



SUCCESS STORY

'Passion Killing' Leads to Community and Police Collaboration

Working with local authorities, a community solves a murder case.



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Build strong girls and strong communities worldwide with the Go Girls! Toolkit, available March 2011. For more information, e-mail ghcommunicationsteam@usaid.gov, or contact Dr. Carol Underwood, Project Director of Go Girls!, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs: cunderwo@jhuccp.org, tel.: 410-659-6300.

In a village in Botswana, an angry boyfriend killed his 17-year-old girlfriend, a type of killing that is common enough for the Botswana to have a name for it: "passion killing." Such killings occur when a disgruntled lover decides that the only way to resolve the situation – be it a case of infidelity, suspected infidelity, or another relationship issue – is to murder the loved one. Although the victim's mother in this case called the police at once, it took them two hours to respond.

In the past, she might have had no option but to accept the delayed response of the police. In her village today, however, there is an additional source of support, a Community Mobilization Facilitating Group, which she can turn to for help – and did.

The Facilitating Group, whose members and leadership are all from the village, was established with help from the Go Girls! Initiative (Go Girls!). Funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through the U.S. Agency for International Development, Go Girls! was a unique program that aimed to reduce girls' vulnerability to HIV. Using its Community Mobilization component, Go Girls! guided the Facilitating Group through a process of recognizing girls' vulnerability to HIV, identifying the root causes of this vulnerability, and calling for community action to address and reduce it. In this process, the Facilitating Group recognized that girls who fear gender-based violence often face increased risk of HIV infection. Such violence reduces their self-esteem and creates situations where they live under intimidation, isolated from their peers and community and unable to negotiate safer sex practices.

When the Facilitating Group received news of the murder, its members were angered by the police's delay in responding to the mother's call. They visited the local police station commander to discuss the situation and to see if they could develop a feasible alternative way of handling such cases in the future. Unhappy with the performance of the police, the station commander asked the facilitating group to assist with the case.

The Facilitating Group, assisted by the victim's family, helped the police solve the case, and the guilty boyfriend was jailed. This led the police to invite the Facilitating Group to attend weekly meetings with them and community leaders, where the close collaboration could send a message to potential perpetrators and deter them from acting in ways that render girls vulnerable to HIV.