



**World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action**

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International Women's Day Press Release

For Immediate Release:

5, March 2009

WOMEN AND MEN UNITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Penang, March 5, 2009. The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) supports and endorses the International Women's Day theme of 'Women and Men Unite to End Violence against Women and Girls.' Gender-based abuse is wide-spread, and includes the physical, sexual and psychological abuse of women. It also includes sexual abuse of children (particularly of girls, with dowry-related violence), rape (including marital rape and rape as a weapon of war), female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, sexual assault, trafficking of women, forced prostitution, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and selective malnourishment. According to a World Health Organization report, "at least one in five of the world's female population has been physically or sexually abused by a man or men at some time in their life".

Pregnant and lactating women are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Many, including pregnant women and young girls, are subject to severe, sustained or repeated attack.ⁱ Obstacles to breastfeeding such as inappropriate hospital practices, not respecting women's choices/preferences and commercial pressures to use infant formula can also be considered as institutionalised social violence against women. Some studies show that women experiencing past or current violence are at increased risk of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and physical health consequences in the postpartum period. We also know that there are significant barriers to successful breastfeeding among survivors of violence. This has major health implications for women and their children.ⁱⁱ

The elimination of violence against women requires men to acknowledge and address the problem. They must not be silent. WABA encourages men to work with women to eliminate the underlying causes of violence against women. Boys must be educated in order to change cultures, attitude and behaviours. Everyone will benefit from a culture of non-violence and respect to women's rights, where boys and men live as equal partners with girls and women.

Men can be involved in various ways:

- Encourage men not to remain passive but to speak up and take action to stop violence against women.
- Work together—men and women—to address underlying cultural, economic and social issues of violence against women and to establish peaceful, equal and respectful relationships.
- Promote men's involvement in healthy relationships/partnerships as husbands/partners and as fathers. Their involvement helps to change gendered roles, contributes to empowering women, and improves bonding between fathers/partners and their children.

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As part of the broad gender equality agenda, WABA reiterates its own positions:

- (1) that all women have the right to breastfeed as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),
- (2) that every woman needs support to fulfill this right, and
- (3) that all forms of violence against women should be eliminated, to ensure that women can successfully breastfeed.

Men have an important role to play in fostering positive attitudes toward breastfeeding and creating supportive environments for all mothers, particularly working women. Men's personal and political contribution starts in the home with the sharing of domestic responsibilities and eliminating gender-based violence. Together, women and men must unite to end violence against women and ensure gender equality, leading to the establishment of loving, harmonious and healthy families and societies.

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Endnotes

iVan Esterik, P. Breastfeeding: A Feminist Issue. http://www.promom.org/bf_info/wababf.html

ii Kendall-Tackett, K, Violence against Women during Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding. Breastfeeding Abstracts, volume 25, number 4, pp. 25-27.

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/ UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Action Food Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). For more information, please contact: World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) • P.O.Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia • Tel: 60-4-6584816 • Fax: 60-4-6572655 • Email: waba@streamyx.com • Website: www.waba.org.my