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Editor's letter

08 March 2013, Issue 08

International Women's Day falls every year on 8th March. In some countries, such as Uganda, it is marked as a national holiday. Sometimes it may feel rather strange to celebrate [International Women's Day](#) when we turn our thoughts to the many crimes and brutal behaviours against women, such as sexual violence for instance. You may remember the [bus gang-rape](#) and murder of the 23-year-old Indian woman back in December. It is only natural to feel like this when we turn our thoughts to shocking events such as this one.

A celebration implies a sense of happiness, yet when we think about the various types of mistreatment and injustices against women, we feel saddened, even angry perhaps. But despite this, I believe it is highly important to celebrate women and their various roles (as child-bearers, mothers, carers, breadwinners, community organisers) and to remind ourselves that on days such as this one, there is usually a strong sense of solidarity, community, and empowerment. These, in my opinion, are the essential tools in overcoming the many issues we, as women, experience.

For our March 2013 newsletter, four women have written about their experiences of living with HIV. This time we are featuring stories from NW England, thanks to [George House Trust](#) (GHT) and Lynda Shentall.

Each of these stories is honest and powerful, giving a clear insight into the many injustices and struggles women, particularly those with HIV, often face. Despite these stories' different backgrounds, they echo similar gender-based issues and similar consequences of an HIV diagnosis: HIV-related illnesses, fear of losing their children, anxiety over immigration, finding employment and

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providing for their families, coupled with experiences of abuse - whether emotional, physical, sexual, or institutional - these are only a few examples of the harsh realities women living with HIV often face, here in the UK, as abroad.

Although international research has identified significant links between being a woman living with HIV and experiencing gender-based violence, in the UK there is little research regarding these links. In response to this, Sophia Forum carried out a [feasibility study](#) looking at the potential for a national investigation into violence as both a cause and a consequence of HIV for women in England. The study was [launched](#) on 14 February 2013 at the House of Lords. As one guest put it: "Well done for a really well organised, information packed and fun day. The event was so informative and made me realise the ongoing challenges around HIV/GBV."

Also with regards to the correlations between HIV and gender-based violence (GBV), we have included three recent blogs on this topic, blogs written by Sophia Forum trustees.

Echoing one of Sophia Forum's objectives, the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women, young women, and girls is the primary theme of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) to take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, 04 - 15 March 2013. Key issues concerning women's rights are at stake in this debate.

We hope you will find this issue informative.
Happy International Women's Day!

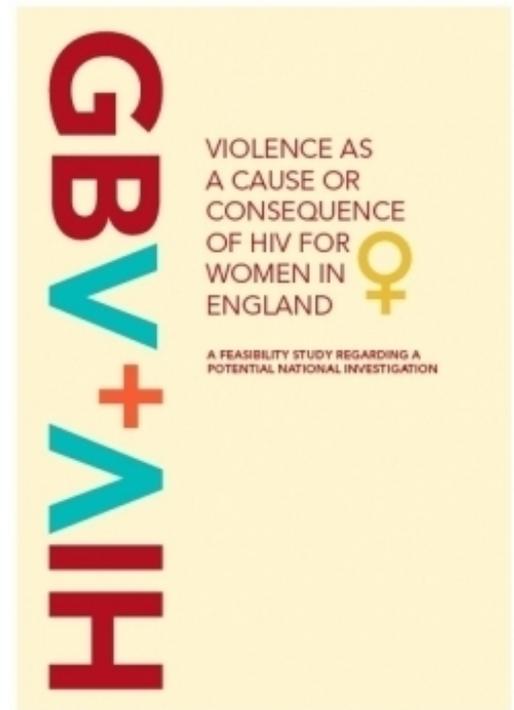
Anca Nițulescu, Sophia Forum Newsletter Editor
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Charlene

["HIV does not stop me from chasing my dreams. HIV is not a disablement. In Africa we were taught that HIV is a death sentence; that is not true."](#)

Lucinda

["For a while, I ignored the diagnosis and kept it to myself, hoping it will just go away. When I eventually returned to the clinic for further tests I was immediately put on medication because my](#)



On 14th February 2013, Sophia Forum launched a new report at the House of Lords, event kindly hosted by Baroness Gould of [Potternewton](#).

This report highlights the experiences of women living with HIV in England in relation to Gender-Based Violence. It documents the findings of a study to explore the potential for a national investigation into violence as a cause or a consequence of HIV for women in England. The study was kindly funded by the Big Lottery.

This launch brought together a full house of leading AIDS charities, women's rights organisations, medical researchers, MPs, Lords and other key actors to discuss practical ways forward to address this issue in the UK.

The [report](#), a [summary leaflet](#) of the report, and a [poster](#) presented at the British HIV Association (BHIVA) Conference in Spring 2012 about these issues can be found on our website.

Thanks to Awards4All and the Monument Trust for funding the report and its launch.





Tina

"My husband's drinking marked the beginning of my struggles. Sometimes he would lock the doors to our bedroom and beat me until he had no more strength. This went on for years. My sisters would tell me to go back: 'It's part of growing up, all women go through this'."

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British Medical Journal (BMJ) Blog:

No (wo)man is an island... and neither is Britain when it comes to HIV - coverage of Sophia Forum report launch.

immunity levels were so low, my doctor was surprised that I was not already bedridden or even dead."



Sarah

"I refused any help or support from my local HIV organisation. I did not want to know anything about HIV. Denial became my best coping mechanism."



Two blogs written by Silvia Petretti:
[My Birthday](#)
[Silence is Violence](#)

GEORGE HOUSE TRUST

BEYOND POSITIVE LIVING

Established for 28 years, GHT provides support services to people living with HIV, their partners, families, and carers in the North West of England. We have a staff team of 15 people and a volunteer workforce of 158, 50% of which are themselves living with HIV. All our volunteers receive training accredited with Open Awards. For some specialist roles volunteers undertake further training. We cover the travel costs of those on no or low income to enable them to access our services. For more information visit our [website](#) follow us on Twitter [@georgehousetrust](#) or [@lyndaght](#).

Alternatively, please either ring 0161 274 4499 or email support@ght.org.uk.

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Disclaimer

All the pieces are the writers' own stories and do not necessarily reflect the views of Sophia Forum.

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Many thanks to Lynda Shentall, Director of Services at GHT, for compiling the four articles written by GHT users for this newsletter.

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