

## **PARTNERING TO ADDRESS LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND HIV/AIDS**

Worldwide, the number of women living with HIV/AIDS is increasing at an alarming rate. Violence against women is both a significant cause and a consequence of this devastating HIV/AIDS trend. Women facing violence within intimate relationships often cannot negotiate safer sex practices, such as condom use. Rape and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation also spread the virus. In addition to untenable levels of stigma and discrimination from the community, women who test positive for HIV are often subjected to physical abuse from partners and can face eviction from their homes. Further, as a result of such stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, they are prevented from obtaining life-saving medical care and treatment.

In 2005, Johnson & Johnson partnered with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the UNAIDS-led Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA) to address the correlation between gender-based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS. The partnership awards grants to community-based organizations and governments in developing nations as part of the UNIFEM-managed United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, a multi-lateral funding mechanism established in 1996 by the UN General Assembly. This unique public-private partnership has helped to create a special funding window within the Trust Fund to support work at the community and national levels to end violence against women as a priority to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV and improve their access to HIV/AIDS services.

### **MAKING AN IMPACT THROUGH INNOVATIVE APPROACHES**

The partnership grants address the distinct but inextricably related conditions that have profound effects on women and girls: poverty, violence, HIV/AIDS and gender inequality; and are able to reach women who have become infected with HIV/AIDS as a result of violence or who suffer escalated violence due to their HIV-positive status.

“Due to the feminization of HIV/AIDS, the future of HIV prevention hinges on our ability to address critical health and societal issues that confront women and the role they play in anchoring families, and by extension, entire societies,” said Sharon D’Agostino, Vice President, Worldwide Corporate Contributions & Community Relations, Johnson & Johnson.

### **Violence Against Women: A Global Health Crisis**

- 59 percent of women in Ethiopia and 50 percent in Bangladesh report sexual violence by an intimate partner.
- In India, 40 percent of women have been victims of violence; half of the 26 percent of women who suffer severe physical abuse report being beaten during pregnancy.
- 68 percent of women in Kenya agree that a husband would be justified in beating his wife, including if she refused to have sex with him.
- Sexual violence against women has been a feature of recent conflicts, including Darfur.
- Studies from Rwanda, Tanzania and South Africa indicate that the risk for HIV among women who have experienced violence may be up to three times higher than among those who have not.
- Fear of violence is a barrier to HIV disclosure for an average of 25 percent of women who participated in a multi-country review by the World Health Organization – rates reached as high as 51 percent in Kenya.

Source: GCWA Issue Brief: *Stop Violence Against Women - Fight AIDS*, Issue #2

In 2005, Johnson & Johnson's support to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women helped to provide grants to projects such as community theater workshops in South Africa that address issues of stigma and discrimination and encourage public action through audience participation. Additional Trust Fund-supported programs provided care and support to survivors of violence and women living with HIV/AIDS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Vietnam, India and Haiti. The impact of these programs can be measured in new opportunities opened for women and girls. For instance, in the DRC, rape victims from Kamisimbi, Walungu, Izege, Kaniola and Ikoma now receive medical treatment, including HIV/STD testing.

### **A CONTINUING EFFORT TO HALT THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS IN WOMEN**

According to Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM, fighting the alarming rates of HIV/AIDS among women and girls requires new approaches involving multiple talents and resources. "The Johnson & Johnson-UNIFEM partnership helps to break new ground by assisting women to gain access to legal and health systems. We connect women living with HIV/AIDS with policy makers and service providers to advocate for treatment protocols grounded in human rights standards." The partnership supports initiatives aimed at reducing gender-based violence to lower rates of HIV/AIDS among women and strengthens efforts to reduce violence that prevents HIV-positive women and girls from seeking justice and obtaining treatment and care.

The 2007 partnership grants include:

- **Botswana, Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs, Women's Affairs Department:** Building capacity among judiciary, police, non-governmental organizations and traditional leaders to detect and respond to violence against women and HIV/AIDS while developing and implementing laws that address this issue;
- **Dominican Republic, Colectivo Mujer y Salud:** Training local service providers, reaching at-risk populations along the Haitian border with promotional events that aim to raise awareness of violence against women and its links to HIV/AIDS and integrating gender perspectives into the national Law on AIDS;
- **India, Breakthrough:** Multiple communications tools, including mass media campaigns, a traveling video van and peer counselors, will raise awareness about women's rights and different forms of violence against women targeting high-prevalence states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka;
- **Nigeria, Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre in partnership with ActionAID International:** Strengthening legislation and advocacy on violence against women through community dialogue, media campaigns and training of government officials with a focus on women living with HIV/AIDS and community groups that support them; and
- **Vietnam, Center for Reproductive and Family Health in cooperation with Vietnam Women's Union:** Improved care and counseling services and public outreach focusing on sexual health and rights will reach women and girls from ethnic minorities along the Vietnam-China border, with a focus on those who have been trafficked into forced prostitution.