

COMBATING GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE IN
THE SOUTH CAUCASUS
PROJECT:
ARMENIA



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Is a three-year regional
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PROJECT CHRONICLES

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FOREWORD

This newsletter is dedicated to the recent work conducted within the training component of the UNFPA “Combating Gender-based Violence in the South Caucasus” project implemented in Armenia.

Lack of knowledge and awareness on gender equality and GBV creates serious obstacles in the field of human rights, including women’s rights advocacy, and is considered as one of the primary issues of concern that needs to be addressed within the framework of programmes tackling GBV problem.

With a purpose of raising awareness of population on GBV and creating a pool of trainers for educating diverse target groups of population on GBV issues, a special training component was considered as one of the primary directions of the project implementation in Armenia.

This component includes a wide range of activities implemented by a consortium of NGOs selected on a competitive basis, namely: International Centre for Human Development (ICHHD), Association of Armenian Women with University Education (AAWUE), and Scientific Association of Medical Students of Armenia (SAMSA).

The awareness raising component aims at:

1. Training of educators on gender and GBV issues, involving representatives of public state institutions, local authorities and NGOs;

2. Raising awareness on GBV among wider groups of population including young people, through special information and education meetings;

3. Delivering skills and knowledge on gender issues, GBV, local and international instruments on GBV prevention to public officials responsible for addressing GBV issues in the country.

Trainings as well as education and information meetings involving active participation of the community and grass roots will contribute to the sustainability of the implemented training component results by ensuring reference to gender and GBV issues even after the completion of UNFPA CGBV project.

International Center for Human Development (ICHHD) is an independent think tank which has been implementing activities aimed at development of democracy, dissemination of liberal values, initiation of reforms in the governance system of Armenia and implementation of research and analysis to study possibilities of regional integration. Association of Women with University Education (AAWUE) is an NGO that has been active in supporting initiatives of human rights protection, ensuring equal rights and equitable treatment of men and women, increasing the role of women in society, enhancing more active participation of women in political and civic activities, addressing gender discrimination and gender stereotypes, promoting civic initiatives and the culture of peace. Scientific Association of Medical Students of Armenia (SAMSA) implements health awareness, educational and training projects for school and university students.

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TRAINING FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL MACHINERY ON GENDER EQUALITY

Creation of a solid knowledge base and capacity building on the basis of already obtained skills and information can be achieved through conducting specialized training programmes tailored to the needs of specific target groups. With a purpose of strengthening the national capacity for women's rights protection and enforcement as well as for building reporting and negotiation skills, training for the target groups of representatives of national machinery on gender equality was conducted within the framework of UNFPA CGBV funded project by the International Center for Human Development (ICHD) in cooperation with the Armenian Association of Women with University Education (AAWUE) and the Scientific Association of Medical Students of Armenia.

About 160 representatives of a broadest range of 75 national institutions engaged in gender and GBV policies participated in a series of trainings conducted by ICHD. The training was delivered to a large number of institutions and their officials first time ever in Armenia. The training covered all branches of the government ranging from the office of the President of Armenia to the Agency of Civic



Aviation, from the National Security Service to local municipalities. Representatives of all line ministries and government agencies, the Parliament, the office of the President of Armenia, the office of the Prime Minister, the Judiciary, offices of the regional governors, the Police, the Prosecutor General's office, many local municipalities, etc. participated in eight three-days training courses. The training was conducted by the team of experts completed a special training course within the framework of CGBV project in Armenia.

A 3-day training module was developed to enhance knowledge and skills of the representatives of national machinery on combating GBV in Armenia. The training module that was prepared by the team of national experts covers gender issues, GBV, international and national instruments for promoting gender equality and combating GBV and comprises a special section aiming at policy making skills of the trainees tailored to gender and GBV national policies.

The training module will be further incorporated into the mandatory training program for civil servants by the government, ensuring that all civil servants get the knowledge on gender and GBV issues and policies. While the training module has been prepared by consortium partners and trainers have been trained, however, the institutional capacities to ensure effective implementation of the courses for civil servants require further action of the government and assistance of the development partners active in this field.

The mutually complementing capacities of the consortium partners were the primary key to success in this practice. Thus, ICHD, the strongest think tank in Armenia, provided the overall coordination of the effort, involved the government institutions,

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led the preparation of the module and provided its unique expertise in the area policy making. The AAWUE's decade-long experience in the area of gender and capacity in delivering gender training was another asset to the effort. Though it was not an easy task to mobilize such a variety of national and local institutions in GBV training, the consistency and working relations with the leaders in the country helped ICHD to overcome many challenges.

2-DAY AWARENESS RAISING MEETINGS

2-day awareness raising meetings were conducted by the Armenian Association of Women with University Education (AAWUE) and the Scientific Association of Medical Students of Armenia (SAMSA) within the framework of awareness raising component of the UNFPA "Combating Gender-based Violence in the South Caucasus" project. Meetings were targeted separately to educational needs of male and female participant groups and heavily relied on the use of "Against Gender-based Violence" training manual which was specially adapted for the purpose of this initiative. Thematic handouts covering gender, GBV, and other related topics were distributed to participants of the meetings.

12 awareness raising meetings on gender-based violence were planned and conducted by AAWUE for the target group of school and university students, women and men in Shirak, Lori, Gegharkunik, Tavush, Ararat, Aragatsotn marzes and Yerevan. Trainers selected from the group of ToT participants Ms. Ruzanna Panoyan, Mr. Armen Avetyan, Mr. Arkadi Akopov, Ms. Mariam Martirosyan, Ms. Rimma Asratyan, Mr. Albert Khachatryan, Ms. Karine Siradeghyan, Ms. Karine Alexanyan, Ms. Astghik Darbinyan, Ms. Irina Manukyan, Ms. Arpine Matinyan, Ms. Anahit Hovhannesyan, Mr. Mamikon Galoyan, Ms. Liana Ghazaryan, Ms. Karine Bazeyan, Ms. Gohar Hoveyan, and Mr. Artak Hovhannisyan led awareness raising meetings with the support of AAWUE experts. Taking into account that the target groups of the meetings included high school and university students, AAWUE provided trainers who had necessary experience and skills of working with children and youth; male trainers were selected for conducting meetings with target groups of men.

Starting from March 2009 SAMSA started the implementation of awareness raising meetings that were organized and conducted in Vayk (Vayots Dzor), Kapan and Goris towns (Syunik marz) and in Yerevan. The information meetings involved active participation of schools children, university students, and representatives of governmental and non-governmental structures. The meetings were conducted by professionals prepared within the framework of "Against Gender-based Violence" project Training of Trainers, namely: Ms. Almast Safaryan, Ms. Susanna Martirosyan, Ms. Silva Khojabaghyan, Mr. Gourgen Minasian, Ms. Nina Barseghyan, Mr. Gevorg Tamamyanyan, Ms. Anna Vardanyan, and Mr. Vahagn Kozmoyan. SAMSA experts also participated in the meetings by providing support to the trainers.

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AWARENESS RAISING MEETINGS ORGANIZED BY AAWUE

Meetings with high school students in Tavush, Shirak and Ashtarak marzes

In total, three 2-day awareness raising meetings were conducted for target groups of 78 school students from 8-11 grades of Dilijan (Tavush marz), Gyumri (Shirak marz) and Ashtarak (Aragatsotn marz) towns' high schools. Overall, 27 girls and 51 boys participated in the meetings.

In Dilijan the awareness raising meetings were conducted by trainers Ms. Ruzanna Panoyan and Mr. Armen Avetyan with the assistance of Ms. Anahit Aghoyan, AAWUE expert. In Gyumri and Ashtarak meetings were facilitated by Ms. Karine Bazeyan, Mr. Arkadi Akopov, Ms. Mariam Martirosyan, Ms. Rimma Hasratyan and Mr. Albert Khachatryan with support of AAWUE experts - Mr. Artak Hovhannisyanyan and Ms. Natalia Martirosyan.

Taking into account the age peculiarities of the target auditorium of high school students as well as the fact that the majority had no idea about the concept of gender, interactive teaching methods were applied to share information with students through real life examples, practical exercises and simulation games. Thus, after explaining the concept of gender, the trainers offered exercises which allowed the students to learn the differences between sex and gender, between physiological and social aspects of both definitions. During a session dedicated to gender stereotypes, gender socialization and formation of individuality students learned to identify gender stereotypes and defined the most commonly spread gender stereotypes in Armenia.

"In the course of time, gender roles change. The proverb that states "Man is the external wall and woman is the inner wall" has already become obsolete. Nowadays, there many families where men are jobless and women are working to make their families' living".

**Gevork Meloyan, student.
Gyumri**

Interactive discussions involved active sharing of opinions and gave the students an insight into the institutes, agents, mechanisms and stages of gender socialization by means of taking a look at personalities and conditions that shaped and impacted formation of their individualities. By means of engaging into discussions around the topic of gender equality and gender-based discrimination students were able to identify the present situation with gender equality and gender-based discrimination in the country.

As this practical exercise demonstrated, girls in general were not conscious of gender-based discrimination and its presence in their lives, while some boys shared radical opinions concerning the traditional role of woman in a society, stressing unacceptability of female labour in construction and quarry fields, recalling that gender equality is impossible due to physical peculiarities of both sexes and due to unequal roles of women and men as "set forth in the Holy Bible". Nevertheless, trainers managed to leverage the students' opinions and to provide for adequate understanding by the auditorium of gender equality and provision of equal rights and equal opportunities as being necessary preconditions for harmonious development of the society.

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During the awareness raising meetings conducted in Gyumri it was observed that here young people expressed keen interest towards the topic of political participation of women.

Participants got informed about international and national legal instruments directed at provision of gender equality and prevention of gender-based discrimination, including the UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education, UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women and UN Convention on the Nationality of Married Women.

“Insufficient representation of women in the National Assembly and on decision-making levels is discrimination. Besides, women’s opinions often don’t count there. It is a wrong thing to do as my Mother for example, often makes proper decisions leading the family out of the critical situations. However, I wouldn’t like my wife to work in the National Assembly as men there use bad language.”

**Grigor Tukhikyan, student.
Gyumri**

During the meeting, the “Yogurt is black” thematic film was demonstrated to the participants. The film scenario built upon UN CEDAW requirements and addressed different aspects of existing issues of gender-based discrimination and gender inequalities in Armenia. The film presented a collective image of a modern Armenian woman covering different aspects of women’s life, including family, politics, business, rural and healthcare spheres, comparing successful female politicians and entrepreneurs in contrast to discrimination against girls and women in

families and labour markets. Also the issue of gender-based violence was covered in the part of the film that depicted rural women who often suffer from domestic violence perpetrated by mothers in law and husbands. Feedbacks of participants collected after showing the “Yogurt is black” thematic film revealed that the majority of them particularly focused on the family issues. They shared a common opinion regarding the importance of equal rights in the family and balanced distribution of family responsibilities among its members.

During sessions that focused on the problem of gender-based violence, students got actively involved in the debates around this issue. Trainers gave definition of gender-based violence and conducted an exercise which demonstrated that violence is a form of discrimination and a violation of human rights. The forms of gender-based violence including physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence, dangerous rites and socio-economic violence, their peculiarities and reasons beyond each of these forms of violence were explained to the participants. Special attention was paid to the problem of domestic violence. In Dilijan, during team work exercises, the students studied different conflict situations in families, possible consequences and ways of solving conflicts. It was interesting to observe that out of 5 groups of participants, only 2 groups suggested non-violent conflict solution approaches. Deriving from examples of violence in families that were shared by participants, it became evident that many of them witnessed cases of domestic violence in their neighbourhood, among families of friends and relatives; this only proves the data concerning prevalence of domestic violence phenomenon in Armenia.

During the presentation of topics on Violence and HIV/AIDS and Drug addiction and Violence, the trainers found out that most of the school students had scanty information concerning these issues. Information provided by the trainers contributed to raised awareness among students concerning ways of getting infected and protective measures, linkages between HIV/AIDS, violence and drug addiction, and

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vulnerability of women as a risk group due to, among other reasons, violence against women.

The problem of trafficking was discussed during the meetings as a global issue of concern. Information was provided regarding prevalence of trafficking in the world, including Armenia, while stressing that both men and women are subjected to trafficking. Students took great interest in discussions regarding this phenomenon in Armenia, its causes, and the role of awareness raising in the prevention of trafficking.

As such, high school students proved to be the most informed group of participants, greatly interested in the presented topics, especially those concerning gender equality, domestic violence and trafficking. Yet, the hardest topics from the point of view of apprehension and perception of the presented information were the “gender stereotypes”, “gender-based discrimination” and “gender socialization”.

**Meetings with groups of female university students in Lori,
Shirak marzes and Yerevan**

In total, 79 female students representing Vanadzor State Pedagogical University, Agricultural Academy and Technological College as well as Gyumri State Pedagogical University and Yerevan North University participated in 2-day information meetings conducted in Vanadzor (Lori marz), Gyumri (Shirak marz) and Yerevan cities.

In Vanadzor the meetings were conducted by trainers Ms. Ruzanna Panoyan and Karine Siradeghyan with support of AAWUE expert Ms. Armenuhi Kyureghyan. In Gyumri and Yerevan meetings were led by Ms. Karine Alexanyan and Ms. Astghik Darbinyan, Ms. Liana Kazaryan and Ms. Irina Manukyan with support of experts Mr. Artak Hovhannisyman and Ms. Lilit Zakaryan.

Although meetings were conducted using a common agenda, each meeting was adjusted to the local needs of the participants' groups. In some cases, ice breaker exercises were used for introducing participants and creating a trustworthy and open environment.

During the first day of meeting, trainers explained the differences between sex and gender by means of engaging students into interactive discussion regarding biological

“In many cases brothers rather than mothers keep girls under pressure in their families, depriving girls of opportunity to choose personal model of behavior”.

Ani Poghosyan, student. Gyumri

and physiological differences between both sexes as well as how these influence commonly accepted social roles. Gender stereotypes and their different manifestations depending on the regions and countries were also discussed and gave students an opportunity to make observations of gender roles and gender stereotypes from their daily life. An interesting observation was made while conducting “woman – driver” exercise; in Gyumri, in contrast to Vanadzor, the majority of students identified themselves with biological sex category. Summing up the responses of girls to the questions “Who, where and when impacted formation of your individuality?” and “Who and when instilled your ideals of femininity?” the trainers drew a conclusion that for majority of participants parents, family, brothers in particular, as well as friends were main agents of socialization.

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Students expressed particular interest in topics of gender equality and equity and gender-based discrimination. Gender equality was presented to the participants as equality of rights and opportunities, as one of the principles of social justice. Trainers also reflected on gender-based discrimination, explained the meaning of the term “discrimination”, provided examples of direct and indirect manifestations of gender-based discrimination in the labour market, showing how it may impact career advancement and political participation of women. While discussing these topics, students stressed the role of mass media and advertisement as means of instilling gender-based stereotypes that exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

During the discussion “Yogurt is black”, a thematic film and a video clip on domestic violence were demonstrated. Following the film and video screening, the students engaged in an active debate; according to some of them, if a husband is harsh, then his wife should behave accordingly, without provoking him, while others made a point that a wife should divorce a violent husband. A common conclusion that the participants arrived at after the film session, was that unfortunately problems shown in the film are real and present in daily life.

The problem of gender-based violence was presented to the participants through interactive exercises which allowed understanding different forms of violence including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological; dangerous rites and etc. Participants were asked to draw a “tree of discrimination” with roots showing causes and origins of discrimination and branches demonstrating possible consequences of discrimination, including gender-based violence.

A separate session was dedicated to the topic of domestic violence and explored how it is manifested in families. During the session on Violence and HIV/AIDS the trainers revealed knowledge gaps of the participants in the following fields: HIV/AIDS prevention and protective measures, linkages between HIV/AIDS, violence and drug addiction, and vulnerability of women as a risk group due to violence against women among other reasons. However, the trainers noticed that majority of participants were already well informed about the problems of trafficking.

The information meetings were concluded with presentation of national and international instruments related to the field of gender equality, gender-based discrimination, and gender-based violence. The students gained knowledge about the UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as well as Beijing Platform of Action. In Gyumri, the participants were greatly interested in the “2004-2010 Republic of Armenia National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in the Society” as majority of them heard about this national document for the first time. Yerevan students were particularly interested in the “16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence” yearly campaign and its origin.

Overall, all three meetings conducted in Vanadzor, Gyumri and Yerevan were rather successful both in terms of awareness raising and active participation of students.

**Meetings with groups of women in Lori, Gegharkunik, and
Ararat marzes**

Three 2-day information meetings were held involving participation of 87 women from Lori, Gegharkunik and Ararat marzes. In Vanadzor (Lori Marz), 30 women from local

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NGOs, political parties as well as housewives participated in the meetings. In Sevan (Gegharkunik marz), target groups of participants included 31 women representing local NGOs, teaching staff of higher education institutions, museum workers and staff of Sevan city hall. In Artashat (Ararat marz) the participants' group included 26 women from local NGOs, political parties, staffs of the Governor's office and the city hall, as well as female journalists, teachers, and medical workers.

Awareness raising meetings were conducted by the following trainers:

- Ms. Karine Siradeghyan and Ms. Arpine Matinyan with support of AAUWE expert Ms. Armenui Kyureghyan in Vanadzor;
- Ms. Anahit Hovhannisyan and Mr. Mamikon Galoyan with support of AAWUE expert Ms. Anahit Aghoyan in Sevan;
- Ms. Armenuhi Kyureghyan, Ms. Ruzanna Panoyan and Ms. Liana Ghazaryan with support of AAWUE expert Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan in Artashat.

The meetings proved that the extent to which the problems of gender equality and gender-based violence are perceived by women depends on their social status and level of education. While in Sevan and Artashat groups of participants included women actively involved in social and political life of their communities who easily apprehended issues related to gender-based violence, a group of women in Vanadzor, who included also housewives, initially rejected the issues of gender-based violence suggested for discussion deriving from their deep conviction that "it is a duty of a woman to obey her husband".

During the first meeting, as a result of conducted exercises many participants had a chance to review their perceptions regarding gender stereotypes, gender roles and norms dominating in the Armenian society. A distinguished example of change that took place in the minds of participants was the change of opinion of one of the participants in Vanadzor. Initially, she began with insisting on a traditional role of a woman as being a housewife taking care of children due to her naturally bound physical weakness. However, later on she confirmed that there were times when she was the only bread winner in her family who had to work to earn living while her husband was abroad.



In Sevan, the exercises demonstrated that in many cases women were not ready to see their husbands doing housework like washing dishes, doing laundry and cleaning the house, and performing other house tasks that went beyond existing gender roles in families. Women wouldn't believe that men could be trusted to do the housework and strongly doubted their ability to do it in a proper way.

"For the first time in my life I felt my gender when a boy was born to our family with 4 girl-kids. Parents were so proud of him that we, the girls, felt inferior."

A comment by participant. Vanadzor

In Artashat the participants actively engaged in the discussion concerning the existing gender norms that led to conflicts in families and provided numerous examples when girls who professionally practiced sports were not allowed by their parents to take part in sport contests or others were not allowed to participate

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in seminars that required travelling from one city to another. As a result of the discussion, a common conclusion was made that the main influence on the formation of individualities of the participants came from their families, school and the environment where they grew up.

The participants were told about gender-based discrimination and ways it is manifested in the fields of labour and employment, politics, on the decision-making level, and in families, as well as got informed about discrete and indirect discrimination. The majority of the participants expressed interest in the topic of gender misbalance in the field of political participation of women. According to them, gender-based discrimination is manifested to the greatest extent particularly in this domain.

During the session dedicated to the topic of domestic violence, numerous examples shared by the participants proved that in case of family conflicts leading to violence, neighbours and relatives prefer not to interfere. This finding once again proved that in such cases, the society still wouldn't intervene to solve the problem due to the fact that it would be considered a family matter that is not subject to condemnation in public. While discussing the problem of domestic violence, the participants highlighted the low educational level, low awareness of human rights as well as lack of protective measures and victim protection institutions as main causes of domestic violence prevalence. After watching the documentary films offered, the participants from Sevan stressed the importance of achieving equal rights and equal opportunities without compromising the best of the national family traditions. Self-discrimination of women has been stressed as one of the reasons that perpetuate gender stereotypes passing from one generation to another.

The presentation of the topics on Violence and HIV/AIDS and Drug addiction and Violence proved that, despite measures taken to raise awareness among population on these issues, the majority of participants lacked basic information regarding the ways of getting infected, the most vulnerable groups of population being prone to HIV/AIDS, means of

prevention, and the ways how HIV/AIDS, violence, and drug abuse issues are linked together. While discussing human trafficking, the majority of participants were inclined to think that in most cases people, both women and men, leaving abroad for work are pretty aware of the risks associated with work migration. The majority agreed that trafficking is a dangerous phenomenon and there is a need of continuous awareness raising on this issue among the population at large.

Towards the end of the meetings, the participants received information about national and international instruments on gender equality and gender-based violence while focusing in particular on the "2004-2010 Republic of Armenia National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in the Society".

Overall, the participants highly rated the work performed by the trainers and were greatly satisfied with the results of the meetings held. Also, the participants suggested implementing similar activities in the mixed groups to involve also male participants.

"The most important feature of a woman's character is courage; even if she possesses all necessary skills and knowledge, without courage she will never make it to the respective heights (of career)."

**Anush Markaryan, a participant.
Artashat**

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COMBATING GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE
IN THE SOUTH
CAUCASUS
PROJECT

Is a three-year regional initiative launched by UNFPA in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with the purpose to create enabling environment for reduction of gender based violence in these countries and to support them in fulfilling international obligations in this field.

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Meetings with groups of men

In total, 75 men took part in three 2-day awareness raising meetings conducted in Vanadzor (Lori marz), Gyumri (Shirak marz), and in Yerevan. Participants involved representatives of local NGOs, political parties, civil servants, teachers, medical workers, entrepreneurs, bankers, farmers and others.

The meetings were conducted in Vanadzor by trainers Ms. Ruzanna Panoyan and Mr. Armen Avetyan with support of AAWUE expert Ms. Armenuhi Kyureghyan; in Gyumri - by Ms. Karine Bazeyan and Ms. Gohar Hoveyan with support of AAWUE expert Mr. Artak Hovhannisyan; in Yerevan by Mr. Artak Hovhannisyan, Ms. Liana Ghazaryan and Ms. Irina Manukyan with support of experts Ms. Natalya Martirosyan and Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan.

Overall, the participants showed and maintained a high level of interest towards the topics discussed within the framework of awareness raising meetings, and gender-based violence in particular. The participants easily grasped the topics of gender, gender norms and ways how these change under the influence of different cultures, religions and other conditions.

While discussing gender stereotypes, participants were, on the one hand, susceptible to the ideas of gender equality in terms of equal rights, yet, on the other hand, they underestimated the situation with equal opportunities in Armenia.

Upon completion of exercises during which the participants got acquainted with ways how gender roles, norms and stereotypes are formed and what social institutions influence their formation, the majority pointed out that in the first place, it was the environment in which they grew up including friends, trainers, films, books, playgrounds, army, etc. that shaped up their personalities; families came only after the mentioned categories.

“I am sure there are gender stereotypes in every society, yet here their influence is very strong. As far as I can see today gender stereotypes are gradually changing”.

**Ruben Ohanjanyan, a participant.
Yerevan**

Statistical data were used to present information regarding vertical and horizontal segregation in different fields, direct and indirect gender-based discrimination in the labour market and in the field of employment. This topic led to hot debates between the participants proving that there is an ambiguous perception of gender-based discrimination phenomenon in Armenia. The majority of the participants shared a common opinion that there is also discrimination against men. An example from the employment in the field of mass media showed that due to the fact that women were less ambitious and less demanding in terms of salary pay, they were more often hired for different positions as compared to men. At the same time, not all participants fully understood the scope of the problem with gender-based discrimination in Armenia. One of the participants stressed that if a woman wants to become a politician, she should struggle to achieve it and not give up half-way while justifying her failure by existing discrimination. The opinion of this participant was supported by other participants.

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Great interest was shown towards the topic of gender-based violence. An interesting observation was made by Gyumri participants, who upon completion of the exercise, mentioned divorce as one of the ways of solving domestic violence issues and when their answers were compared to those received from female audiences, men concluded that despite all changes, even when women become victims of violence they remain tolerant, depending on the opinion of the society and dominating stereotypes, lacking self-respect and unable to protect themselves.

In Gyumri and Vanadzor, after watching the documentary films, the participants concluded that women themselves perpetuate gender stereotypes in their families. An Austrian documentary “Showing Red Card” which addressed the implementation of the law that banishes perpetrators of domestic violence from their houses, was shown to Yerevan male audience. The majority of participants strongly doubted the appropriateness of a similar law introduction in Armenia due to the possibility of high level of misuses that may occur if the law gets enacted. Overall, participants expressed their negative opinion towards domestic violence, stressing that only weak, inadequate men perpetuate violence, while pointing out also to the roots of domestic violence that include illiteracy, lack of education and bad manners, among women – lack of knowledge of their rights and their vulnerability.

During the sessions dedicated to Violence and HIV/AIDS and human trafficking topics majority of men were more or less informed about these topics, some had undergone medical check-ups to test HIV/AIDS. As to trafficking, majority shared a common opinion that it is impossible to subject a person to trafficking since people in most cases are aware of the risks associated with trafficking. However, examples provided by trainers demonstrated that in most cases trafficked persons fall victims of frauds and awareness raising alongside with governmental control over organizations offering employment opportunities outside the country of residence, are considered the most effective means for combating trafficking.

Summing up the results of awareness raising meetings, the trainers pointed out the effectiveness of discussions around the topic of gender-based violence. Male participants were interested in more concrete and straight to the point examples and data concerning the situation with gender-based violence in Armenia, and position and role of the government in addressing gender-based violence. Participants readily shared their own solutions of addressing this problem and stressed the importance of conducting similar meetings in the mixed groups of participants that would include both men and women, as well as representatives of the governmental structures.

Meetings for village governors

Out of the awareness raising meetings conducted in Lori marz, the most interesting and important ones were those that involved participation of village governors from Spitak, Gugark, Tumanyan, Stepanavan, and Tashir communities. The participants of these meetings greatly valued the importance of awareness raising events carried out in villages, taking into account the high migration rate of men from villages searching for seasonal work abroad. The participants explained this pervasive phenomenon as a result of harsh socioeconomic conditions and widely spread stereotypes of the role of breadwinner traditionally assigned to a man according to which he should be the one to provide for the living of his family, take care of all financial matters and play a role of a family head.

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The participants pointed out that it has been long since women started to be engaged in work that according to dominating stereotypes is considered a “man’s job” and includes farming practices like land cultivation, cattle breeding, and crop selling. In a way, these practices result in labelling of these women as “mannish”. Yet village women, who take on their shoulders a heavy load of “male work”, see no other way but carrying on with this burden as there are no men to support their families.

Also, issues associated with seasonal inflows of migrants were discussed during the meetings. It was mentioned that returning migrants bring with them numerous infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS, which penetrate into their families. The participants stressed the importance of conducting awareness raising meetings in the wintertime season when migrants return to their homes, and emphasized the importance of awareness raising meetings as effective means of sharing information regarding possible means of preventing the spreading of diseases.

A psychological aspect of migration was also discussed. The participants mentioned that migrants employed as cheap labour to some extent feel humiliated and upon their return home are often trying to restore their self-esteem through violence against their wives and children.

AWARENESS RAISING MEETINGS ORGANIZED BY SAMSA

Vayots Dzor marz: Vayk

In Vayk meeting sessions were conducted on March 16 -17 by Ms. Almast Safaryan.

2-day meetings targeted male audience of high school and university students selected from Vayk schools, Yerevan State Economic University, Yerevan State University, Vayk lyceum and Yeghegnadzor state college, with the total of 25 male participants.

“Against Gender-based Violence” training manual was used by the trainers as educational reference guide adapted according to the needs of the mentioned target group. During the meeting thematic handouts on topics of gender equality, gender-based violence and other related issues were distributed to the participants.

During the first day, participants gained knowledge on the concept of gender, got acquainted with gender stereotypes and socialization processes. The second day was dedicated to the discussions including Q&A sessions during which the participants addressed numerous questions to the trainers thus displaying a high level of interest towards the topics presented.

Syunik marz: Goris

In Goris meetings were organized in “SYUNIK” institute and included two information meetings conducted in separate sessions from March 13 till March 17 for women’s and men’s target groups represented by the staff of “SYUNIK” institute, Goris State



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University, Goris English Language Teaching Centre, as well as Goris City Council, "Teachers' House" Association, local NGOs, and other state structures. Overall, 30 women and 30 men participated in the information meetings in Goris.

The meetings were conducted by Ms. Silva Khojabaghyan and Mr. Gourgen Minasian, supported by SAMSA expert Ms. Hasmik Hovhannisyan.

The participants greatly valued the importance of these meetings in raising awareness of population on GBV while stressing the importance of involving even greater number of interested individuals and organizations in similar activities.

The information meetings were covered by local mass media.

Kapan

In Kapan the information meeting took place on March 13-14 in Syunik regional centre for youth events. The training manual used by the trainers as main reference guide was adapted to the needs of the target group of participants that included in total 27 females representing 7 high schools, Yerevan State University, State Engineering University of Armenia, Agricultural Academy and Leader's School.

The information meeting sessions were marked by a high level of interest and participation of the target groups in discussions and team work leading to active knowledge building on GBV issues.



The participants expressed their gratitude to the organizers of this event and stressed the significance of the information meetings in raising awareness of population on GBV as an important precondition for effectively combating GBV phenomena.

Yerevan

In Yerevan in total 4 meetings were conducted by SAMSA trainers Nina Barseghyan, Gevorg Tamamyan, Anna Vardanyan, and Vahagn Kozmoyan.

The meeting sessions were organized in Yerevan State Medical University for the groups of high school and university students representing Yerevan State Medical University, Yerevan State University, State Engineering University of Armenia, Yerevan State Pedagogical Institute and other higher education institutions as well as for the teaching staff of the mentioned universities, NGO representatives, state structures, 100 participants in total.

The participants gained knowledge on gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination, gender equality, socialization and trafficking as well as instruments for combating gender-based violence. The participants greatly valued efforts and expertise level of trainers and expressed gratitude for being involved in meetings. They displayed a high level of interest towards discussed topics by means of addressing numerous questions to trainers and sharing experiences from their daily lives. They also thanked the organizers and shared a common opinion about the

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importance of continuously raising awareness on GBV among population as a part of efforts targeting GBV reduction in the country.

REFLECTIONS FROM AWARENESS RAISING MEETINGS

“White ribbon” suits everyone

**Extracts from a thematic article by Ruzanna Panoyan,
AAWUE trainer/graduate of ToT**

“Violence will never yield anything good”, these were the words of a student from a small Dilijan school at the end of the awareness raising meeting, and I thought how great it would be if every single person in the world would have shared the same idea with this student. I always feel extremely upset every time I hear about violence. Yet I never understood the core of this problem. Only after my participation in the ToT seminar I got a chance to reconsider my vision of this problem. I was shocked by the fact that more women die as a result of violence as compared to women’s deaths because of oncological diseases...

Stereotypes like “if he beats me - he loves me”, “Don’t wash your dirty linen in public” are too strong. That is why so many women still live in the atmosphere of violence for years, hiding this problem from others. They even don’t perceive it as a problem but rather take it as a minor family matter. Echoes of violence will long be heard in the lives of children who grew up with violence in their families. According to psychologists, these children will grow up either with a psychological complex of a violator, or a complex of a victim. In Armenia, victims of violence are often condemned as they are seen as instigators of violence... All attempts of a woman to explain herself are drowning in the “marsh of prejudices”, traditions of patriarchal culture where she has a “husband-master” whom she should obey. She is afraid of loosing her family, her husband; she is scared of loneliness, her social and economic vulnerability. When a woman comes to police, quite often she is blamed for provoking violence in the family, for wrong behaviour and unfair accusations of her husband.

During the awareness raising meetings the topic of violence against men was also discussed. The participants pointed out the difficulty of corresponding to clichés of “the real man” and “manhood” in the Armenian society. According to them, men are often subjected to psychological violence both in the society and in the family, since they never should expose their weaknesses, should always behave like men, and at the same time should earn good money so that neither society nor family would blame them for not being real men...All male participants of the meetings agreed to wear white ribbon - the international symbol of unity of men who stand together to combat violence against women as a token of fight against despotism and violence against women.

Certainly, combating violence is a tough task, and no international campaign, not even a decade-long campaign, will ever manage to eliminate this phenomenon if the society won’t acknowledge destructive consequences of this evil.

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