

You are the salt of the earth
You are the light of the world
let your light shine before others
and glorify your Father in heaven
November 2024



Supporting survivors and challenging the drivers of gender-based violence (GBV)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that *“Violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a major public health problem and a violation of women’s human rights.”*

WHO estimates that, globally, about 1 in 3 women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence. Intimate partner violence is the most prolific: 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.

Governments have started to give this huge issue greater focus, with nearly 500 laws or policies to protect women against violence created or strengthened since 2019, and conviction rates for GBV are improving in many countries.

Gender inequality and social norms that view violence against women as acceptable are two root causes of these shocking statistics.

Sadly, GBV also contributes to a gender disparity in new HIV infections: in South Africa, for example, women are twice as likely to be living with HIV.

But GBV is preventable.

With your help, ACET programmes are challenging the drivers of GBV and, thanks to you, supporting its survivors. This newsletter shares a few examples with you.



Catering vocational training in Zimbabwe



‘Toxic Masculinities’ training in Nigeria

WARNING:

This newsletter contains real-life stories of rape, abuse and violence.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in the newsletter, please do seek help and support.

ACET Nigeria promotes gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours with young people at their Esteem clubs; helps survivors report GBV and get convictions; challenges harmful practices such as child marriage that perpetuate a cycle of violence; and runs community training to educate about positive masculinity and nonviolent conflict resolution in relationships.

In Zimbabwe, the Nehemiah Project works with female sex workers, who are particularly vulnerable, helping them negotiate safer sex;

report violence; and access GBV services. They also provide business and vocational training, so these ladies can create a safer way of earning a living.

Our Relationships and Sex Education programmes in the UK and Ukraine foster healthy relationships, setting boundaries, and having respect for others. We teach about sexual consent, promote gender equality, and tackle the potentially harmful consequences of sexting and how ‘learning from’ pornography can skew your views on relationships.



Simi's story

Nigerian authorities declared a 'state of emergency' on sexual and gender-based violence in 2020, as rape is such a prevalent human rights violation in the nation. Most survivors do not see justice, perpetrators are not prosecuted, and hundreds of cases aren't even reported because of corruption, stigma, and victim blaming.

Girls with a disability are four times more likely to have experienced rape than their peers with no chronic disability.

Vulnerable girls like Simi.

Simi is only 18 years old and is hearing-impaired.

When she became pregnant, she could not talk about what had happened to her. So, she wrote down the name of the person that raped her.

Because of perceived shame and stigma, her family took her and her belongings to the man's house. Here, she lived with him as her husband - but the man turned her into a punching bag.

He beat her and subjected her to all kinds of maltreatment.

He then abandoned her.

Simi gave birth in 2023 but, when she was breastfeeding, she had no food to eat.

Sometimes she would go for more than three days without food.

Simi struggles all alone, as the father is not taking responsibility to provide for her and their baby.

But Simi is now receiving support from the ACET Nigeria team. They are helping her access the National Human Rights Commission, in order to get financial support from the man who took advantage of her vulnerability.



Simi and her child



An Esteem Club

Harmful gender relations are the foundation of violence against women and girls. With your help, ACET Nigeria is working hard with its communities to challenge these widely accepted social norms.

ACET Nigeria's Children's and Esteem clubs promote gender equality and tackle the custom of child marriage. The children learn that girls and boys are equal, can fulfil the same roles, and should have the same opportunities in education and life. They are empowered to delay sex, keep themselves safe and have goals and aspirations.

ACET Nigeria also trains community leaders to be educators and safeguarding leads, and their "Better Parenting" courses tackle a culture of physical punishment and gender inequality in the home. Their "Toxic Masculinities" community training aims to break a cycle of gender-based violence.

Your support helps this to continue.



Noeline's story

In absolute numbers, South Africa has a higher number of cases of HIV than any other country – 7.6 million. There is a huge gender disparity in infection rates, as women are twice as likely to have HIV.

Lack of education and job opportunities, violence against women, and stigma are amongst the factors that drive this inequality.

KwaZulu-Natal Province has the highest HIV burden – this is where our partner, Crossroads, works with ladies like Noeline.

Here, Noeline tells her story.



Noeline

"You cannot have HIV in the community and live peacefully. You will always get people who are afraid to talk to you and insult you. Life before the Crossroads Support Group was stressful.

I passed Matric at night school and my dream was to be a nurse, but it never came through because of the HIV challenges.

At the Crossroads HIV Support Group, it was so easy to step out of the shame and join the group because Sister Lewazo is so encouraging and open about her status. I realized that I cannot keep quiet about my status. I want to be the one who prevents others from getting HIV.



Serving soup to the community

I have learnt there is nothing wrong with being HIV+, it is not a death sentence. I just have to adjust my attitude and not shirk on taking my medication. Using condoms is the cheapest method to prevent HIV, as well as STIs and early pregnancy. You shouldn't engage in sex if you do not know your partner well.

You should report all gender-based violence to the police. Do not keep quiet about your situation even if they don't believe you! Women in our community are not given much of a voice – but I have learnt that women are strong, we bring value to the table.

In our group, we are like family. I can share all my worries because I receive emotional support that really encourages me.

We do soup kitchen three days a week for the community at the Crossroads Hope Centre. I have learnt how to take care of others, especially the elderly in the community that attend our GOGOs gatherings.*

I believe I can achieve my dreams. I only wish to be of help to others and protect others from getting HIV."

(*granny in Zulu)



Anenyasha's story

Many women in Bulawayo's high-density suburbs resort to sex work in desperation, due to poverty, lack of job opportunities, and the responsibility of caring for family.

Sex work for Zimbabwean women like Anenyasha is difficult and dangerous. The risk of violence for sex workers is great. As many as 75% of female sex workers are assaulted or abused at least once in their lifetimes.

Anenyasha tells her story.



Anenyasha (left) with one of the Nehemiah team

Two of Anenyasha's children



"While working as a sex worker, I met a man who became my boyfriend and the father of my fourth child. He was abusive but - because he was able to take care of me and our child - I stayed with him.

If I made any money, he would beat me up and take that money from me.

But then I was introduced to the Nehemiah Project early last year. They taught me that I can work with my own hands and take care of my children. I learnt so much and was also offered counselling.

When I got a business grant from the Nehemiah Project, my boyfriend turned the house upside down and took all the money.

He beat me up till I was badly bruised. He tore up all my pieces of clothing including the clothes I was wearing, because I told him I wanted to leave him."

"The Nehemiah project helped me with clothes and also medication for my injuries.

It was then that I was told I could report the abuse. It was successful because he got arrested.

My two middle girls, I had left with their fathers' relatives, because I had no way to take care of them.

But through the Nehemiah project, I was empowered to take my children back through the assistance of the police.

I discovered my daughters had been living in conditions that were not conducive. Many nights they would spend without eating. They never went to school.

My third daughter was timid and gravely afraid of people and would not interact or speak. It was discovered that her father's younger brother had been sexually abusing her.

I opened a police case and now my daughter is doing a lot better.

I have since stopped being a sex worker and work with my own hands.

Currently I am selling tomatoes and chicken cuts, to support my children. If I hadn't connected with the Nehemiah Project, I would have been dead because of the abuse or life stresses.

My encouragement to those who are experiencing abuse is to report it and seek help and counselling.

There is a way out."

Simbisai's story

"A friend of mine introduced me to the Nehemiah Project after she saw the abuse I was experiencing. I got vocational training and counselling from the project, and they helped me start a new life and move away from my abusive marriage.

It was not easy as he was the father of my daughter and I hoped to raise her in a stable environment with both parents, but with the help I got from the project to start a business, he became more abusive by taking the money I had made.

He would come home drunk and get violent. At times he would even sleep with a knife under the pillow just to scare me.

Even though he was working he wasn't responsible; he wouldn't buy food or pay rent. I had to always make a plan to ensure there was something in the house.

Even then if I did piece jobs, working as a maid or selling items, he would take my money and go spend it in the bar.

The Nehemiah Project helped me to get a place away from my abusive husband. I left the house with just my and my daughters clothing - and nothing else.

Currently I am selling groceries and am able to take my daughter to school through the Nehemiah Project's assistance.

I hope that I will be a beauty therapist one day and also own a grocery shop.

If I had not connected with the project my child would still not be going to school and I would still be with my abusive husband.

Thanks to the Nehemiah Project I have broken free from his hold."



Beauty therapy
vocational training

FACTS & STATS

Violence against women continues to be a pervasive human rights abuse in Zimbabwe.

39% of women have reported being physically abused since the age of 15, and 12% between 15 and 49 years old have experienced sexual violence.

Intimate Partner Violence is the most dominant form.



Selling groceries



Nadiya's story

"I saw how my mother, having given birth to me at the age of 18, suffered. She had sex with my father as a teenager. He would beat her. Then he left her. I also saw my grandfather get drunk and beat my grandmother.

I was raised by my mother and my siblings' dad (not my dad). He sexually harassed me. He molested me, insulted me a lot, grabbed my private parts.

So, the topic of sex in general is very painful for me.

I first attended ACET Ukraine sessions in 7th and 8th grade (aged 12 to 14). Their "University of Healthy Youth" topics were interesting - but I understood that they were a challenge for me.

I had been sure that sex at my young age was normal and that it's everyone's choice to do it. I watched erotic films, I thought that sex before marriage was good, that abortions were normal, and that all men are scum.

But after the ACET sessions, I really thought about it. I seemed to argue with myself. I had other thoughts - about fidelity, love, the hope that there are good men somewhere.

My conscience was telling me something new, because I heard something new at the ACET sessions.

In the following spring, it turned out my friend helped at the ACET youth club 'Space of Great Stories.' I went with her and met the leader, Svetlana. As I often joked about sex, Svetlana talked to me about it. We talked about this topic for a long time. I said at the time that my opinion would not change, but in fact I started to change.

I cried at the club because they raised difficult questions for me: relationships with boys, with my family, with friends. I underestimated a lot. I am grateful to Svetlana for her many hours of conversations with me.

Now I help at the club, and I want to become an ACET coach. I am already different.

I am still afraid of men, especially drunk ones, because I saw how my drunken grandfather beat my grandmother many times. And I am still sometimes afraid that I will repeat my mother's mistakes in choosing men.

But there is hope that I will find love, that my life will be good. Now I have friends at the ACET club who make the world a better place."



15 year old Nadiya with friends



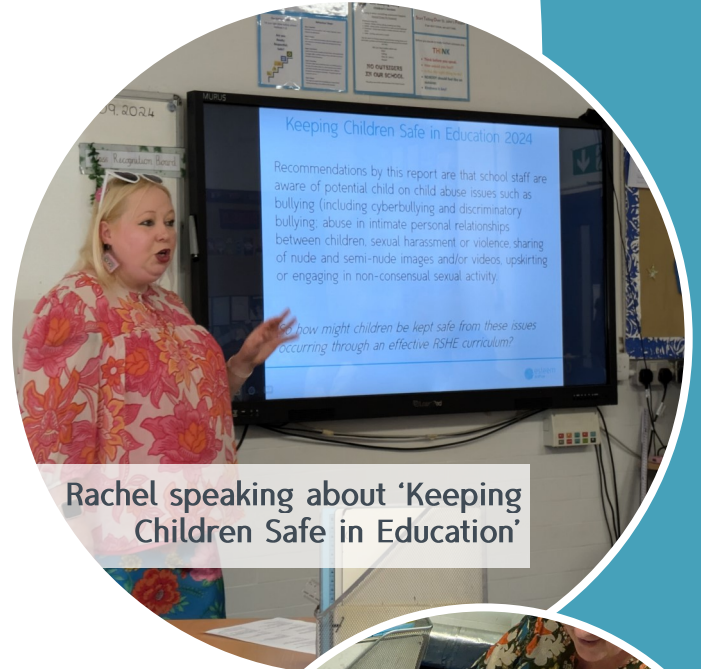
Nadiya at the ACET Ukraine club

Alarming Statistics

The NSPCC estimates that half a million UK children suffer abuse each year, with 2.5% of under 11s affected. Threats to children can be online or in person; from adults known to them; from criminal activity such as gangs; or from another child.

The National Police Chiefs' Council reports that 52% of all child sexual abuse cases involve children offending against another child and data from English and Welsh police forces from 2019 to 2022 suggests that there has been a 26% increase in cases of abuse where the perpetrator was a child aged under 10.

This is why talking to children early on is so important!



Rachel speaking about 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'



Teachers get hands on at a workshop

"The practical activities and discussions were very helpful in questioning what we thought we knew. I'd recommend the training to help teachers talk to children more openly about these subjects."

Feedback from a workshop attendee

Keeping children safe

Hand in hand with safeguarding measures, Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) is so important in helping keep children safe from abuse, something recognised in the recent Department of Education's research report 'Teaching Relationships Education to Prevent Sexual Abuse.' We're passionate about teachers being confidently equipped to deliver RSHE topics, and we also believe that this education needs to start early in primary school – in age-appropriate ways.

With your help and funding from the Benefact Trust, Rachel has been developing and piloting primary RSHE curriculum for the past 2 years. This academic year, she will be delivering training workshops for 250 primary teachers in Cheshire to help them grow in confidence and knowledge so they can better support the children in their care.

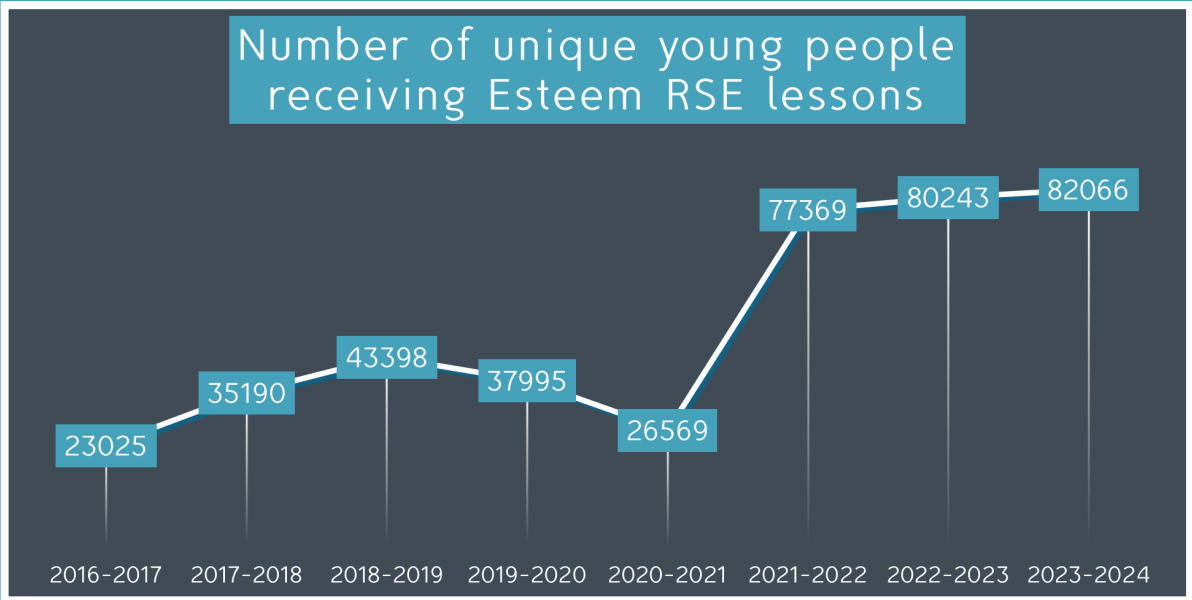
Examples of primary RSHE topics that contribute to safety are: keeping private parts private; safe boundaries and personal space; safe and unsafe touch; permission seeking in relationships; privacy and secret keeping; speaking up and reporting feelings of being unsafe; and online safety.

The workshops Rachel is delivering aim to build teachers' confidence in using RSHE vocabulary and answering tricky questions in an age-appropriate way. For example, what to do if a child asks a question that is beyond their expected maturity level, or that goes beyond the statutory learning outcomes for Primary-aged RSHE, and how to deal with the safeguarding concerns that this might flag up.

If you have any concerns about what is being taught at primary age, please get in touch so we can put your mind at rest.

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A record year

With your help, our network of trained and supported RSE educators continues to grow. In the 2023/2024 year, we trained another 114 educators through 6 accredited and 3 teacher training courses.

We ended the year with 278 members in the network — resulting in a record year for us. Together, the network reached at least 82,066 young people with Esteem RSE lessons.

Our members deliver the lessons that are most needed in their areas but Sexual Consent remained one of the top two topics requested across the network.

This is a clear indication that this topic is a vital part of the RSE curriculum, helping young people set boundaries; assess risky situations; make safe choices; show respect for others' boundaries; and be aware how choices determine consequences.

The subjects of Sexting (sending sexually explicit content) and The Impact of Pornography (on how a person views relationships and sex) reappeared in the top 5 subjects taught this year — so we know that these are still areas that schools see as priority.

Student feedback after Esteem network lessons

"As a result of today, I won't send nudes. Other young people should hear this so they can stay safe online."

"I found the lessons really important because they taught me how to treat a woman properly."

"The most important thing I learnt was about the importance of communicating clearly about consent. I will now be able to confidently say no in uncomfortable situations."

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