

Chapter 12: Male Inferiority and Gender-Based Violence

THE BIBLE OF MALE INFERIORITY

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a deeply entrenched issue globally, manifesting in various forms—domestic abuse, sexual assault, female genital mutilation, and honor killings, among others. While much attention has been placed on addressing the systemic inequalities that perpetuate such violence, the psychological roots of GBV have often been overlooked. To truly understand the underlying causes of gender-based violence, we must examine the emotional insecurities that fuel these behaviors. At the heart of this issue lies male inferiority, a complex psychological state wherein men, driven by feelings of inadequacy, seek to assert dominance and control over women.

Male inferiority is not just a byproduct of patriarchal systems; it is the very force that sustains these systems. Men, who are conditioned from an early age to believe that their value lies in their ability to control others—particularly women—often respond to feelings of powerlessness or vulnerability by resorting to violence. Whether in the form of domestic abuse, rape, or murder, gender-based violence is frequently a reflection of the fear and insecurity that many men feel when their dominance is threatened.

Patriarchal societies reinforce these harmful notions by teaching men that their worth is tied to their ability to assert dominance, while any display of vulnerability or emotion is a sign of weakness. In cultures where this belief system is deeply ingrained, gender-based violence becomes normalized—seen not as a violation of human rights, but as an acceptable means for men to reassert control. To effectively address GBV, we must therefore confront the psychological roots of male dominance—particularly the ways in which male inferiority manifests as aggression and violence.

This chapter will explore the intricate relationship between male inferiority and gender-based violence, examining how feelings of inadequacy among men lead to toxic behaviors that perpetuate violence. From the rampant domestic violence in countries like Papua New Guinea, where cultural practices reinforce male dominance, to the practice of honor killings in regions like South Asia and the Middle East, we will investigate how gender-based violence is deeply connected to male efforts to maintain control and reclaim power in situations where they feel threatened. Through this exploration, it becomes clear that addressing male inferiority is not just crucial for gender equality, but for the eradication of violence against women globally.

The Psychological Roots of Male Inferiority and Violence

At the core of male inferiority is the notion that men must continuously assert their dominance to maintain their social standing and prove their worth. In many cultures, masculinity is constructed around ideas of strength, control, and invulnerability—qualities that are often upheld through aggression and violence. Men are taught that expressing emotions like fear, sadness, or insecurity is not only undesirable but fundamentally incompatible with the image of a "real man." This social conditioning places men in a psychological bind: they are expected to be stoic and powerful, yet their internal sense of inadequacy constantly threatens to undermine this image.

When men perceive their dominance to be at risk—whether in the context of a romantic relationship, family dynamics, or workplace interactions—they may resort to aggression as a means of reasserting their control. This behavior is driven not by inherent cruelty or a natural propensity for violence but by the fear of losing power. The more men feel disempowered or emasculated, the more likely they are to react violently in order to restore their sense of control.

This phenomenon can be observed in various forms of gender-based violence, particularly in cases of domestic violence, where men who feel their authority is being questioned or undermined by their partner often respond with physical abuse. Research has shown that men who experience feelings of failure—whether in terms of financial instability, loss of employment, or social isolation—are more likely to engage in violent behavior toward their partners. The violence serves as a way to "reclaim" the power and authority they feel they have lost in other areas of their life.

In many patriarchal societies, this dynamic is further reinforced by cultural norms that position men as the head of the household and women as subordinates. Men are socialized to believe that their role as the protector and provider is intrinsic to their identity, and any threat to this role is met with hostility. For example, in communities where women begin to challenge traditional gender roles—by seeking education, employment, or financial independence—men may react violently as a way to reassert their dominance and authority.

This cycle of male inferiority and gender-based violence is not limited to domestic settings. It is pervasive in workplaces, public spaces, and social interactions, where men who feel their status is being challenged often resort to forms of sexual harassment, intimidation, or violence to regain control. In each case, the root cause of the violence is the same: men, driven by feelings of insecurity or inferiority, use violence as a way to assert dominance and prove their worth.

The pervasive nature of toxic masculinity ensures that these patterns of violence are passed down from generation to generation. Boys who grow up in environments where male dominance is celebrated and violence is normalized often adopt these behaviors themselves. They learn that being a man means being in control, and that violence is an acceptable means of maintaining that control. This creates a cycle of violence that perpetuates the harmful dynamics of male inferiority, ensuring that each new generation of men is conditioned to uphold the same toxic standards of masculinity.

Breaking this cycle requires a radical shift in the way we understand masculinity and power. It requires challenging the notion that men's worth is tied to their ability to control others and replacing this with a healthier, more empathetic understanding of manhood—one that allows for the expression of vulnerability, emotional complexity, and cooperation. Only by addressing the psychological roots of male inferiority can we begin to dismantle the systems of violence that it perpetuates.

Papua New Guinea: A Case of Extreme Domestic Violence

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), the intersection of cultural practices, patriarchal beliefs, and male inferiority has created one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world. According to studies, approximately two-thirds of women in PNG have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partners, and many of these acts of violence are rooted in cultural beliefs about male ownership of women. The situation in PNG offers a stark example of how male inferiority, when combined with cultural traditions that emphasize male dominance, can lead to some of the most extreme forms of gender-based violence.

At the heart of domestic violence in PNG is the tradition of bride price, a cultural practice in which a man's family pays a sum of money or goods to the woman's family in exchange for her hand in marriage. This transaction often leads men to believe that they have purchased ownership of their wives, viewing them as property rather than as equal partners. When women do not conform to the expectations set by their husbands—whether by challenging their authority, refusing sexual advances, or failing to perform domestic duties—men often resort to violence as a way to reassert control.

For many men in PNG, violence becomes a tool of dominance, a way to compensate for feelings of powerlessness or inadequacy. Men who feel disrespected or emasculated by their wives often turn to physical violence as a way to reassert their authority and reinforce the gender hierarchy. This dynamic is further exacerbated by the social stigma surrounding domestic violence in PNG, where women who report abuse are often ostracized by their communities or blamed for provoking their husbands' aggression.

Even though the Family Protection Act was passed in PNG in 2013, which criminalized domestic violence and sought to provide legal recourse for victims, enforcement of this law remains weak. Many police officers and legal authorities are unwilling to intervene in what is still widely considered a private matter between husband and wife. This culture of impunity allows the cycle of violence to continue, and men, emboldened by the lack of accountability, feel justified in using physical aggression to maintain their dominance.

The case of Papua New Guinea illustrates how cultural practices like bride price, when coupled with the male inferiority complex, create an environment where gender-based violence is not only tolerated but often expected. Men who feel their masculinity is threatened, or who believe their wives are stepping out of line, view violence as an acceptable response, justified by both cultural tradition and the psychological need to reassert their control. In such a setting, male inferiority fuels the perpetuation of gender-based violence, making it incredibly difficult to break the cycle without addressing both the cultural roots and the emotional insecurities at play.

The solution to this deeply entrenched issue in PNG, and in similar cultural contexts, requires more than just legal reform. While laws are important, they are not enough to dismantle the psychological and cultural structures that uphold male dominance. What is needed is a cultural shift that challenges the traditional notions of ownership and control in relationships, combined with efforts to redefine masculinity in ways that allow men to express vulnerability without resorting to violence. Only by addressing the root causes of male inferiority can we begin to reduce the rates of gender-based violence in PNG and beyond.

Honor Killings: A Religious and Cultural Perspective

While domestic violence in places like Papua New Guinea often stems from cultural practices that reinforce male ownership of women, in other parts of the world, the issue of honor killings represents another tragic and violent expression of male inferiority. Honor killings are a form of gender-based violence where women are murdered by their male relatives—fathers, brothers, or husbands—because they are perceived to have brought shame or dishonor to the family. This perceived dishonor often revolves around issues of sexual autonomy, such as a woman choosing her own romantic partner, engaging in premarital sex, or defying her family's wishes in marriage arrangements.

Honor killings occur most frequently in societies with strong patriarchal traditions that place a high value on female chastity and obedience. These societies often uphold the belief that a woman's behavior reflects on the honor of her male relatives, and any perceived deviation from accepted norms of femininity is seen as an affront to male authority. This link between female behavior and male honor creates a culture where men feel

obligated to control the women in their lives, and when they perceive that control to be slipping, they resort to extreme violence to restore it.

At the heart of honor killings is the same psychological driver that fuels other forms of gender-based violence: male inferiority. Men who feel that their status or reputation has been diminished by a woman's behavior—whether real or imagined—often react violently in order to reclaim their authority. This violence is a response to the fear and insecurity that men experience when they feel their control is slipping. In patriarchal cultures where men's worth is tied to their ability to regulate the behavior of women, any perceived loss of control is experienced as a threat to their masculinity. This threat triggers feelings of inadequacy, which are then projected outward in the form of violence.

The practice of honor killings is especially troubling because it is often justified through a misinterpretation of religious beliefs. In many cases, perpetrators of honor killings cite religious or cultural values as justification for their actions, even though no major religion explicitly condones such violence. Instead, these killings are the result of patriarchal customs that have co-opted religious traditions to enforce male control over women. In this context, the murder of women becomes a means of reasserting male dominance, cloaked in the language of honor and virtue.

For instance, in parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, honor killings continue to be practiced, even though they are widely condemned by human rights organizations and, in many cases, are illegal. The legal systems in these regions often offer leniency to the perpetrators of honor killings, framing them as crimes of passion or cultural practices that are difficult to legislate against. This legal complicity allows the practice to persist, with thousands of women being murdered each year in the name of family honor.

Honor killings serve as a particularly stark reminder of how male inferiority manifests itself in different cultural contexts. In societies where men's control over women is seen as a marker of status and reputation, any challenge to that control is met with violent retribution. Men who feel that they have lost honor because of a woman's actions often see murder as the only way to regain their standing within the community. This is a clear example of how insecurity and inferiority drive extreme violence, and how cultural norms can exacerbate these psychological dynamics.

To effectively combat honor killings, it is not enough to simply legislate against them. While legal reforms are important, they must be accompanied by efforts to change the underlying cultural beliefs that tie male honor to the control of women. This means challenging the idea that women's behavior is a reflection of male status, and promoting a more equitable view of gender relations where men do not feel the need to assert dominance

through violence. By addressing the psychological roots of male inferiority, societies can begin to dismantle the cultural systems that allow honor killings to continue.

Confronting Male Inferiority to End Gender-Based Violence

At the heart of gender-based violence lies a psychological force that has driven much of human history's oppression and aggression: male inferiority. As we've explored in the cases of Papua New Guinea and honor killings, the pervasive issue of gender-based violence stems from men's deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and the societal pressure to assert dominance in response to perceived loss of control. These violent behaviors, often viewed through the lens of culture, religion, or patriarchal systems, are ultimately manifestations of insecurity, where men feel compelled to use aggression to reinforce their status and authority.

The problem of male inferiority is not simply an individual issue; it is embedded in the social and cultural structures that uphold patriarchy. From the traditions of bride price in Papua New Guinea, which reinforces the idea that men own women, to the misguided notions of honor in South Asia and the Middle East, which justify the murder of women in the name of family reputation, these practices are all underpinned by the belief that men must control women to maintain their value. When men feel their dominance is threatened—whether in personal relationships or within the broader social order—they often resort to violence as a means of reasserting power.

For feminist movements to succeed in truly addressing gender-based violence, they must recognize that this violence is not simply the product of patriarchal systems but is fueled by a psychological dynamic rooted in male inferiority. While it is essential to fight for legal reforms, social equality, and economic empowerment for women, these efforts must be paired with a deeper exploration of the emotional drivers that lead men to commit violent acts. Without addressing the insecurities that lie at the core of male dominance, efforts to end gender-based violence will remain incomplete, treating only the symptoms of the problem without tackling the root cause.

This means that addressing male inferiority should be a central focus of future efforts to combat gender-based violence. Programs aimed at preventing domestic violence, for example, must go beyond simply punishing the perpetrators or providing support for victims. These programs should also work to challenge toxic notions of masculinity, providing men with the tools to express their vulnerability and manage their emotions without resorting to violence. This could involve creating spaces for emotional education, where men are encouraged to explore their feelings of inadequacy and understand that violence is not a solution to their problems.

Furthermore, cultural change is crucial to ending practices like honor killings. This will require a reframing of traditional gender roles, particularly in communities where men's control over women is seen as central to their identity and honor. By promoting an alternative vision of masculinity—one that values empathy, equality, and emotional intelligence—societies can begin to dismantle the cultural systems that perpetuate male dominance.

While these changes may seem difficult, they are not impossible. In many communities, activists and reformers are already working to challenge harmful cultural norms and promote gender equality. In Papua New Guinea, for example, there are efforts underway to address the cultural roots of domestic violence by working with local leaders and communities to redefine masculinity and promote non-violent conflict resolution. Similarly, in countries where honor killings are prevalent, there are growing movements that seek to challenge the idea that women's behavior should dictate men's status. These movements are critical to dismantling the patriarchal structures that reinforce male inferiority and gender-based violence.

Ultimately, to end gender-based violence, we must confront the emotional and psychological foundations of patriarchy. Male inferiority is a driving force behind the toxic behaviors that lead to violence, and without addressing this dynamic, efforts to achieve gender equality will remain incomplete. The solution lies not only in changing laws and policies but in fostering a cultural and emotional transformation—one where men no longer feel the need to assert dominance to prove their worth, and where women are free from the fear of violence and oppression.

The Fifth Wave of feminism, as we've discussed in previous chapters, is crucial to this transformation. It must incorporate a focus on the psychological healing of men, as well as the empowerment of women, to create a world where gender-based violence is no longer a fact of life. By challenging male inferiority and promoting a more emotionally healthy version of masculinity, we can begin to dismantle the cycles of violence that have persisted for centuries. Only by addressing both the internal emotional dynamics and the external structures of patriarchy can we hope to create a more just, equitable, and peaceful world.