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## **Violence Against Girls and Women Linked to Spread of HIV/AIDS**

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=17133>

More than 37 million people are living with HIV and almost half of them are women. Some have become infected through sexual violence and exploitation. It is estimated that one in three women worldwide will be raped or abused in their lifetime.

UNICEF is working to confront the inequalities that leave girls and women particularly vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.

“Increasingly the face of HIV/AIDS, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, is a female face and it is a young female face,” says UNICEF Child Protection Office Pamela Shifman. “And until we address violence against women and prevent violence against women and girls, we will not be able to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic.”

Most recently rape has been used to terrorize and humiliate girls and women in the Darfur region of Sudan. But in many other parts of the world – such as the conflict-affected areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo – the same tactics are used. Because of the high rate of HIV infection among soldiers, it is estimated that almost one-third of rape victims in parts of DRC will be infected by HIV.

Ms. Shifman visited DRC last year and says victims are aged from seven to over seventy. “These girls and women had survived the violence so far, they had survived the rape. But many of them

will actually die from the violence, because far too many of them will become HIV positive and will die of AIDS as a result of the rape.”

Child soldiers can also become the perpetrators as well as the victims of sexual violence; the risk of HIV infection is high. In some countries, as many girls as boys are recruited, and end up being forced into marriage or used as sex slaves.

UNICEF is a leader in demobilizing child soldiers and is committed to ensuring that HIV care and support is included when children return to their communities. In emergencies UNICEF assesses the vulnerability of children to HIV and AIDS so that effective action can be taken.

UNICEF believes that in order to succeed in the fight against HIV and AIDS, violence against women and girls must be stopped.

For more information:

<http://www.unicef.org>

<http://www.genderandaids.org/>

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