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BURUNDI

SNAPSHOT

Helping Sexual Violence Survivors in Burundi

Volunteers spread the word about care and prevention



A. Jackson/EngenderHealth

July 2013, the health center hosted a meeting with community leaders to identify and address barriers that prevent survivors from seeking and receiving care.

“Now we have confidence that we can help.” --Rizabeti, volunteer community health worker, Giteranyi Township, Burundi

In rural Giteranyi Township, Burundi, a 29-year-old school-teacher named Rizabeti* volunteers for a local women’s group. Women come to her seeking solutions to their problems, often linked to domestic violence. Across the township, Vigitori, age 34, volunteers as a community health worker. He counsels the population on reducing their health risks and links them with the local health facility.

In July 2013, the RESPOND Project—funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and led by EngenderHealth in partnership with Burundi’s Ministry of Public Health and Fight Against AIDS—brought together Rizabeti, Vigitori, and 23 other community leaders to improve services for survivors of sexual violence.

Beginning in May 2013, more than 300 community leaders participated in two-day workshops that confront the harmful gender stereotypes that contribute to sexual violence and deter survivors from seeking help after a sexual assault. The same participants then met with health-care providers at local health centers, who introduced the leaders to the care they offer to survivors and the social and legal services available in the community. Together, providers and community leaders identified barriers that prevent survivors from receiving care and discussed how they could be resolved.

Before the workshop, said Rizabeti, “I and other women leaders participated in township meetings, only to hear that there is a case of violence and that we have to help them, but we had no training. Now we have confidence that we can help.” Thanks to the meeting with health providers, she said, “Now we know where to go when we bring a survivor to the health center. The survivor doesn’t have to wait in line, but can go directly to the provider. The providers even gave their phone numbers and told us to call if a survivor is coming.”

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Rizabeti said she also learned the time frame for post-exposure prophylaxis against HIV and emergency contraception. Even Vigitori, who is affiliated with the health center as a community health worker, said that, until the meeting, he was not aware of services that the center offers to sexual violence survivors.

“Before, I didn’t help survivors. If someone told me about a rape survivor, I’d say ‘It’s not my job. There’s a women’s group to help them,” said Vigitori. Now, he speaks out against sexual violence twice a month during community health talks to groups of 40 or more men and women. “Now I’m not only involved, but the population knows I can help,” he adds.

As a schoolteacher, Rizabeti has integrated what she learned from RESPOND into sexuality education classes for 450 students aged 12 to 14. She has also given two public talks to groups of 80 to 100 adults to raise awareness about the issues around sexual violence.

In 2014, RESPOND will continue to engage communities in preventing and responding to sexual violence.

USAID, through RESPOND, provides technical assistance that strengthens health sector response to sexual violence (SV) survivors; promotes gender equity in the community to prevent SV; and better links SV survivors to local services.

*Full names withheld to protect privacy.