

2 **Male Violence: Definitions, Forms and Spheres**

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2.1 **Definitions**

In order to carry out research on violence against women, we must first overcome certain obstacles.¹ These involve choosing a topic, approach and focus, which are aspects shared by all research, and defining the terms used in this field, starting with violence against women itself. In this regard, we must be able to answer two questions:

- **What is violence against women?** We need to know its nature, how it manifests, and who sustains and justifies it.
- **What should we call it?** Various terms are used in documents, laws and studies: domestic violence, gender-based violence, male violence, violence against women, and so on.

1 The Catalan and Spanish versions of this guide often refer to male violence in the plural, as *violències masclistes* and *violències machistas*, respectively, to denote the many types of violence and their multifactor causes. However, this is not the case in English, as the plural form is not widely accepted and the singular is understood to fulfill this function.

In other words, we must ensure from the outset that we understand these aspects and assimilate them into our system of thought and discourse, so that there is no room for confusion or doubt about our knowledge of the topic, approach and focus of our research, nor about our grasp of the field of study or the specific academic language used in it. This can be applied to any scientific subject to determine what is being studied and what it should be called. However, the topic at hand must also contend with widespread ignorance and confusion, both of which are sustained by patriarchal discourses that systematically question the truthfulness and justification of the harm, effects and even existence (by **denialists**) of violence against women.

The issue of having multiple concepts associated with violence against women initially arose from the difficult task of acknowledging its existence and, thus, defining it. As a result, the terms '**domestic violence**', '**gender-based violence**' and '**male violence**' are often **misused** depending largely on how elaborate discourse on this type of violence is in a given society and on the development of laws within different legislative frameworks. However, we must embrace the fact that these terms **are not equivalent or synonymous** and should not be alternated in discourse as a strategy to avoid repeating the same expressions.

This confusion has two clear causes: firstly, the fact that the terms have evolved over time, replacing each other as progress has been made in defining the nature of violence against women; and, secondly, the reluctance of patriarchal societies to acknowledge this violence as a phenomenon that differs from other stipulated forms of violence. Hence, in some social contexts, what in the 1960s was defined as 'domestic violence' was later recognised as 'gender-based violence' and then, in the twenty-first century, as 'male violence'. In the same way, the forms that this violence takes and the spheres in which it occurs are continually being revised.

Violence against women is aimed at sustaining and reproducing the patriarchal model and order, supporting unequal power relations, the superiority of hegemonic masculinity and, consequently, the subordination and control of women. If we recognise patriarchy as a system built upon these power relations, we will see that its effects involve all members of society – both women and men – and all spheres of life. Accordingly, all human relations in male-dominated societies are understood to be conditioned by this system of gender-based privilege, which inevitably creates a systemic imbalance of power: the authority of the universal male and the subordination of the complementary female.

The UN defines violence against women as follows:

Violence against women and girls is defined as any act of *gender-based* violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical,

sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Violence against women and girls encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family or within the general community, and perpetrated or condoned by the State [emphasis added].²

The key to this definition is the modifier ‘gender-based’, which is the idea that led the term ‘domestic violence’ to evolve into ‘gender-based violence’. Thus, ‘domestic violence’ has remained as a concept that situates violence in a particular setting but has nothing to do with the gender of the people involved in the system of violence. It is violence that takes place in the home, especially between family members.

Meanwhile, the UN’s definition of ‘gender-based violence’ is worded as follows:

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. While women and girls suffer disproportionately from GBV, men and boys can also be targeted. The term is also sometimes used to describe targeted violence against LGBTIQ+ populations, when referencing violence related to norms of masculinity/femininity and/or gender norms.³

As it were, this type of violence can be shared with groups of people other than women and girls. This is because its definition relies on the fact that some violence is committed as a result of gender differences, which are socially constructed. However, it does not single out the violence suffered by women because of their womanhood. In other words, gender-based violence is perpetrated against an individual on the basis of their sex or gender, whereas male violence is perpetrated by men against women.

Many organic laws use ‘gender-based violence’ to refer to violence against women. Others, meanwhile, have heeded feminist demands and criticisms, adopting the term ‘male violence’ to designate violence that is perpetrated against women because they are women,

² <https://www.unwomen.org/es/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>.

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>.

underpinned by patriarchal structures and, therefore, protected by a system of power relations in which men hold power over women. It is a concept that recognises women's rights as **human rights** and is distinct from other stipulated forms of violence. Thus, 'male violence' denotes how male chauvinism drives and protects men's behaviour and abuse of power over women.

Male violence is classified as systemic in the sense expressed by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2009). This modifier takes into account the effects of violence committed by a system that favours certain social groups beyond the interaction between perpetrator and victim. Different forms of male violence have also been defined, namely physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, sexual abuse, economic violence, digital violence, institutional violence, obstetric violence, second-order violence, vicarious violence, structural violence and symbolic violence. With regard to the spheres in which this violence occurs, intimate partner violence, family violence, workplace violence, social violence and community violence are those generally identified. Debate on the definition and categorisation of this phenomenon is still ongoing for two reasons: firstly, because the nature of these forms of violence and the spheres of life in which they take place change over time and vary between social, historical and cultural contexts; and secondly, because the debate requires a social agreement built on a theoretical framework that is still under discussion.

Having clarified the answer to the two questions above regarding violence against women, we will briefly review the forms that this violence takes. It should be noted that these types of violence do not usually occur separately, but rather overlap. For our review, we will avoid entering into theoretical debates, as this is not the purpose of this guide, and we will refer instead to the main established definitions.

2.2 Forms and Spheres of Male Violence

In Catalonia, Law 5/2008 on the right of women to eradicate male violence advanced theoretical considerations on violence against women at the time. This descriptive law enacted by the Government of Catalonia lays down legislation on victim care, awareness-raising and the prevention of male violence. As a pioneering law in Europe, it states that the violence experienced by women for being women is based on the principles of patriarchy, which justifies and protects a form of masculinity that can be considered as aggressive, controlling and subordinating. That is, male chauvinism. In addition to establishing what constitutes male violence, defining it and describing its nature, the law sets out the spheres in which it occurs and the forms it takes, in order to make the instruments and strategies for its eradication

more effective. In the same way, categorising male violence improves the tools for prevention and victim care.

We are therefore justified in our decision to use the categorised forms of male violence set out in this law, which has also defined and validated the feminist movement.⁴ That being said, other international laws and the analyses and definitions put forth by feminist critics may also be taken into account.

Beyond this law, the above text also made reference to symbolic and structural violence. These two terms do not denote types of male violence, *per se*, but rather define its nature. It was Bourdieu who, in *Distinction* ([1996] 2012), referred to symbolic violence as that which has the role of disciplining society according to the social position of each member of the hierarchy and is enshrined in the unconscious or tacit acts and modes through which social and cultural dominance is exercised. In this way, symbolic violence is based on the discrimination and denigration of identities that deviate from hegemonic power, in order to ensure the continuity of this power. Structural violence, as described by Johan Galtung (1969), is defined as violence that is supported by a social structure, harms a person or social group and prevents them from achieving what they need or even from exercising their individual and collective rights. These are therefore two essentially sociological terms that seek to determine how hierarchy plays a role in the equation of violence associated with interactions between dominant, oppressive or privileged subjects and the dominated, oppressed or subaltern. With respect to the domains in which this violence occurs, we find, among others, racism, classism and sexism.

According to Law 17/2020, male violence can be perpetrated on a one-off or repeated basis in any of the following **forms**:

- a. Physical violence
- b. Psychological violence
- c. Sexual violence
- d. Obstetric violence and violation of sexual and reproductive rights
- e. Economic violence
- f. Digital violence
- g. Second-order violence
- h. Vicarious violence

Furthermore, according to the law, the various forms of male violence “are also considered as violence against women when they are committed with the threat or infliction of physical or psychological

⁴ Law 5/2008 of 24 April was revised in Law 17/2020 of 22 December to add new forms of violence against women. For a definition of the forms and spheres of male violence, see <https://portaldogc.gencat.cat/utillsEADOP/PDF/8303/1828756.pdf> (in Catalan).

violence against women's affective environment, especially against their children or other family members, with the intention of inflicting harm on the women involved".

The following **spheres** of male violence are stipulated:

- a. Intimate partner violence
- b. Family violence
- c. Workplace violence
- d. Social or community violence
- e. Online violence
- f. Institutional violence
- g. Violence in women's political or public life
- h. School violence
- i. Any other similar forms of violence that harm or threaten women's dignity, integrity or freedom

Of course, this law does not contravene international organisations, but it does update some of their core documents, such as the UN's *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* of 23 April 1994.

As we have noted above, the law can be consulted to understand the nature of each of these types of violence. However, we believe that it may be helpful to elaborate here on some of the key concepts which may be confusing due to their complexity or novelty. Therefore, we will take a closer look at obstetric violence, digital violence, second-order violence and vicarious violence.

With regard to obstetric violence, the law says: "[obstetric violence] involves preventing or hindering access to truthful information required to make independent and informed decisions". In effect, it refers to manipulating or impeding the exercise of women's rights in relation to their sexual and reproductive health, and has implications for the conditions in which the entire reproductive process takes place. It also refers to "gynaecological and obstetric practices that do not respect women's decisions, bodies, health and emotional processes". The impact of such violence can be physical as well as psychological and emotional. Having this type of violence specified has marked an achievement in the observation of women's bodies as individual and inviolable spaces that belong to them.

Given its current relevance and increasing intensity, it is important to point out what digital violence is. According to the law,

[digital violence] includes online acts of male violence and misogyny committed, instigated, escalated or aggravated partly or entirely through the use of information and communication technologies, social media platforms, websites or forums, email and instant messaging systems, and other similar means that affect women's dignity and rights.

In addition to causing psychological, emotional and even physical harm, such violence reinforces gender stereotypes and has serious implications for women's dignity, reputation, privacy and freedom, all of which can hamper victims' freedom of expression and public and political representation.

Second-order violence and vicarious violence can be confused as each involves third parties other than the victim and perpetrator in its own way. To understand them properly, we must start with the definition of vicarious violence, which is violence against children "with the aim of causing psychological harm to the mother". Nowadays, these children are also considered victims of male violence. Second-order violence, on the other hand, is perpetrated against the people who support the victims of male violence, hindering its prevention and detection as well as the care and recovery of the victims.

The point here is to highlight the complex and varied nature of male violence and to guide the interests of those wishing to analyse its symbolic representations in literature or other artistic works. Different forms of violence are often interwoven in such creations, as violence against women tends to be perpetrated in multiple ways. Moreover, violent attitudes and indeed the effects of these attitudes can be hard to identify and recognise. It is therefore necessary to understand their forms and nature, lest one's literary analysis be based on a paradigm that is incomplete or misguided.

The content of this section is intended as a guideline for the theoretical framework of any research on the analysis of literary works from a gender perspective.

