Globally, up to six out of every ten women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. The continued prevalence of violence against women and girls demonstrates that this global pandemic of alarming proportions is yet to be tackled with all the necessary political commitment and resources.—UN Women

Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence — yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.—UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 8 March 2007

Violence against women, including rape, is believed to be “the most pervasive human rights violation we know today.”

Violence against women devastates individuals, families, and communities and stalls development.

Inequality between women and men is seen by many experts as a root cause of violence against women. Laws that don’t protect women and girls from sexual abuse and violence in the developing world are prevalent. Male-dominated traditions may give men license to abuse girls and women. Many victims do not come forward due to shame and threats.

For women and girls 16–44 years old, violence is a major cause of death and disability. In 1994, a World Bank study on ten selected risk factors facing girls and women in this age group found rape and domestic violence more dangerous than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war, and malaria.
United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight objectives designed by the UN to improve social and economic conditions in developing countries by the end of 2015. **Each month we focus on the MDGs impacted by our theme and our monthly featured project.**

This month we highlight MDG #3: **PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN**

- Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.
- Women are slowly rising to political power but mainly when boosted by quotas and other special measures.

How to Protect and Empower Sexually Abused Women & Girls in Developing Countries

- **Define Gender-based Abuse:** In December 1993, the global dimensions of female-targeted violence were acknowledged by the international community when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.** The Declaration “affirmed that the phenomenon violates, impairs or nullifies women’s human rights and their exercise of fundamental freedoms.”

- **Enforce commitments by governments:** “Countries around the world agreed in 1993 that there should be shelters, legal aid and other services for girls and women at risk, and counseling and rehabilitation for perpetrators.”

- **Provide victims of abuse with safe shelter and resources.** Many shelters in countries are still provided by non-governmental organizations, not the governments.

- **Adopt Legislation that provides for prosecution of the offender and criminalize violence against women.** “Women need strong laws, backed by implementation and services for protection and prevention.”

- **Provide women and girls with education and business skills training** to help them become self-sufficient and exert more control in relationships.

- **Ensure women’s access to independent savings accounts,** micro-credit, and other financial tools.

- **Encourage leadership among women** in their communities and governments.
Emerge Global: Providing Sexually Abused Girls in Sri Lanka with Solutions

This month’s featured program, Emerge Global, works with Sri Lankan girls 10-18 years old who’ve been removed from their homes due to abuse or high risk of abuse. Emerge Global supports these girls in becoming confident and independent, aiming to empower them to support themselves and end abuse in their own sphere of influence.

Specifically, the Emerge Bead program provides the girls with critical skills and resources for their futures, using a comprehensive curriculum that emphasizes leadership, life skills, and business knowledge while simultaneously generating personal savings through jewelry design.

Most of the girls helped by Emerge Global have endured incest their entire lives and about half of current participants have children as a result of rape.

Sri Lanka and Gender-based Violence

♀ Gender-based violence is rampant in Sri Lanka. According to Emerge Global, women often feel they have no choice but to tolerate abuse of themselves and their daughters, and fear more violence if they confront abusers.

♀ At least 60 percent of all women in Sri Lanka have experienced domestic violence.8

♀ “There is a long practice of rape in the Sri Lankan society as a means to exercise power and demoralization of communities.”9

♀ The patriarchal traditions of the Sri Lankan culture are deep-rooted. “Although women in the larger cities have become more educated and independent, especially families in poorer, rural areas, from cultural minorities or lower castes are still very male-dominated with discrimination of women, domestic violence and rape being especially prevalent.”10

♀ Insufficient prevention: “Incidents of rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, incest, assault, obscenity against women, unwanted advances, perverted acts, forced pornography, forced prostitution and media violence all prevail in Sri Lankan society. Violence against women continues to take place in the private and public sphere, and the measures taken to prevent and redress, remain insufficient.”11

♀ Upsurge in Violence: “Education level, women holding management positions, women in professions and even in normal social norms, Sri Lankan women enjoy better position than in Pakistan, Bangladesh or India. But in the recent past there’s been a tremendous upsurge in acts of violence against women.”12

The amount of courage it takes for these girls to testify in court against abusers, often who are their own fathers, is remarkable. At Emerge, we believe these are the girls who will change abuse in Sri Lanka as we know it. They simply need a little support and a few tools to get there.

--Emerge Global
Veil of Silence: "While some positive measures to address gender-based violence in Sri Lanka through enactment of laws are in place, it remains hidden in the private domain, shrouded by a veil of silence and denial." 13

Questions for Discussion

1. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, Sri Lanka has in many ways acknowledged the economic advantages of educating and empowering women. It was ranked 16th in the world for gender equality in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2010, ahead of many developed countries, such as the Netherlands, The United States and Canada. Yet gender-based violence is rampant in Sri Lanka. What do you think may be some reasons behind this disparity in Sri Lanka?

2. Sri Lanka is a conservative and patriarchal country, where “marriage is considered a private matter; the common perception is that men are superior and their sexual urges indomitable.” 14 What are some ways to change deep-rooted patriarchal cultural beliefs such as these?

3. Do you believe there are adequate laws to protect women and girls from violence and sexual abuse in your own community?

Voices: Women and Girls We Serve

The following statements were provided by Emerge Global.

I like making jewelry because it frees my mind.
--Program participant, age 15

I was very happy to keep my own first piece of jewelry and I will remember it till I die. Even if it breaks into a million pieces, I will treasure it all my life.--RMCD, recent program graduate

When I bead, it is almost like meditating. I have to pay attention to each bead, one at a time. Then my mind cannot think anything else. The bead program was there when I arrived at Ma-Sevana. When I arrived the other girls told me about Alia miss. They said that there are very pretty beads which we can use to make stuff. Then we can also sell them and get money into our accounts. I think beads can help other girls. If I can help I like it a lot. My favorite part is to select the colors and collect patterns. --SR, now a peer educator in our program

We were waiting for Mondays with a heart full of happiness. I thank Mrs. Nirukshi, Alia Miss, and everybody. I think I owe them . . . for my baby, for making my house . . . didn’t have anyone. I have learnt something and the money I have earned is worth so much to me. Also, my husband doesn’t have a fixed job. He is doing driving as his job. So that money I saved is worth so much to me. Because of that, I thank them. --APIL, now building her own money with savings from the Emerge Bead Program

I have learnt to seek my creativeness which is inside my body and participate in this program with my absolute best. I’ve also learned how to improve some vocational training, and how to talk bravely. --CTLK, current participant who aims to be a police woman or lawyer

Changing the world one dinner at a time
Sources:


2 Ibid


6 Ibid


10 Ibid


