WSCF Lingua Franca
Stop Being Silent!
Novi Sad, Serbia 2009

From 28 July to 2 August, 28 participants from throughout Europe gathered for the Lingua Franca training, Stop Being Silent!, held in Novi Sad, Serbia.

After a matching activity identifying myths and facts about domestic violence, Jaanus Teose, WSCF Europe's Gender Coordinator, opened the programme with an introductory lecture on "What is Domestic Violence? Identification and Warning Signs." He then led role-plays on "Values and Boundaries" which focused on the importance of knowing one's own values and boundaries.

Present Realities

Marijana Senjak, a psychologist from Croatia who worked at Medico Zenitsa, women's therapy center in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for fifteen years during and after the war, gave a presentation on the "Impact of War Trauma on Domestic Violence in Post-Conflict Societies." She started with a personal reflection activity, as used in group therapy sessions, and participants chose symbols to represent their feelings and strengths from a pile of stones and shells. Marijana proceeded, from her experience, to share about the long term effects and interconnection of war rape, domestic violence, and trafficking on both the individual and the community. The session was closed when participants picked another symbol, this time representing future dreams.

Biljana Rakic, a psychologist, led a session on “How to Respond" based on her experience working as a psychologist in a women's center in Novi Sad. Long discussion continued about true and false perceptions of domestic violence in our societies and lives.

Zana Hoxha Krasniqi, a theater director from Kosovo, gave a presentation on "Using Theater as a Tool in Fighting Stereotypes on Gender Roles and Domestic Violence in the Balkans." Together with a small team, Zana created a theater production entitled "Kitchen of Victims", portraying the stories of four females, each victims of domestic violence. This play was then performed throughout the Balkans to raise awareness about the issue of domestic violence and had resounding effects in local communities. Together, participants read and discussed the stories of the victims in the play.

Andrijana Covic, from the local obudsman office in Novi Sad, led a training session on "Raising Awareness and Holding a Public Dialogue." She began by introducing steps needed to make changes in society, from identification of the problem to evaluating the solution, and then gave examples of actions in the local area of Vojvodina. Using examples of other challenges in the region, participants were divided into groups to try to come up with solutions and to identify where these solutions could be implemented (in the general public, the local government, NGOs, etc).
A Universal Challenge

On the film evening participants watched "North Country", a film based on the true story of Lois Jenson's response to abuse and sexual harassment which led to the first successful class action lawsuit addressing sexual harassment in the workplace, setting a precedent for the future. Discussion followed the film. For victims in the film, breaking the silence was essential to find justice, healing, and safety for the future.

During the panel discussion, the situation of domestic violence, as well as government, NGO, and other social structures providing services were presented, revealing information about successful developments and challenges facing different regions in Europe. Nataliya Pylypiv presented on the situation in Ukraine, Lenka Semorádová led the Czech participants in a presentation on the Czech Republic, Nino Gagua presented on Georgia and Jaanus Teose on Sweden. After questions, all reflected farther on the situations in their own countries as a group.

After the panel, participants listened to a radio clip about a current study exploring war crime against women perpetuated by the Allies in World War II, emphasising that the challenge of fighting crime against women is universal. Even decades after the crimes were committed, it was important for the German women to be able to share their stories. Previously, because they felt guilt for their country's crimes, they had been even more reluctant to share their own experiences. Discussion continued on the topic of violence against women and on the importance of breaking the silence and remembering the humanity of the victim (not forgetting the humanity of the abuser, either, who may require rehabilitation opportunities) for sustainable healing processes individually and in society.

Coming Together

In the language lessons, participants examined the meanings, connotations and implications of the terms victim, abuser and observer (and their synonyms, survivor, perpetrator or offender, and bystander). Through brief lecture and games, all examined the use of gender-neutral language. Worksheets, games and discussions were used to further encourage speaking.

On the intercultural evening, participants shared songs, games and video and powerpoint presentations about their home countries. All also shared national food and drinks.

During the excursion, Gabor Nemet led everyone on a walk through the city. After free time for further exploration, all enjoyed dinner out in Novi Sad.

In Conclusion

In the final evaluation, a concluding discussion about domestic violence and future actions, "what can we do?", was fueled by a role-play exercise. John Whitson, a student from India living in the Netherlands, made a final meal of curry for all to share.

During the closing ecumenical worship, participants wrote prayers on pieces of paper with "hands" on them. These hands were then placed in the center of the room, together, for all to reflect on in prayer and silence. The final party concluded the week together, and all left after breakfast the next morning.

A special thanks to our donors who made this seminar possible: GBGM (General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church) and Finn Church Aid