



# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## New PAHO Book Provides a Voice against Violence

*“For three years he kept me locked in a room. He opened the door at six in the morning to leave, and he wouldn’t return until six in the evening. Not until that moment would I see the light of day.”*

—Guatemalan woman

*“I am eight months pregnant and when he comes home, he starts to rail and break up things. He kicked me in my belly, and the water bag burst.”*

—Woman from Belize

*“Listen to the voices of these women and girls telling their stories. They are asking us to bear them and do something about gender-based violence, the most pervasive form of abuse in the world.”*

—Chilean writer Isabel Allende

Millions of women in the Americas and around the globe suffer the effects of physical, sexual, and emotional violence in their own homes every day. Their pain is too often silent and invisible to the rest of the world. Yet as many as one out of every three women are victims of gender-based violence, one of the most widespread human rights and public health problems in the world today.

Gender-based violence—and how communities can put an end to it—is the focus of a recently released book by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). *Violence against Women: The Health Sector Responds* is the fruit of nearly a decade of field experiences by PAHO and its partners—at the community, national, and international levels—in 10 Latin American countries. The book’s production, a collaborative effort with the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO), shares the findings of PAHO’s early research into the health situation of women, what they revealed about the extent of gender-based violence, and the launching in 1995 of a pilot project in Central America to address this issue. Using an integrated community approach involving the health sector, along with the legal, judicial, educational, religious and NGO sectors, buttressed by the development of national policies and laws, the PAHO strategy has helped create more than 150 local anti-violence networks throughout Latin America.

The second part of *Violence against Women: The Health Sector Responds* highlights the results of the project’s recent evaluation and includes numerous insights by health workers, school-

teachers, police and court officials, women’s advocates, and other community leaders regarding the effectiveness of the project’s approach. Most revealing of all, however, is the voices of the women themselves, as they describe living with violence and the community’s response to their needs.

The book’s final chapter presents a global perspective on how the lessons learned in Central America and PAHO’s integrated strategy may be applied in other communities around the world. As world human rights activist and Nobel laureate Nelson Mandela notes in the chapter’s closing, “Violence can be prevented. In my own country and around the world, we have shining examples of how violence has been countered. Governments, communities, and individuals can make a difference.”

In a special testimony, Isabel Allende, herself an internationally known voice against violence, adds: “This is an important book, and I hope it will make a difference.”

Readers may purchase the publication by visiting PAHO’s online bookstore at <http://publications.paho.org> (order code: OP 12).



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