



*Stop Being Silent:
Identifying, Overcoming and Preventing
Domestic Violence*
Lingua Franca Training Seminar



Lingua Franca

From 28 August until 2 September, 16 participants gathered in Nitra, Slovakia, for a WSCF-E Lingua Franca training entitled, “Stop Being Silent: Identifying, Overcoming and Preventing Domestic Violence”.

After arrivals on Wednesday afternoon, the first evening began with introductory games to help the participants begin to get to know each other in preparation for the week ahead.

Identification and Warning Signs:

The first full day of the conference began with an opening worship and singing. Participants then divided into two groups to brainstorm about their associations with the term “domestic violence”, and then gathered to share and discuss these initial associations together. Then, in two new groups, participants completed a matching game, matching common myths about domestic violence with facts. Participants continued the activity farther by reflecting and sharing additional myths perpetuated in their own cultures.

Jaanus Teose, the WSCF-E Gender Coordinator, gave a lecture further introducing the topic and its manifestations in society. Following from the lecture, first in smaller groups, and then in plenary, participants discussed these questions: What types of violence are considered acceptable/unacceptable (ex. corporal punishment)? What defines a healthy/unhealthy relationship? What social perceptions/ideas help create/lead to domestic violence?

After lunch and siesta, participants gathered for a session on the psychology of the victim and perpetrator. All started by brainstorming on large sheets of paper about their associations with the terms “victim”, “abuser”, and “observer”. Jaanus then lectured on common characteristics and warning signs of abusers, also focusing on the consequences of abuse in both the psychology of the victim and the abuser. Rachael Weber, the Lingua Franca Coordinator, then continued the presentation, focusing on common physical and psychological indicators of abuse. Participants divided into groups to discuss these questions: What role does jealousy play in relationships? Is there such a thing as healthy jealousy? What are the potential implications/consequences of labelling someone as victim/abuser/observer? How does the concept of privacy affect domestic violence?



The groups reported in plenary, and then all together participated in a group reading about domestic violence. Together, all evaluated the situation in the reading, the psychology of the victim and the abuser, as well as the circumstances surrounding the abuse and the factors and influences that led the victim to leave the relationship.

The afternoon finished with an informal language lesson, led by Sophie Dutton from the UK. In the evening, after Protestant worship, participants gathered for the intercultural banquet and presented and shared together traditional food and drinks from their home countries.

Manifestations in Society:

After worship on Friday morning, Bernardina Bodna-Rova gave a lecture presenting statistics about domestic violence throughout Slovakia. She talked about the need for such data, and the problems and failure in the data, giving an in depth look into domestic violence in Slovakia, in the local context. Participants then gathered in small groups for discussion to follow-up on her presentation.



A panel discussion focusing on domestic violence in various countries throughout Europe filled the afternoon session, and followed from the morning presentation. Iolanda Gensini presented about the history and present situation of domestic violence from her home context in Italy. Andrea Toma and Andra Fedor presented on Romania, Jaanus on Sweden, and Anastacia Gkitsi on Greece, revealing the situation throughout the diverse regions in Europe. Others added their reflections, elaborating on the current situation and on either the resources, or lack of resources, to combat domestic violence in their home contexts.

After informal language games, and Orthodox worship, the evening was filled with cultural presentations. Through games, skits, dances, and songs, participants shared aspects of their home cultures with each other.

Values and Boundaries:

On Sunday morning, all gathered at the top of the hill by the venue, overlooking the city of Nitra, and joined in ecumenical worship. Jaanus began the morning session by discussing the functions of values and boundaries (physical and mental) and how they relate to domestic violence and sexual abuse, before leading a role play focusing on “how close is too close?”

Using a variety of scenarios, from a stranger on a crowded bus or in a pub to a grandparent or an attractive acquaintance, participants evaluated their comfort levels relating to the amount of personal space they desire. This revealed both individual and cultural differences, including past influences creating positive or negative perceptions of seemingly neutral situations, and fuelled much discussion.

After coffee break, Jaanus led another role play focusing on values in specific situations. Participants went to four corners of the room to reveal their reactions to various scenarios relating to domestic violence and then discussed their responses.

After lunch participants went into Nitra for an excursion; after walking through the main street, all went on a small train tour before dinner in a Slovak restaurant. In the evening a film-screening of *North Country* was shown. The film is based the true story of Lois Jenson who experienced sexual harassment in her work at the coal mines and her response to this abuse led to the first class-action lawsuit about sexual harassment in the

work place, *Jenson vs. Eveleth Mines*, setting a precedent for the future.



Religion, Faith and Action:

After Catholic worship, Monday morning opened with a session led by Rachael exploring religion and domestic violence. Participants began by dividing into groups to explore domestic violence in the Bible before coming back to plenary to discuss their findings. Intense discussion of the stories followed, beginning with social constructions taken from Adam and Eve, and including from Tamar and Amnon, Dinah and Shechem, to Christ’s teachings and Paul’s letters.

In additional reflection upon this topic, participants were asked to focus on how these stories could be used to combat domestic violence in society. One example of this, given from a Bible Study done by the World Council of Churches, is the Tamar Campaign, using a bible study of Tamar in 2 Samuel to raise awareness about domestic violence as something to be worked against, and not as something to remain silent about, reversing trends to hide these issues in both the history of the church and society.

After lunch, the afternoon session began with a language lesson led by Rachael. After reviewing vocabulary, all joined in a reading from the Lutheran World Federation on domestic violence. The topic followed from the morning exercise, but also led into an activity examining the positive and negative connotations of words, including, for example, the differences in tone of these words: victim and survivor, or abuser, oppressor, and perpetrator.

The language lesson was followed by a session that examined the activities of the week with the theme, “what can you do?” All participated in a discussion related to a simulation of a situation of domestic violence and discussed how they could apply what they learned upon returning home.

Then participants began evaluating the week, beginning by filling in a target before answering written evaluation questions. Following a role play method used earlier in the week, participants moved to four corners of the room in response to questions about the week’s theme, and additional discussion evaluating the activities was fuelled.

Rachael then gave a presentation about WSCF Europe, before the closing worship. Participants planned the farewell party and led different games; dancing continued into the night. In totality, the week provided a safe forum for discussion about domestic violence in society across cultural boundaries, empowering all on this challenging issue.



**We thank our supporters:
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