

Community Health Volunteer Update

A Newsletter from the APHIA II Western Project

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Understanding Violence Against Women

Violence against women is widespread in Kenya and frequently occurs in the home, but also in public places such as schools, workplaces or even churches. Most commonly violence is used by men to exert control and to assert their authority over their wives and girlfriends. In their own homes, women are most vulnerable as their husbands, male partners, fathers and other male relatives are usually the perpetrators.

Violence against women takes the following forms:

Physical (hurts the body)

Emotional (hurts feelings, includes verbal abuse and threats)

Sexual (forced sexual intercourse and unwanted sexual activity)

Economic (controls access to money, property or resources)

Physical violence against women in their homes is often known as domestic violence. It involves the use of physical power by men to control their wives or partners.

Emotional violence depends on verbal abuse and harassment, which often includes the threat of physical violence.

Economic violence occurs when men deny women access to money, food or other basic needs as a means of controlling what they do and where they go. Women often stay in violent relationships because of their dependence on men for a

roof over their head.

Sexual violence covers any type of unwanted sexual activity, which is achieved by force or threat, and ranges from unwelcome sexual comments or advances to inappropriate touching and rape.

Sexual violence can be committed by individuals or groups, who are often people known to the victim but sometimes also strangers. Rape and sexual assault is not about feeling sexually attracted to someone, but about the need to control women.

Despite legislation on violence against women, some people, men and women, resist change and cling onto traditions which influence what is considered appropriate and acceptable behaviour for women and men in their communities. However, some cultural practices violate women's rights. Violence against women is, for example, deeply rooted in traditional ideas of what it means to be a woman or a man and sometimes accepted as part of a community's culture. Where traditional practices harm women, men or children, they need to be abandoned or changed.

Women who experience violence often suffer injuries and long-lasting physical and emotional pain. Rape and violence increases the probability of depression and suicide, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Women who are physically hurt may be unable to take care of their children or continue to work in the short and the long term.

The consequences of violence destroy personal relationships and quality of life, both for the victims and children who often witness violence. Children exposed to violence frequently develop emotional problems and tend to imitate violent be-



A man beats his wife as neighbors watch

haviour they have seen or experienced throughout their lives. The cycle of violence is thereby continued from one generation to the next.

Violence against women affects the wider community too. Violence in families leads to increased violence in surrounding areas and society generally, which in turn erodes overall security in communities. Victims of violence lose their means of earning a livelihood, temporarily or even permanently and become dependent on their relatives and the neighbours. If needless violence could be stopped, scarce resources used for health, social and legal services to support women recovering from physical and sexual abuse, could be invested in the development of communities to everyone's benefit.

The Kenyan Government recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and is committed to safeguarding women and girls from all forms of violence. A wide range of international laws have been signed and increasingly they are being incorporated into national laws. The Sexual Offences Act passed in 2006, for example, provides protection against all forms of sexual violence in Kenya. The Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Bill, once law, will also provide protection against physical, sexual and psychological abuse in the home.

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Taking Action Against Violence



My name is Concepta Nafula. I'm 35 years old and live with my three children in Mbakalo village, Bungoma North district.

My husband worked for an oil refinery company in Mombasa, but despite the large distance between us, we were happily married for over fifteen years. He was always involved in the family, kept in regular contact by phone and visited frequently. Over the years, the family grew ever closer emotionally and socially influential in the community. We also became more prosperous and purchased a three acre piece of land to settle on.

The turning point came in 2005 when my husband's newly married brother was killed in a road accident. My husband was chosen by the community to take care of the

widow as is customary in our community. A few days after his brother was buried, my husband returned to his workplace in Mombasa. Shortly after, my mother-in-law dispatched the widow to join him as his wife.

When I learned from a neighbor what had happened, I traveled to Mombasa to find out for myself. On arrival, my husband abused me and hit me. He threw me out of his house saying he never wanted to see me again. I traveled back to my rural home miserable, but determined to focus on raising my children.

My husband later lost his job in Mombasa and returned to our family home in Mbakalo village. He continued to insult and beat me, began to stay out drinking and eventually stopped supporting us financially, abdicating all his family responsibilities. When my husband sold three quarters of our land, I had to seek for help from the

provincial administration to stop any further sales.

With the encouragement of the provincial administration officers, my husband agreed to be counseled by a community health volunteer. Over time, he has learned to control his temper and stop using violence against me. He is finally seems to be himself again.

My experience of violence convinced me of the need to join other women in my community to campaign for an end to violence in our relationships and homes. We meet to support each other and share ideas and discuss our experiences. Many of the women have shared stories similar to my own and are committed to creating a better future for themselves and other women. I'll continue working to end violence against women and urge women living in violent relationships not to keep quiet but to speak out.

What Can You Do About Violence against Women

Speak out against violence



Violence against women is prohibited by law in Kenya. If you know someone is being abused, intervene to end the violence or report the incident to the police.

Support women who have experienced violence

Women who are victims of violence should talk to someone they trust; a family member or a close friend, a health worker or community leader. Sometimes there are women's groups working to provide legal assistance, to counsel victims and to help report crimes. Women should never be afraid of reporting such attacks to the police. If necessary and possible, women should find emergency shelter to avoid continued violence.

Get your community talking about violence and its consequences!

As a community health volunteer, it is also important to encourage members of your community to talk about violence against women. Groups can discuss how women and men relate to each other and consider how they might seek to promote changes. You can create a safe place for participants to talk about violence they have experienced or caused.

Identify services and support structure for women experiencing violence

Existing services and support structures can be identified in your community and widely shared to increase awareness and understanding of violence against women. By becoming aware of the consequences and causes of violence against women, you can become a committed advocate for prevention of violence and provide support to women and families who experience violence in your community.

POLICE HOTLINES

Butere Mumias	0203532196
Teso	0717292356
Bungoma	0203532188
Vihiga	0736350149
Busta	0572511111
Mt. Elgon	0202394902
Kakamega	0203532186
Lugari	0202394902

EMERGENCY
112/999

REMEMBER ..

If participants in your groups have questions about gender and you do not know the answer, write them on your reporting form and the answers may appear here.

For more answers, don't forget to check out the background notes of each chapter in your Community Health Volunteer Manual. It's full of detailed information about lots of health issues!

Men's Involvement Builds a Bridge of Hope

Men's exposure to first-hand accounts of domestic violence are proving highly effective in ending violence against women. The powerful testimonies of mothers, wives and daughters, who have experienced violence at the hands of male family members, have convinced some men of the need to reject violence. Ignatius Mmboyi, 50, from Elweesero village in Western Province, is one such man.

Ignatius used to violently pound, kick, box, slap and abuse his wife. His children watched in dismay, sometimes trying to stop him. Their neighbors, however, dared not interfere. Such beatings are commonly considered 'bedroom' or 'domestic affairs', and therefore a family matter for male heads of household. Here Ignatius describes how domestic violence almost destroyed his marriage and made him realize the need for men to change and for communities to intervene to stop violence against women.

"Whenever my wife did anything wrong I would hit her. Her resort to alcohol made me angry. On one occasion, she arrived home drunk. I was about to beat her when Gavana, my closest friend walked in on our fight. He spent a long time talking to us and urged us to discuss



The EMI group members during an outreach at one of the local licensed beer dens in Elweesero village.

our problems. Over the next few months, my wife and I worked hard at sorting out our differences. Gradually we rebuilt our relationship and became a loving couple again

Inspired by my own success in abandoning violence and saving my marriage, I joined three friends in May 2006 to form the Elweesero Men's Initiative (EMI). The group aims to improve family relationships and promote respect for women and girls in our community. Its' thirty two male members have all recognized the long lasting damage their behavior has had on both the victims and on themselves as the perpetrators of violence. They have resolved to stop using violence and work constructively with their families to tackle their problems and frustrations".

Every Tuesday, EMI members meet to discuss their own efforts to maintain non-violent relationships and how they can influence other men in their community to follow suit. Together they reflect on how men have learned from a young age to treat women as inferior and to exert their power over them. In doing so, they have realized that the roles of men and women have slowly evolved and changed for the better over time. Not so long ago, for example, women were seldom leaders in their communities or educated, but now they are increasingly involved in community decision-making and their daughters attend school along with their sons.

By mobilizing community members to come together to talk, Ignatius and others are helping to raise

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Laws in Kenya on Sexual Violence

The passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 2006 was a milestone in progress towards gender equality. The Act created detailed legislation to deal with all forms of sexual violence in Kenya for the first time ever. Stiff minimum sentences were introduced for a variety of criminal offences of a sexual nature; many of which were not previously specifically recognized by the law.

Key Elements of the Sexual Offences Act:

Rape

Convicted rapists will now receive a minimum of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life imprisonment. The sentence for gang rape is a minimum of 15 years in prison.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is when the vagina

or anus is penetrated with any part of the body or an object. The offence carries the same sentence as rape.

Defilement

A person who rapes or sexually assaults a child is guilty of the offence of defilement. If the child is under eleven or less the sentence is imprisonment for life.

Child Abuse

A wide variety of offences, involving the abuse of children, are now recognized in the Act. Sentences are severe and reinforce the Government of Kenya's commitment to children's rights.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation

Where people are transported within or outside of Kenya for the purposes of sexual exploitation, the sentence

is a minimum of 15 years in prison and maximum of life imprisonment.

Incest

Any male or female person committing an indecent act or causes penetration with another person known to be their child, sibling, nephew or niece, uncle or aunt or grandchild is guilty of incest.

Deliberate transmission of HIV

Any person who knows they are infected with HIV or any other life threatening sexually transmitted disease and causes another person to become infected will be sentenced for a minimum of 15 years in prison and a maximum of life imprisonment.

For more information on the Sexual Offences Act see

<http://www.thesexualoffencesact.com>

Men's Involvement Builds a Bridge of Hope

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awareness that violence against women is wrong. They confront attitudes of people who condone violence and are challenging both men and women to get involved in their campaign to stop violence. Group members have begun sensitizing the community through talks at schools, barazas, community gatherings, peer to peer conversations, home visits and informal chats.

EMI members have also become increasingly aware of the toll AIDS has had on their community and in particular on married couples. The group has recently lost one of its own members to AIDS and is familiar with the strains relationships are placed under when one partner tests negative and the other positive. All too often husbands blame their wives for bringing the virus into the family and accuse them of infidelity. Women are, however, biologically more prone to HIV infection than men and their husbands or partners will most likely eventually test positive too.

Whatever people's HIV status, EMI is helping couples to understand the virus, to protect themselves and to stay together. People with HIV can remain healthy and lead normal lives. Ignatius and his wife have publicly declared their status and encourage others to know their status. Through support groups linked to the comprehensive care centre in Kakamega's provincial hospital, EMI is helping trace defaulters and promoting adherence to ARV treatment.

Ignatius has himself witnessed positive changes in his own life. He no longer abuses his wife but treats her with respect. With counseling and support from other members of EMI, Ignatius has learned to redirect anger, frustrations and disappointments into constructive conversations with his wife. More regular and honest communication with his wife and children has helped strengthen his bonds with the family and create a more rewarding home life.

Since EMI became active, they have noticed changes in their community. People now talk more freely about violence as well as health issues such as HIV and AIDS. The success of their work to end violence against women has also been recognized by people within and outside of the community and their efforts have received support.

Get involved in the campaign in end violence against women. You can join the campaign to end violence against women. Mobilize men in your community to discuss violence against women. Talk about the serious long term consequences of violence on the victims and perpetrators.

Violence has serious long lasting consequences. Everybody has a right to live free from violence. If you are experiencing violence don't keep silent. Start by letting a friend, peer or a relative know about it. Find support from within the



Ignatius with his wife at their home in Elweesero

community and discuss what options you may have. Report the incident to the local police station – there are laws protecting women against domestic and sexual violence. Participating in support groups can help. Engage your community in interactive discussions that can stop violence.

To learn more, contact Elweesero Men Initiative by email: elweeseromen@yahoo.com

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