



Regional Dialogue: Latin America

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FACT SHEET: Women and Girls

Although there is broad legislation addressing equal opportunity for women in areas such as employment, political participation and land ownership, women and girls in Latin America have few sexual and reproductive health rights and continue to be victimized by sexual assault and domestic violence. As a result, they have limited access to health services and are at a greater risk of contracting HIV. An estimated 550,000 women are living with HIV in Latin America. There has been a reported increase in new HIV infections among women in the region.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Legislation addressing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights for women has been controversial and slow to develop in Latin America and the rest of the world. Further, current SRH laws do not acknowledge the linkage between sexual and reproductive health and HIV or address the specific needs and problems of HIV-positive women.

The impact is that women living with HIV have a lack of services available to them, are often discriminated against and have their confidentiality breached by health workers, and do not receive adequate information about their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Progress:

- Between 2007 and 2009, 11 of 15 Latin American countries reporting data experienced an increase in HIV screening of pregnant women. Five countries reported that more than 80% of pregnant women were given an HIV test (Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Argentina and Panama).

Challenges:

- Women living with HIV are often coerced into sterilization by healthcare providers.
- Less than 50% of pregnant women diagnosed with HIV have access to antiretroviral therapy in Venezuela, Guatemala, Mexico, Bolivia, Honduras, Colombia and Paraguay.

Violence against women and the law

Although many Latin American countries have passed legislation addressing violence against women, violence persists and enforcement is often inconsistent.

A study in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina found that women living with HIV are more likely to be victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, both before and after diagnosis. This suggests that violence and threats of violence may limit women's ability to negotiate safe sexual behavior; forced sex may directly increase women's risk for HIV; prior sexual abuse may lead to increased sexual risk taking as an adolescent/adult; and women who test for HIV and share test results with partners may be at increased risk for violence.

Progress:

- Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and Venezuela criminalise violence against women, and also have policies to prevent violence, support and protect victims and ensure effective implementation.
- Mexico, Colombia, Dominican Republic and Paraguay have training programmes for police, prosecutors, judges, lawyers and security personnel, to enhance their capacity to handle cases of violence against women.

Challenges:

- Many countries that have domestic violence legislation do not consider marital rape an offense.
- Femicide is spreading throughout Latin America. More than 3,800 women and girls have been murdered in Guatemala since 2000.

Primary Sources

- *Global Report: UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, UNAIDS, 2010
- *AIDS Epidemic in Latin America, Prevalence of HIV in Latin America*, UNAIDS, May, 2011
- "Demanding Rights for HIV-positive Women," Center for Reproductive Rights
- "Manuela en el Congreso", Movimiento Manuela Ramos, Parliamentary Resource Center

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