

## FACT SHEET

### Sexual Violence Against Girls

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*Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence — yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.*

— UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 8 March 2007

Violence is a global challenge and a leading cause of death and disability worldwide. Sexual, physical, and emotional violence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable in society, particularly adolescent and pre-adolescent girls. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 150 million girls experienced some form of sexual violence with physical contact. Sexual violence contributes to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and therefore is an important factor in prevention strategies for HIV/AIDS and other STD's. Furthermore, sexual violence undermines the ability of girls to remain in school and ultimately reduces the potential for women to enter the formal labor force, thus slowing economic growth and poverty alleviation. In short, sexual violence against girls has devastatingly negative near-term consequences to victims and systemic negative long-term consequences in societies where such violence is prevalent.

A 2007 cluster survey study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) determined that sexual violence against girls is widespread in Swaziland:

- Approximately 1 in 3 females experienced some form of sexual violence as a child
- About three-quarters of the perpetrators of sexual violence against girls were men or boys from the respondent's neighborhood, boyfriends or husbands, or male relatives
- At least 42% of girls and women who reported any incident of sexual violence had two or more incidents before they reached age 18
- Sexual violence was associated with significantly increased probability of depression, thoughts of suicide, unwanted pregnancy, pregnancy complications or miscarriages, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS<sup>1</sup>

#### **Violence against girls is widespread ...**

- A 2006 WHO multi-country study found that between 20% and 50% of females indicate that their first sexual experience was forced<sup>2</sup>
- Twenty percent of girls and 10% of boys experience sexual abuse as a child<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly 50% of all sexual assaults are committed against girls 15 years or younger<sup>4</sup>
- As many as 47% of girls in African primary or secondary schools report sexual abuse or harassment by male teachers or classmates<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reza et al, Sexual violence and its health consequences for female children in Swaziland: a cluster survey study. Lancet, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> WHO, *Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women* (2006), at 51. Available at [http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who\\_multicountry\\_study/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/).

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, *Child protection information sheet: Violence against children* (2006), at 5. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child\\_Protection\\_Information\\_Sheets/pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child_Protection_Information_Sheets/pdf).

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA, *State of World Population 2005* (2005), at 51. Available at <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *Addressing violence against women within the education sector*. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/Education.pdf>.

- As many as 3 of every 10 women have forced first sexual experiences, with up to 45 per cent of women who were girls under 15 at the time of their sexual initiation reporting the experience as forced<sup>6</sup>

### ... and deeply rooted in cultural norms

- 104 million children around the world are not in primary school – more than half of them are girls<sup>7</sup>
- Poor, uneducated, and often times orphaned girls are more vulnerable to being sold or forced into sex trafficking
- Over 60 million girls worldwide are child brides, married before the age of 18. Rape and other forms of violence and abuse characterize married life for many of these girls<sup>8</sup>

### Violence against girls makes them more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases

- Violence against girls is associated with an increased risk of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV
- Females make up 61% of adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. Three-quarters of all women living with HIV/AIDS live in that region<sup>9</sup>
- Children who are sexually abused are more likely to engage in behaviors known to be risky for HIV as adults; they are also more likely to experience sexual or domestic violence<sup>10</sup>
- Worldwide, young women aged 15-24 are 1.6 times more likely to be infected with HIV than are males their age; in sub-Saharan Africa, they are three times more likely to be infected with HIV than are males their age<sup>11</sup>

### Socioeconomic Impact<sup>12</sup>

- For females aged 15 to 44 years, violence is a major cause of death and disability.<sup>13</sup> In a 1994 study based on World Bank data about ten selected risk factors facing women in this age group, rape and domestic violence rated higher than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria<sup>14</sup>
- A 2003 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the costs of intimate partner violence in the United States alone exceed US\$5.8 billion per year: US\$4.1 billion are for direct medical and health care services, while productivity losses account for nearly US\$1.8 billion<sup>15</sup>
- A 10% increase in girls attending school adds 3% in economic growth to developing countries<sup>16</sup>

<sup>6</sup> García-Moreno, C. et al, 2005: 52; Uganda Bureau of Statistics and Macro International Inc. 2007. [Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006](#).

<sup>7</sup> Colclough, C. et al 2003: Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality Summary Report. Available at [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa\\_report/summary\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa_report/summary_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Figure represents data for 2006 from UNICEF global databases based on MICS, DHS and other national surveys, 1987–2006. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). 2008. *ChildInfo: Statistics by Area: Child Protection*. UNICEF, New York: [<http://www.childinfo.org/marriage.html>].

<sup>9</sup> UNAIDS, *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update* (2007), at 18. Available at [http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007\\_epiupdate\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> WHO, *World report on violence and health* (2002), at 164. Available at [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/chapters/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/chapters/en/index.html).

<sup>11</sup> UNFPA, *State of World Population 2005* (2005), at 51. Available at <http://www.wunfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> UNIFEM. Statistics available at [http://www.unifem.org/attachments/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/facts\\_figures\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_2007.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures_violence_against_women_2007.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2002, Recommendation 1582 (2002) on Domestic Violence against Women.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank 1993, *World Development Report: Investing in Health*, New York, Oxford University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003, *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence against Women in the United States*, Atlanta.

<sup>16</sup> Madeline Albright, *Women Empowered: Inspiring Change in the Emerging World*, CARE, 2007

- A study by CARE International found that educated and employed females in the developing world return 90% of their earned income to their families, while males only return 35%

*The consequences of violence against children include both the immediate personal impacts and the damage that they carry forward into later childhood, adolescence and adult life.*

- *UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon*