

Advancing Human Rights and Eliminating Violence against Women: A Responsibility of All

Violence against women affects everyone, not only its direct victims. When a mother is abused, her children suffer; when a girl is abused, her parents and other relatives are affected; every time a woman is hurt, her whole community feels the ripples of trauma.

Countries and societies pay not only socially and emotionally, but also financially for the consequences of violence against women (VAW). Each year, VAW costs billions of dollars in lost productivity and medical care.

As violence against women affects everyone, eliminating it is also the responsibility of all. And since most perpetrators of gender based violence are men, they play a particularly important role in eradicating it.

WHAT WE CAN DO:

Support and believe victims of violence against women

One of the pervasive myths about gender-based violence is that victims often make up accusations against men they don't like. While this situation might happen occasionally, the reality is that most reports of VAW are truthful. Most victims of VAW have little to gain by making their stories public. If anything, in almost every country, their status in society diminishes and they may face an increased risk of violence. It takes great courage and strength for a woman to step forward and point a finger at her aggressor.

When we are presented with a story of violence against women, personally or professionally, it is important that we suspend our skepticism and attend to the person's practical and emotional needs. We can all make a difference by not re-victimizing women with our denial and judgment.

Help raise awareness about the issue

In the last 16 years, we have made great strides in making violence against women more visible to everyone. Many NGOs in Latin-America have created successful local and national campaigns and have helped educate the press and the public about the dynamics of VAW. Clearly, there is more to be done. Awareness has to be raised not only through public education. We all have a role to play, by talking about the issue to our family members, friends and colleagues. Many people don't believe there is a real problem until they hear the truth from someone they trust and respect.

Advocate for laws and policies that protect victims

As indicated in other parts of this package, great work has been done in creating laws to protect women against VAW. Although many of these laws could be improved and need to be constantly updated, a major challenge facing many Latin-American countries is the lack of resources and the political and social will to implement the decrees.

As private citizens, we have the responsibility to make governments accountable for adequately funding the policies they have created to protect women against violence. Furthermore, we have to make our voices heard to ensure that the problem is taken seriously and receives more than lip-service.

It is also important to make sure that institutions at the local level create and enforce zero-tolerance policies to protect women against harassment and violence. We all can have a voice on what happens in our countries, municipalities, workplace, schools and places of worship.

Be inclusive of all victims, including underserved populations

In spite of all the progress that has been made over the last sixteen years in many countries, an ongoing problem is the lack of attention and services for marginalized populations. Because of complex problems, including poverty, cultural and linguistic barriers and the reality of multiple oppressions, many women have not had access to even the minimal relief available to their more privileged counterparts.

It is imperative, as we move forward with the struggle against VAW, that we not continue to leave behind the women that might be in greatest need, especially women from indigenous and ethnic minorities, migrants, women living in extreme poverty and in rural settings, women affected by disabilities and/or HIV, and women of different sexual orientations.

WHAT MEN CAN DO:

Reflect and Act

Change begins at home, and men need to examine their own behaviors and experiences to learn if they are helping to end violence or helping to continue it. Many men who are not physically violent have used some form of violence-verbal, psychological, or sexual-at some point in their lives. And most men do nothing to stop other men who are abusive to women.

Men can begin by asking such questions as: How do I treat the people around me – children, partners, coworkers, neighbors? Are there ways in which I am controlling or abusive? Do I support sexism by laughing at sexist jokes and repeating them?

Take action as a bystander

A bystander is a family member, friend, classmate, teammate, or co-worker-anyone (male or female) who is in a relationship with someone who is abusive or experiencing abuse. Bystanders are not the primary targets or victims of violence, but they are affected by the violence because they are close to it.

There are countless ways that bystanders can prevent, interrupt, or intervene in abusive behaviors, and the majority carry little or no risk of physical confrontation. The goal is to create a peer culture in which gender-based violence is socially unacceptable. This climate would provide strong disincentives for violence. Individuals who act in abusive ways would suffer loss of respect, friends, and status, along with the greater likelihood of legal and nonlegal sanctions. Empowering male bystanders to voice their opposition to violent behavior will lead to new norms of appropriate and respected behavior.

Serve as a mentor or role model

Providing role models and mentors to young men and boys can be a vital and effective way to combat VAW. Some organizations working with men use role models to reach their audience. Some campaigns enlist celebrities and

In **Brazil**, the Instituto Promundo has implemented *Program H*, which encourages young men to question traditional “norms” associated with masculinity and promotes both discussion and reflection about the “costs” of traditional masculinity as well as the advantages of gender equitable behaviors, such as better care for their own health.

Program H, replicated throughout the world, uses educational workshops, lifestyle campaigns, innovative approaches to attracting young men to health facilities, and a culturally sensitive impact evaluation methodology.
<http://www.promundo.org.br>

In **Nicaragua**, the Asociación de Hombres contra la Violencia (Association of Men Against Violence) has organized dozens of workshops and talks with campesinos and with youth in the poor barrios. They run annual White Ribbon Campaigns and have had National Meetings attended by hundreds of men from all over the country.

sports heroes for their posters and outreach materials, while others depict ordinary men collectively voicing their concerns about violence against women.

Whether a man is a mentor or a role model depends on his relationship with other men and boys in his life. Role models set examples for those around them of positive behaviors and attitudes toward women and girls. They display respectful and nonviolent options through their actions. Mentors can be role models as well, but they also play a leading role in others' lives. They are the caretakers, teachers, coaches, bosses, and others who help to guide men and boys toward becoming nonviolent men.

Work as an ally

In addition to doing self-work, taking action as a bystander, and serving as a role model, men can help to prevent VAW by working as allies with women.

Because men have more economic, political, and social power than women, the best way for men to work as allies is to use their gender privilege in whatever way they can to prevent violence. In particular, they can try to change the policies and conditions that contribute to violence against women and the oppression of women.

Men who work as allies in this way see the benefits of gender and social equality in their own lives and the lives of the women around them. Being an ally also means being accountable to women and recognizing their leadership in violence prevention. As those who are most often targeted by gender-based violence, women must continue to lead in this field and the gender justice movement. It is essential for men, as allies, to listen to and learn from women and to be accountable for how they use their privilege.

Some of the information in this factsheet has been adapted from the Online Toolkit for Working with Men and Boys produced by the Family Violence Prevention Fund. **For more information, go to** <http://toolkit.endabuse.org/Home>

The Family Violence Prevention Fund in the United States has launched Coaching Boys into Men, a campaign that invites men to become mentors and role models to boys and young men. Based on national research findings, this initiative uses public service announcements, posters, brochures and workshops to engage men in the issue of violence against women and children and to help them recognize their role in helping to solve the problem.

A key strategy of this campaign has been to engage school athletic coaches by creating and distributing a "playbook" that encourages them to interrupt sexist and abusive behavior when it happens in everyday situations
<http://endabuse.org/>