



## Addressing the Drivers and Effects of Sexual Violence in Kenya: GVRC's Journey

'GVRC continues to gain a reputation for innovation in dealing with survivors of sexual violence. The organisation has fine-tuned the model and continues to learn from mistakes. We have developed a GVRC Sexual Violence Management Handbook where the steps used in dealing with survivors is recorded and monitored. Local hospitals have asked for support in setting up centres modeled on the GVRC. Additionally, a form developed to record the survivor's medical history is being used by government and sixteen Ugandan Members of Parliament spent time with GVRC in 2016 to see how best to replicate the model in Uganda.

#### -Rebecca Gitau, Manager, Medical and Psychosocial Support Services, GVRC

# Sexual violence (SV) has devastating effects on the mind, body and spirit of a human being.

For this reason, it is critical for SV survivors to have affordable, accessible and comprehensive medical and psychosocial support, as they recover and seek to live full lives. In that regard, the Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC) housed by the Nairobi Women's Hospital receives funds from organisations such as the African Women's Development Fund, so that

the organisation can provide high quality services to survivors free of charge. Since establishment in 2001, GVRC has expanded operations to five facilities in Kenya serving over 30,000 survivors annually, with the majority being women and children.

SV is driven by systemic discrimination embedded in patriarchal norms and beliefs. Cultural values and beliefs make women more vulnerable. Deviation from the expected norms, .e.g. being vocal and assertive, as well as using various forms of birth control or family planning, may make girls and young

women targets for violence. In addition, lack of clarity in law and enforcement practices on marital rape as a criminal offence that is punishable if married men coerce sex from their spouses whenever they wish, also contributes to sexual violence and entrenched attitudes and behaviors. Over the years, GVRC has worked with individuals and institutions in and outside of government, on a range of activities, to address these issues. This work includes law reform initiatives and activities where citizens are vigorously engaged to address the underlying causes of SV.





#### **Milestones: AWDF Grant to GVRC**

GVRC received a grant of USD 40,000 between May 2014 to May 2016, with the following achievements:

**212** §

#### girls & women

from Nairobi, Kajiado, Kiambu and Nakuru received medical support for sexual violence.

follow up cases on HIV/AIDS status and mental state plan

2 support group

programme cycles were undertaken.

Revamped counseling units in

**5** GVRC Centers







for **10-month** therapy programmes for 3 support groups targeting women, children and parents.

Introduction of the reproductive health sessions has led to an improvement in scores of the 2015 GVRC student cohort. Students achieved a score of **94%** with respect to that year's Nursing Council of Kenya Examinations.









Development of GVRC process documents including the GVRC Sexual Violence Management Guidelines Handbook.

Enhanced social media engagement on sexual violence with the largest audience being males between the ages of

'We have seen people change. They now have restored their self-esteem. For example, we have a girl who could not speak when she came here. She is now a rapper in Kibera and is facilitating a group. We believe the key success factor was having programmes that were fun and that went beyond therapy. We also discussed issues such economic empowerment and legal support. We brought in image consultants to help navigate selfesteem issues and also introduced intergenerational dialogues as a way to break the silence and stigma around sex, sexuality and violence. Initially people were so shy they would write what their thoughts were on paper. But then towards the end, they could not keep quiet.'

> -Rebecca Gitau, Manager, Medical and Psychosocial Support Services, **GVRC**

### The Results: **AWDF** and **GVRC's** partnership

The key changes realised by GVRC with the support of AWDF are represented in the following stories of change.

#### **Provision of Youth Friendly Reproductive Health Services**

'All young people need is the platform and a safe space to talk where they won't be lectured. They know a lot but also learn from peers who may give wrong information...'

> -John Chege, **GVRC**

In 2015, GVRC started a campaign on their social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) using the hashtag #activism to reach more young people online, with a view of having an open,



honest discussion on ways to prevent and address sexual violence. This saw a rise in the number of university students previously engaging with GVRC rise from 100 to 300-350 annually. As a result of the interactions with GVRC during the grant period (May 2014-May 2016), three young people built applications that have proved useful in the prevention and response to sexual violence.

'The Usalama App was developed in late 2016 and has been used since then. Once you download it on your phone, you can pre-programme three emergency contacts. If you think you are in trouble, you press the alert button on the app and your emergency contacts are alerted with details of your geographical location. The app also has contacts for the nearest hospital including GVRCs,

the nearest police station, shelters and other places you can access legal aid services...'

#### -Nimo Kimeria, **GVRC**

'...The app also has a feature where you key in your next support group or therapy session and GVRC can follow-up with you on appointments. The information that is being collated through the database is also helping service providers such as GVRC have accurate numbers on instances of sexual violence and abuse. Harmonising data will assist in having accurate numbers that can be utilised for gender responsive budgeting by the government.'

-Rebecca Gitau



#### **Bragging Rights**

The aspects of the AWDF project that GVRC staff are most proud of include:

#### **Exceeding Expectations**

'We set out to reach 200 girls and women, to provide them with medical and psychosocial treatment. We reached 212! All of them graduated from the ten step programme that aims to support survivors in their healing!'

> -John Chege, **GVRC**

#### **Making Room for Innovation and Creativity**

'This grant allowed us to get creative. We integrated art therapy as a way to reach more survivors of sexual violence and this has been extremely useful in dealing with children. Through their art, we were able to figure out what happened to them and where they were in terms of the healing process. For example, heavy shading denotes a child who is

heavily traumatised and can't speak. If you see loads of red, it means danger, anger or depression. Dull colors point to self-blame or low self-esteem. We also revamped our therapy rooms across all GVRC centers to make them more conducive and calming for survivors.'

-Rebecca Gitau

"The support group at GVRC is most helpful because when you come with your problems - thinking that it is too heavy for you and you are the only one then somebody else comes with another story that is so serious and so heavy. So it makes you feel like, 'I am not the only one, I am not going through this alone. We are many.' As we share in the support group, we encourage one another and we learn more. If you want to book an appointment with any of the counselors, you can come anytime, any day. At times you come, and your heart is so heavy but once you talk to a counselor and you go back home, at least you are relieved."

-Sheila

"In Nairobi, we deal with more urban cases. Those coming in from rural areas are often for reconstructive surgeries - these massive tears. GVRC has been very useful by removing suffering and assisting our patients. We perform operations to repair reproductive

organs that have been damaged during assault. That's when it's beyond any rural remedies available"

"We have support groups for different issues - one for domestic violence, rape, and another for children. The survivors meet monthly – they share and encourage each other. We also provide access to legal justice - they will come to us to support court cases. That's where you get to know, how's your case going in court? Is there hope? Do you need a lawyer? Those are the major things we

"We also started a support group for the police. We realised that even they go through a lot of trauma. With qualified counselors, we piloted a police support group where they can also share. Due to the high levels of awareness we've done - we've agreed to work with them to increase their capacities to better deal with the issues when a client goes to report."

> -Alberta Wambua, **Executive Director, GVRC**



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