Howard University Explores the **Critical Nexus of Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence**



During Howard University's 2026 Search Month, a timely and compelling convening examined the increasingly urgent intersection of **Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**. Titled, ***Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence: A Critical Nexus*,** the conference brought together scholars, advocates, students, and global leaders to explore how rising temperatures and extreme weather events are intensifying risks to women and girls worldwide.

The conference was conceptualized and convened by Dr. Goulda Downer, Associate Professor in the Howard University College of Medicine, alongside Dr. Aneta Plummer, Executive Director of the Center for Women, Gender, and Global Leadership at Howard University. Dr. Downer opened the event with a sobering reminder that as the planet warms, violence against women rises. Citing emerging research, she noted that for every one-degree Celsius increase in global temperature, intimate partner violence increases by nearly five percent. "As temperatures rise," she emphasized, "more women and girls experience violence."

Dr. Downer also underscored the need for stronger and more standardized data collection to better understand—and ultimately interrupt—the link between climate stressors and gender-based violence. While scientific consensus continues to grow around the health impacts of climate change, she stressed that critical data gaps remain that hinder effective prevention and response.

The keynote address was delivered by Jacquie Patterson, Founder and Executive Director of *The Chisholm Legacy Project*. Patterson powerfully connected climate change, displacement, and violence to long-standing systems of inequality affecting marginalized communities. She emphasized the importance of centering frontline voices and advancing community-driven solutions rooted in justice, equity, and lived experience.

A highlight of the conference was **"Voices of Courage: Survivors of Gender-Based Violence Share Their Stories."** This moving segment featured women leaders from three regions of the world: Ms. Mabel Adinya Ade (Nigeria), Ms. Carolyn Kitione (Fiji), and Ms. Danièle Magloire (Haiti). Each shared how climate-related disasters have compounded vulnerability in their communities—and how they are integrating GBV prevention into climate response and resilience efforts. Their testimonies brought global perspective and human urgency to the discussion.

The conference also elevated student scholarship. Laura Tissot, a Howard University sophomore and intern in the College of Medicine, presented findings from a small peer survey revealing that nearly all respondents were unaware of the link between climate change and GBV. The results highlighted a critical knowledge gap and reinforced the importance of education and awareness-building across disciplines.

The program concluded with a dynamic panel moderated by Dr. Plummer titled **"From Impact to Action: Confronting Climate Risks and Gendered Violence."** Panelists Dr. Helen Bond (School of Education, Howard University) and Dr. Doris Macharia (President, Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation) emphasized that addressing climate change and gender-based violence together allows for more transformative, equitable, and sustainable solutions.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Downer reminded attendees that climate change and gender-based violence are deeply interconnected—especially during emergencies and disasters. As climate risks accelerate, she underscored the urgent need for evidence-based action to protect women and girls and build resilient, equitable communities worldwide.

"As temperatures rise, more women and girls experience violence."
— Dr. Goulda Downer

"Scientific consensus is growing around the health risks posed by climate change, yet significant data gaps remain. Without better data, we cannot design effective solutions."
— Dr. Goulda Downer

"Those most impacted by climate change already live at the intersection of multiple injustices. Their voices must be at the center of the solutions."
— Jacquie Patterson

"When disasters strike, women are often the first responders and the last protected."
— Ms. Carolyn Kitione

"When climate and gender are addressed together, we shift from crisis response to long-term resilience."
— Dr. Doris Macharia