

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE GAMBIA



GBV

**A Handbook
(Including stories of survivors)**



Prepared by the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), and the Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations (the Victims' Center) to raise awareness and increase redress on Sexual and Gender Based Violence in The Gambia.

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List of acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IHRDA	Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SOA	Sexual Offences Act
TRRC.	Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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STOP GBV

**NO TO SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE!!**

1. INTRODUCTION TO THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is designed to facilitate a better understanding of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in The Gambia. It contains stories of women in The Gambia that have been subjected to different forms of SGBV. These stories have been included for advocacy purposes. It also includes, in summary of laws addressing SGBV in The Gambia, the main causes of SGBV, its effects, and how to prevent SGBV.

2. BACKGROUND OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE GAMBIA

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) as defined by The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships.¹ SGBV is mostly rooted in individual attitudes that allow violence in the family, work place, and community. Men may be victims of SGBV. However, the preponderance of evidence suggests that women are much more likely to be abused.²

Although Rape, Child Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other forms of SGBV are criminal offences in The Gambia, its occurrence is believed to be quite common. According to The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018, 75 percent of girls between the ages of 15 to 19 have undergone FGM.³ 44 percent of girls between the ages of 15-19 think the practice should continue, while 49 percent think it should stop.⁴ 67 percent of girls at the age of 18-19 believe that a man should beat his wife.⁵

1 The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) definition of Sexual and Gender Based Violence, available here: <http://www.unhcr.org/sexual-and-gender-based-violence.html>. (last accessed 17 February 2020).

2 World Health Organisation. WHO/WHD Violence against women: a priority health issue. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1997. WHO document WHO/FRH/WHD/97.8#.

3 The Gambia Bureau of Statistics. 2019. The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018, Survey Findings Report. Banjul, The Gambia: The Gambia Bureau of Statistics. Available here: <https://mics-survey-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/West%20and%20Central%20Africa/Gambia/2018/Snapshots/The%20Gambia%202018%20MICS%20Statistical%20Snapshots/English.pdf> (last accessed 17 February 2020).

4 Ibid

5 Ibid (n3) above.

The laws of The Gambia prohibit rape and assault; however spousal rape is not recognized by the law.⁶ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports to The Gambia noted the adoption of the Domestic Violence Act (DVC) and the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) in 2013. However, it is concerned that violence against women remains widespread.⁷ The Committee amongst other things stated its concern on the lack of criminalization of marital rape and unclear provisions in the Domestic Violence Act relating to the definition of “aggravated” domestic violence and allowing out-of-court settlements, which often do not take into account women’s best interest.⁸

There are no specific statistics on the occurrence of Rape in The Gambia, but it has become clear from reports that this behavior has become a common practice in families, at community level and at the State level. In 2019, the Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) heard from victims of SGBV during the Jammeh era with most, if not, all, of the perpetrators being government or military/security officials.⁹ Toufah Jallow, a 23-year-old accused former President Yahya Jammeh of rape. Her allegations against Jammeh became a catalyst for change in The Gambia.¹⁰

Speaking up about one’s personal experience in The Gambia, however, has its challenges and backlash. The challenges being how victims who speak out are treated by the public, as they face the risk of re-victimization. The TRRC issued a warning that it would use the law to clamp down on those who discredit witnesses, following a politically-motivated backlash against one of the victims who had alleged that she was raped by two “junglers” while in detention.¹¹

6 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Violence Against Women in Africa: A situational Analysis. Available here: <http://www1.uneca.org/Portals/awro/Publications/21VAW%20in%20Africa-A%20situational%20analysis.pdf>. (last accessed 17 February 2020).

7 CEDAW/C/GMB/CO/4-5.

8 Ibid.

9 JUSTICEINFO.NET, “GAMBIA’S TRRC HEARS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND TORTURE AGAINST WOMEN”, 28 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/truth-commissions/42738-gambia-trrc-sexual-violence-torture-against-women.html>. (last accessed 17 February 2020).

10 The New Humanitarian, “The Gambia’s “MeToo” year breaks silence on Rape”, 5 February 2020. Available at <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/02/05/Gambia-SGBV-gender-jammeh-MeToo>. (last accessed 17 February 2020).

11 Ibid.

3. LAWS ADDRESSING SGBV IN THE GAMBIA

Sexual Offences Act

The Sexual Offences Act criminalizes every form of sexual assault, exploitation and harassment. This legislation amends the law and procedure relating to the trial of rape and other sexual offences. The Act addresses some of the barriers that have impeded the trial of rape and other sexual offences in the past. This Act expands the definition of sexual assault and other coercive acts to include circumstances where the survivor is coerced into the sexual acts and incorporates perpetrators who would have escaped punishment prior to the amendments of this legislation.

Section 7 prohibits a court from treating the evidence of any complainant in criminal proceedings at which an accused is charged with an offence of a sexual or indecent nature with special caution because the accused is charged with such an offence.

Section 11 lays down the special duties a prosecutor. It states that ‘In criminal proceedings at which an accused is charged with an offence of a sexual nature, the prosecutor shall consult with the complainant in such proceedings in order:

1. To ensure that all information relevant to the trial has been obtained from the complainant, including information relevant to the question whether the accused maybe released on bail and the imposition of any conditions of bail; and
2. To provide all such information to the complainants as will be necessary to lessen the impact of the trial on the complainant’.

The Act goes further to state in section 13 that a complainant of rape has the right:

1. To attend any proceedings where the question is considered whether an accused who is in custody on a charge of rape may be released on bail or, if bail has been granted to the accused, whether any further conditions of bail may be imposed, or whether any such conditions of bail may be amended or supplemented; and

2. To request the prosecutor in proceedings referred to in paragraph (a) to present any information or evidence to the court that may be relevant to any question under consideration by the court in such proceedings’.

Domestic Violence Act

The Domestic Violence Act (DVA) 2013 addresses domestic violence and provides protection for the survivors of domestic violence, particularly women and children.

The DVA states in its section 18 that the use of violence in the domestic setting is not justified on the basis of consent.¹² Police officers are also required by the Act to respond promptly to a request by any person for assistance from domestic violence and shall offer such protection as the circumstances of the case or the person who made the report requires, even when the person reporting is not the victim of the domestic violence.¹³ A court before which criminal proceedings in relation to domestic violence is pending may, on its own motion or on an application by the victims, issue a protection order in respect of the victim.¹⁴

A court may issue a protection order to prohibit a respondent from committing or threatening to commit an act of domestic violence personally or otherwise against an applicant, or a relation or a friend of the applicant.¹⁵

Women’s Act

The Women’s Act provides an innovative and comprehensive provision for the protection of women from violence. Section 6(1) of the Act provides for a protection that was not addressed in the 1997 Constitution or any other law in The Gambia. It reads:

(1) Every woman shall be protected against any form of physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm, suffering, or violence whether occurring in public or private life;

(2) Any form of violence against women is hereby prohibited; and

¹² Domestic Violence Act, 2013. Section 18.

¹³ Ibid, section 21.

¹⁴ Ibid, 25(4).

¹⁵ Ibid, Section 28.

(3) All Government Departments, agencies, organs, public or private institutions shall take appropriate measures to promote and protect women's rights and their legal status from any form of abuse by any person, enterprise, organization or institution.

Women's (Amendment) Act of 2015 prohibits the act of Female Genital Mutilation. It states in section 32A that:

1. A person shall not engage in female circumcision
2. A person who engages in female circumcision commits an offence and is liable on conviction:
 - (a) To imprisonment for a term of three years or a fine of fifty thousand dalasi or both; and
 - (b) Where female circumcision causes death, to life imprisonment.

Trafficking in Persons Act

The Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 is being enforced throughout the country. This is a comprehensive piece of legislation that addresses, amongst other things, the problems of trafficking in women and children. The main purpose of the Act is to prevent, suppress, and punish the perpetrators of trafficking in persons, and to rehabilitate and reintegrate survivors of trafficking.

Section 38 of the Act elaborates on the consent of victims of trafficking. It states that in prosecution, the consent of a victim of trafficking to the intended or realized exploitation is irrelevant where a trafficking of a person occurs. It further states that past sexual behaviors of a victim of trafficking is irrelevant and inadmissible for the purpose of proving that he or she was engaged in other sexual behavior or to prove his or her sexual predisposition. The legal age of consent to sex, legal age of marriage or other discretionary age is not a defense to trafficking.

Section 45 lays down provisions for the protection of victims of trafficking. It states inter alia that the victims of trafficking shall not be subjected to discriminatory treatment in practice on account of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, religion, political or other opinion etc. The proceedings shall be conducted in such manner that will not be detrimental or prejudicial to the rights of the victim of trafficking and are consistent with the psychological and physical safety of a victim of trafficking and witnesses.

Children's Act

The Children's Act provides a criminal justice system for children. The Act protects children from all forms of violence and abuse, economic and sexual exploitation, and trafficking. It also prohibits child prostitution, harmful publications, child marriage and harmful traditional practices.

Section 27 prohibits any person from deceiving, coercing or using any means whatsoever to induce a child to go from one place to another to do any act with intent that the child may be, or knowing that it is likely that he or she will be, forced or reduced to have sexual intercourse with the another person;¹⁶ or, in order to gratify the passions of another person, procures, entices or leads away, even with his or her consent, a child for immoral purpose.¹⁷

Constitution of The Gambia, 1997

Section 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia adopted in 1996, and amended in 2004, includes the following provisions:¹⁸

(1) No person shall be held in slavery or servitude

(2) No person shall be required to perform forced labour.

Section 29 of the same Constitution includes the following provisions: (2) Children under the age of sixteen years are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation and shall not be employed in or required to perform work that is likely to be hazardous, or to interfere with their education, or be harmful to their health of physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.¹⁹

Section 27 of the same Constitution includes the following provisions: (1) Men and women of full age and capacity shall have the right to marry and found a family (2) Marriage shall be based on the free and full consent of the intended parties.²⁰

The said Constitution in its Section 21 provides that “No person shall be subject to torture or inhuman degrading punishment or other treatment”.²¹

16 Children's Act of The Gambia, Laws of The Gambia, Vol. 3, Cap 45:01. Section 27. ISBN 978 0 409 04772 1.

17 Ibid.

18 Constitution of The Republic of The Gambia, 1997. Section 20. Reprinted in 2007.

19 Ibid, section 29.

20 Ibid (n 12) above, section 27

21 Ibid, section 21.

4. STORIES OF SURVIVORS

It always takes courage for SGBV victims/survivors to come out and tell their stories, and such testimonies are vital for effective advocacy and for healing. In this section, survivors, who have opted for anonymity, tell their stories.

SJJ²²

At the age of 3, I left my hometown to live with my aunt in Bundung. For twelve (12) years, I faced a lot of maltreatment living with my aunt. At the age of 10, I was sexually harassed and raped by my Islamic teacher who had told me, “If I don’t have sex with you, I will tell your aunt that you are not doing well in your studies and that you follow men around.” As a result, I let the Islamic teacher do as he pleased.

At the age of 15, I was forced to get married to a 40-year-old man. My father had threatened to divorce my mother if I didn’t get married to the man. My aunt also threatened to throw me out of the house if I refused the marriage. This thus affected my education, as I was not able to go back to school that year until the following year.

While I was in school, my mother and other relatives forced me to go visit my husband and in-laws. I visited but was raped by my husband while I was asleep. I woke up the following day in pain, but there was no blood. I could not walk, but everyone was in a celebratory mood, clapping and dancing. Later, I got pregnant, but my husband denied responsibility, and I lost the pregnancy after three (3) months.

My father died in 2013, and in 2016 my I divorced.

FB²³

I used to help my mother sell water at the Serrekunda General Hospital where I was raped by a construction worker who used to buy water from me. This happened when I was eleven (11). I had resisted going to sell water at the hospital, but every time I did, my mum would beat me up, and later she decided not to support my education.

I then decided to play football, but eventually moved to the provinces to live with my uncle. On my first day, I was also raped by my uncle. I couldn’t report

22 IHRDA and GCVHRV interview with SJJ, 13TH January 2020.

23 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with FB, 31ST January 2020.

the matter to my father because I felt he won't believe me. I got pregnant, but it was aborted by my grandmother. After a year, I returned to school but my mum insisted that I continue selling water at the hospital. I did with the belief that the construction worker who had raped me would no longer be there. I was raped again by the same man and got pregnant again. I lost the pregnancy again, this time due to stress. I was in a coma for a month.

BN & TK²⁴

On our way to court some time in 2016, TK and I were arrested and taken to the PIU office in Banjul by security officers. We were both arrested on our way to the High Court in Banjul to observe the court proceedings of Solo Sandeng, who was our dad and uncle.

At the PIU we were taken to a large room with a desk and a chair where we were both interrogated. We were asked about the reason for wanting to attend the court proceedings and we mentioned that we were going to observe. I was slapped because I had a gum in my mouth and was taken to another dark room where I was raped three times by two security officers.

On her part, my cousin TK was not raped, but was tortured, and as a result sustained injuries. We were both released after two days in custody.

SJ²⁵

I lost my mother when I was six (6) months old. I was rejected by my father because he was never married to my mother. For that reason, I was raised by my grandmother. At the age of 9, I was sexually abused by my foster mother's brother-in-law who lived with us in the same compound. I was also abused by my foster brother.²⁶ As a result of my struggles in the village, which also contributed to my dropping out of school several times, I decided to leave the village and move to the house of my sister who had just got married. I was again sexually harassed and raped twice by my sister's husband. I was also physically abused by my relatives. This abuse has resulted to several injuries on my body.²⁷

24 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with BN and TK 14th and 13th January 2020.

25 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with SJ, 15th January 2020.

26 Ibid

27 Ibid

SL²⁸

In April 2000, I joined students at the April 10 & 11 protest. Together with other students at the protest, I was chased and beaten by paramilitary officers at “Jeshwang” around the Gambia Technical and Training Institute (GTTI). I was caught by the paramilitary officers and beaten up, but I cannot recall everything else that happened. All I remember is that I woke up at the hospital and saw that blood was oozing out of my private part, and I had also sustained bruises on my body. As a result of the injuries on my private part, I lost my first child. The beatings also caused me severe pain in my abdomen and back.

MD²⁹

I have been married to my husband for fourteen (14) years. I have five (5) children. I, however, have been a victim of Gender-Based Violence from my husband for years. I have been assaulted and beaten by my husband several times. My husband has threatened to divorce me several times, but I have always insisted on staying and saving my marriage. I have reported the case to the Cadi court that summoned my husband, but the court is yet for give a final decision on the case.

FFMS³⁰

In 2018, I visited Edward Francis Small Hospital to treat an abdominal pain (UTI) that I have been nursing for some time. At the hospital, I was attended to by a Doctor who was recommended by another Doctor I was scheduled to meet. On my second appointment, the Doctor asked me to meet him at the clinic. I got to the clinic, but it was closed; so I called back and he told me he was at his quarters. I went to the quarters, but was raped by the Doctor. I conceived a baby as a result of that, but later lost the child. I reported the case to the police, but later withdrew it following pressure from the Doctor that raped me.

JN³¹

I was raped by a neighbor at the age of three (3) years. I had reported home and asked my father to help me pull my underwear down. My father called

28 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with SL, 7th February 2020.

29 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with MD, 6th February 2020.

30 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with FFMS, 14TH January 2020.

31 IHRDA and GCVHR interview with JN, 31st January 2020.

my mother to do it instead, and she noticed that there were some scratches and bruises in my private part. I was taken to the Serrekunda Hospital and the medical report showed that I had been raped. The case is currently at the Juvenile Court for hearing.

5. ANALYSIS OF SURVIVORS' STORIES

Gender stereotypes are often used to justify violence against women. Cultural norms often state that men are aggressive, controlling and dominant, while women are docile, subservient, and rely on men for provision. These norms can foster a culture of outright abuse, such as rape, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, the latter spurred by outdated and harmful notions of female sexuality and virginity. These norms can also cause violence or conflict in families when they are challenged. SJ's case clearly shows closely related pattern. She was abused by her sister's husband who seemed to be the breadwinner at that time.³² Despite sexually harassing and raping her, he managed to get away with it every time. His wife, SJ's sister, also failed to believe SJ, as it would threaten her marriage.³³

Social norms, on the other hand, shape authority. These norms support the authority of male and female teachers over children, often using some form of violence to maintain that authority and reinforce social and gender norms. SJJ's case fits the social norm aspect of the main causes of SGBV in society. She was forcefully raped by her Islamic teacher who had asked her to comply with his quest to have sex with her or he would report her to her aunt.³⁴ Socially, parents do not always tend to believe their children in such instances, and for that SJJ couldn't report the case to her family because she felt they won't believe her.³⁵

Conflict and unrest situations have also created more SGBV cases. Women like BN and MS face unique dangers in times of crisis, making everyday activities potentially dangerous. According to the United Nations, the maternal mortality rate in conflict and post-conflict countries rises to 2.5 times higher than the average. During crisis, women may experience not only sexual exploitation and abuse, but also gendered denial of access to basic services. These risks are all compounded by the intersecting inequalities and vulnerabilities. In The Gambia, there have been cases of violence against women during conflict. As

32 Ibid (n 15) above.

33 Ibid

34 Ibid (n 12) above.

35 Ibid.

stated in the cases of BN and MS, in conflict situations, such as the one that arose during the Electoral Reform protest in 2016 and that led to the arrest of top politicians in the country, with the death of Solo Sandeng, public security officials tend to torture and raped women in the process.³⁶ In seven out of ten documented cases, rape was not reported to the Courts, while one case was withdrawn out of pressure.

Generally, the narratives around SGBV portray women as victims and men as perpetrators. In our society, this is also seen to be accurate.³⁷ The main perpetrators, although being men, are mostly family members of the victims, as seen in the case of SJ and MD,³⁸ medical officials, as seen in the case of FFMS and FB³⁹, security or states officials as in the case of BN, SL and MS⁴⁰, and from close friends or neighbours, and teachers as in the case of SJJ⁴¹, and JN⁴².

❖ **The impact of SGBV on women's health:**

The effects of SGBV on women vary widely. It depends on the nature of the particular interest, the woman's relationship with her abuser, and the context in which it happens. SGBV typically has immediate and long-term physical, psychological, and social effects. For the victims/survivors, these are interconnected.⁴³ The above collection of survivors' stories reveals the following physical and psychological health effects:

➤ **Physical Impact**

a. Injury and disability

Victims of SGBV suffer serious injuries and disabilities as a result of the violence inflicted on them. For instance, JN's medical report indicated that she sustained injuries in her private part after she was raped.⁴⁴ MD sustained severe injuries⁴⁵ and SL felt unconscious as a result of the beating she got from

36 Ibid (n 14) above.

37 IHRDA and GCVHRV Focus Group Discussion, 7th February 2020.

38 Ibid (n 15) and (n 17) above.

39 Ibid (n 13), (n 16) and (n 18) above.

40 Ibid (n 14) above.

41 Ibid (n 12) above

42 Ibid (19) above.

43 Ibid (n 25) above.

44 Ibid (n 21) above.

45 Ibid (n 19) above.

the paramilitaries.⁴⁶ She sat on a wheelchair for months and used crutches with four legs to support her.⁴⁷ She still faces a lot of pain on her abdomen and her back, as a result of the beatings and eventual rape by the paramilitaries.⁴⁸

b. Sexual and Reproductive health problems.

Victims of SGBV are also more than likely faced with severe sexual and reproductive health problems. JN, just like SJ, experienced severe pain, such as internal bleeding, which in-turn resulted to a miscarriage.⁴⁹

➤ Psychological Impact

a. Anxiety

Anxiety is a major psychological effect that most victims of SGBV face. This brings about doubt and pulls women in a circle of unending thoughts. This is evident in the case of FS who mentioned that she was always scared to sleep at night because she kept thinking of what would happen to her if she died. Her anxiety also always takes her mind back to the event of what happened to her.⁵⁰ FB was also seriously affected and still getting psychological support years after rape.⁵¹ JN, although young, would always run away whenever she saw the man that raped her.⁵²

b. Stigma

Victims also tend to be stigmatized after being subjected to SGBV. Some would go to the extent of not wanting to socialize with anyone.⁵³ The stigma attached to victims are mostly social factors which always put the blame on women (in the case of rape) and most, if not all, victims end up being re-victimized. This in-turn builds the feeling of guilt and shame for many victims.⁵⁴

46 Ibid (n 18) above.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid (n 21) above.

50 Ibid (n 20) above.

51 Ibid (n 13) above.

52 Ibid (n 21) above.

53 Ibid (n 13) above; 'I told my neighbors that if anyone they don't know ask about me, they should tell me that they don't know me. I felt so bad when they raped me'.

54 FS said 'It was very difficult for me to come home I could not even walk properly. Everything was out of me like I had the fear to deal this between me and Allah'. JN hides whenever his rapist visits her family.

c. Fear

Victims fear to meet perpetrators as in the cases of FB, BN and FS. For instance, FS could not go to an appointment because she was afraid to meet her rapist. The fear is orchestrated by perpetrators. For instance, BN indicated: “Some of my neighbors will come to our house to warn me, because they met some people on the way who asked them about me saying that they have something to give me. They asked my friend’s younger sister twice and she came to tell me. Another woman who lives by the road told me that they asked her about me too.” SJ still gets frightened to look at her mother, because the latter forced her into a marriage.⁵⁵

d. Mistrust of others

FB could not tell her mother why she could not go sell water on the streets, because she was convinced that her mom wouldn’t believe her. She would pretend to obey her mom, but rather go and hide, instead of selling water, which would result in beating from her mother.⁵⁶

e. Loneliness and depression

Most are left all alone with little or no support from family members. This causes depression and loneliness, and also lowers their self-esteem.⁵⁷

➤ Economic and Social Impact

- a. Rejection and social stigma at the community level. For instance, FB felt rejected by her family that she ended up leaving her mom and dad and went to stay with her aunt.
- b. Reduced ability to participate in social and economic activities. For instance, BN was threatened with reprisals, had she reported her case to court. Thus, she had to resign from her job for fear of meeting her rapists and the paramilitary: BN said: “I was not doing anything and I resigned from my job because I got a warning from the Paramilitary, so it was not safe for me to go to work.”

55 IHRDA and Victims Center interview with BN, 14th January, 2020.

56 Ibid (n 13) above

57 SJ stated; ‘Because of my experience, I could not be in any relationship with anyone but it is now changing. I don’t have any rapport with my family members except for salutations. I cannot stay a long time at anyone’s house except at my grandmother’s. I cannot sleep at my foster mother’s house’

- c. Increased vulnerability to other types of SGBV. FFMS was raped and then forced by her family into a marriage relationship.
- d. Negative impact on women's income-generating power.
- e. Dropping out of school. After being raped many times by her brother-in-law, SJ dropped out of school for a few years. BN also dropped out of school for one year.

6. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ERADICATE/REDUCE THE CAUSES OF SGBV?

1. Raise parents' awareness of the dangers of traditional practices
2. Transform attitudes towards harmful practices at multiple levels
3. Engage respected community elders in the fight against violence
4. Engage boys and young men to become change agents
5. Reach out to marginalized and rural areas
6. Embolden women and girls to speak out and to report cases either to the Police or Courts
7. Education
8. Prosecutors should be intransigent with perpetrators and should not drop charges merely because the perpetrator offers to marry the victim.
9. Courts should handle rape cases through an expedited procedure



7. CONCLUSION

Sexual and Gender Based Violence is very common in The Gambia. Men and most women accept violence as a way of life and do nothing about it. The culture of silence on this practice needs to be broken to encourage more discussion and intervention on the matter. Courts and the Police should also be sensitive to the issue, and, as a matter of policy, they should deal with SGBV cases speedily. Otherwise, perpetrators of SGBV would continue going unpunished, which can encourage the persistence of the phenomenon and deter victims from reporting cases.

The Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) is pan African human rights NGOs registered in The Gambia since 1998. IHRDA envisions An African continent where all have access to justice using human rights mechanisms at the national, sub-regional and regional levels for the promotion and protection of human rights. Through litigation, advocacy and capacity building activities, IHRDA demonstrates that the use of African human rights instruments and mechanisms is an important tool to ensure respect for human rights. For more details, visit www.ihrda.org

The Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations (The Victims' Center), is as a non-profit organization registered in The Gambia since 2017. The Victims' Center provides support to the victims in terms of psychological and medical treatment and educational support to the victims' children and channels their grievances for onward advocacy, engagement and possible redress in collaboration with both governmental and non-governmental bodies, UN Agencies and donors engaged in the fight against impunity and for truth, justice and accountability. For more details, visit www.victimscentergm.org

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