



Graduate Women  
International (GWI)

# Policy Position

## Incest

### The Issue

Incest is defined as sexual intercourse between people who are very closely related<sup>1</sup>. It usually takes the form of an older family member sexually abusing a child or adolescent. It violates both human and children's rights. As it takes place within the family, incest often goes unnoticed and unreported, and there is a lack of reliable statistics about this form of abuse. In fact, it is a crime that victimises family members, in particular children, who live with the ill effects of this abuse for the rest of their lives. Some of these long-term adverse effects are low self-esteem, high risk of mental disorders, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and post traumatic stress disorders and can often lead to situations where victims go on to become abusers themselves.

### Barriers to elimination of incest

- Victim is unaware that it is abuse;
- False shame or family loyalty;
- Family complicity;
- Social stigma where victim is viewed as culpable; and
- Lack of support services for victims;
- Lack of prosecution of perpetrators; and
- Lack of reporting by professionals including healthcare professionals and teachers of suspect behaviour amongst children.

### GWI's position

Incest as a social issue has often been overlooked by governments who see it as a private family matter. Victims must be provided with support services to help stop the abuse and to aid their holistic recovery. Perpetrators must be punished and communities need to remain vigilant by supporting victims and developing processes to report suspected abuse.

In order to address the main barriers to the elimination of incest, GWI urges states to:

1. Introduce, review or amend appropriate legislation regarding incestuous abuse of children;
2. Enforce such legislation and publicise judicial sentences to raise awareness and deter;
3. Raise awareness within communities to de-stigmatise victims and shift culpability to perpetrators;
4. Launch public campaigns to highlight the issue of incest and its negative consequences.
5. Introduce measures to be put in place within communities to help identify and safeguard victims from abuse.
6. Encourage dialogue at international fora, such as the Human Rights Council, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA with a view towards reaching consensus condemning all forms of incest.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incest>



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