GBV against climate change activists

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Query: Assess whether GBV is used to silence or intimidate climate change activists and environmental human rights defenders. If so, provide information on prevalence and significant trends. Detail the impact this has on climate change activism. Investigate whether any work has been done to address this, and assess levels of success

Purpose: To inform FCDO's narrative on the issue and to guide our external and internal influencing strategy.

1. Overview

As the climate crisis escalates, there are growing concerns about reports of gender-based violence (GBV) being used as a way to silence those at the forefront of speaking out and defending the planet. This report summarises the evidence exploring the prevalence of GBV against climate change activists and environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs), its impact on climate and environmental activism, and efforts to address GBV in this context. It is based on rapid desk-based research (see Annex 1 for methodology).

Distinguishing between climate change activists and environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs)

This review found no commonly agreed definition of a "climate change activist". However, taking from environmental organisations and academics, we define climate activists as *individuals or groups focused on pressurising governments and industry to take action to safeguard a liveable future by addressing bad and unjust outcomes caused by anthropogenic global warming.*[1]

The UN defines EHRDs as *"individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna*".[2]

Climate change activists and EHRDs are united by a commitment to: 1) defend human rights threatened by climate breakdown and environmental degradation; and 2) protect specific environments and the planet to ensure it is habitable for future generations. In many cases, there is fluidity between these types of activism, with individuals' work fitting under both definitions.

In general, climate change activists and EHRDs work at different levels. Climate change activists tend to focus on global warming and its impact on the planet as a whole, often lobbying at the international level. EHRDs tend to focus on specific environments, working at the local and national levels to stop environmental destruction.

In both cases, climate change activists and EHRDs are at risk of GBV being used as a method to silence their voices. There is increasing international recognition of the risk that violence poses to the work of EHRDs. On 21st March 2019, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution, recognising the importance of EHRDs and calling for their protection. Specifically, it calls for protection mechanisms to reflect the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women EHRDs of all ages and their risk to GBV.[3] Similar legislation has not been passed to protect climate change activists from this violence.

Summary of key findings:

GBV is used as a tactic to silence climate change activists and EHRDs. It is used by powerful actors, including transnational fossil fuel, extractive, agribusiness and financial institutions, as a tactic to undermine the credibility of climate change activists and EHRDs, suppress their voices, dismantle their status within their communities, and discourage them and others for continuing this work.[4] It is also used by intimate partners, families and communities as retaliation against climate change activists and EHRDs for challenging existing gender norms through their activism and leadership.[5]

Women and girls who speak out about climate change are often at elevated risk of GBV when they face multiple systems of discrimination that intersect with sexism and misogyny, such as racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, religious bigotry and sectarianism. For example, nearly two-thirds of the women EHRDs killed in 2021 were indigenous women, who often experience explicit racism as part of the violence committed against them.[6] In addition, online harassment campaigns against Greta Thunberg, a girl activist with Asperger's Syndrome, involved attacks related to her age and mental capacity in an attempt to undermine her activism.[7]

Types of GBV perpetrated against climate activists and EHRDs are multiple. These include threats of violence or death, killings, online harassment and abuse, disinformation and smear campaigns, non-partner sexual violence, community violence and intimate partner or family violence.

Box 1. Key Statistics on GBV against Climate Activists and EHRDs

Threats of violence or death: A global analysis of GBV against women EHRDs found that some face weeks or even years of death threats aimed to end their work challenging corporations.[8]

Killings: Latin America is considered one of the most dangerous places to be an environmental activist, home to 88% of the 177 activists murdered in 2022.[9]

Online harassment and abuse: A 2023 Global Witness survey of 468 climate scientists (32% of whom were women) found that 40% had experienced online abuse and harassment related to their work, rising to 49% for those who had published more than ten journal articles, and again to 73% for those who appeared at least once a month in the media.[10] In 34% of cases where women scientists had experienced online abuse and harassment, their sex or gender had been targeted.

Disinformation and smear campaigns: An International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) report on women EHRDs highlights that they are often subjected to smear campaigns that label them as bad mothers and wives, spread rumours about extramarital affairs, and dismiss them as genuine leaders because of their gender. [11]

Non-partner sexual violence: Anecdotal evidence provides examples of where women EHRDs have been attacked with sexual violence during their activism, primarily by armed groups and security forces. For example, one report highlights that soldiers raped, beat and killed members of the Escravos Women's Coalition (EWC), during a blockade of oil terminals in Nigeria.[12]

Community violence: There is limited data available on community violence against women and girl climate and environmental activists. However, multiple reports highlight that through challenging social expectations about how a woman should behave, activists are at greater risk of violence from their communities, especially highly patriarchal ones.[13]

Intimate partner and family violence: There is no data related to intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence. However, an IUCN report highlights that when environmental activism is seen as defying sociocultural gender norms, hostility and violence can stem from within the family.[14] This is echoed by the experiences of women and girl activists beyond the climate and environmental activism space.[15]

The impact of GBV perpetrated against climate activists and EHRDs is significant and can have detrimental effects on their continued activism. GBV can cause ostracisation and rejection from family and communities,[16] increased fears of safety,[17] a loss of joy and productivity in their work,[18] and health-related issues including depression and anxiety. These consequences can have significant impacts on climate and environmental activism, leading women and girl activists to step away from their activism for periods of time, self-censor in certain spaces such as in their communities or online,[19] and in the most extreme cases, leave activism entirely.

This evidence review found a few initiatives focused on addressing GBV in relation to climate change activists and EHRDs but could not find evidence of impact. These initiatives include: 1) accompaniment of women EHRDs by international human rights observers; 2) social norms change initiatives; 3) capacity building of public officers; and 4) regional advocacy efforts.

Gaps in evidence:

- **There is limited prevalence data available on GBV against climate change activists and EHRDs.** This evidence review has relied primarily on a few surveys either focused on climate change activists in the Global North or focused on human rights defenders, including but not limited to EHRDs globally. It has also relied on anecdotal evidence from interviews with climate change activists and EHRDs. In many cases, where there is prevalence data on EHRDs, this data is not disaggregated by gender.[20] In addition, much of the prevalence data tends to focus on fatal attacks rather than other forms of non-fatal violence such as sexual violence, IPV, and smear campaigns.
- **Limited data exists on the impact of GBV on climate change activists and EHRDs and the consequences of this for their activism.** This evidence review has relied primarily on anecdotal evidence from interviews with activists and defenders.
- **There are very few examples of initiatives focused on addressing GBV climate change activists and EHRDs and no impact evaluations on existing initiatives.** A promising set of grants awarded in 2023 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (ICUN) are focused on supporting women and girl climate change activists and EHRDs to prevent and respond to GBV. These projects have not yet published results, but they may be forthcoming.

2. GBV as a tactic to silence and intimidate climate change activists and EHRDs

GBV is used as a way to silence and intimidate climate change activists and EHRDs globally. While there is limited prevalence data on the use of GBV against climate change activists and EHRDs, there is extensive anecdotal evidence from interviews with activists and defenders globally. Reports highlight that violence against women and girl climate change activists and EHRDs is likely to be severely underestimated.[21] This is due to underreporting of incidents of violent retaliation.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that women and girl climate change activists and EHRDs living in patriarchal communities face similar risks of violence as their male counterparts when they challenge powerful stakeholders with vested interests such as multi-national corporations and governments. In addition, by challenging social expectations about how women should behave through their activism, they face additional risks of violence from families and communities.[22] This reflects trends seen in other types of activism where women and girls are engaged, such as political activism and activism around women's rights including access to sexual and reproductive health services and education, among others.[23]

> *"When they threaten me, they say that they will kill me, but before they kill me, they will rape me."*
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> Lolita Chávez, women environmental human rights defender from Guatemala

Violence against climate change activists and EHRDs is highly gendered and often intersects with other forms of discrimination. Perpetrators often leverage traditional gender norms to undermine women's leadership, reinforce social perceptions of them as "inferior", and increase the risk of their ostracisation from families and communities. Violence against women activists from indigenous backgrounds is often explicitly racist[24], while violence against women activists with disabilities is often ablest as well.[25] In addition, young climate activists face specific risks of abuse linked to their age from those who feel children "don't have the right" to engage in climate activism that challenges adult policy and decision-makers.[26] While this evidence review found no examples of how diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) might increase the risk of violence against climate activists and EHRDs, given the risk of violence that those with diverse SOGIESC face in other forms of activism, it is likely that those fighting for climate justice are at increased risk as well.[27] Examples of violence against women and girl activists include:

Threats of violence and death: Climate activists and EHRDs face highly gendered threats of violence and death, intended to intimidate them into ending their work. A global analysis of GBV against women defenders in environmental conflicts found that some face weeks or even years of death threats aimed at ending their work of challenging corporations.[28] The threats themselves are often sexually violent, in some cases racist, and leverage social norms to undermine women's position as leaders and activists. As Lolita Chávez, a women

environmental human rights defender in Guatemala explains, *"When they threaten me, they say that they will kill me, but before they kill me, they will rape me. They don't say that to my male colleagues. These threats are very specific to indigenous women. There is also a very strong racism against us. They refer to us as those rebel Indian women that have nothing to do, and they consider us less human."*[29] Increasingly, climate change activists and EHRDs expect these types of threats. Txai Suruí, a 24-year-old activist and member of the Paiter Suruí indigenous people, received multiple death threats after she addressed the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow, which although distressing, did not come as a shock to her.[30] In addition to women and girl activists, young boy activists also face threats of death. For example, Francesco Vera, a child activist from Colombia who established the "Guardians for Life" movement, raising awareness about environmental causes across Latin America, has received death threats since the age of 11 years old.[31] He finds these threats traumatising to talk about.

Killings: A 2019 study published in *Nature Sustainability* found that over 1,558 EHRDs were reported killed between 2002 and 2017.[32] In 2021, Global Witness reported that one in ten EHRDs who were killed globally were women.[33] Of these, nearly two-thirds were indigenous women. Both studies anticipate that these numbers do not show the true severity of violence due to substantial underreporting.

Latin America is considered one of the most dangerous places to be an EHRD, home to 88% of the 177 EHRDs murdered in 2022.[34] While gender-disaggregated data is not available for the region, illustrative examples show that in 2019 at least two of the 31 EHRDs killed in Colombia were women. [35] This data reflects trends regarding women human rights defenders in Colombia more broadly, where 14% of the 108 human rights defenders killed in 2019 were women. The analysis also finds that violence impacts indigenous populations disproportionately. Despite making up only 4.4% of the population in Colombia, indigenous peoples accounted for half of EHRDs murdered.[36]

Analysis of violence against EHRDs found that countries with significant women-led environmental movements appeared to be no more or less peaceful towards women EHRDs.[37] Instead, women killed in contexts with strong women-led movements were more often killed through mass violence such as in crowds by armed police. Crowd violence accounted for 51 out of the 81 cases of women EHRDs documented as killed in the Environmental Justice Atlas.[38]

Environmental journalists are another group of activists at risk of murder, with a consortium of media partners called Forbidden Stories, estimating 29 environmental journalists were killed in the last decade.[39] This makes environmental journalism one of the most dangerous types of journalism (after war reporting). Forbidden Stories has not produced gender-disaggregated data about the deaths of environmental journalists. However, Daphne Caruana Galizia, and Maria Efigenia Vásquez Astudillo are two female environmental journalists referenced as murdered for their work reporting on climate change and environmental degradation in Malta and Colombia.

Online harassment and abuse: Over the past decade, the internet has become a key space for organising environmental and climate activism. Many environmental and climate change activist groups including *Fridays for Future*, *Extinction Rebellion* and *Spice Warriors* use social media to spread awareness about climate change, mobilise activists, and connect globally. This has gone hand-in-hand with an increase in online harassment and abuse against activists.

> *In 34% of cases where women climate scientists had been subjected to online abuse and harassment, their sex or gender had been targeted by perpetrators, while 13% had received online threats of sexual violence.*
>
> Global Witness, 2023

In 2023 Global Witness polled 468 climate scientists, 32% of whom were women.[40] This research revealed that 40% of climate scientists had experienced online abuse and harassment related to their work, rising to 49% for those who had published more than ten journal articles, and again to 73% for those who appeared at least once a month in the media. This abuse was also often gendered. In 34% of cases where women scientists had experienced online abuse and harassment, their sex or gender had been targeted by perpetrators. In addition, 13% had received online threats of sexual violence, compared to 2% of their male counterparts, while 8% had experienced death threats.

While similar data could not be found for women climate change activists and EHRDs more broadly, anecdotal evidence suggests that the abuse experienced by these activists is widespread. Renee Karunungan, an environmental campaigner from the Philippines, explains that many of the comments she receives are *"about my body and face…things like 'you're so fat' or 'ugly…but also things like 'I will rape you".*[41] Research by the UN around youth activism (inclusive but not limited to climate and environmental activism) found that young women and girl activists are at particular risk of online harassment, control, blackmail and humiliation through doxing[1] and the use of deepfakes[2], including those of a sexual nature. [42]

In some cases, online harassment and abuse against high-profile women and girl activists is coordinated by large lobby networks. Analysis conducted by DeSmog in 2019 found that a large subsection of those driving online abuse and harassment against Greta Thunberg were part of an established network of extreme free-market lobby groups with strong ties to the fossil fuel industry and funders of climate science denial.[43] A note by the UN Secretary General reflects that coordinated attacks of this nature, *"have also led at times to the portrayal of climate justice activists as national security threats, rather than as front-line human and environmental rights defenders."*[44] These attacks can have a significant impact on the support they are able to garner.

An International Press Institute (IPI) report from 2024 highlights that environmental journalists are also often exposed to organised online attacks and abuse that challenge their credibility and

[1] Doxing is a form of cyber-attack where a person's personal information is collected and disseminated without their consent for malicious intent.
[2] Deepfakes involve the creation of digitally altered photos or videos where a person's face or body appears to be somebody else.

cause safety concerns and psychological stress.[45] Although the findings from this report were not disaggregated by gender, the experiences of female journalists were included. For example, Ghanaian environmental journalist, Mariam Ansah, explained that the risk of online attacks and threats increases her fear of physical attacks. This leaves her with the difficult dilemma of whether to publish anonymously. While anonymity can reduce the risk of attacks, as a freelancer, her ability to work relies on her visibility which is put at risk by publishing anonymously. Nepalese environmental journalist Bhikuti Rai explained that "in general, journalists are not provided with the tools, skills and resources to reduce the risk…for online attacks, there is no support system". These experiences were echoed by findings from ten in-depth interviews with science journalists (including environmental journalists) in the USA.[46] These journalists reported that they repeatedly received harassing phone calls and messages from readers, including some that left them fearful. According to these journalists, women bear the brunt of such attacks. A survey from 2017 of almost 400 women journalists across 50 countries by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) supports these findings, highlighting that 44% of women journalists (including but not limited to climate journalists) had experienced online abuse.[47]

Disinformation and smear campaigns: Disinformation and smear campaigns are well documented as a tactic to silence women activists globally.[48] Kvinna till Kvinna conducted a survey with 485 women human rights defenders across 67 countries and found that one in three had been subjected to false accusations and smear campaigns.[49]

> Women environmental human rights defenders are often subjected to attacks that label them as bad mothers and wives, spread rumours about extramarital affairs, and dismiss them as genuine leaders because of their gender.
>
> IUCN (2021)

Similar data could not be found for women climate change activists and EHRDs specifically. However, anecdotal evidence showed that women climate change activists and EHRDs experience disinformation and smear campaigns. In addition, disinformation and smear campaigns against Greta Thunberg have been widely documented. Analysis of misinformation and disinformation shared about Thunberg between Summer 2018 and October 2019 identified multiple narratives intended to discredit her which spread globally.[50] These included personal attacks (questioning her mental capacity), allegations about her associations (with violent movements like Antifa, Islamic State, and controversial individuals such as George Soros), and allegations that she is a puppet to the "climate industrial complex". The global spread of these messages seems to have been facilitated primarily by a collection of conspiracy theory sites, pro-Trump and climate change denial groups along with larger right-wing media groups. Thunberg has also been subjected to gendered deepfakes, including a video entitled "Explanation of how to save planet by not using vibrators", shared on YouTube, and other videos where she seems to promote the use of "sustainable weapons" such as "vegan grenades". These deepfakes are another example of how technology and false information are used to undermine her activism.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, relevant authorities often don't take reports about smear campaigns against young activists seriously, meaning they do not have access to the same support as their older counterparts.[51]

Non-partner sexual violence: Non-partner sexual violence is referenced as an example of violence perpetrated against women EHRDs across multiple reports.[52] However, prevalence data of this violence is very limited. Anecdotal evidence provides examples of where women EHRDs have been attacked with sexual violence during their activism, primarily by armed groups and security forces. For example, one report highlights that soldiers raped, beat and killed members of the Escravos Women's Coalition (EWC), during a blockade of oil terminals in Nigeria.[53] In another report, an analysis of violence against women EHRDs in the Philippines found that sexual assault was common during police raids.[54] Research into violence experienced in Latin America against women EHRDs found that sexual abuse and violence against defenders primarily occurred during violent forced evictions.[55] In some cases, women EHRDs were physically and sexually assaulted by Special Police Forces or paramilitary groups contracted by extractive companies.

This report found two key contexts in which non-partner sexual violence has been used against climate change activists. In the first case, anecdotal evidence suggests that these activists tend to be subjected to online sexual violence such as non-consensual exposure to sexually explicit content. For example, Lilly Platt, an 11-year-old climate activist from the Netherlands who has gained over 11,000 followers on X for her messages about climate change and environmental protection, has had her social media accounts flooded with pornography and hate messages.[56] In addition, climate change activists are at risk of exposure to sexually abusive and manipulative tactics by police. For example, in 2013, a legal case against the London Metropolitan Police highlighted the cases of eight undercover police officers who had formed "deeply personal" and sexual relationships with climate change activists in order to gain intelligence on their movements.[57] These were described as "highly manipulative and abusive" policing operations by claimants, many of whom had developed long-term relationships with undercover officers only to find them disappear at the end of their deployment. In another instance, from 2019, a 17-year-old girl was one of over 20 Extinction Rebellion activists who were strip-searched by police.[58] This has been described by the founder of Sisters Inside, an organisation supporting criminalised women and girls, as "sexual assault by the state".

Community Violence There is limited prevalence data available on community violence against women and girl climate change activists and EHRDs. However, multiple reports highlight that through challenging social expectations about how a woman should behave, activists are at greater risk of violence from their communities, especially highly patriarchal ones.[59] This is supported by anecdotal evidence that some EHRDs face abuse, harassment and ostracisation from their communities due to their work. For example, Bae Rose Undang-Lumadong, an EHRD in the Philippines, reported being harassed by members of her community, resistant to her position as a leader.[60] This abuse included comments such as "you're just a woman". In some

cases, community violence also involves threats towards the children and families of women and girl EHRDs. In one case, Berta Cáceres, an indigenous EHRD from Honduras who was killed in 2016, had to send her children away from her community following threats that they would be subjected to retaliatory violence if she continued her work.[61]

Intimate partner and family violence: There is limited prevalence data available on intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence against women and girl climate change activists and EHRDs. However, a report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN) highlights that when climate and environmental activism is seen as defying sociocultural gender norms, hostility and violence can stem from within the family. [62] This report identifies various forms of abuse and harassment from partners and families towards EHRDs including threats of divorce and threats to separate activists from their children. This type of violence is echoed by research into violence against women and girl activists more broadly, who are at higher risk of domestic violence and abuse when their activism challenges cultural notions of what is appropriate behaviour for women.[63] According to a survey of Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica (Northern Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Central-Southern Mexico) between 2012 and 2014, 5% of all attacks against WHRDs were committed by family members.[64]

3. The impact of GBV on climate change activism

The impact of GBV on climate change activists and EHRDs is significant and can involve ostracisation and rejection from family and communities, increased fears of safety, a loss of joy and productivity in their work, and health-related issues including depression and anxiety. These impacts can also have significant consequences for climate and environmental activism. They can lead women and girl activists to step away from their activism for periods of time, self-censor in certain spaces such as in their communities or online, and in the most extreme cases, leave activism entirely. The risks associated with being a climate change activist and EHRD may also discourage new activists from joining the ranks of climate and environmental activism, jeopardising its sustainability. Since the risk of GBV against climate change activists and EHRDs is particularly acute among indigenous, rural, disabled, and otherwise marginalised groups of women and girls, the risk of activists from diverse backgrounds stepping away from this work increases the chances that the climate and environmental activism space will increasingly lack the inclusion of diverse voices, experiences and perspectives.

Examples of how GBV can impact climate and environmental activists and their work include:

Self-censorship: Self-censorship is commonly reported as an outcome of GBV perpetrated against climate and environmental activists, which poses a significant risk to the sustainability of climate and environmental activism. Research by Amnesty International with women and girl activists, including climate and environmental activists, found that TFGBV increased the risk of activists self-censoring, hindering their full participation in activism and

public life.[65] These findings were echoed by a Global Witness poll of climate scientists, which found that online abuse and harassment led 41% and 40% of female and male climate scientists respectively to report being less likely to post on social media about climate issues, while 33% and 28% reported being less likely to contribute to the media, and 27% and 21% reported being less likely to speak in public about climate issues. [66] As Sarah Zungu, a San Indigenous Leader and environmental activist from Namibia explained, sometimes she feels she should stop speaking out because *"these are big people"* she is speaking up against, with significant power to cause harm.[67]

The United Nations Human Rights Council highlights fears that the impact of online abuse and harassment against child activists may be particularly severe, since they are less likely to have built up levels of resilience or established the support networks that their older counterparts have access to. [68] This can cause young women and girl activists to leave online spaces or engage in self-censorship. A global study by Plan International examining the experiences of 1000 girl activists, including climate and environmental activists, found that the risk of self-censorship among young activists extended beyond the online space. Survey results showed that only 50% of girl activists felt comfortable speaking about their activism within their communities for fear of abuse, harassment or ostracisation. [69]

Decisions to stop their work in climate and environmental activism: This review found no examples of women and girl activists leaving their work due to violence. However, given the levels of abuse and harassment that some experience, we assess that this is a significant risk for those working in this field, although it may not be reported.

Breakdown of communication and mobilisation channels: Climate and environmental activists often use online platforms as a primary method of communicating and mobilising locally, regionally and globally. Where online abuse and harassment causes women and girl activists to feel unsafe online, key online communication and mobilisation channels are at risk of breaking down because activists stop using them. This poses a significant barrier to mobilisation, especially across borders. A statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2018 highlights the risk of technology facilitated GBV (TFGBV) on the ability of women activists to communicate and mobilise online.[70]

Ostracisation from families and communities: Ostracisation from families and communities can increase the risk that women and girl activists reduce their engagement in climate activism. The global study by Plan International mentioned above, which examined the experiences of 1000 girl activists, including climate and environmental activists, found that fear of ostracisation by families and communities posed a significant barrier to girl activists' continued work. Of the girl activists surveyed, 27% reported that community members expressing negativity towards their activism posed a significant barrier to their continued efforts.[71] The risk of ostracisation from families and communities was echoed by Global Witness' work with women EHRDs.[72]

Safety fears: Abuse and harassment, including threats of violence, can lead to increased safety fears among women and girl climate change activists and EHRDs, which can reduce the extent to which they engage in activism. Global Witness' poll of climate scientists found that 26% of female climate scientists experienced fear for their personal safety, compared to 19% of men.[73] These findings were echoed among EHRDs. For example, Sarah Zungu, a San Indigenous Leader and EHRD from Namibia explained to Amnesty International that she is afraid to walk on her own at times as a result of the abuse she is subjected to.[74] She also identifies greater risks of violence because she is Indigenous and so the authorities see her as inferior. She explains, "*They don't see me as human as I am a 'Bushman Woman'".*

Loss of joy and productivity at work: The use of GBV against climate change activists and EHRDs can also reduce the joy and productivity of activists, making it harder for them to engage in this work. Global Witness' poll of climate scientists found that 58% of female climate scientists who had been subjected to online abuse and harassment experienced a loss of productivity at work, with 25% saying that it caused them to dread work.[75] This was compared to 43% and 20% of male climate scientists respectively. While this review did not find evidence that this type of abuse led to individuals leaving the sector completely, we assess that this is a risk in the most severe instances.

Health-related issues: Health-related issues are another key impact of GBV against climate change activists and EHRDs, which may also increase the risk of them stepping away from their work for periods of time. The 2023 Global Witness poll of climate scientists found that those who had experienced online abuse, including threats of sexual violence and rape, reported the impact on them was significant.[76] For example, 21% reported that the stress associated with this abuse had caused physical illness, compared to 10% of men, while 32% reported sleeping problems, compared to 22% of men. In addition, 28% of female climate scientists reported experiencing depression as a result of online abuse, compared to 19% of men, and 62% had experienced anxiety compared to 46% of men.[77]

4. Efforts to address the impact of GBV on climate change activism

This review found limited evidence of initiatives focused on addressing the impact of GBV on climate change and environmental activism. Of those initiatives identified, no evaluations were found, so it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of these activities. A report by the United Nations Human Rights Council raised concerns that when it comes to addressing GBV, young activists are often denied the support available to older activists.[78] This is echoed by the findings of this report, which found no interventions focused on providing support to girl climate change activists or EHRDs.

The longest-standing initiative identified through this evidence review, involves addressing GBV against EHRDs through accompaniment by international human rights observers. The presence of international human rights observers is intended to reduce the risk of all forms of violence

against EHRDs, by raising their visibility among the international community. In addition, a promising new set of grants awarded through IUCN in 2023 are focused on preventing and addressing GBV against women EHRDs. Awarded to initiatives based in Mexico, Kenya, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, these initiatives take various approaches to addressing GBV. These include social norms change initiatives, capacity building of public officers, and regional advocacy efforts. No initiatives focused on addressing GBV against climate change activists were identified through this review. More details are included in the following table:

Initiatives focused on addressing the impact of GBV on climate change activism		
Type of Initiative	**Details and examples**	**Impact**
Accompaniment by international human rights observers	Organisations such as Peace Brigades International (PBI) deploy international human rights observers to accompany EHRDs in order to increase their visibility and reduce the risk of attacks against them. Throughout 2022, Peace Brigades International worked with Credhos, a human rights organisation based in Magdalena Medio region in Colombia to support the ongoing work of women environmental defenders. In particular, they supported the work of women activists and leaders making visible and denouncing industrial pollution of rivers and confronting armed groups associated with the companies committing this pollution.[79] Recent years have seen intensified attacks against women environmental defenders in the region.[80] As well as physical accompaniment, PBI has conducted widespread international advocacy to raise the visibility of activists at risk in order to reduce the risk of them being attacked for their work. For example, PBI has contributed to the inclusion of these women's work in international reports including The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA),[81] Global Witness,[82] and The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).[83] They have also organised visits from journalists, leading to articles in media outlets such as El País,[84] requested investigations into the threats against women environmental defenders from international governments including the UK and Canada, and supported women environmental defenders to speak at international conferences such as COP. PBI believes that through these ongoing efforts, the risk of attacks against environmental defenders in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia have reduced, allowing them to continue their work.	Reports do not cover the impact of accompaniment efforts, so it is not possible to determine how effective they are at preventing GBV.
Regional support offering grants, hotlines,	The EU-funded project Protect Defenders provides a range of services to support human rights defenders (HRDs). These are available to all HRDs and are not	To date, Protect Defenders has supported 55,000

temporary relocations, and capacity building, accompaniment and advocacy	specific to survivors of GBV or EHRDs. However, some services may be relevant to survivors or those at risk. Protect Defenders funds a helpdesk with protection officers available 24/7, which HRDs at immediate risk of violence can contact for support and advice. They also offer emergency grants to ensure that HRDs can access and implement urgent security measures to protect themselves, their family and their work. They offer a temporary relocation programme, which provides financial support to a host organisation that supports an HRD to relocate. Finally, they provide training, capacity building and accompaniment to HRDs, as well as monitoring the situation of HRDs on the frontline to advocate for their protection, locally, regionally and internationally.	HRDs globally. Through their support, 23,000 HRDs have received protection and development grants, 11000 HRDs have accessed training and capacity building, 16000 HRDs have been connected through advocacy and outreach actions, and 1500 human rights organisations and communities have been able to continue operating despite risks of violence.
Social norms programming to challenge harmful norms that prevent women from participating in conservation and environmental management	In Kenya, the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA) and the Taita Taveta Wildlife Conservancies Association (TTWCA) are working together to support women to meaningfully and safely participate in conservation and environmental management. In 2023 they were awarded a RISE grant to develop a programme that challenges harmful social norms and improves the capacity of partners to address GBV within their programmes and conservation efforts.[85] This will include efforts to prevent intimate partner violence, and non-partner physical and psychological GBV that is increasingly faced by women rangers working to manage and protect conservation areas. It will also include efforts to support male allies who are often confronted with verbal abuse for supporting women's participation in these spaces. In Cambodia, the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC) and Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) received a RISE grant in 2023 to support women's participation in community-protected areas and forest management by addressing harmful social norms that lead to GBV. This project will include engaging men and boys to challenge harmful attitudes around women's engagement in environmental protection and transforming social norms and harmful behaviour from husbands and male leaders.	RISE grants awarded in 2023- no evaluation data available to date.

Capacity building of public officers to end GBV against women working in eco-tourism	In 2023, Espacio de Encuentro de las Culturas Originarias (EECO) and World Wild Life Fund (WWF) Mexico received a RISE grant to address high levels of GBV in coastal ecotourism. This programme will include raising awareness of the linkages between GBV, environmental degradation and climate change, and building the capacities of public officers to prevent and respond to GBV in this context. [86]	RISE grants awarded in 2023- no evaluation data available to date.
Regional advocacy and partnerships between women environmental defenders	In 2023, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the Association of Indigenous Women of the Archipelago (PEREMPUAN AMAN) and the BAI Indigenous Women's Network received a RISE grant to work with indigenous women environmental defenders across Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. This programme will support women environmental defenders build networks and conduct regional advocacy to develop strategies to end GBV as a tactic to silence their work. [87]	RISE grants awarded in 2023- no evaluation data available to date.

Annex 1: Methodology

This research query has been conducted as systematically as possible, under tight time constraints. The mapping was conducted through online searches using Google and relevant electronic databases.

Key search terms included: "climate activism" or "environmental activism" or "environmental defenders" or "environmental human rights defenders" or "climate defenders" or "climate activists" or "environmental activists" AND "GBV" or "violence against women" or "violence against girls" or "gender-based violence" AND "impacts" or "self-censorship" or "mental health" or "ostracisation" or "health" AND "prevention efforts" or "programmes" or "grants" AND "impact" or "evaluation"

To be eligible for inclusion in this rapid evidence review, documents needed to fulfil the following criteria:

- Focus: GBV against climate and environmental activists, the impact on climate and environmental activism, and efforts to address these impacts
- Countries: Global
- Time period for written research and evidence: Information on websites or documents from January 2010 to the present.
- Language: English.

Limitations:

- Availability of information online: One significant limitation encountered during the evidence review process was the availability of information online specific to climate and environmental activists. This review found substantially more information about GBV, the impact of GBV and efforts to address GBV against women activists more broadly but there was not time to explore the potential links between GBV against women activists with non-climate focuses and those focused on the climate and environment.
- Geographical limitations: Another notable limitation was the limited evidence on GBV prevalence against climate and environmental activists from the Global South. While this report did find anecdotal evidence that suggested women and girl activists from the Global South experienced GBV in relation to their climate and environmental activism, the larger surveys primarily focused on women and girl climate activists based in Europe and the USA.
- Limited time: An important limitation of this mapping exercise was the constrained timeframe. The rapid nature of the evidence review process limited the opportunity to thoroughly explore the prevalence of GBV against climate and environmental activists, the impact of GBV, and efforts to address GBV against climate and environmental activists. As a result, the evidence may not fully capture the prevalence, impact or efforts to address GBV in this context.

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