

Indirect Risks:

- Abusive men are more likely to have HIV and to impose risky sexual practices on their partners. They are more likely to have multiple partners, sex more often, and transactional sex, to practice anal sex and to report symptoms of sexually transmitted infections.
- HIV-infected women are more likely to have experienced physical or sexual violence; and victims of violence are at higher risk of HIV infection.
- Being a victim of sexual violence can make women susceptible to risk behaviours which can lead to HIV infection. Forced sex in childhood or adolescence increases the likelihood of:
 - ◆ having first consensual sex at a younger age
 - ◆ engaging in unprotected sex
 - ◆ having multiple partners
 - ◆ participating in transactional sex.
- People who experience forced sex in intimate relationships often find it difficult to negotiate condom use; and proposing the use of the condom may increase women's risk of violence.
- Fear of partner violence and rape impede women's access to HIV/AIDS information, HIV testing, HIV/AIDS treatment and counselling.

Sexual Violence in South Africa

- The rape of over 50 000 girls and women of all ages is reported annually to the police in South Africa.
- The rate of reported rape is 194 per 100 000 female population. This is at least three times higher than, for example, the rate in the United States.
- It is estimated that only one out of nine rapes is reported, so the real extent of the problem is much larger.

This fact sheet was compiled from the article 'Sexual Violence and HIV: Understanding the Linkages', written as part of the collaboration between AfroAIDSinfo (www.afroaidsinfo.org) and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (www.svri.org).



Sexual Violence
Research Initiative



MRC AfroAIDSinfo
Project

For more online resources, on sexual violence see the Sexual Violence Research Initiative Web site at <http://www.svri.org> Obtain a list of references for this fact sheet from SVRI at svri@mrc.ac.za

For more information on HIV/AIDS, see the AfroAIDSinfo Web portal at www.afroaidsinfo.org or contact us at afroaidsinfo@mrc.ac.za

Sexual Violence Research Initiative and AfroAIDSinfo

Sexual Violence and HIV



Fact sheet

The link between sexual violence and HIV is well established. It is in part biological as women may be exposed to HIV during rape, and partly mediated through gender power inequalities and the impact of sexual violence on women's sense of self, and in particular perceptions of control over sexual access to their bodies and their self-esteem.

Fact sheet

Compiled by:

Sexual Violence Research Initiative and MRC AfroAIDSinfo Project

What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence is defined as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” Sexual violence can take place in different circumstances and settings. These include:

- ⇒ coerced sex in marriage and dating relationships,
- ⇒ rape by strangers,
- ⇒ systematic rape during armed conflict,
- ⇒ sexual harassment,
- ⇒ sexual abuse of children,
- ⇒ sexual abuse of people with mental and physical disabilities,
- ⇒ forced prostitution and sexual trafficking,
- ⇒ child marriage,
- ⇒ denial of the right to use contraception,
- ⇒ forced abortion, and
- ⇒ violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation and obligatory inspections for virginity.

Sexual Violence in Facts

- More than one in five women will be raped or experience an attempted rape from a partner or another man in her lifetime, whilst up to a third of girls report their first sexual experience was forced.
- Perpetrators of sexual violence are most often an intimate partner or family member.
- Between 250 000 and 500 000 women in

Rwanda were raped during the 1994 genocide.

- 700 thousand – 4 million women per year are forced or sold into prostitution worldwide.
- Sex workers are among those disproportionately affected by HIV.

Determinants of Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence is a gendered phenomenon in that its nature and extent are a reflection of pre-existing social, cultural and economic disparities between men and women.
- Both men and women can be victims of sexual violence although the vast majority of sexually violent acts are committed by men against women and children.
- Rape is an act through which men communicate their power to their victim. It can be an act of punishment and an expression of holding power over someone and it can be an act through which the perpetrators affirm to themselves a sense of power which they may not feel in other aspects of their lives.
- Male privilege and control was identified as one of the three top factors predicting the perpetration of violence against women.
- Sexual violence has been linked to a cluster of male behaviours which include: sexual and physical violence, having many sexual partners, transactional sex, and alcohol abuse.

Consequences of Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence results in a range of health consequences both in the short and long term. These include:
 - ⇒ HIV,
 - ⇒ sexually transmitted infections,
 - ⇒ unwanted pregnancy,
 - ⇒ unsafe abortion,

- ⇒ chronic pelvic pain,
- ⇒ genital injuries,
- ⇒ pelvic fistulae,
- ⇒ urinary tract infections,
- ⇒ post-traumatic stress disorder,
- ⇒ depression,
- ⇒ suicide, and
- ⇒ homicide.

- Rape Trauma Syndrome is a particular type of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which refers to the range of physical, psychological and behavioural reactions that may be experienced by sexual violence survivors.
- Social exclusion and rejection: Many women do not report rape due to shame and fear of stigmatisation. The widespread fear of HIV/AIDS can contribute to the stigmatisation of rape survivors and their children, as well as of others suspected of carrying the illness.
- Violence breeds violence: In later life, child victims of violence are more likely to be victims or perpetrators themselves.

Sexual Violence and Women’s Vulnerability to HIV

Direct Risks:

- If the perpetrator is infected, HIV transmission may occur during the rape. If the rape results in abrasions and tears these will facilitate the entry of the virus into the bloodstream.

Those who suffer anal rape are also considerably more susceptible to HIV since anal tissues can be easily damaged, allowing the virus an easier entry into the body.