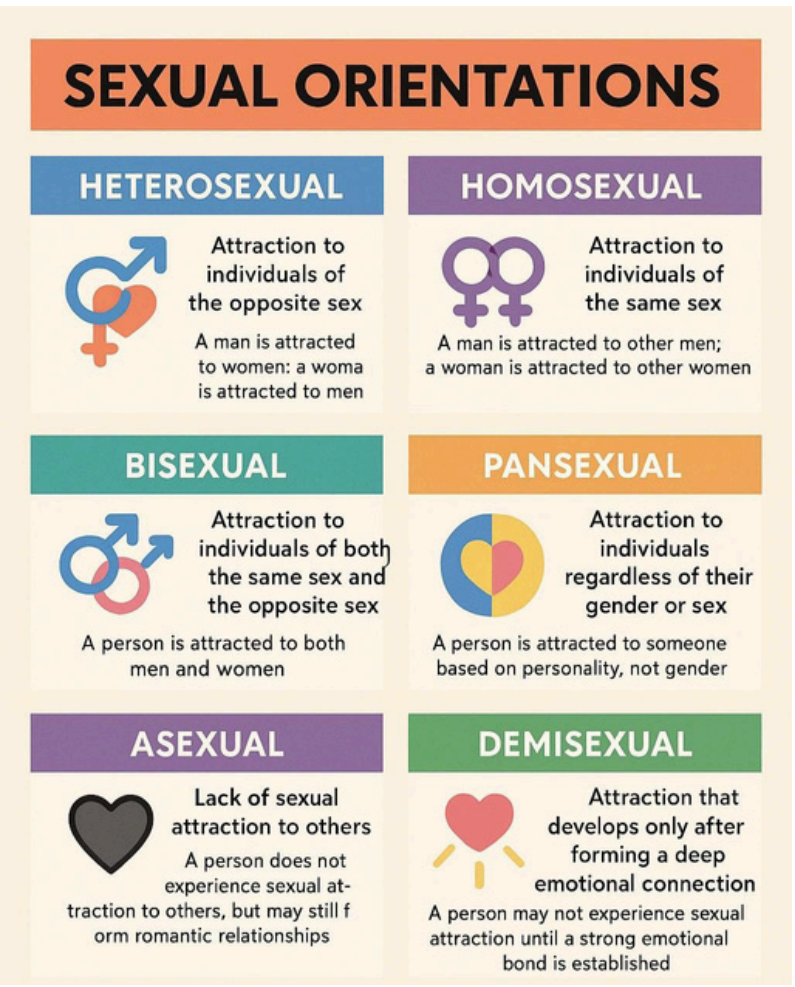
2.2 DIVERSITY OF SEXUAL ORIENTACIONS



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2.3 GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED SOCIALIZATION

Our understanding of what is considered feminine or masculine is learned mainly through an educational and social process.

During this process, we internalize the values, expectations, and roles that society teaches us through environments such as family, school, work, media, and advertising.

➡ AMPLE :

From an early age, boys are often given cars, tools, and are encouraged to be strong, competitive, and not show emotions.
Girls, on the other hand, receive dolls, toy kitchens, and are taught to be nurturing, gentle, and caring.

➡ This reinforces the belief that boys should be active and dominant, while girls should be emotional and caring.

2.4 GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES

GENDER ROLES:

Gender roles are the behavior patterns that society attributes to men and women based on their biological sex, and these expectations are internalized by individuals from a young age." Bem (1995).
These roles determine what is expected of people in different social contexts (family, work, etc.).

GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes are generalized beliefs about the attributes of women and men, which limit their roles in society" (UNESCO, 2018).

Often, these stereotypes do not reflect reality and are used to justify differences in power and opportunities between genders.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER STEREOTYPES:

MASCULINE GENDER	FEMENINE GENDER
Rational, controls emotions	Emotional, sensitive
Provider, protector	Caregiver, homemaker
Strong, competitive, confident	Submissive, kind, cooperative
Leader, decisive	Supportive, less involved in decision-making
Should not cry or show weakness	Free to express emotions

EXAMPLE:

From a young age, boys are taught to be strong and not show emotions, while girls are taught to be sensitive and nurturing.

This contributes to the construction of gender roles, and as an impact, it limits both genders' emotional and professional options. For instance, a man might feel pressured not to express his feelings, while a woman may be seen as "too emotional" in a professional setting.

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2.5 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER:

- Primary socialization: From childhood, gender roles are learned through toys, colors, and differentiated activities.

- Secondary socialization: Institutions such as school, friendships, and media reinforce these roles, including professional expectations.

Culture and traditions: Each society defines gender roles according to its customs and values.

2.6 IMPACT OF GENDER NORMS:

- Rigid expectations: Social pressure to conform to traditional roles (e.g., men with no emotions, women as caregivers).

- Gender inequality: Norms perpetuate discrimination (e.g., pay gap, violence).

- Restrictions on identity: Non-binary people may face exclusion for not fitting expected norms.

Gender norms, learned from childhood, limit people's emotional and professional choices, reinforcing traditional roles that perpetuate inequality.

2.7. TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

The social construction of gender has evolved throughout history due to changes in social, political, and cultural structures. Social movements, advancements in human rights, and transformations in education and technology have driven these changes, redefining gender roles and expectations in society. Below are some of the main transformations in the social construction of gender:

- Feminist and LGBTQ+ Movements: Since the 19th century, feminist movements have questioned traditional roles and fought for equal rights, leading to new opportunities for women in education, work, and politics.

- Women's Emancipation: As women gained access to education and paid work, their roles within society changed, leading to the acceptance that women can be leaders, scientists, politicians, etc.

- Change in Male Roles: Men have also begun to question traditional expectations, seeking a balance between work and family life, and even taking on more domestic roles, such as caregivers.

- Recognition of Non-Binary Gender Identities: In recent decades, it has been recognized that gender is a spectrum and not a fixed category.

- Changes in the Perception of Sexuality: In the past, sexual orientation was strongly linked to gender expectations (e.g., heterosexuality as "normal"). However, over time, there have been several transformations regarding the acceptance of sexual diversity.

- Advances in Human Rights: The recognition of women's rights, gender equality, and the rights of LGBT+ individuals (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people) has driven significant changes in the social acceptance of diverse sexual and gender identities.

- Changes in Education: The inclusion of gender studies and the promotion of equality in schools have allowed for greater awareness and deconstruction of gender stereotypes from an early age.

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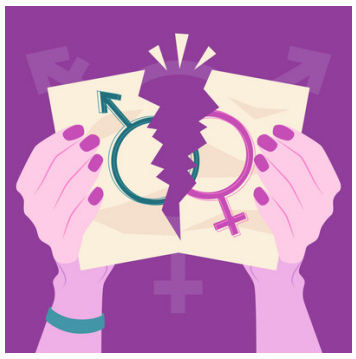
3. GENDER EQUALITY, STEREOTYPES, AND PREJUDICES

GENDER EQUALITY: the equality of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women and men, and girls and boys.
(UNITED NATIONS)

Gender equality seeks to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their sex, have the same rights, opportunities, and conditions to fully develop in all areas of life.

However, this equality is hindered by the presence of deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and prejudices in society.

3.1 GENDER STEREOTYPES:



It has been previously defined what gender stereotypes are; in summary, we can say that they are preconceived ideas about how women and men should behave according to their sex.

THESE STEREOTYPES LEAD TO:

Limit people's aspirations and abilities.

They are reproduced in education, the media, the family, and the workplace.

Reinforce traditional roles that hinder equality

IMPACT:

- Positive: In very rare cases, some stereotypes may provide a sense of belonging or identity, but this is limited and not universal.

- Negative: They limit opportunities, reinforce discrimination, promote gender-based violence, and hinder individual freedom of expression.

IT IS NECESSARY:

- Question traditional roles: Critically reflect on why men and women are expected to act in certain ways.
- Example: Why is it considered unusual for a man to be a nurse or for a woman to be an engineer?
- Promote fair practices:
- Encourage equality in language, task division, access to opportunities, and daily treatment, both at home and in school or work.

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3.2 GENDER PREJUDICES

Gender prejudices are negative attitudes or judgments toward a person based solely on their gender. These prejudices can lead to discrimination, exclusion, and violence, affecting access to opportunities and rights.

From these stereotypes arise gender prejudices, which are negative attitudes or judgments that lead to discrimination, exclusion, or unequal treatment.

People who do not conform to gender stereotypes are often seen as "different" or "abnormal" by a society that expects behaviors, clothing, interests, or expressions to be clearly defined according to the sex assigned at birth.

EXAMPLES:

A boy who prefers dancing instead of playing football may become a target for mockery or exclusion.
A woman who does not want to be a mother or prioritizes her career may be judged as "selfish."
A non-binary person may face discomfort or rejection in spaces that only recognize male or female gender

3.3 GENDER DIVERSITY AND EQUAL TREATMENT

Gender stereotypes not only affect women and men but also people with diverse gender identities. These stereotypes limit the way people express themselves, act, or are accepted in society.

→ LGBTQI+PHOBIA

LGBTQI+phobia is the rejection or mistreatment of individuals who are part of the LGBTQI+ community (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people, intersex individuals, and more).

This rejection can take many forms: violence, mockery, exclusion, or unfair treatment. It is also a mindset that considers only heterosexuality (attraction between men and women) as "normal" or valid.
Although all forms of hatred towards LGBTQI+ people are related, each one has distinct characteristics:

- Homophobia, lesbophobia, and biphobia occur when someone rejects people who love or are attracted to individuals of the same sex or both sexes.

- Transphobia, on the other hand, is the rejection of people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, or who express their gender differently than what society expects.

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3.4 IMPACT OF GENDER PREJUDICES

Gender prejudices have a significant impact on both life decisions and the health of individuals, affecting their choices, emotional, and physical well-being.

IMPACT ON LIFE DECISIONS:

- Career choices: Prejudices limit professional options. For example, women are often pressured to choose professions associated with caregiving, while men face disapproval if they want to enter fields considered "feminine."
- Interpersonal relationships: Gender stereotypes influence relationships, such as expecting women to be submissive or men to be dominant, which can affect relationship dynamics and choices about who they associate with.

IMPACT ON MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH:

- Mental health: Gender stereotypes generate stress, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders by forcing people to conform to social expectations of their gender. Women who do not meet beauty standards, or men who do not meet masculinity standards, may experience low self-esteem and other emotional disorders.
- Physical health: Prejudices also affect how people take care of themselves. For example, men may avoid seeking help for emotional problems for fear of being perceived as weak.
- Gender-based violence: Prejudices also fuel domestic and gender violence, as traditional roles (such as female submission or male dominance) may lead to greater social tolerance for violence, severely affecting the physical and mental health of victims.

In summary, gender prejudices not only limit people's decisions and aspirations but also have negative effects on their health, both mental and physical, perpetuating cycles of discrimination and harm.

REFLECTION:

Learn to act without being guided by prejudices, questioning the ideas we were taught about genders and stereotypes.

Reflect on our own values and attitudes, to build a coexistence based on respect, empathy, and inclusion.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:

Diego is a 22-year-old young man with an intellectual disability. Since he was a child, he has been passionate about cooking and dreams of becoming a chef.

However, he often heard comments from family and friends who told him he "wasn't capable" of working in a professional kitchen due to his disability. Many thought he wouldn't be able to keep up with the pace or understand the complexities of a kitchen.

Despite the prejudice, Diego decided to enroll in a culinary school specialized for people with disabilities. There, despite the challenges he faced in learning certain techniques quickly, his dedication, patience, and passion for cooking helped him stand out among his peers. Diego also began working as a kitchen assistant in a local restaurant.

Throughout his career, Diego has not only learned to handle tasks in the kitchen but has also created an inclusive space for people with different abilities.

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3.5 GENDER EQUALITY IN SEXUAL RELATIONS

Gender equality in sexual relations means that all individuals, regardless of their gender, have the same right to freely decide, with mutual respect and consent. When equality exists, sexual decisions are made consciously, shared, and safely, which fosters healthy relationships and the well-being of everyone involved.

What does gender equality in sexual relations mean?

It means that all people, regardless of gender, have the same right to:

- Decide whether or not they want to have sex.
- Freely express their desires, doubts, or boundaries.
- Actively and equitably participate in decisions about care, pleasure, the use of contraceptives, or the right time to begin a sexual relationship.

This is only achieved if there is mutual respect, open communication, and clear consent.

3.6 GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Gender norms dictate how men and women should behave in society, especially in the context of romantic relationships. These norms are deeply rooted in stereotypes that perpetuate inequalities and unrealistic or harmful expectations.

Traditional masculinity:

Men are socialized to be dominant, rational, sexually active, providers, and to avoid showing vulnerability or emotions.

Control, jealousy, difficulty expressing affection in a healthy way.

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TRADITIONAL FEMININITY:

Women are socialized to be passive, emotional, submissive, dependent, and nurturing.

Tolerating abusive behaviors for fear of "failing" in the role of a partner or believing that they must sacrifice themselves for love.

RISKS WHEN THERE IS NO GENDER EQUALITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

In contexts where gender roles are rigid or there is a power imbalance (due to age, experience, or position), risks such as the following can arise:

- Sexual coercion (pressure to have sex without genuine consent).
- Sexual or emotional violence.
- Increased exposure to unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Negative impact on self-esteem and emotional well-being.

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4.GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS THE VIOLENCE THAT WOMEN EXPERIENCE SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

"Violence against women shall be understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women, and shall refer to all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Article 3 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

Where Can Gender-Based Violence Occur? Gender-based violence can happen in any space, including:

🏫 Schools or universities: between students, or even by teachers or staff.
🏠 At home: by parents, partners, or other family members.
🌆 Public spaces: streets, transportation, entertainment venues, etc.
🌐 Online and on social media: harassment, threats, sharing of intimate images without consent, and more.
🔎 It's important to recognize that gender-based violence is not always visible.
It can appear in the form of words, attitudes, or social norms that normalize control, inequality, or abuse.

Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Abuse: A Matter of Power, Not Desire

⚠️ False Belief:
"Gender-based violence or sexual abuse happens because the perpetrator couldn't control their sexual desire."

❗ The Truth Is:

Sexual abuse, rape, and intimate partner violence are not about passion, attraction, or lack of self-control.
These acts are actually:
Expressions of power, control, and domination.
Ways to impose the perpetrator's will through fear, force, or manipulation.
Strategies to assert authority, especially in societies with gender inequality.

RELEVANT DATA

The EU Survey on Gender-Based Violence provides detailed data collected between September 2020 and March 2024.

Approximately 30% of women have experienced physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives.
13% have suffered physical violence or threats without sexual violence, and 17% have experienced sexual violence.

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4.1 TYPES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

TYPES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	DEFINITION
PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE	Toda conducta que, directa o indirectamente, esté dirigida a ocasionar daño o sufrimiento físico sobre las mujeres y que pueda producir lesiones
ECONOMIC VIOLENCE	Toda conducta que atenta contra la integridad psíquica y emocional de las mujeres mediante amenazas, insultos, humillaciones, coacciones, menosprecio del valor personal o dignidad, exigencia de obediencia, aislamiento social, culpabilización y privación de libertad
SEXUAL VIOLENCE	Se produce en aquel tipo de situaciones en las que una mujer es forzada o coaccionada para llevar a cabo actividades sexuales en contra de su voluntad. No es necesario que exista penetración ni que se produzca el acto sexual
ECONOMIC VIOLENCE	Toda limitación, privación no justificada legalmente o discriminación en la disposición de los bienes, recursos patrimoniales o derechos económicos comprendidos en el ámbito de la convivencia de la pareja o en los casos de ruptura de la relación. Se incluyen situaciones en las que se obliga a la pareja a depender económicamente del agresor
SOCIAL VIOLENCE	Limitar, controlar e inducir a la pareja a su aislamiento social, separándola de familiares y amistades con la intención de alejarla de su entorno habitual y dejarla sin apoyos ni recursos.
DIGITAL OR CYBER VIOLENCE	Harassment, threats, sharing of intimate content without consent, and control through social media.
INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE	Denial of rights or negligent or discriminatory treatment by public institutions.
OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE	Dehumanizing treatment or invasive medical practices without consent during pregnancy, childbirth, or the postpartum period.

Alicante City Council & Government Delegation for Gender-Based Violence. (n.d.). Informative guide on violence against women.

IT IS ALSO CONSIDERED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

- Female genital mutilation or circumcision: A procedure that alters or damages female genitalia for non-medical reasons, a highly harmful practice and a violation of human rights.
- Child, early, or forced marriage: Unions where one or both individuals do not freely consent, or are minors, which hinders their development and freedom.

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4. 2 GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND DISABILITY

Research suggests that women with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence, emotional abuse, and sexual assault compared to women without disabilities.

- RESPONSE European project, funded by the Erasmus+ program, has conducted a study on gender-based violence and disability. The data confirms the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) against women with disabilities.

8 out of 10 women with disabilities who participated in the study have been victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

- According to the study "**Ojo al dato. Visibility of a hidden reality through data**: women, disability, and violence," in Spain, of Fundación ONCE concluye que:

40.4% of women with disabilities experience gender-based violence, compared to 32% of women without disabilities

→ DOBLE PERSPECTIVA DE GÉNERO Y DISCAPACIDAD

As emphasized throughout this training, women with disabilities face double discrimination: for being women and for having a disability. This intersection places them in a particularly vulnerable situation, exposing them to higher levels of social exclusion, economic dependence, and especially, gender-based violence.

The combined effects of sexism and ableism often lead to limited access to support services, education, and employment opportunities, making it even more difficult for them to seek help or leave abusive situations. Therefore, any comprehensive approach to gender equality and violence prevention must take into account the specific needs and rights of women with disabilities.

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4.3 ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTIES FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

- Lack of accessibility to services
- Stigmatization and discrimination:
- Lack of emotional and psychological support
- Limited access to education sexual and relationships
- Intersection of multiple discriminations:
- Limited participation in decision-making

- Women with certain types of disabilities, especially those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, often referred to as "invisible disabilities," face particular challenges. Since their disabilities are not easily visible, they often have to explain and justify their condition, which complicates access to necessary accommodations and understanding of their situation.

Additionally, a common barrier for these women is the lack of credibility of their accounts. This forces them to recount their experiences repeatedly, which can lead to re-victimization. This repeated process of reliving traumatic experiences causes significant suffering and often discourages victims from reporting or proceeding with the necessary legal procedures.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:

Ana has a psychosocial disability and, due to her condition, often experiences difficulties in communicating and expressing her emotions clearly. One day, Ana was a victim of abuse at her workplace by a colleague, but when she decided to share her experience with her supervisor, she was ignored.

She was told that she was "probably confused due to her disability" and that it was not possible for what she was mentioning to have happened.

This not only invalidated her experience but also left her without the necessary support, leading to emotional re-victimization.

DIFFICULTIES FOR PROFESSIONALS AND INSTITUTIONS

- Lack of training, tools, and skills for professionals on gender-based violence against women with disabilities

- Scarcity of adapted materials for people with disabilities, specifically for women, regarding sexuality, relationships, and gender-based violence.
- Lack of universal accessibility of services and resources related to gender-based violencemen with disabilities, making it difficult for them to seek help and support.

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4.4 KEY STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ABOUT VIOLENCE AND PROMOTING SAFETY

1. RECOGNIZE ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Identify Red Flags: Teach students to recognize signs of abuse in relationships, which may include controlling behavior, emotional manipulation, isolation from friends and family, physical harm, or threats.

2. RECOGNIZING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF RELATIONSHIPS

- Understanding Gender Violence: Educate about the different forms of gender-based violence
- Intersectionality: Highlight how gender violence is affected by factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation.
- Respect for Consent: Teach the importance of consent in all interactions

3. HOW TO ASK FOR HELP FROM A TRUSTED ADULT

- **Use clear and accessible language.** Use simple, direct, and unambiguous language to explain what violence is (emotional, physical, verbal, etc.) and why it is wrong.
- **Provide accessible resources.** Offer materials such as pictograms, videos with sign language interpretation, or easy-to-read formats, depending on individual needs.
- **Use concrete examples.** Present real or simulated everyday situations that they can relate to. Use images, role-plays, or short videos to illustrate.
- **Promote self-esteem.** Reinforce self-worth, the right to be respected, and the right to feel well. Emphasize that everyone deserves safe and healthy relationships.
- **Validate their emotions.** Encourage them to express how they feel in different situations and let them know their emotions are valid and important.
- **Break harmful myths.** Talk about common myths related to love and dependency, such as "jealousy means love" or "I'll never find anyone else."
- **Identify trusted adults.** Create lists or visual maps of people they can go to for help (family members, teachers, support professionals).
- **Practice what to say.** Rehearse simple phrases they can use to ask for help, like "I need to talk," "Someone is treating me badly," or "I don't feel safe."
- **Use role-playing.** Act out conversations where they tell a trusted adult about a situation of abuse. This builds confidence to speak up in real life.
- **Create a personalized safety plan.** Help them develop a simple safety plan: steps to take, who to call, and where to go if they ever need to leave a dangerous situation.

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5. ISAWP PROJECT TEACHING MATERIALS : Inclusive Sexuality: A World of Possibilities

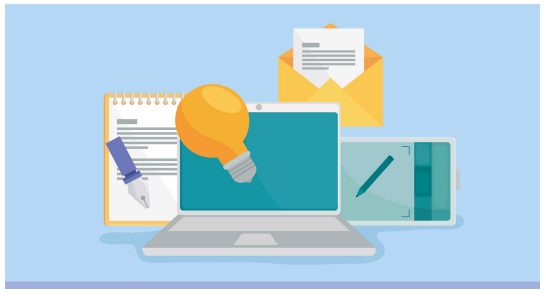
After the theoretical explanations, we now present the teaching materials developed within the framework of the ISAWP project: Inclusive Sexuality: A World of Possibilities. These materials will serve as the foundation for delivering the workshop.

Affective-Sexual Education for Young People with Disabilities which will be held in each of the project's partner countries.

These materials have been created specifically for the ISAWP project, following the key concepts recommended by UNESCO, and taking into account the necessary adaptations to ensure accessibility and suitability for the target group.

The teaching materials for Key Concept 3 have been developed by Gençlik Fırsatları Derneği (GFD) , partner in the ISAWP project.

You can find the materials in "Unit 5 in Classroom".



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