



**Together for girls**

We can end sexual violence





# A GLOBAL INJUSTICE

Sexual violence against girls is a global human rights injustice of vast proportions with severe health and social consequences. It can take different forms, including sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual exploitation. This scourge is not unique to one country or continent. Rich and poor nations, urban and rural populations, are all affected by the devastating impacts and long term consequences to girls who have experienced sexual violence, as well as their families and communities. The data is stark. In 2002, the World Health Organization estimated that 150 million girls under the age of 18 had experienced some form of sexual violence. Studies also indicate that as many as six out of ten sexual assaults are committed against girls ages 15 and younger. As shocking as these numbers seem, they are likely underestimates because most cases of sexual violence are never reported to the authorities due to fear, stigma and discrimination. Millions of girls are also exploited in prostitution and pornography every year, often lured or forced into these situations through false promises and limited knowledge about the risks.

All of these acts violate the fundamental human rights and dignity of children. Yet in too many countries, society turns a blind eye to these crimes, allowing perpetrators to go unpunished.

The consequences of this injustice are profound, with immense health and emotional effects on the individual as well as broader social and economic impacts. Girls who are victims of sexual violence are three times more likely to have an unwanted pregnancy, and girls under 15 who are pregnant are five times more likely to die in childbirth

than women ages 20 to 24. Girls who are victims of sexual violence are also at increased biological risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Even if a girl is not infected with HIV directly following an act of sexual violence, research indicates that she becomes more likely to contract infectious and chronic diseases afterwards. This is because sexual violence alters the life path of many girls, leading them down a road of depression, substance abuse and high-risk behaviors.

In many places, schools are unsafe for girls. The threat of sexual violence is not only a reason some families do not send their daughters to school, but it also may affect a victim's chances of receiving an education. Girls who have experienced sexual violence can find themselves pulled from school by their families and caregivers, or they choose to leave because of their fear and depression. A lack of education hinders a girl's prospects of earning a sustainable income, perpetuating and deepening the cycle of vulnerability. Ultimately, societies pay a deep price for these outcomes because educated women are vital to the health and prosperity of countries. One study has shown that a 1 percent increase in girls attending secondary school adds 0.3 percent in economic growth in developing countries.

Ending sexual violence will allow girls worldwide to live safer and healthier lives and fulfill their right to freedom from violence, exploitation and abuse. Ending sexual violence against girls is central to achieving justice and prosperity.

Photo Left

— Indigenous girl, 17, who became a sex worker to escape violence at home. (Guatemala)  
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# A MODEL FOR CHANGE

Our response is a unique partnership, called *Together for Girls*. Launched at the Annual Meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative in 2009, the partnership currently brings together private sector organizations including the Nduna Foundation, BD (Becton, Dickinson and Company), the CDC Foundation and Grupo ABC, four United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM (part of UN Women) and the U.S. government through the U.S. Department of State – U.S. President’s Emergency Plan (PEPFAR) in collaboration with the Office of Global Women’s Issues – and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Working with national governments and civil society, we are taking practical and effective steps to tackle sexual violence against girls.

Partnership efforts focus on three pillars:

- **Conducting national surveys and collecting data** to document the magnitude and impact of sexual violence against girls to inform government leaders, civil society and donors.
- **Supporting a plan of action at country level** with interventions tailored to address sexual violence. These range from national policy-level dialogue and legal reform to improved services and community-based approaches.
- **Launching communications and public awareness** campaigns to draw attention to the problem and motivate changes in societal and gender norms and behaviors.

Experience in Swaziland demonstrates how this approach can make a difference. Swaziland collected accurate national data on the scale and causes of sexual violence. This research indicated that one-third of girls experienced sexual violence. This alarming finding provided a catalyst for coordinated actions by the government, civil society,

international agencies and other key stakeholders. This included a national education campaign for the general public to raise awareness around the issue of sexual violence and how to prevent it, strengthening the capacity of police to respond to sexual violence through training and establishing specialized units to investigate such offenses against children, and the establishment of a child friendly court with safe spaces for children’s testimony and strengthened legal systems.

These three pillars – generating data, implementing evidence-informed policies and interventions, and mobilizing communities – will form the foundation of sustainable action in countries around the world. Laying this foundation for countries to change the social norms and behaviors which allow these crimes to go unpunished will improve the lives of girls who have experienced sexual violence.

## JOIN US

In light of the daunting challenge, why are we so optimistic about *Together for Girls*? Because countries increasingly see first-hand that violence against girls is diminishing the lives of their populations and holding back the development of their nations. There are clear signals of a welcome shift of attitudes within societies against sexual violence. The growing desire of governments and communities, and the increasingly strong voices of women and girls around the world to confront this reality, are encouraging signs. We must seize this opportunity. We must get this right. Ending sexual violence requires the support of organizations and individuals who are deeply concerned about the injustices girls face and are committed to driving change. Together we can build societies where girls are safe and valued. The result will be a more hopeful world for girls – and for us all.

To learn more, contact Veena Sriram, [vsriram@cdcfoundation.org](mailto:vsriram@cdcfoundation.org)







# WHAT WE KNOW



## MAGNITUDE & CONTEXT

- Sexual violence is universally condemned but much more frequent than people realize. In 2002, 150 million girls under 18 had experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence.  
(Source: Andrews G et al. Child sexual abuse. In Ezzati M, Lopez AD, Rodgers A, Murray C, eds. Comparative Quantification of Health Risks: Global and Regional Burden of Disease Attributable to Selected Major Risk Factors. Vol. 1. World Health Organization. Geneva, 2004; United Nations, United Nations Study on Violence Against Children. Geneva, 2006)
- Available data show that anywhere from 36% to 62% of reported sexual assaults are committed against girls 15 years or younger.  
(Source: Heise LL, Pitanguy J, Germain A. Violence against women: The hidden health burden. World Bank Discussion Papers, No. 255. Washington, D.C., 1994)
- Sexual violence is often hidden under a veil of disbelief, fear and shame. Data suggests that only 10% to 20% of child sexual abuse cases are reported to official authorities.  
(Source: Violence Against Children: United Nations Secretary-General's Study, 2006; Save the Children, 10 Essential Learning Points: Listen and Speak out against Sexual Abuse of Girls and Boys – Global Submission by the International Save the Children Alliance to the UN Study on Violence Against Children. Oslo, 2005)
- Based on a survey conducted in Swaziland by UNICEF, the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other partners in 2007, approximately one in three girls experienced some form of sexual violence and about three-quarters of the perpetrators of sexual violence against girls were men and boys from the respondent's neighborhood, boyfriends or husbands, or male relatives.  
(Source: Reza et al, Sexual violence and its health consequences for female children in Swaziland: a cluster survey study. Lancet, 2009)

## CONSEQUENCES

- Girls who experience sexual violence are at significantly greater risk for depression, post traumatic stress syndrome, suicide, unwanted pregnancy, miscarriages and other complications during pregnancy, as well as sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. They are also more likely to experience intimate partner violence or sexual violence.  
(Source: Jewkes R, Sen P, Garcia-Moreno C. Sexual violence. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds. World Report on Violence and Health. World Health Organization. Geneva, 2002)
- Child sexual abuse accounts for 7% to 8% of the mental health disease burden amongst females globally.  
(Source: Andrews G et al. Child sexual abuse. In Ezzati M, Lopez AD, Rodgers A, Murray C, eds. Comparative Quantification of Health Risks: Global and Regional Burden of Disease Attributable to Selected Major Risk Factors. Vol. 1. World Health Organization. Geneva, 2004.)
- Sexual violence has been linked to various chronic diseases including cancer, heart disease and lung disease, in part through the adoption of unhealthy behaviors after experiencing sexual violence.  
(Sources: Felitti V et al. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 1998; Danese A et al. Adverse childhood experiences and adult risk factors for age-related disease. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 2009)

## LINK WITH HIV

- Sexual violence against girls is associated with an increased risk of HIV infection, and acquiring sexually transmitted diseases.  
(Source: Jewkes R, Sen P, Garcia-Moreno C. Sexual violence. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds. World Report on Violence and Health. World Health Organization. Geneva, 2002; Jewkes et al. Intimate partner violence, relationship power inequity, and incidence of HIV infection in young women in South Africa: a cohort study. Lancet, 2010)
- When they become adults, people who were sexually abused as children are more likely to engage in behaviors known to put them at risk for HIV.  
(Source: Jewkes R, Sen P, Garcia-Moreno C. Sexual violence. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva, 2002)
- In the nine sub-Saharan African countries most affected by HIV, on average, three young women (ages 15 to 24) are infected with HIV for every young man; in the Caribbean, HIV prevalence is especially elevated among adolescent and young women, who tend to have infection rates significantly higher than males their own age.  
(Source: UNAIDS, 2009 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic. Geneva, 2006)
- Worldwide, HIV is the leading cause of death and disease among women of reproductive age (15 to 49).  
(Source: World Health Organization, Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda. Geneva, 2009)

Photo Left

— Displaced girl, 12, raped when fetching firewood. (Sudan)

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TOGETHER  
WE CAN END  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
AND BUILD A FUTURE  
WHERE GIRLS  
ARE SAFE, HEALTHY  
AND VALUED.

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Photo Right  
— Girl, 13, raped by neighbor  
(Sierra Leone)

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