

Introduction

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, Human Rights Day. It was started by activists at the inaugural Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991 and continues to be coordinated each year by the Center for Women's Global Leadership. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

COVID-19 Pandemic

As the world retreated inside homes due to the lockdown measures introduced to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, reports showed an alarming increase in the already existing pandemic of violence against women. Physical, psychological, sexual, and economic forms of domestic violence are being fueled by household economic and food insecurity and confined living conditions due to lockdown and social isolation measures. School closures, financial, and food insecurity have heightened the risk of violence for girls including sexual exploitation, harassment, and child marriage.

Limited physical mobility, suspended public transport, and closed or stretched capacity of specialist support services (such as hotlines, shelters, crisis centers, and sexual and reproductive health services) hindered the ability of victims and survivors to access support. Perpetrators used restrictions due to COVID-19 to exercise power and control over their partners to further reduce their access to services and support from formal and informal networks.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment, and it is considered the key global policy document on gender equality. It sets strategic objectives and actions in 12 critical areas of concern: women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl-child.

Working with Survivors of Violence

A survivor-centered approach is to engage with survivors of violence with respect, where their consent, safety, and confidentiality are upheld. Please take special care and consideration to survivors to ensure that they have given informed consent for their stories to be used, they understand that their story and/or photo will be used in the context of ending violence against women and girls, and whether an alias is required or identifying details removed.

Ways to Take Action

- Use our social media toolkit to help raise awareness of and educate about gender-based violence
- Contact your local shelters and organizations working with survivors and other people on the margins to see how you can best support their work in your community

- Share support resources and information about available services in your community on your social media and with your church community, colleagues, and others
- Speak up whenever you witness violence, including cyber violence
- Donate to Global Ministries projects that support women and girls (https://www.globalministries.org/womens_empowerment)
- Advocate at the local, state, and federal level for increased funding to resources that combat violence against women, including shelters and hotlines
- Publish an op-ed and/or letter to the editor in your local newspaper about gender-based violence and/or the impact of various issues on women or non-binary folks
- Continue this work after the 16 days are over
- Recognize Break the Silence Sunday (4th Sunday in April) in your church (<https://breakthesilencesunday.org>)

Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233); www.thehotline.org
- National Dating Abuse Helpline: Call 1-866-331-9474 or text “loveis” to 22522; www.loveisrespect.org
- GLBT National Help Center: 1-888-843-4564 and 1-800-246-PRIDE (national youth talkline); www.glnh.org
- 16 Days of Activism resources from the World Council of Churches (<https://www.oikoumene.org/events/16-days-against-sexual-and-gender-based-violence>)
- World Council of Churches Thursdays in Black (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black>)
- UCC Justice Issues - Women and Domestic Violence (https://www.ucc.org/justice_womens-issues_domestic-violence)
- Global Ministries Resources on Women and Children (https://www.globalministries.org/get_involved_justice_and_advocacy_global_poverty_women_and_children)
- UN Women resources for the 16 Days of Activism (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>)