



"Violence against women: Good practices in
combating and eliminating violence against women"

Expert Group Meeting

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Counselling service for women with trauma of violence

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short history

Violence against women as a broad issue with many dimensions. During the war, armed conflict, totalitarian regimes and states under fundamentalist reign, women's movement starts usually with organising support for women and children victims of violence - covering their immediate needs. One of them is psychological trauma recovery. This is as well the case with the example of Autonomous Women's Center (AWC), which was formed in 1993 in Belgrade to organise counseling service for women affected by male violence in wartime and non-war time. The Serbian regime (1991-2000) in that time started and carried on wars in the region. The responsibility of feminists in these political situations are many layered, in respect to women's needs as well in respect to the war politics done "in our name". In all Eastern Europe, in the so called transitional phase (transition from totalitarian to democratic structure) many women's organisations advanced their work in developing counseling service, and on the other hand started programmes for collaboration and education of the state institutions (social work services, community health services, police, courts). After many years of professional and activist work, in every region as well as in Belgrade, higher social transparency of violence against women is reached and this also means higher awareness of women's need for counseling.

The history of women's movement in states that were not in wars show the same rule, the first to be founded by women political activists thirty years ago were rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters and SOS Hotlines, therefore counseling services for women. By now most of the countries in the world have some forms of women's support groups for women victims/survivors.

Three introductory recommendations for services are crucial:

- women's services to women victims/survivors of violence should standardize their experience
- women's services should be recognized by the state and/or government.
- women's services that come out from women's movement should be part of inter-institutional or multi-agency model of prevention of violence against women.

What follows is an example of a of Counseling team in the Autonomous Women's Center in Belgrade that address the basic needs of women survivors of violence.

needs

Traumatic states are formed of three dimensions: emotions, thoughts and deeds. Therefore needs of women, nevertheless constructed by patriarchal cultural system, come from these three recovery aims: emotional awareness, cognitive autonomy, acting in/with autonomy.

1. emotional awareness

Psychotherapeutic hypothesis number one is that emotions are one of the major blocks / barriers of women to move out of the violent situations or to be able to overcome trauma from the past. Therefore, in order to support women on her way to autonomy, step one is work on women's emotional awareness through identified steps:

- recognizing one's own emotions
- naming emotions (fear, guilt, shame, helplessness, low self esteem, etc)
- letting emotions out (crying, rage expressing, etc.)
- expressing emotions verbally (talking about her emotions)
- emotional independence (process of controlling emotions)

relationships. Experience shows that many women (must) continue to live in the same/similar living conditions as before.



The needs of traumatised women previously stated are met through different aspects of counseling service.

1. Different dimensions of Counseling service:

- a) SOS Hotline counseling and information offering (from 8 h/day to 12 or 24 hours a day.) Trained counselors give information and counseling on the phone. It is not only informative, but counseling line.
- b) Individual counseling sessions - (sessions last from 30-50minutes done by trained counselors). Counseling sessions with

4. quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis show one aspect of the success of work using data base. The factors that show the success:

- number of

risk factors

1. Implementation and maintaining SOS Hotlines and Counseling services depend very much on enthusiasm of the group leaders to carry on the project.
 2. Keeping standards and principles is not easy to do, given the cultural relativism and general political atmosphere of not keeping standards in political governing - there is a bad model.
 3. Working with women survivors of male violence is hard work, and after some time some of the counselors find out they cannot work this anymore.
 4. The government/state can make standards for the counseling services which most likely will disregard “experience” as a professional factor, so that women working as counselors for many years but without adequate diploma, can be dismissed in the process of standardization of work.
 5. The government/state can decide to open their own SOS Hotline and shelter services and fill them completely with their “professionals” which do not have training on violence against women or counseling trauma.
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