

Report from the Regional Conference:
“Multidisciplinary Approach to the Protection of Children and Women
From Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault)

SUMMARY

Organized by the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade on 30-31 May 2003, it was held the Regional Conference titled: “Multidisciplinary Approach to Protection of Women and Children from Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault”. Organizations from Slovenia (“SOS Hotline”), Croatia (“Brave Telephone” – Policlinic for Child Protection of City of Zagreb, and Association “Mirta”), Federation BIH (“Medica”, Zenica), Macedonia (“ANI”, Stip) and Serbia and Montenegro (“SOS Hotline” and “Giraffe”, Podgorica) as well as 14 GOs and NGOs that are member-organizations of the Network of Trust to Fight Gender-Based Violence. The Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade is a founder and co-ordinator of this network. Also representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Welfare and The Ministry of Education took part on our conference.

Conference enabled exchange of precious experiences gathered along many years of working against violence and resulted in concrete plans for future joint activities. This is for the first time in our country to succeed in direct co-operation of a big number of relevant organizations from former Yugoslavia that have been providing direct services daily to child and adult survivors of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA) and each of them implement and promote multi- and interdisciplinary approach including GOs and NGOs.

We find important to say that all invited organizations from former Yugoslavia answered and took part on the Conference actively except one - ”Potpora”, Zagreb which cancelled its attendance in the last minute for good reasons. So, 7 organizations from former Yugoslavia took part and 15 GOs and NGOs that belong to the Network of Trust to Fight Gender-Based Violence (The Network of Trust). Total number of participants has been 41 (in preparation stage we limited number of 2 applications per organization). Evaluation process that participants joined in the shape of video recording from the first to the last moment along the Conference period showed that excellent atmosphere was reached (many touching moments...).

CONTENT AND METHODOLOGY

- **Opening and closing ceremony** were done in a workshop manner through exercises to get to know each other (related to resemblances and diversities), in movement, and at last through suggested good bye ritual.
- **Plenary presentations** had brought bundles of significant information that created essential overview on DV and SA in children and women in the region. Countries from the region have already a history of practicing multi- and interdisciplinary model. During exchange we heard that certain states to a large extent took the responsibility for gender-based violence (GBV) issue – many participants described examples of good practices that might suit as a kind of ‘inspiration’ to other participants.
- **Workshops:**

Area: DV and SA

Workshop 1: “Violence: Personal, Political, Activist, Public”

Reported by facilitator, Ms Ljiljana Bogavac

15 participants attended this workshop. Group was diverse according to the years of working experience in the area of GBV, type of organization (NGO, GO, women’s, mixed), job descriptions of participants within their own organizations (therapy, rights of women and children through direct lobbying for changing legislation, activist (and) professional...).

Background of this workshop was linked to invisibility of violence 'assisted' and protected by the secrecy, silence and feelings of shame and guilt. Responsibility is always and only on the side of offender and offender chooses this behavior (instead of some other behavior). This starting point triggered personal insights of participants, checking if we are violent ourselves: toward whom, why, when – in the family, private and working environment – what do we do when we recognize it. We discussed awareness of the power belonging to our helper's position and what are all the ways we are at risk to abuse this power (traps or 'red flags'). We investigated who is actually accompanying this power to helpers, how comfortable and provocative this role and accompanied power is?! We were glad to open the theme of reinforcing dependency helper-client relationship, how easy it is to do it (especially when providing shelter services).

Introspection started up by the participants themselves showed we had no dilemmas regarding our attitudes. Instead, we worked hard on serious analyze and how to provide assistance in the best and the most professional way to those exposed to violence.

Duration: 2 hours.

Area: Civil Society and Human Rights

Workshop 2: "Let's Go Swimming"

Reported by facilitator, Ms Zorica Zivojinovic

Program "ABC of Democracy"

The goal of this workshop was to point out traps of social perception such as stereotypes and prejudices: self-perception and perception through group stereotypes – prejudices, ways to overcome stereotyping, getting to know each other.

There were 9 participants working in 3 small teams. Their task was to make a collage, picture of the sea, but with no right to communicate verbally. Afterwards we analyzed feelings raised by this instruction. Majority experienced it as limiting at the moment the instruction had been given but later on they realized to be forbidden to speak made no essential limit and this worked as a kind of surprise. After we went for swimming in the sea we designed...

According to the way how participants enter and dive into the sea – 'jumpers', 'walkers' and 'testers' – we formed 3 groups. Questions for each group were the following:

1. How does your group describe other two groups?
2. How does your group describe its own characteristics?
3. What do you think how other two groups would describe your group?
4. What do you think how each of these tow groups would describe herself?

By answering questions and making mini-presentations in front of other groups, each group got united, acted as rivals and started up using violent communication. Exchange brought many prejudices on each other's account that got deepened. All participants tried to get out their roles and justify their behavior explaining that in a real life they would have never behaved that way. This process lasted approx. for 1 hour. Facilitator stopped it just before the conflict would explode. Facilitator told a story about an imaginary land where some socially or personally irresponsible group or individual reinforces process of division on groups by using existing stereotypes and prejudices.

Participants' reactions on this story were in the shape of comparison the story with their own just experienced process. Although the majority tried to deny its own reactions, they agreed we all have our assumptions about what others think of us and afterwards we make constructs in our head that significantly define our behavior. They noticed that it is very easy to manipulate our opinion in such situations.

Finally, participants commented they felt they had learned something new and opened some questions for further thinking.

Area: Diversity Issues and Violence

Workshop 3: Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Childhood Sexual Assault – Intervention

Reported by facilitator, Ms Dusica Popadic

9 participants attended this workshop. The same like in other workshops they came from various GOs and NGOs. We spoke on stereotyped linking sexual diversities with potential history of childhood sexual abuse and / or later on predicted risk of taking the role of pedophile in adulthood. This all was discussed through the prism of social pressure that these prejudices introduce in place of the right to freely choose sexual orientation and sexual identity. Process has been painted with climate of respect and celebrating diversities, pointing out and being critical toward homophobic behaviors, speaking on internalized homophobia and difficulties in accepting your own diversity, listing present homophobic events / examples we witnessed in the region. One of conclusions after checking each other's attitudes was, of course, declaring discrimination of sexual diversities as a hate crime. We discussed masked tolerance both by general public and professionals ("Homosexuality is for long time not on the list of psychiatric disorders, but I think..."). Ethical issues were analyzed when making the choice of helper (e.g. therapist) such as:

- When we speak of pathology, we think of homophobia, and not of different sexualities.
- Non-acceptance to follow the request of client at the start of therapy process to work on changing sexual orientation (lesbian / gay into heterosexual), but redirecting theme to (internalized) homophobia that might be the cause of such request. Some of negative effects of inadequate assistance naturally relate to self-respect (what to do with clients who 'did not succeed to change' sexual orientation?)
- Avoiding patronizing in sense of claiming that clients 'actually do not know exactly' their sexual orientation, so their starting request should be respected ('to change').
- Disclosure of therapists' sexual orientation on request of the client for therapeutic purposes and the right of the client to get answer. This question principally does not differ much from usual situations that include telling personal, private information about the therapist, but it is important to know that the options belonging to diverse sexual identity carry different care and careful approach in the work (e.g. if a therapist is heterosexual, it is important to reach that mentioning this sexual orientation wouldn't be excluding for client).
- Compulsory supervision (and personal learning therapy) in the aim of precise recognizing your own response as a therapist to sexual diversities.

Specifically difficult is the process of selecting your own helper when you are lesbian or gay survivor of childhood sexual assault. Counselor must have attitudes, expertise and experience that enable her to answer both to difficulties of everyday life belonging to sexual diversity and effects of history of childhood trauma.

We investigated our attitudes and looked around to the environment in order to crystallize plans of action (making an influence through ed. programs for the staff of different institutions as well as suggesting sexual education at school so that themes like sexuality, emotional needs, (private parts of) body, boundaries and abuse (and defense) would be easier opened. It turned out to be tricky question who would facilitate such programs (e.g. external trainers; some of participants added that it's very brave to work on sexual diversities...), and all from perspective and in the context of promoting human rights (right on sexual orientation is just one of guaranteed human rights).

Workshop triggered different aspects which surely deserve continuation of this talk. Participants got some literature to take away.

Duration: 1 hour 50 min.

- Discussion groups: Conclusions and agreements through "Practicing Future"

- a) Need for continual co-operation among organizations-participants
- b) Establishing joint mailing list where relevant information and examples of good practice will be exchanged
- c) Mutual joining each other's projects

- d) Exchange of materials regarding legislation / administrative measures
- e) Exchange of specialized ed. programs (e.g. catalog of programs carried out by NGOs)
- f) Developing common methodology
 - establishing protocols
 - exchange of research tools (applying uniform-adapted questionnaires and comparison of results)
- g) Need to exchange written materials (manuals, books, brochures...)
- h) Reporting about the Conference to media and related ministries in own countries
- i) Exchange of information about fundraising possibilities and consultations on this matter. Joint project in front of donors in the region.

Regional Conference was covered by audio / video / photo recording that available at the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade. Creating audio and video recordings worked as the Conference evaluation method. Set of questions tested 1. In what climate participants decided to join the Conference, 2. first impressions and feelings at arrival (when activities on decorating working environment for the Conference took place and participants made their banners together; informal meeting each other occurred evening before the opening ceremony), 3. Evaluation of the content during the Conference itself (ongoing structured interviews in breaks) and 4. Evaluation by participants at the end of the Conference. Evaluation was done by Ms Sanja Miloradovic (NGO “Swallow”) with camera assistance.

Sincerely,

Dusica Popadic
ITC director

June 04, 2003