

PRESS RELEASE

## Our Strength is the Solution:

# Communities Can Prevent Sexual Violence

Where is your strength? Is it in the power of your words? Your relationship with others? Your vision for a safer world? Find your strength, and share it with your community during the 16 Days of Activism 2008. The 16 Days of Activism starts on 25th November, the International Day Against Violence Against Women, includes World AIDS Day on 1st December, and ends on International Human Rights Day 10th December. This year, the GBV Prevention Network is calling for action to prevent sexual violence and violence against women.

Sexual violence limits women's power over their bodies, sexuality and reproductive health. It includes all forms of forced or coerced sexual acts such as, demanding sex through intimidation or threats of physical harm, marital rape, rape by strangers, and rape as a weapon of war. It also includes acts against the sexual integrity of women e.g. forced or early marriage, FGM, denial of the right to use contraception, forced abortion, and forced sex work. No matter what the context is, sexual violence has profound physical, psychological, and social consequences for the girls and women who experience it.

You might think that sexual violence is not happening in your community. The 2005 World Health Organization multi-country study on women's health found that the proportion of women physically forced to have sex with their current or former partner varied from 12.9 percent in urban Namibia, 27.1 percent in rural Tanzanian and 46 percent in rural Ethiopian.

Sexual violence also affects girls. Fourteen percent of women involved in a 2003 study of 15 to 19 year old women in Rakai District, Uganda reported that their first sexual intercourse was coerced while a national study in Swaziland found that 10.6 percent of 13 – 17 year old girls reported their first sexual experience as being rape.

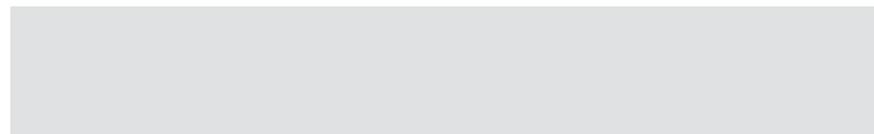
Sexual violence also occurs with impunity within conflict settings. It is estimated that at least 250,000 women were raped during the genocide in Rwanda and in the Sierra Leonean civil war 215,000 to 257,000 women were sexually assaulted.

Sexual violence has been shown to increase the risk of HIV infection can lead to unwanted pregnancies, and serious reproductive, physical and mental health consequences. These do not just affect women, but the whole family and community as well. Enormous resources are spent responding to the consequences of sexual violence at household, community and national level. We need community efforts to stop and prevent sexual violence – before it happens.

"We recognize prevention as the most important step towards tackling issues of violence against women. This necessitates initiatives at community level that are geared towards changing social norms and behaviors that promote violence against women". –Sandra Musoga –Coalition of Violence Against Women (COVAW), Kenya

You can use your strength to prevent sexual violence in your community --even small actions and words can make a difference. Be a role model for young women and men, show others in words and actions how to respect women, reach out to girls and women experiencing violence, support the choices of women, teach girls that their bodies are their own and they have a right to live free from violence. And remember, it starts with you – have you talked with your partner lately about how to have safe and happy sex. Give it a try – today!

For more information contact:



[www.preventgbvafrica.org](http://www.preventgbvafrica.org)