



> **Grace Osakue**, guest editor for the thematic section of this magazine on:

## Gender-based violence

In this issue of *Exchange* we have selected gender-based violence (GBV) as our main focus of attention. GBV has many forms, including domestic violence, female genital cutting, rape and forced prostitution. An overview article written by guest editor Grace Osakue of Girls' Power Initiative in Nigeria sheds some light on the complexity and pervasiveness of this issue. After describing different types of GBV and its effects, she gives some examples of programmes that have addressed this issue in Nigeria, China and Cambodia. A box on gender-based violence in schools provides some data on the prevalence and persistence of violence against school children and gives UNICEF's definition of a 'child-friendly school'. Other articles and boxes describe programmatic approaches which address trafficking in girls (Nigeria), integrating HIV/AIDS in GBV programmes (South Africa), and involving men in violence-reduction initiatives.

Other issues addressed in this issue are religion, gender and knowledge about HIV and AIDS in Mozambique, and the promotion of the female condom in Burundi.

We wish you pleasant reading and welcome your comments!

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**HIV prevention, gender and religion in Mozambique p.14**

## Violence against women and girls: breaking the culture of silence

*"We no longer kill the girl baby with the poisonous sap of the oleander plant as traces of the poison can be detected. We make the death appear natural. For instance, we starve the baby to death or asphyxiate it"*

*"I had to have an abortion because of pressure from my parents. When they heard I was pregnant, they pressured me to abort for my own well being and that of the family"*

*"The boys were patient, standing in line and waiting their turn to rape. Their two victims, girls of thirteen [years] were patient as well, never crying out, at least that was what neighbours said, and endured violence and abuse not once but repeatedly over five months"*

*"It was in Italy that I discovered that we were in for prostitution of a higher order. Though I resisted at the beginning but there was nothing I could do since I was already committed by the oath I took and the pant the trafficker collected from me"*<sup>1</sup>

Whether it is female infanticide, forced abortion, gang rape, human trafficking, or any other form of violence that girls and women suffer, they all share one characteristic. These are actions directed at women and girls simply because of their sex. These acts of violence inflict physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm on women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action defines violence against women as *"any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women [and girls], including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in*

*public or private life.*" Perpetrators and victims of violence are, however, of both sexes. Men are also known to suffer from gender-based violence (GBV) but the magnitude is near insignificant as compared to that of women. Women suffer most because of patriarchal values which accord them lower social status. When we talk about GBV, what readily comes to mind is violence perpetrated against women and girls.

GBV violates several recognised human rights such as the right to life, freedom from torture, equal protection before the law, liberty and security of person, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental



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health, and the right to be heard. It also violates women's right to control their sexuality.

## Types of GBV

Women and girls suffer from numerous forms of violence and these include acts that cause physical harm such as female genital mutilation. Other forms of violence include stalking, blaming without reason, neglect, and sexual harm such as rape and forced prostitution. Often, these groupings only reflect the nature of the violence and not the effects.

The most pervasive form of GBV women and girls suffer is *domestic violence*. This usually takes place in the home and is perpetrated by family members or relations. Domestic violence includes forced marital sex, incest, honour killings, female infanticide, child beating, etc. Many girls in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle-East are exposed to female genital mutilation. This type of GBV varies from partial or total removal of the external female genitalia to the narrowing of the vaginal opening through stitching. This practise is part of a concerted effort to make women abide by cultural dictates and control their sexuality.

*Sexual violence* is also a common form of GBV and this ranges from sexual harassment, insertion of objects into genital openings, sexual intercourse without consent, to child defilement and forced prostitution. Among these forms of sexual violence, rape is most prevalent. The figures for South Africa alone stand at one million cases every year. This simplifies to one incident occurring every minute. According

to the Population Reference Bureau, only one out of every 35 cases of rape is reported. Over 60% of the victims are between the ages of 14 and 19 years. Globally, it has been said that most rapists attack victims that are under the age of 15. The rapists are usually familiar people and not total strangers. Rape is considered as an act of immorality in certain cultures and some families insist on girls marrying the perpetrators to restore family honour.

During wars and conflicts, rape is taken as a symbol of subjugation and humiliation of the enemy. In such contexts, female refugees and street children are more susceptible to rape than during peace times. Children, in general, are vulnerable to sexual abuse because of their ignorance and trustfulness.

**GBV occurs everywhere, be it in the home, school, workplace or wider society**

GBV occurs everywhere, be it in the home, school, workplace or wider society. The major reason for its widespread nature is embedded in certain patriarchal values that regard women as mere sex objects to be conquered and satisfy the desire of men. Certain myths also see women as accomplices in the rape cases and men as having animalist desires which cannot be controlled. In the absence of limited institutional mechanisms to address GBV and a deliberate culture of silence around issues of sexuality and abuse, GBV will continue to thrive.



# KIC

## Knowledge Infrastructure with and between Counterparts (KIC)

The KIC Project aims to boost dynamic knowledge sharing, collaborative learning and networking. It is an action-oriented, counterpart-driven pilot project, of which the first phase runs up to the end of 2006. Within the KIC Project Oxfam International and *Exchange* are collaborating to reinforce the learning on HIV/AIDS. The following issues will be about Women living with HIV/AIDS and Sexual & Reproductive Rights Education. Oxfam counterparts are invited to write articles about lessons learned

related to these topics. The articles produced in the framework of this collaboration are accompanied by an Oxfam logo in a green title box. The KIC Project also has an interactive website: [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org), which enables Oxfam counterparts to share evidenced-based practices and documents, and to participate in online communities. For questions and comments about this edition or about the project, counterparts are encouraged to use the email address [aids.kic@oxfamnovib.nl](mailto:aids.kic@oxfamnovib.nl).

## HIV/AIDS, conflict, and gender- based violence: some facts

During conflict and flight women and girls may experience violence, forced pregnancy, intentional HIV infection, abduction, sexual abuse and slavery, or rape. In settings of refuge they may continue to face violence, for instance:

- abuses that existed in society previous to the conflict;
- domestic violence that often increases: in many displaced settings, women are separated from family, community members, or other support systems that may formerly have offered a certain amount of protection from abusive partners;
- exploitation and abuse from people with power, even those who control and distribute humanitarian aid.

Factors that contribute to gender-based violence in conflict situations include:

- a general breakdown in law and order, with an increase in all forms of violence;
- erosion in the social structures and the normal mores of society that control acceptable behavior in the community;
- the perception by perpetrators that they will not be brought to justice;
- the polarization of gender roles during armed conflict with the development of an aggressive ideal of masculinity and the idealization of women as bearers of the cultural identity;
- the goal of ethnic cleansing. Rape, forced pregnancy, and other forms of GBV can be weapons of ethnic cleansing directly and by attempting to destroy individuals mentally and the social bonds within a group.

Source: *Gender-based violence in populations affected by armed conflict. A field guide for displaced settings, RHRC Consortium/GBV Global Technical Support Project, www.rhrc.org/pdf/Fact Sheet for the Field.pdf*

### Effects of GBV

The effects of GBV on girls are costly, intense and long lasting. These can be physical, psychological, social or economic in nature.

- **Physical effects** – According to the UNHCR, physical effects of sexual violence include pain, contracting of STIs and HIV in cases where the assailant is infected, mutilated genitalia, unintended pregnancy, abortion or infanticide, unwanted children, and even death.
- **Psychological effects** – Psychological trauma is also known to result from GBV and this ranges from paralysis and terror to emotional pain; sense of denial, depression, mental disorder, and sometimes suicide. The victim can also experience nightmares and be haunted by fear and feelings of shame or guilt.
- **Social effects** – Social costs to survivors of GBV include rejection, stigmatization, further sexual exploitation and severe punishment. The development and well-being of children and families is also affected. Boys who witness battery are likely to be of violent disposition while girls grow into victims. GBV inhibits girls' access to schooling, may result in poor performance at school and deprives society of the full participation of women in development. Research confirms that: *“Early sexual victimisation may leave*

*women less skilled in protecting themselves, less sure of their worth and their personal boundaries, and more apt to accept victimisation as part of being female, these may increase the chances of future victimisation like battery, rape, domestic violence, high risk behaviour in adolescence and adulthood like unprotected sex with multiple partners, alcohol and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, prostitution.”<sup>2</sup>*

**Efforts to address GBV will remain reactive and less successful if we continue to keep silent about it and believe that equality of the sexes is a myth**

- **Economic effects** – Victims bear enormous financial costs in accessing justice and health services. States also bear costs when they commit resources to provision of legal and health services to survivors.

### What is being done?

Some government institutions and many non-governmental organizations have started conducting awareness raising campaigns, legal reforms and providing services for survivors of GBV. For example, in Lagos, Nigeria, *Project Alert*



Photo: Armando Waak, PAHO

([www.kabissa.org/prokert](http://www.kabissa.org/prokert)) provides information on violence against women and renders support services to female victims of violence. It has actively campaigned to raise awareness on violence against girls in parts of Nigeria, brought about and pursued litigation and law reform on the issue, published several research reports on the subject and mobilized support for health-care services to victims.

Research, advocacy and hotline management are strategies that have been combined successfully by the *Maple Women's Psychological Counselling Centre* in Beijing, China ([www.maple.org.cn](http://www.maple.org.cn)). The centre opened the first women's hotline in China in 1992 and has since then added special anti-domestic violence hotlines, carried out researches and public awareness activities that have led to law reform, e.g., prohibition of domestic violence and legal responsibility of the

concerned government department in the 2001 Revised Marriage law.

An example of successful adoption of a holistic approach is that of the *Project against Domestic Violence* in Cambodia ([www.padv.org.kh](http://www.padv.org.kh)). It is a pioneer organization in that country dealing with issues of domestic violence through law reform, research and publication, collaboration with government and other

sectors, workshops and trainings, community mobilization, direct services to victims and a male involvement project.

Other strategies that have been recommended to address GBV include:

- comprehensive education on sexuality to demystify the subject, build life skills in adolescents to recognise and combat GBV and become gender sensitive;
- strengthening women's economic

opportunities in order to improve their options and negotiating power within and outside the homes;

- involving survivors in programming;
- eradication of structural inequality against women through promotion of equal access to opportunities, assets, resources and rights;
- integrating statistics on GBV into data collection, planning and training projects to increase the visibility and recognition of GBV as obstacle to development;
- implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by governments, especially the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls in policies, statutes, bills and laws.

### Gender-based violence in schools

- In an educational setting in Ecuador, 22% of adolescent girls reported being sexually abused at school.<sup>1</sup> A Human Rights Watch study of violence in eight South African schools found that sexual abuse and harassment of girls were rampant in many schools. Girls were raped in school lavatories, dormitories and empty classrooms.<sup>2</sup>
- Perpetrators of gender-based school violence are generally older male classmates, but teachers are also offenders. A 2003 study in Dodowa, Ghana, found that teachers were responsible for 5% of these assaults on students. Additionally, one third of the 50 teachers interviewed said that they knew of at least one teacher who had sex with students.<sup>3</sup>

Education is an important tool in the fight against HIV and AIDS. However, some schools fail to provide the necessary protection for children and may expose young people – especially girls – to violence. School cultures can contribute to gender violence. Often, gender stereotypes and inequities abound in the classroom, where different behaviours and roles are expected from girls and boys. Gender-based violence in schools takes many forms, e.g., sexual harassment, aggressive or unsolicited sexual advances, touching, groping, intimidation, verbal abuse or sexual assaults. Schools that are not safe or that promote gender disparity breed the inequality that lasts a lifetime. HIV-prevention education is undermined in these hostile environments because the curriculum teaches one thing and the atmosphere models the opposite.

While access to, and the availability of, life skills classes are important to stopping the spread of HIV, so too is a school environment that is child-friendly, and protects the rights of all children. According to UNICEF, a child-friendly school:

- is gender-sensitive for both girls and boys;
- protects children (there is no corporal punishment, no child labour and no physical, sexual or mental harassment);
- involves children in active and participatory learning;
- involves all children, families and communities (and is particularly sensitive to and protective of the most vulnerable children);
- is healthy; has safe water and adequate sanitation, with separate toilet facilities for girls and boys;
- teaches children about life skills and HIV/AIDS.

*Adapted from: Girls, HIV/AIDS and education, UNICEF, 2004 (32 p.):*  
[www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_25047.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_25047.html) (English/French/Spanish)

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### Conclusion

That GBV is pervasive is well known. Efforts to address it will remain reactive and less successful if we continue to keep silent about it and believe that equality of the sexes is a myth. All those who are concerned about GBV should therefore seek ways to be proactive and more effective by addressing the gender issues in their settings and programming to break the culture of silence on the issue. ■

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1. For reasons of space, we have omitted the references. They can be found in the online version of this article: [www.kit.nl/ils/exchange\\_content/html/2006-2\\_contents.asp](http://www.kit.nl/ils/exchange_content/html/2006-2_contents.asp).
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