

SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

OVERVIEW

Liberia's civil conflict exacerbated the situation of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which is extremely prevalent occurring across all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Commentators note that women in many societies are socialized to accept, tolerate, and even rationalize domestic violence and to remain silent about it. Victims of sexual and domestic violence suffer health and psychological burdens. As with all violence, impacts are felt on aspects of life and the economy of the nation.

UNICEF supports the Government of Liberia in addressing SGBV issues through various mechanisms.

Accomplishments

- Rape Law supported for amendment and implementation, expanding the definition of rape with more severe punishment of perpetrators as a deterrent. The Chief Justice has dedicated a specialised criminal court for the prosecution of SGBV cases.
- Supported establishment of the National Gender Based Violence (NGBV) Task Force chaired by the Ministry of Gender and Development. The task force has produced and is disseminating a simplified version of the amended rape law.
- Adaptation of the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) training pack by the NGBV Task Force for use by its members in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Ministry of Education has also endorsed the materials for use in schools.
- Establishment of mechanisms to prevent, monitor and report SEA and SGBV in schools and communities. These involved provision of training and referral arrangements for students, teachers and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in public and private schools in six counties. Work in communities concentrated in catchment areas served by 31 women and children protection units of the Liberian National Police (LNP).
- Rehabilitation support to SGBV victims / survivors through support to safe homes that provide psychosocial and other care services.
- Support to the LNP to establish a Women and Children Protection Section (WCPS) trained to manage sexual violence and juvenile justice cases.

Challenges

Data from the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found that 44% of women aged 15 – 49 have experienced physical violence and up to 29% had experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the survey. Another 18% have experienced sexual violence, including forced sexual initiation. On attitudes to domestic violence, 59% of women aged 15-49 consider their husbands justified in beating wives for specific reasons. Data gathered from victims of sexual violence by MSF–Spain show that two thirds of rapes take place either in the survivor's home (41%) or that of the perpetrator (25%).

Liberia's weak justice system, pervasive poverty and a lack of economic opportunities for perpetrators is compounding the situation. During the war, combatants were the principal perpetrators of sexual and gender based violence. Today, husbands, partners, boyfriends, stepfathers or stepmothers and teachers are fulfilling this role. Adult women rarely report rape unless it is accompanied by a serious injury that requires medical attention. SGBV is a contributing factor to high teenage pregnancy rates which force many girls to drop out of school. There are a limited number of health facilities providing SGBV response services and the quality of health care provided to survivors is generally poor.

FOCUS AREAS 2008-2012

- Scale up of SGVB and SEA prevention and response in communities and schools;
- Supporting Government rehabilitation of victims/survivors of SGBV through the establishment of safe homes;
- Supporting the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the provision of quality health service to survivors of SGBV;
- Building capacity of the judiciary and the police in the handling of GBV cases;

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