



## FACT SHEET: International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)

The House of Representatives introduced the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) on February 4, H.R. 4594, and the Senate introduced a similar bill, S. 2982, on the same day. I-VAWA protects women and girls worldwide by making violence prevention and response a priority for U.S. foreign policy. Specifically, I-VAWA addresses international violence against women and girls (VAW/G) through a multisectoral lens—linking the response to violence with other foreign assistance programs, such as development assistance, humanitarian aid, global health, and peacekeeping.

This coordinated response addresses socio-cultural and gender norms, the legal environment, the integration of violence prevention and response with health services, and the provision of safe educational spaces for both girls and boys. I-VAWA also allows for civil-society capacity building and program implementation by indigenous groups, which helps strengthen community ownership and enhance sustainability, as well as ensuring that programs are tailored to meet local needs and priorities.

### Intersection of Violence and HIV/AIDS

Violence against women and girls is widespread and deeply rooted in cultural norms and power dynamics. Physical, sexual, and emotional violence occur most often at the hands of people the victim knows. And in many countries, men and women alike believe that violence within the family is acceptable, which serves to perpetuate a cycle of violence.

Women and girls are at increased risk for HIV/AIDS due to violence. In sub-Saharan Africa, where the burden of HIV/AIDS is greatest, 61% of people living with HIV/AIDS are women, compared with approximately 50% globally.<sup>1</sup> Violence or the fear of violence can prevent women and girls from negotiating safer sex,<sup>2</sup> and from seeking health services or information, including HIV testing, treatment, and care.<sup>3</sup> Studies have shown that violence or the fear of violence can also have concrete impacts on behaviors that increase vulnerability to HIV and lack of access to HIV/AIDS services. For example, women who have been forced to have sex have been found to be almost six times more likely to use condoms inconsistently than those who have never been coerced.<sup>4</sup>

Trauma arising from physical, sexual, or emotional violence can also lead to behaviors that increase the risk of HIV infection, such as alcohol and drug use, regardless of whether the violence was experienced as an adult or witnessed as a child. In addition, men who are violent toward their intimate partners have been shown to be more likely to have multiple sexual partners than men who are not violent.<sup>5</sup> This is important because multiple concurrent sexual partnerships are a leading cause of the spread of HIV in a generalized epidemic such as exists in much of sub-Saharan Africa.

**One in three women around the world will be physically, sexually, or emotionally abused in her lifetime.<sup>6</sup>**

**Abused women are at greater risk of acquiring HIV,<sup>7</sup> and women living with HIV have more lifetime experience of violence than HIV-negative women.<sup>8</sup>**

**Thus, violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of HIV/AIDS.**

## Comprehensive Response to Violence Against Women and Girls

The International Violence Against Women Act recognizes that an effective response to violence against women and girls must be comprehensive and cross-cutting, as well as embedded in the culture and context of specific countries. This means that support for violence prevention and response must be present across all aspects of society—from politics and policy to classrooms and the mass media.

I-VAWA establishes a new Office for Global Women's Issues that will coordinate U.S. foreign policy efforts on gender integration and women's empowerment. I-VAWA will also elevate the existing Office of Women in Development at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), empowering it to guide USAID's efforts to integrate gender across all policies, programs, and activities of U.S. foreign assistance.

As violence is clearly linked to health, particularly susceptibility to HIV/AIDS, the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) which implements the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), has begun to link violence against women and girls programming with HIV/AIDS services. I-VAWA will help ensure OGAC can work across agencies and divisions to promote a comprehensive response to VAW/G that will strengthen the U.S. response to the AIDS pandemic. Indeed, without addressing VAW/G, our multi-billion dollar investment in fighting global HIV/AIDS is destined to fail.

**I-VAWA advances a multisectoral approach and will support programs in 5 to 20 countries in a range of areas:**

- 1. Political commitment and resource mobilization;**
- 2. Legal and judicial reform;**
- 3. Health sector reform;**
- 4. Education sector reform;**
- 5. Community mobilization for zero tolerance;**
- 6. Mass marketing for social change; and**
- 7. Interrupting the cycle of violence.**

## Sources

[1] UNAIDS, *2007 Epidemic update*.

<http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/EpiUpdate/EpiUpdArchive/2007/default.asp>.

[2] American Foundation for AIDS Research, *Women, sexual violence and HIV* (2005). <http://www.amfar.org>.

[3] Ogden, Jessica and Laura Nyblade, *Common at its core: HIV-related stigma across contexts* (2005). <http://www.icrw.org>.

[4] American Foundation for AIDS Research, *Women, sexual violence and HIV* (2005). <http://www.amfar.org>.

[5] WHO, *Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women* (2006), at 69.

[http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who\\_multicountry\\_study/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/).

[6] UNFPA, *State of World Population 2005* (2005), at 67. <http://www.wunfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm>.

[7] Heise, L., M. Ellsberg, and M. Gottemoeller (1999). "Ending violence against women," *Population Reports*, Series L. No. 11.

[8] Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, *Stop violence against women, fight AIDS*.

<http://www.womenandaids.unaids.org/themes/docs/UNAIDS%20VAW%20Brief.pdf>.

## Learn More and Take Action

Generate the political will to end the HIV/AIDS pandemic—join the Global AIDS Alliance Grassroots Network!  
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