

16 YEARS FOR 16 DAYS

South Africans around the country are challenged to declare a truce on violence against women and children – and, ultimately, to make it a permanent one.

Focus On

November 2006 Nursing Update

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Imagine if, for 16 days, there was no rape, no child abuse, no sexual harassment, and no emotional abuse. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence is an international campaign that was started by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) in 1991 and runs from 25 November (International Day Against Violence Against Women) to 10

December (International Human Rights Day). This symbolic link between violence against women and violation of human rights emphasises that the one is as unspeakable as the other. Although the global campaign focuses on violence against women only, South Africa added children to its campaign because of the high incidence of child abuse in the country. South Africa is still home to high levels of violence against its women and children, despite a world-renowned Constitution and a legislative overhaul that safeguards women's rights.

Since it began 16 years ago, the 16 Days of Activism has been used as an organising strategy by women's groups to call for the elimination of violence against women by:

- Raising awareness about gender-based violence as a human rights issue at the local, national, regional and international levels
- Strengthening local work around violence against women
- Establishing a clear link between local and international work to end violence against women
- Providing a forum in which organisers can develop and share effective strategies
- Demonstrating the solidarity of women around the world organising against violence against women
- Creating tools to pressure governments to implement promises made to eliminate violence against women. Last year the campaign, coordinated by the Department of Correctional Services, popularised the white ribbon as a symbol of personal and organisational commitment to the eradication of violence against women and children. For the eighth year, South Africa is taking part in the global campaign.

The South African Campaign also aims to:

- Generate greater awareness of the negative impact of violence on the development of women and children.
- Stress the importance of partnerships between government and civil society in eradicating women and child abuse.
- Involve men and boys as crucial role players in the eradication of violence against women and children.
- Provide victims and survivors of violence with information about legislative services and other mechanisms put in place by the government to ameliorate the impact of violence on their lives.
- Raise funds for non-governmental and community based organisations working with victims and survivors of violence.

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, said: "Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace."

Violence against women is a direct consequence of the inequalities between women and men. It denies women their most basic human rights, such as the right to health, and undermines the social and economic development of communities and whole countries. Statistics paint a horrifying picture of the social consequences of violence against women. In 2002, the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation declaring violence against women a public health emergency, and a major cause of death and disability for women 16 to 44 years of age. In a World Bank report, it was estimated that violence against women was as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined. The economic cost is also considerable.

A 2003 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the costs of intimate partner violence in the USA alone exceed \$5.8-billion per year, 4.1-billion of which is for direct medical and health care services, while productivity losses account for nearly \$1.8-billion. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, with the abuser usually someone known to her. Violence against women and girls is a universal problem of epidemic proportions and is perhaps the most pervasive human rights violation that we know today... it devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development

What's being done?

Addi Lang, founder member of the Return to Roots Foundation, which deals with rape prevention, was invited, by the Women Empowered Programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, to attend an evening seminar in May this year to engage participants on the issue of Women and Abuse. "Here we found there was a palpable frustration and desperation among many attendees, including myself, at the lack of action against the violent atrocities perpetrated against women and children, she reports.

"Many expressed the view that rhetoric and theory in the absence of no-nonsense activism was tantamount to turning a blind eye to the severity of the onslaught against women's rights to safety and human dignity. "Fighting back raw emotion and grappling with the enormity of the battle against women and abuse, many attendees enquired about how they could intervene in stemming the rising tide of violence against women," she continued.

"The initial cause, by way of a marketing campaign, was started through my own company, Return to Roots Africa, where a brand or product directly supports a cause. This became the start of strategic alliances which have now been formed with Opera Africa (arts and culture), Tivoli Ristorante, (food Industry, including mentoring and business skills), Figures Models SA Benmore (life skills and mentoring), and TBS Services (safety and security). Others are soon to follow, where small businesses can stand together and enhance the value of corporate social responsibility." The Return to Roots Foundation has links with the CWGL and continues to utilize business linkage and networking as a main source of the awareness campaign of rape prevention.

"After hosting the fourth successful women's day event, called Networking through Salsa, we now prepare for Networking through Opera, which includes a production of Romeo and Juliet at the SA State Theatre in October and November as a fundraiser, in which the lead singer, South African born Michelle Breedt (currently the most sought after mezzo sopranos in Europe) is making a contribution to the Return to Roots Foundation" Addi explains.

We now have alliances with over 20 small businesses and can offer value adds to the loyalty program for membership, which begins early 2007. Other angles of fundraising include events, ie Romance 4 Roots, Rights 4 Roots, Run 4 Roots (Comrades runners pledge support), Womens Day events, Ride 4 Roots (cyclists participating in the 94.7 cycle challenge pledge their support) We then offer companies the possibility of sponsoring direct projects in rural and peri urban areas.

The impact of abuse on women and children

Clinical and corporate psychologist and consultant, Dr Merle Friedman, recently gave testimony as the expert witness on the side of the prosecution in the Jacob Zuma rape trial. She provided a theoretical overview of the abuse of women and children in society at the Women and Abuse Seminar which took place in May. Attributing the structural dynamics of violence to society, community, family and the individual, Dr Friedman elaborated:

Society

Social structures are not engineered to support women and children. This allows for society to become complicit in the oppression and abuse of women. For example, the nature of social structures and the lack of proper social services do not facilitate the reporting of abuse and act as a deterrent to women and children seeking help.

Community

There is insufficient space for women within community structures to assume leadership roles and to assert that they know what is good for them.

Family

Autocratic and patriarchal families, where women's voices are ignored and where children are still expected to be seen and not heard, become fertile grounds for abusive relationships to thrive unchecked.

Individual

An exclusive preoccupation with the individual is inadequate for understanding abusive behaviour. Rather, it is an amalgam of various social structures that socialise individuals into particular patterns of abusive behaviour. It is also important to acknowledge that not every male or female is abusive. Dr Friedman identified the following side effects that abused women are likely to experience:

Lack of confidence and self-esteem

Women stay in abusive relationships because they feel that they will not be able to make it on their own.

Depression and anxiety

Women may lapse into clinical depression and/or anxious depression and may become fearful of the future.

Post-traumatic stress disorders

This is a life- and brain-changing disorder.

Alcohol or drug abuse

Women may turn to substance abuse or self-medicate as a form of escapism.

Medical problems

Physical and mental abuse gives rise to various medical problems such as gynecological and gastronomical disorders.

“Abuse has a holistic impact on the victim,” Dr Friedman explained. “It impacts negatively on the victim’s life, love and work relationships. For example, an abused mother is usually unable to parent properly, she is unable to engage in meaningful relationships and she is unable to work effectively. Furthermore, abuse generally operates in a cyclical pattern. The abusive partner generally feels remorse after abusing his partner. He apologises and, because the woman lacks self-esteem and confidence, she believes him and forgives him and the pattern of abuse perpetuates itself.” Referring to the Disability Adjusted Life Years Index (DALY), Dr Friedman pointed out that gender-based crimes (rape and domestic victimisation) account for approximately one in five healthy years lost to women aged 15 to 44 in established market economies, and 5% in developing countries. Globally, the health burden of gender-based victimisation is comparable to other high risk diseases such as HIV/AIDS, cancers, TB and cardiovascular diseases.

Citing figures from the US, Dr Friedman sketched the economic impact of abuse on women. In aggregate, rape remains the most costly crime, accounting for \$5,100 tangible out of pocket expenses and \$87,000 for emotional distress and lost quality of life. Furthermore, it impairs women’s holistic functioning for approximately eight months and her sexual functioning for six years or more. Social support does moderate the impact. To further illustrate the impact of rape on an individual, Dr Friedman referred to a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Study (PTSD) – The Burden on the Individual and Society, conducted at Harvard University. The study, which drew on the National Co-morbidity Sample, showed that males are more likely to develop PTSD when raped, and women are more likely to develop PTSD with physical abuse and molestation. Eight percent of males and 20.45% of females were more than likely to develop PTSD with any trauma.

The 1992 UN Declaration on Violence against Women

This is the first international human rights instrument to address the issue and contains this definition: "Violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". Some women experience domestic violence in the family at the hands of an abusive partner or relative. Others face sexual harassment in the workplace. In some countries, women are subjected to harmful traditional practices which can leave them scarred or severely traumatised, or they may be forced to marry at an early age, increasing their vulnerability to abuse. Women may also be forced into prostitution by traffickers and, in times of conflict, it is women who are most likely to be the target of sexual violence, especially rape. And abuse is not just physical. It may also be emotional, sexual or psychological. In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture.

Poverty, marginalisation and certain aspects of women's identity, such as their race or ethnicity, can also leave some women more vulnerable to violence. While men also experience violence, women's lower social status puts them at particular risk, and the number of cases of violence against women continues to grow at an alarming rate. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) calls, at article 4, for states to condemn violence against women and not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination. States should pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating violence against women.

The Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, provides for the realization of equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to political and public life, as well as to education, health and employment. CEDAW articles 2, 5, 11, 12 and 16 of the Convention require the state parties to take action to protect women against violence of any kind occurring within the family, at the work place or in any other area of social life. General Recommendation 19 of the committee, which monitors the treaty (CEDAW Committee), noted that "[g]ender-based violence ... impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions" and was a form of discrimination (124).

Rape and HIV/AIDS

Protecting women (and men) from rape, and thus from the potential exposure to HIV caused by rape, requires a number of measures. Amnesty International has documented rape in police custody, in prisons, in the community and in areas of conflict or war. While each situation requires some particular reform, what is common to all is that there needs to be political will to make clear that rape is an unacceptable crime and will be punished; that there must be public education to encourage greater gender-awareness; that police and medical professionals should be provided with more training on sensitive investigation and documentation of rape; that medico-legal and trauma services be strengthened and that laws on rape and other sexual offences be reformed to adequately address the nature and seriousness of rape. The gravity of rape has been recognised at the highest international level.

The International Criminal Court, under article 7 (1) (g) of the Rome Statute of the ICC, considers rape (and similarly grave forms of sexual abuse) as crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population. When committed in the context of an international or non-international armed conflict, these offences also constitute war crimes (18). Addressing the crime of rape requires support and protection for witnesses, before, during and after the trial. The obstacles posed to effective justice in rape cases are considerable and supporting complainants effectively is essential if justice is to be done.

Women face gender-specific risks from HIV in a number of ways. The growing proportion of women affected by HIV arises from a mix of physiological, social and human rights factors. Women and girls appear to have a higher inherent risk of being infected via heterosexual activity (compared to men) because semen contains higher levels of HIV than vaginal fluids. Moreover the vagina offers a larger area of mucosal tissue subject to micro-injuries through which the virus can enter the bloodstream. Women are thus more likely than men to contract HIV through a single heterosexual encounter (10).

Young women are particularly vulnerable to coerced sex and are increasingly being infected with HIV/AIDS. Over half of new HIV infections worldwide are occurring among young people between the ages of 15 and 24, and over 60% of HIV-positive youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are women. A study conducted in Tanzania in 2001 found that HIV-positive women were over two and half times more likely than HIV-negative women to have experienced violence perpetrated by their current partner. However the differential levels of infection seen in southern Africa and elsewhere, where four to five times more young women than young men in the same age group are infected each year, do not reflect solely, or even mainly, biological differences between males and females but rather social and human rights factors. For many women the most common risk factor they face is living with an HIV-positive husband or partner (whether he

is aware of his status or not). Other risk factors include: the level of violence to which women are subjected; harmful traditional practices, which put women at higher risk; and socio-economic factors; which limit women's capacity to protect themselves.

Women's inability to negotiate safe sex and refuse unwanted sex is closely linked to the high prevalence HIV/AIDS. Unwanted sex – from being unable to say “no” to a partner and be heard, to sexual assault such as rape – results in a higher risk of abrasion and bleeding, providing a ready avenue for transmission of the virus. Both realities obliterate women's ability to protect themselves from infection.

Violence is a cause, as well as a consequence of, HIV/AIDS, and for many women the fear of violence prevents them from declaring their HIV-positive status and seeking help and treatment. They have been driven from their homes, left destitute, ostracized by their families and community and subjected to extreme physical and emotional abuse. In 1998 Gugu Dhlamini was stoned to death by men in her community in South Africa, after she declared her positive status on radio and television on World Aids Day.

Womankind Worldwide

Womankind Worldwide is an organization based in the UK and believes that violence against women is an abuse of their fundamental human rights, including their rights to health, and freedom from torture. Aside from the physical, emotional and mental toll on women, violence prevents women from participating fully in society. Violence limits women's access to resources, such as land, water and food, and their ability to participate in activities such as work, education, travel and community meetings. Violence against women also carries economic costs for both the individual and society. While the cost implications are difficult to assess, some of the costs include: missed work, health care, emergency shelters and legal procedures to bring perpetrators to justice. For these reasons, violence against women constitutes a major obstacle to development, peace and security.

It is also their belief that discrimination and unequal power relations lie at the heart of women's greater vulnerability to violence and that addressing the inequality that is deeply entrenched in all societies must be central to our responses to the issue. Throughout history, violence has been used as a way of controlling women, both within the family and the wider society, and reinforcing their subordinate position to men. There are a number of cultural, social and political factors which perpetuate and exacerbate the problem. Factors such as: cultural norms, military tactics, negative media images, social pressures on men to express their “masculinity”, inadequate laws to prohibit violence against women, government complacency, and the absence of educational programmes to address the causes and consequences of violence. Equally, the issue of

violence against women cannot be separated from other important issues affecting women, such as HIV/AIDS.

For example, women who are raped in South Africa are being killed when they disclose their HIV-positive status to the rapist. Efforts to enable women to gain control over their lives and their bodies are at the heart of Womankind Worldwide's work to reduce violence against women. Through their partners, they support the development of local strategies and responses to violence against women, that include: counseling and support services for survivors of violence, education and awareness raising to reduce tolerance and increase knowledge of the causes and consequences of violence, as well as research, advocacy and lobbying of decision-makers with the power to change laws and policies to benefit women. The forms of violence that they respond to and the types of responses may differ from country to country, but in each instance, women and men are encouraged to work together and to involve the wider community in order to bring about lasting change in attitudes and behaviours.

Quote

“ South Africa and its political leadership champions women: in law, in our Constitution, and those striving for representation at all levels in our society. But the way we value women, the dignity and respect we give women, does not reflect this.” Giving credence to the Call to Action that emanated from the Women Leading the Way: Health, Wealth and Peace Conference, convened in March 2006.

Resources

- AIDS Law Project:
 - <http://www.alp.org.za/>
- Canadian HIV/AIDS legal network:
 - <http://www.aidslaw.ca>
- Global Campaign for Microbicides:
 - <http://www.global-campaign.org/>
- Global Coalition on Women and HIV/AIDS:
 - <http://womenandaids.unaids.org/>
- GNP+: Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS:
 - <http://www.gnpplus.net/>
- ICASO: International Council of AIDS Service Organizations:
 - <http://www.icaso.org/>
- International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS:
 - <http://www.icw.org/>
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance :
 - <http://www.aidsalliance.org/>
- International Partnership for Microbicides:
 - <http://www.ipm-microbicides.org/>

- Physicians for Human Rights Action on AIDS:
 - <http://www.phrusa.org/campaigns/aids/index.html>
- UNAIDS:
 - <http://www.unaids.org>
- UNAIDS global reference group on HIV/AIDS and human rights
 - http://www.unaids.org/en/in+focus/hiv_aids_human_rights/reference+group.asp
- UNIFEM HIV/AIDS program:
 - <http://www.genderandaids.org/>
- UNFPA: Preventing HIV:
 - <http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/index.htm>
- WHO HIV/AIDS program:
 - <http://www.who.int/hiv/en/>

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