INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence directed at individuals on the basis of their gender. It cuts across status, class, religion, race, economic, and geographic barriers. Boys and men are also targets of violence, but the majority of victims are girls and women (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999; World Health Organization (WHO), 2002a). In addition to being defined as a social and criminal justice problem, GBV is often viewed as a public health threat because of its high prevalence across women’s life span and of its multiple and severe health consequences (Briere & Jordan, 2004; Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994; WHO, 2002a). GBV is also viewed as a human right issue because it violates a number of absolute human rights: Right to life, right to freedom from fear and torture, right to safety and security, and right to freedom of movement (Astbury, 2003).

GBV evolves from unequal gender power relations, whereby women are more likely to be disadvantaged relative to men (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2005). The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) and subsequent United Nations conferences recognized the elimination of GBV as central to the equality, empowerment, and development of women. A gender mainstreaming approach to combat GBV involves integrating both men’s and women’s needs and experiences into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs and policies (UNFPA, 2005). This will necessitate a careful scrutiny of available knowledge base of the phenomenon (Cheung, in this volume).