

Joint statement

Linkages between water, sanitation and hygiene and violence

A lack of access to a basic toilet in or near the home or poor access to water supply can lead to women and children defecating in the open after dark or having to walk long distances to collect water. Both can increase their vulnerability to harassment and violence, including sexual violence. This is known to occur in many different countries and contexts around the world.

But whilst poor access to water and sanitation services can increase vulnerabilities to violence, the differences in social power between males and females is the fundamental reason that gender-based violence exists in all countries. This is further exacerbated for females or others who may be particularly vulnerable due to their social grouping, age, disability or other factors.

The SHARE Research Consortium - funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development - has recently led the development of the Violence, Gender and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) Practitioner's Toolkit with the contributions of a wide range of professionals. It has been co-published by 27 organisations.

The toolkit has been developed for organisations and governments that are providing access to these essential services, to help them better identify and acknowledge these risks and contribute to their reduction in practical ways.

The toolkit examines the available evidence around how a lack of access to appropriate sanitation, water and hygiene increases vulnerabilities to violence. Currently, although there are examples from many countries, much of the available evidence is anecdotal. There are only a few in-depth studies and only limited work has been done to-date on monitoring the effectiveness of water and sanitation projects from a perspective of personal safety and security.

We know that there are many benefits to providing appropriate access to water and sanitation facilities, including health, dignity, convenience, income generation and safety. As a group we know that poor infrastructure and poor design of basic sanitation, hygiene services and clean drinking water can create unsafe environments for women and children and increase their vulnerabilities to discrimination and violence. However, we feel that it is important to acknowledge that it cannot and does not address the root causes of violence, including gender-based violence. And while more investments, political leadership and action research are required to increase access to sanitation, water and hygiene in order to fully realise the benefits, provision of facilities alone cannot prevent any form of violence, including gender-based violence, from occurring.

We hope this toolkit will encourage practitioners working in water, sanitation and hygiene to improve their understanding of these issues and in turn the effectiveness of their work, and will encourage WASH sector actors and those working in protection, GBV and women's empowerment to strengthen linkages. This toolkit aims to help WASH sector practitioner's to play their part within the limits of their own capacities, working in a technical focussed sector. It does not take away from the essential need for wider societal change to tackle the underlying causes of violence including gender based violence.

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