

MARY'S STORY – WAR AND CONFLICT

Mary was born to farmers in an area close to the border. As a child, her life was quite common and uneventful. While her country had been the scene of tribal clashes for years, the violence had never reached her village. She didn't realize how bad it was until the day that the fighting moved into her area. Mary, like many other teenagers in her village, was abducted by soldiers and taken to an army camp. She was forced to stay in the army camp for six years, during which time she was raped repeatedly and gave birth to two children. It was only after the army was defeated that Mary was set free. But none of the soldiers took responsibility for her or the children, so she and the children were left alone without any form of support. Because Mary had been kept at the army camp, she never had the opportunity to finish her schooling; she feared this would prevent her from finding a decent job. She decided to return home, but was rejected by her family. They saw her as an unclean person who brought shame to the family because of the life she had been forced to lead in the army camp.

War and Conflict and HIV/AIDS

War, violence and civil strife are contributing to the rapid spread of HIV. Civilians are often displaced, abused and left in conditions of poverty. People trying to escape the ravages of war may move from areas of a lower prevalence of HIV to an area with a higher prevalence. In Kigali, Rwanda, in 1995 increases in HIV in pregnant women were directly attributed to rape and displacement during the Rwandan genocide. These violent upheavals are also associated with an interruption in normal social and family relationships. These strained and broken relationships can lead to a greater risk of HIV/AIDS transmission.

How has war and violence affected Mary's life?



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Located in Mahomet, Ill., ELI is a community-based nonprofit organization emphasizing life skills for emerging youth leaders in third world countries. ELI has been formed by Paul and Virginia who have been working with youth in United States and abroad for more than 30 years. For further information on ELI, please call (217) 377-9444.