

REPORT FOR PRESENTATION

TO THE

BAHAMAS CRISIS CENTRE CONFERENCE

THE DOMINICA NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN



PRESENTED BY
VANYA DAVID
CRISIS PROGRAM/MANAGER

BRIEF HISTORY

DOMINICA

Dominica is situated at the northern end of the Windward Chain of the Lesser Antilles.

It is the largest of this island group, lying between the two French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Roughly rectangular in shape with rounded projections at each end, it is 46 kms. (29 miles) long by 25 kms. (16 miles) wide, an area of 790 sq. kms (290 sq. miles).

Ruggedly beautiful and volcanic in origin, Dominica's narrow coastal shelves, towering green mountains covered in dense tropical forests, deep valleys and countless streams provide magnificent scenic views. Agriculture is the mainstay of the island's economy, with bananas being the main crop, followed by coconuts.

Dominica is perhaps the most naturally beautiful and different of all Caribbean destinations. Dominated by towering mountains and primordial rain forests, criss-crossed by rivers and waterfalls, Dominica offers incomparable opportunity to experience one of the last spots on earth, where nature, so unchanged and unspoiled, flourishes in abundance.

INTRODUCTION

The Dominica National Council of Women was established in 1986. As you may be aware, the DNCW is a voluntary umbrella organization representing women's group on the island. It seeks to advance the cause of women and ensure the integration of women in all aspect of society.

From its inception, DNCW has taken on two major thrust Development Program and Crisis Services. The Dominica National Council of Women (DNCW) is registered as an Association for Non-profit limited/Non-Government Organization since September 22nd 1998, under the Government of Dominica Companies Ordinance CAP 318 and companies regulations SRO No. 29 of 1981.

This umbrella organization has a membership of fifty-six (56) registered groups divided into seven zonal districts. The management committee elected every two years comprises nine (9) executive members and fourteen (14) zonal representatives. DNCW also collaborates with other stake holders to meet its objectives.

The DNCW crisis program focuses on preventative approach to Violence. It caters to the needs of individuals and families by means of education and training, counseling and shelter services.

DNCW is an advocate for the recognition of the Domestic Violence Act .Since the establishment of the Council; it has been providing counselling services for women, men and their families. Presently perpetrators are coming in seeking to reform their lives.

DNCW'S MOTTO

“Together we strive; Together We Achieve” forms the basis for implementation of programmes. Collaboration, cooperation and consistency have become important passwords in the process of Crisis Intervention, our role is “Mediatory” and the full involvement of clients is requested in arriving at solutions.

AIMS OF DNCW

The Dominica National Council of Women aims to sensitize, empower and unite women and their families, with the knowledge relating to their rights in order for them to develop their full potential; and to find common solutions to problems affecting them and, to create the awareness of the vital role those women play in the development of the country.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Crisis Programme focuses on a preventive approach to violence and more specifically domestic violence, catering to the needs of individuals and families by means of:

- ❖ Education and training for target groups
- ❖ Public Education
- ❖ Counseling and Shelter services

OFFICE MANAGEMENT

DNCW at present has three part time employees, Project Coordinator, Crisis/Shelter Manager/Counselor -paid by The Violence Against Women (VAW)- , and an Office Administrator. A number of volunteers including the Management Team assist in the day to day activities at the office and in the zones.

CRISIS SHELTER MECHANISM

This shelter has served as a source of strength and empowerment for many victims and their families; due to limited resources persons are only allowed to stay for a maximum of five (5) days. This situation from time to time causes some inconveniences for the clients as in certain circumstance they may require more

time and access to a kitchenette. Private homes are sometimes used for short period of time; DNCW would like to improve this situation but would need funding to upgrade and manage and provide for the security of shelter personnel and clients.

CLIENT OBJECTIVES

- To collaborate with DNCW to reduce and eliminate incidence of violence in their families.
- To cooperate with program personnel in ensuring the safety and security of themselves and that of counselors/workers and the shelter.
- To take advantage of all opportunities available for self development through education and training particularly skills training for economic independence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN DOMINICA WHAT EXISTS AND THE REALITIES

The Constitution of Dominica established equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed. There also exists Government policy on women, which promote equity and equality and stipulations, seek to remove discriminatory practices and prevent women from reaching their full potential.

Over the past few decades efforts has been made to addressing this social ills. For example there has been:

the 1998 Sexual Offences Act seeking to protect citizens from sexual abuse and more specifically the girl child who is more frequently the victims of rape, incest and carnal knowledge.

- The “2001 Protection Against Domestic Violence Act” provide legal means by which persons, especially women and children (including girls) most frequently the victims can be protected from all forms of domestic abuse.

Dominica is also signatory to and/or has ratified a number of international conventions/agreements. These instruments has set goals and targets which supports the principles of basic human rights that promote zero tolerance for abuse of the female sex. These include:

- The CEDAW Convention ratified in 1989. This has gradually been directing some effort at reducing any indirect discrimination against women.
- The Balem do Para 1994,
- Lima Accord Goals,
- Beijing plus 5 Platform for action
- The Millennium Development Goals.

With all of this the reality the Pattern of violent behavior against the female sex seems not to change thus creating a negative impact of violence on the family and entire society.

Data and more in-depth research indicate a high level of violence against women and girls and a growing culture of violence within the society.

A recent report on the health situation in Dominica commissioned by the Government, revealed three major health issues, these are obesity, HIV/AIDS and injuries caused by violence.

Research also seem to indicate there is a cultural acceptance of abuse of women resulting from the socialization process , Interaction with school age youth through a project implemented by the Women’s Bureau 2004-2006 confirms this assumption.

The 2001 study on Domestic Violence conducted by the Women's Bureau revealed that various forms of abuse take place between partners in relationships in all districts in Dominica, and at all social levels and within all age groups. The data also revealed that out of 770 respondents thirty-one percent (31.8%) had experienced some form of abuse either in a current or previous relationship. Twenty percent (20.4%) of which were females. Physical and verbal abuse such as swearing and humiliation were very prevalent forms of abuse. Women were mainly the ones who suffered physical abuse and did so more frequently than men.

Police files, records of patients at the hospitals, and counseling records at the Welfare Division the Women Bureau and the DNCW and News papers continues to show physical battering of women. For instance:

- The period May to December 2006, counseling records at DNCW central Office showed a 50% increase in physical battering of women.
- Police case files showed amalgamation of four hundred and fifty-nine (459) cases of domestic violence over a three year period 1999 to mid 2001 and for the year (2002 to 2003) 165 cases with more than ninety percent female victims. Police report also states that about 99% of persons seeking protection under the Protection against Domestic Violence Act within the last two years are women.

Women suffer sexual harassment but many feel insufficiently empowered to take action or feel that it is difficult to seek redress in the absence of legislation.

Another emerging issue now being discussed is human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women coming to our shores from neighboring islands. While Dominica laws forbid any acts of exploitation and human trafficking certain gaps

may need to be addressed and regulatory measures put in place to remove any opportunities for the exploitation of women.

The situation as regards our girl children is also a major cause for concern. The OECS report on rights of children show Dominica to have the highest level of abuse of children and more specifically sexual abuse of the girl child. 327 sexual abuse cases were recorded with about 98% against the female child over a four year period 1999 to 2003.

At this time there is an apparent lack of these necessary facilities to effectively respond to violence against women. For example police officers have complained of having nowhere to take women victims for safety when called during the night to deal with a crisis situation. Counselors have indicated a feeling of helplessness in dealing with many cases due to a lack of support systems or sufficient follow up.

Court related procedures are also seen as a problem. Many Domestic Violence cases are adjourned prematurely due to a number of reasons to include delays in serving of orders, lack of follow through or gaps in the law itself. Concerns raised by Police officers also suggested some difficulties are encountered in administering or in implementing these Act.

Ongoing research/data gaps, unavailability of gender desegregated data and data analysis, no formal system of data collection, are view as major setbacks to more effectively direct policies and for proper monitoring. Additionally the lack of technical expertise within the relevant institutions to carry out the task is a cause of concern.

Persons unwillingness give evidence in court especially if the perpetrator is a relative, tend to frustrates court procedures, acceptance of bribes when the

victim is a minor, The lack of sufficient information to allow decision making as regards the law and processes are also some of the constraints experienced

SUPPORT SERVICES/NET WORKING

Public awareness and education at community and national level, lobbying and advocacy by a number of partnering agencies including DNCW, Women Bureau Welfare Division, The Police, HIV/AIDS Unit, The Church, Drug Prevention Unit among others is the major instrument used at this time. Most of these agencies offer counseling interventions and programmes for affirmative action. The present state of the country's economy and more so after Hurricane Dean makes it difficult to source personnel and funding to operate programmes or to provide the necessary mechanisms to facilitate implementation of relevant legislation

Through the VAW project discussions and workshops has been conducted with partners police, Legal Aid Clinic; Women and men's organization, Youth, members of the judiciary, Social Welfare and other persons dealing with the implementation of legislation, policies and disciplines to respond to violence against women. Through out the course of implementation a number of issues identified; the major being the lack of resources/funds and manpower/education materials are said to cause the ineffectiveness in the implementation of legal instruments. These are to be dealt with at a symposium expected to be conducted later this year.

The recently established Legal Aid Clinic is one way of ensuring legal representation for all vulnerable groups including women and the girl child in situations of violence

FUNDING

Funds for the DNCW are derived fro membership subscription and local fundraising ventures. The VAW project "multi-sectoral Integrated approach for

improved implementation of existing laws, policies and plans of action to address violence against women and girls in Dominica.,” funded by the UNIFEM Trust Fund has been the main source of income. The two year project, now being implemented through a multi Sectoral Committee, ends in December 2007.

CONSTRAINTS

While Government has accepted the National Gender and Equity policy and plans of action which aims to provide more formal direction for addressing gender and development issues in Dominica, there remains much work to be done to implement this policy and other legislations required.

Accompanying mechanisms such as counseling, mediation, support groups, a functioning crisis centre/shelter or proper court system such as a family court, are critical and must go along with policies and laws for effective execution.

Of Wide spread concerns in the community and national level indicates that there is an apparent need to:

- Review and amend 2001 the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act to eliminate and facilitate implementation and strengthen the legal aid clinic
- Establishment of a Family court and policy frame work for Juvenile/young offenders
- Review/enact legislation or policy to address trafficking in persons (women and girls) and discourage exploitation of women for prostitution and deal with issues of sexual harassment
- Accelerate efforts towards family law reform to include among other measures, the recognition of common law union
- Give consideration to ratifying the CEDAW optional protocol
- Review social protection systems to deal equitably with risk and vulnerability caused by poverty, sickness, lost of employment, disaster etc.

- Promote active dialogue and engagement between the justice system and religious, cultural, civil society institutions and communities to discuss women human rights at all levels
- Strengthen key institutions to undertake gender sensitive research and data collection and analysis and create linkages to enable sharing of information

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

There is the growing need for networking in Dominica and the Caribbean if we are to succeed in the adoption of a zero tolerance approach to gender based violence there is also a call for the employment of a more strategic, integrated approach involving all sectors if we are to effectively deal with this malaise of violence against women and girls.

Gender concerns such as violence against women and girls must be more fully integrated, and must be inclusive approach across all sectors and should help to bring together the response of various agencies to Domestic Violence. The adoption a Caribbean plan of action needs to be addressed. Targeting the youth to help to break the trend is also important. The importance of having men on board will help them to see the enormity of the problem and to join in the fight.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of the DNCW in regards to Domestic Violence in Dominica has been tremendous irrespective of it scarce recourses. However, there is much more to be done in order to eliminate the causes/effects of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence in general. Our partnership with other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and Government Departments and the public to help eradicate Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence is gaining recognition. It is our hope that the combine efforts of the society in entirety, public, private and civil

will do more to effectively eradicate social ills in our society, particularly among women and girls.