

Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day

5 September 2009

Resource Packet

Love One Another

written by
General Conference Women's Ministries Department

**Prepared by the General Conference
Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day Committee**

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries

Adventist Review

Children's Ministries

Education Department

Family Ministries

Health Ministries

Ministerial Association

Women's Ministries

Youth Ministries

April 2009

Dear Church Leaders:

Joyful greetings. Once again another Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day will soon be here. Over the past seven years we have focused on domestic violence, incest, abuse of power, and abuse of the elderly. This year we will focus on violence against women.

News on this issue is everywhere, in the news, on the TV, the radio and the internet. There are many stories of human trafficking, young girls forced into prostitution, Female Genital Mutilation, early childhood marriages, domestic violence, forced abortions, rape and on and on.

One of the mandates that God has given to us is found in Proverbs 31:8-9, *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the right of the poor and needy”* (NIV). If there was ever a time that this statement held true it is now.

As a church, as women of God, can we continue to sit quietly on the sidelines and do nothing for our many, many sisters around the world who are suffering from some form of abuse. I think not. So on this day, we ask giving a call to all our sisters, and brothers, to join us in speaking out for those in pain. Join us as we say “No” to violence against women and girl children. “No” to abuse of any kind.” “No, we will not sit idly by and do nothing.” “NO!”

The world in which we live needs children of God to love them to Him, the only one who can heal their pain. Are you ready? We pray that you will say “Yes” to this challenge. “Yes” to God’s call. “Yes, we are ready!”

With love and joy,

Heather-Dawn Small
GC Women’s Ministries Director

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Love One Another Sermon

Prayer

INTRODUCTION

The Scripture text for our meditation today is 1 John 4:7-11. Follow me as we walk through four Bible stories that will help us better understand the meaning of this passage.

Let me tell you the story of a woman we shall call Joan. When Joan was old enough to be married she was given in marriage to the eldest son of a wealthy and notable man. We will call this man James. He had three sons and was very proud of his sons, for sons would carry on his name and heritage.

Unfortunately Joan's husband died and according to the custom in the country where she lived her father-in-law had gave her in marriage to his second son. But then second son died. Again custom dictated that Joan should marry the third son, but her father-in-law told her the third and last son was not of marrying age; he was still too young. So he sent Joan back to her father's home with the promise that when the third son was of marrying age he would call for her.

According to the customs of their country James wronged Joan in two ways, first by not following through on the custom of his day and second by sending her back to her father's home. Once a woman married into a family they became her family. Even if her husband, died she would still lived with his family.

Joan returned to her father's home with much shame and distress. For a woman to be sent back to her father's home after being married was disgraceful in the culture in which she lived. Once married a woman belonged to her husband's family, even if she was widowed she stayed with them. Returning to her father's home would have caused the eyes of all in the village to look upon her with disdain; and there was already the suspicion that maybe she had done something to her first two husbands that could have caused their deaths. Maybe she was cursed. Even her father would have been angry with her for shaming him in this way.

Time passed and the third son grew up, but Joan's father-in-law did not send for her. After a while she realized that it was not his intention to marry her to his last son. What could Joan do? She desperately wanted to restore herself in the eyes of her family and the people. But how could she do this? She was only a woman. She had no voice in family gatherings, no husband to speak up for her, nothing to bargain with. But as she thought on this situation she came up with a plan. A plan born from desperation and feelings of deep shame.

Joan realized that she needed to convince her father-in-law that she was not cursed and that he had wronged her. She remembered that even though her father-in-law believed in God he also believed that if he wanted some extra help he could offer a sacrifice to the gods of the land.

It was a special time of the year, a time when the men went to the shear the sheep, and Joan decided that now was the time to put her plan into action. She would change her widows' dark

clothing for the colorful and tempting wear of a prostitute and go and sit by the roadside to meet James.

The next day as she sat by the roadside James came by. He saw a prostitute sitting by the roadside and he was enticed. He did not recognize her as his daughter-in-law; so he went with her and slept with her. Since he had nothing to give her in return for her services he told her that he would leave two tokens with her until he could send someone to give her payment. Joan agreed.

The next day he sent the payment but no one could find the prostitute and no one in the area knew her. By this time Joan safely back in her father's home. Soon Joan realized she was pregnant. After three months some people went to James and told him that his daughter-in-law was pregnant. In anger James called for her to have her put to death. But when she came, and was accused, she showed him the tokens he had left with her and told him that the man who owned these tokens was the father of her child.

James anger turned to shame when he realized that the child she carried was his. It was his dishonesty – not giving her in marriage to this third son – that was at the root of the story. What could he do? He confessed to her his wrong doing and told her that she was innocent and without blame.

So what do you think of that story. Amazing! Unbelievable! Not really. You can find this story in Genesis 38. It's the story of a woman named Tamar and her father-in-law, Judah, son of Jacob.

Do stories like this still happen in our world today, in the 21st century. We think that such abuse of a woman could not occur in this day and age, but there are still cultures where a woman whose husband has died is expected to marry a brother of the husband. This is what culture demands of her. This is a form of abuse, for it robs the woman of her power of choice.

As Christians God gives each of us a choice. Remember the words of Joshua to the children of Israel in Joshua 24:15 “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve.” God, our Creator and Redeemer, gives us, His creatures the choice to serve Him. No force, no pressure is brought to bear on us. It's our choice. What choice did Tamar have? None, except to degrade herself to the status of a prostitute.

LIVING IN A PAINFUL WORLD

We live in a world filled with pain, suffering and evil of every kind. And we each have our own personal struggles that distress and depress. But we serve a mighty God. A God who is concerned with everything that concerns us. A God who gives us hope and joy in a world longing for peace and healing. A God who loves us.

The Bible text reminds us, “Fear not; I am with you, ‘I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore’” Rev 1:18. What a beautiful reminder. It doesn't matter where we are today, God is with us.

1 John 5:18, 19 says, *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear... We love Him because He first loved us.”* Once we are filled with the love of God we don’t have to fear. But for many in this world fear is their constant companion, they have not experienced the love of God; and that is why on this Abuse Prevention Emphasis day we are going to take a closer look at the violence that women in our time and Bible times had to suffer. As we do this we must ask ourselves, “What can I do to help? How can I make a difference? How can I love in a healing way.”

But first let me share with you a brief definition of the term “violence against women,” as voted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

“...violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

There are many stories in the Bible of women who suffered abuse of various kinds; we just spoke about Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah (Genesis 38). There’s the story of Jephtha’s daughter (Judges 11); the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8); the Woman at the Well (John 4); the Levite’s Concubine (Judges 19); Tamar, daughter of King David who was raped by her brother (2 Samuel 13); Hagar, Sarah’s servant (Genesis 16); Dinah, daughter of Jacob (Genesis 34); and Hannah mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1). And these are just some of stories of abuse against women found in the Bible.

So come on a journey with me as we take a closer look at this problem of violence against women that has scourged the earth from its ancient times to present day.

Dinah, daughter of Jacob (Genesis 34)

Dinah was the daughter of Jacob. The same Jacob who had 12 sons. You can imagine that growing up among 12 brothers meant that she was very protected and maybe a bit spoilt.

The Bible tells us in Genesis 33:18 that Jacob went to live near Shechem. He bought a piece of land and lived there with his wives and children.

Read with me Genesis 34:1-2

*“Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.
And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her.”*

What Shechem did was deplorable! He took advantage of an innocent young girl. He violated her against her will. That’s called rape. There was no justification for his actions. But the story does not end there, it only gets worse. We read –

“His [Shechem’s] soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this young woman as a wife.” And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came.” Genesis 34:3-5

The story then continues with Hamor, father of Shechem, going to ask Jacob for Dinah’s hand in marriage because Shechem said he loved her and wanted her for his wife. When Jacob’s sons came he told them what had happened to their sister. And they were angry. Hamor pleaded with them for their sister’s hand in marriage to his son (vs8). Hamor wanted peace. But Jacob’s sons wanted revenge, so they pretended to agree with Hamor.

Then a few days later, at a time when their guard was down, Jacob’s sons, in great anger against Shechem for raping their sister, killed all the men of Shechem. Read the entire story in Genesis 34. What they did was even more deplorable than what Shechem had done to their sister. Was every man in the city guilty because of the act of one man? This was mass murder, and as a result they brought shame on their father’s name but even more so, they condemned their sister to a life of solitude and shame.

You see, more than the shame of rape was the shame of living as an unmarried woman in her father’s home childless until she died. The custom of her time gave honor to women who were married and had children, but she would never have a husband, a home of her own, or her own children. She would remain cursed for the rest of her life.

If Shechem had gone about it the right way, and had respect for Dinah and asked for her hand in marriage first, most likely Jacob would have agreed if only to make a pact of peace and goodwill between the two families. Yet, even though he did wrong Shechem still wanted to marry Dinah. He wanted to fix the wrong he had done. In Bible times that would have erased her shame.

Even though Shechem’s act of rape was deplorable, he showed more integrity in his attempt to rectify the situation than did Dinah’s brothers. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah. Her brothers only wanted blood and they never stopped to think of how this would affect their sister until the day she died.

One of the missing elements in this story was respect. Respect for Dinah, respect for the request of Hamor and Shechem to make right their wrong, respect for the sanctity of human life, and respect for their father Jacob.

E. G. White tells us that we should, *“Cherish the love of Jesus in the heart, respect each other, for Christ has given His life for you. Every soul is precious in the sight of God. It is a wonderful thing to be remembered and cared for every hour by God.”* (7 Manuscript p 204)

Does rape still happen in our day? Look in the newspapers, turn on the TV news, stories of rape and violence against women are prevalent. Women are raped in every country.

- Did you know that in the United States a woman is raped every six minutes?
- Did you know that that in Peru, 90% of 12 to 16 year old girls giving birth were pregnant from rape and often incest?
- Did you know that in South Africa a sex crime happens every twenty seconds?

I know that many of you did not come to church to hear such horrors. But this is the world in which we live. These are people God has sent us to reach for him; the rapist and the victim. We can't be selective.

If you think about Jesus' agenda when He lived here on earth you will discover that He had no prejudice. He loved everyone. Isaiah 61:1-3 tells us that he came to set the captives free and to show compassion for the oppressed. Jesus is the perfect example for us to follow. We are His hands, His feet, and His voice in this world.

Let's look at two more stories. These stories look at abuse of women from a slightly different angle.

Hagar, servant of Sarah (Genesis 16) and Hannah, mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1)

I have grouped these two stories together for they tell of the same type of abuse. Emotional abuse by one woman to another.

Hagar was Sarah's servant. She had no rights as a servant. She did as she was told. The Bible tells us in Genesis 16:1-4

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.
So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.
Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.*

Note carefully in verse four that when Sarai saw that Hagar was pregnant she despised her. Her anger and dislike for Hagar came from jealousy. And this is the root cause of much abuse that women suffer at the hands of other women. This emotional abuse can go deep and hurt intensely. In her anger and jealousy Sarai treated Hagar so badly that she ran away.

In the story of Hannah, second wife to Elkanah, we are told in 1 Samuel 1 that she was unable to have children. In Bible times, children were considered a man's true wealth, especially boy children who could carry on his name.

Let's read verse 2, 4 – 7

*And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children...
And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters.
But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the Lord had closed her womb.
And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb.
So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.”*

Peninah, Elkanah’s first wife had children. Hannah, his second wife had no children. Yet Elkanah loved Hannah more and treated her better than he did Peninah as we see by his giving Hannah an extra share of the meat. Again we see jealousy at work. Peninah taunts Hannah and makes her life miserable.

But what did God do in each of these situations. To Hagar he said “*I will multiply your descendants exceedingly...*” (vs 10). God made a promise to Hagar. He saw her distress and He answered her.

To Hannah, God made her a promise through the priest Eli that she would have a son and she promised to return her son to God. As she had promised, when Samuel was still young she took him to Eli to serve in the temple. But God’s blessing did not end with Samuel. The Bible tells us in 1 Samuel 2:21 that God also blessed her with three more sons and two daughters.

Four cases of abuse against women –

- Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah – abuse of power
- Dinah, daughter of Jacob – sexual abuse, abuse of power
- Hagar, servant of Sarai and Hannah mother of Samuel – emotional abuse by another woman

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

The missing element in each of these stories is love. Not just any love. Remember in the story of Dinah, Shechem said he loved her and wanted her for his wife. But how can you sexually violate someone you love. That’s not God’s love. What is this love we are speaking about? Turn with me to 1 John 4: 7 – 9

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*

If we are to treat each other with love we must know God. God’s desire is to love the world through us. He knows that human love is deficient. Human love is vengeful. Human love can turn from love to hate in a moment and in a crime of passion can kill the one you claimed to

love. That's not how God loves. To know God's love, to experience God's love, to show God's love **you must know God.**

Read a little further with me in 1 John 4. Look at verse 12 to 16 –

*“No one has seen God at any time. **If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.***

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

*And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. **God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.**”*

There was an old song that said, “What the world needs now is love sweet love, no not just for some but for everyone...” These words are truer today than when they were first penned. This world in which we live is dying for love, but not just any love, the world needs God's love. Men and women are killing each other, abusing each other because a lack of genuine love.

APPEAL

God's question to you and me today is “Will you be my instrument of love in this world of sickness, pain, and evil?” God knows the world is evil, yet He still sends us. Why? Because the love of God can overcome the evil, pain and sickness of this world has to offer.

God has shown his love for us, He sent His Son to die, His only Son, Jesus Christ to die for you and me and for every victim of abuse, and every abuser. Such amazing love is beyond our comprehension and beyond all words.

There is someone outside of these walls that only you can touch; only you can heal; only you can love, only you can forgive, and only you can reach. You can be God's instrument to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

So what can we do? Here are a few ideas –

- Recognize that gender-based violence is a tremendous evil, that it is never acceptable and cannot be condoned.
- Help raise awareness. Share materials about gender-based violence with your church and surrounding community
- Provide ongoing support to a local women's shelter or other organization benefitting victims of gender-based violence.
- Prison Ministries – ministering to the abuser
- Care for hurting people in our church. Be non-judgmental. Develop support groups.

There is much more that can be done but this is a good place to begin.

The story is told of a pastor who lived many years ago. One day he announced to the congregation that at the next evening service he would preach on "The Love of God." The next day as the shadows fell and the light ceased to come in through the church windows, the congregation gathered. No candles were lit that night, but in the darkness the pastor took a lighted candle and carried it to a large picture of Jesus on the cross he had erected at the front of the church. First of all, he illumined the crown of thorns, next, the two wounded hands, then the nails in Jesus feet, and finally the marks of the spear wound in His side. In the hush that fell over the congregation, he blew out the candle and left the church. There was nothing else to say.

What can we say in the light of such sacrifice? But even if words fail us we can act. We can show God's love. If you desire to be God's hands of love in this world and His voice to protest the violence that women and girl children suffer everywhere, join in standing with me as we pray a prayer of commitment to our God.

Prayer...

This seminar can be done in one 2-hour sessions or 2 ½-hour sessions

**SEMINAR
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
ITS SCOPE AND RELEVANCE FOR
THE CHURCH TODAY**

PART 1

I. INTRODUCTION

“So I take a blanket and I spend the night with my children out in the cold because he is hitting me too much and I have to take the kids to stop him hitting them too. I would go up the mountain, and sleep there all night. I’ve done that more than ten times.”

Woman interviewed in Peru

Jin Yi is 19 but still looks about 12, her age when she was sold into marriage to a 30-year old peasant. These days, the once-rebellious youngster cuts a timid figure. "I forgot how to laugh or cry," she says. "Each time I did, his family beat me. They treated me like a slave doing hard labour. Everyone knew about me in the village, but when I protested and ran away, I was caught and beaten. I didn't try again." Jin is one of the lucky ones. After seven years held against her will in southern China, she was rescued by Peking police on May, 2000 in a national crackdown on human trafficking.

Woman interviewed in China

Gender-based violence is a global public health, economic development and human rights problem of epidemic proportions. Throughout the world, violence against women and girls is perpetrated within marriage and families by husbands, intimate partners and relatives; within communities by strangers and traditional leaders; in the workplace; across international borders as women are trafficked for sex and labor; and as a tool of war by military forces. In wartime and in post-conflict settings, women seeking refuge are often victims of exploitation and assault. Approximately one in three of the world’s women will experience gender-related violence in her lifetime, with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries.

The most widely used definition of violence against women (VAW) is:

“...violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private

life.” United Nations’ General Assembly Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104 of December 1993

II. BACK TO BASICS: A FOUNDATION

When we waken to the issues and prevalence of gender violence in our world, we may feel overwhelmed. But once we take heart and begin to search for answers, we will find sources of encouragement, practical information, and inspiration.

Turning to the Bible, we are reminded of the inestimable value of every person on earth. God loves every person—whether that person ever turns to Him or not. God *is* Love! We may easily mouth the words “God so loved the world.” Do we remember that means EVERY person—the annoying, the old and feeble, the abused wife, the pregnant teen, the girls not allowed an education, the woman murdered as an “honor killing”—every one!

Many scriptures remind us of each person’s value. In I Corinthians, Paul clarifies why we must respect one another, why we must not harm another: “Surely you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you! God will destroy anyone who destroys God’s temple. For Gods’ temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple.” 1 Cor. 3:16, 17 (TEV) How can we choose to do nothing when others suffer the unspeakable anguish of gender-based violence? God **is** love. His word tells us we must love others; we must care about the gender-based violence that kills or wounds thousands of women around the world every day. “If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars....The command that Christ has given us is this: whoever loves God must love others also.” I John 4:20, 21 (TEV)

Not only the Bible but also the writings of Ellen White remind us of the value of each person God has created. “Man must be of value....Christ’s taking human nature upon himself shows that He places a value upon every soul....When God gave His son, He gave all heaven. He could do no more” Te 287.

III. RECOGNIZING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women jeopardizes women’s lives, bodies, psychological integrity and freedom and has been called the “the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world.” Yet many of us rarely think about this issue. As children of God we must. We must inform ourselves. We must recognize Christ’s mission as our mission—to set free the captives.

■ Activity 1: Definition of Violence Against Women

1. Facilitator leads a brainstorming session to create a list of acts that constitute violence against women. Facilitator asks each of the participants to share their ideas randomly or in turn. The ideas are not criticized or discussed; participants may build on ideas voiced by others. The questions for brainstorming are:
 - What does the phrase “violence against women” mean to you?
 - What acts do you consider to be “violence against women”?

A. EXPANDED

The definition for violence against women is amplified in article 2 of the UN Declaration, which identifies three areas in which violence commonly takes place:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs in the family, including battering; sexual abuse of female children in the household; dowry-related violence; marital rape; female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; and violence related to exploitation;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs within the general community, including rape; sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women; and forced prostitution;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

B. THE PROBLEM

We know that violence against women is an atrocious human rights violation that must be stopped. What people often don't realize, however, is that violence against women is also a major cause of poverty and a huge barrier to economic opportunity. It keeps women from getting an education, working, and earning the income they need to lift their families out of poverty.

Here are a few general examples of gender-based violence:

1. Women often suffer harm which is either unique to their gender, such as **female genital mutilation** or **forced non-choice abortion**, or which is more commonly inflicted upon women than men, such as **rape** or **domestic violence**.
2. Women may also suffer harm solely or exclusively because they are women, i.e. as a result of their gender, such as the **policies of the Taliban in Afghanistan**.
3. Women often suffer harm at the hands of private individuals, such as family members who threaten them with **honor killings**, or abusive spouses who **batter** them.

IV. KINDS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

We can place various types of violence against women in three main categories. We will list them and then talk briefly about each one.

A. Violence Against Women in the Family Setting

Within the family is generally where the following types of violence against women occur:

- Domestic violence
- Traditional practices
- Female genital mutilation
- Son preference
- Dowry-related violence and early marriage

Now let us look briefly at each of these five kinds of violence.

1. Domestic violence

Violence against women in the family occurs in developed and developing countries alike. It has long been considered a private matter by bystanders—including neighbors, the community and government. But such private matters have a tendency to become public tragedies.

- Statistics paint a horrifying picture of the social and health consequences of violence against women. For women aged 15 to 44 years, violence is a major cause of death and disability.
- A study conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, reported that 13 percent of deaths of women of reproductive age were homicides, of which 60 percent were committed by the victims' partners.
- Studies show that between one quarter and one half of all women in the world have been abused by intimate partners. Worldwide, 40-70% of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner.
- In the United States, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes. Indeed, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury among women of reproductive age in the United States. Between 22 and 35 per cent of women who visit emergency rooms are there for that reason.
- In Peru, 70 per cent of all crimes reported to the police involve women beaten by their husbands.

Gradually some governments are coming to recognize the importance of protecting victims of domestic abuse and taking action to punish perpetrators.

2. Traditional practices

In many countries, women fall victim to traditional practices that violate their human rights. The persistence of the problem has much to do with the fact that most of these physically and psychologically harmful customs are deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of their society.

These violations include female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM), dowry murder, so-called “honour killings,” and early marriage. They lead to death, disability, physical and psychological harm for millions of women

3. Female genital mutilation

According to the World Health Organization, 85 million to 115 million girls and women in the population have undergone some form of female genital mutilation and suffer from its adverse health effects.

“Even though cultural practices may appear senseless or destructive from the standpoint of others, they have meaning and fulfill a function for those who practice them. However, culture is not static; it is in constant flux, adapting and reforming. People will change their behavior when they understand the hazards and indignity of harmful practices and when they realize that it is possible to give up harmful practices without giving up meaningful aspects of their culture.”

— Female Genital Mutilation, A joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA statement, 1997.

- Every year an estimated 2 million young girls undergo this procedure. Most live in Africa and Asia—but an increasing number can be found among immigrant and refugee families in Western Europe and North America. Indeed, the practice has been outlawed in some European countries.
- It is estimated that more than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, mainly in Africa and some Middle Eastern countries, and two million girls a year are at risk of mutilation.
- In France, a Malian was convicted in a criminal court after his baby girl died of a female circumcision-related infection. The procedure had been performed on the infant at home.

There is a growing consensus that the best way to eliminate these practices is through educational campaigns that emphasize their dangerous health consequences. Several governments have been actively promoting such campaigns in their countries.

4. Son preference

Son preference is the consistent favoring of male children, affects women in many countries, particularly in Asia. Its consequences can be anything from foetal or female infanticide to neglect of the girl child over her brother in terms of such essential needs as nutrition, basic health care and education.

- In India’s wealthiest state, Punjab, statistics show that for every 1,000 boys there are 300 girls among ‘higher caste’ families. But ActionAid said that ideally for every 1000 boys, there should be 950 girls. “In urban sites, families abort daughters because they have access to technology,”

- In China and India, some women choose to terminate their pregnancies when expecting daughters but carry their pregnancies to term when expecting sons.
- According to reports from India, genetic testing for sex selection has become a booming business, especially in the country's northern regions. Indian gender-detection clinics drew protests from women's groups after the appearance of advertisements suggesting that it was better to spend \$38 now to terminate a female foetus than \$3,800 later on her dowry.
- A study of amniocentesis procedures conducted in a large Bombay hospital found that 95.5 per cent of foetuses identified as female were aborted, compared with a far smaller percentage of male foetuses.

5. Dowry-related violence and early marriage

In some countries, weddings are preceded by the payment of an agreed-upon dowry by the bride's family. Failure to pay the dowry can lead to violence.

- In Bangladesh, a bride whose dowry was deemed too small was disfigured after her husband threw acid on her face.
- Small community studies have also indicated that dowry demands have played an important role in women being burned to death and in deaths of women being labeled suicides. In India, an average of five women a day are burned in dowry-related disputes—and many more cases are never reported.
- Early marriage, especially without the consent of the girl, is another form of human rights violation. Early marriage followed by multiple pregnancies can affect the health of women for life.
- While cultures throughout the world have dowries or similar payments, dowry murder occurs predominantly in South Asia. According to official crime statistics in India, 6,822 women were killed in 2002 as a result of such violence.
- In Bangladesh, there have been many incidents of acid attacks due to dowry disputes, leading often to blindness, disfigurement, and death. In 2002, more than 300 women and girls in Bangladesh were victims of acid attacks; in 2005 that number was 267.

PART 2

SUGGESTION:

This seminar may be presented in either one or two sections. If you choose to present it in two sections, this is the best place to divide it. Be sure that a brief summary concludes part one and a brief review introduces part two.

B. Violence Against Women in the Community

Acts of violence against women in the setting of the community include the following:

- Rape
- Sexual assault within marriage
- Sexual harassment
- Prostitution and trafficking
- Pornography
- Mistreatment of women migrant workers

1. Rape

Rape can occur anywhere, even in the family, where it can take the form of marital rape or incest. It occurs in the community, where a woman can fall prey to any abuser. It also occurs in situations of armed conflict and in refugee camps.

- In the United States, national statistics indicate that a woman is raped every six minutes.
- Relations between residents of the Japanese island of Okinawa and American GIs were thrown into turmoil in 1995 after two marines and a sailor allegedly kidnapped and raped a 12-year-old girl.
- A report of seven different countries found that more than 60% of sexual assault victims know their attackers.
- In South Africa, a sex crime happens every twenty seconds.
- In some countries, up to one-third of adolescent girls report forced sexual initiation.
- In Uttar Pradesh, India, about 2/3 of 98 respondents reported being forced into sex by their husbands about 1/3 of them by beatings.

Statistics on the frequency of rape underline the importance of education to sensitize the public about the special horrors of rape, and of sensitivity training for the police and hospital staff who work with victims.

2. Sexual assault within marriage

Sexual assault within marriage is included under this category because it is the community attitudes prevalent in many areas—attitudes held by law enforcement, local leaders, neighbors, and even church leadership—which allow this type of violence to go unpunished. In many countries sexual assault by a husband on his wife is not considered to be a crime: a wife is expected to submit. It is thus very difficult in practice for a woman to prove that sexual assault has occurred unless she can demonstrate serious injury.

3. Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a growing concern for women. Employers abuse their authority to seek sexual favours from their female co-workers or subordinates, sometimes promising promotions or other forms of career advancement or simply creating an untenable and hostile work environment. Women who refuse to give in to such unwanted sexual advances often run the risk of anything from demotion to dismissal.

4. Prostitution and trafficking

Many women are forced into prostitution either by their parents, husbands or boyfriends—or as a result of the difficult economic and social conditions in which they find themselves. They are also lured into prostitution, sometimes by "mail-order bride" agencies that promise to find them a husband or a job in a foreign country. As a result, they very often find themselves illegally confined in brothels in slavery-like conditions where they are physically abused and their passports withheld.

- An estimated two million women are caught each year in the worldwide sex industry while countless children and other women are forced into low-wage jobs. UN, 2008
- The UN said there are no accurate statistics, but the number of women trafficked across borders each year could be twice as high if the count includes those forced into domestic situations.
- In Thailand, prostitutes who complain to the police are often arrested and sent back to the brothels upon payment of a fine.
- The extent of trafficking in women and girls has reached alarming proportions, especially in Asian countries. More than 100,000 women are trafficked annually in South Asia.
- Many women and girl children are trafficked across borders, often with the complicity of border guards. In one incident, five young prostitutes burned to death in a brothel fire because they had been chained to their beds.
- At the same time, sex tours of developing countries are a well-organized industry in several European and other industrialized countries.

5. Pornography

Another concern highlighted is pornography, which represents a form of violence against women that "glamorizes the degradation and maltreatment of women and asserts their subordinate function as mere receptacles for male lust."

- According to comScore Media Metrix, there were 63.4 million unique visitors to adult websites in December of 2005, reaching 37.2% of the Internet audience.
- According to the Florida Family Association, PornCrawler, their specialized software program, identified 20 U.S. companies that accounted for more than 70 percent of 297 million porn links on the Internet.
- By the end of 2004, there were 420 million pages of pornography, and it is believed that the majority of these websites are owned by less than 50 companies (LaRue, Jan. "Obscenity and the First Amendment." Summit on Pornography. Rayburn House Office Building. Room 2322. May 19, 2005).
- The Internet pornography industry generates \$12 billion dollars in annual revenue – larger than the combined annual revenues of ABC, NBC, and CBS (Family Safe Media, January 10, 2006, <http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html>).

6. Violence against women migrant workers

Female migrant workers typically leave their countries for better living conditions and better pay—but the real benefits accrue to both the host countries and the countries of origin. The migrant workers themselves fare badly, and sometimes tragically. Many become virtual slaves, subject to abuse and rape by their employers.

- In the Middle East and Persian Gulf region, there are an estimated 1.2 million women, mainly Asians, who are employed as domestic servants. According to the independent human rights group Middle East Watch, female migrant workers in Kuwait often suffer beatings and sexual assaults at the hands of their employers.
- Working conditions are often appalling, and employers prevent women from escaping by seizing their passports or identity papers.

C. Violence perpetrated or condoned by States

Perhaps most appalling of all the gender-based violence is that which is perpetrated or condoned—or at the very least ignored—by those responsible for upholding the law and providing protection. Examples include:

- Custodial violence against women
- Violence against women in situations of armed conflict

- Violence against refugee and displaced women

1. Custodial violence against women

Violence against women by the very people who are supposed to protect them—members of the law enforcement and criminal justice systems—is widespread. Women are physically or verbally abused; they also suffer sexual and physical torture.

2. Violence against women in situations of armed conflict

Rape has been widely used as a weapon of war whenever armed conflicts arise between different parties. It has been used all over the world: in Chiapas, Mexico, in Rwanda, in Kuwait, in Haiti, in Colombia.

Women and girl children are frequently victims of gang rape committed by soldiers from all sides of a conflict. Such acts are done mainly to trample the dignity of the victims. Rape has been used to reinforce the policy of ethnic cleansing in the war that has been tearing apart the former Yugoslavia.

3. Violence against refugee and displaced women

Women and children form the great majority of refugee populations all over the world and are especially vulnerable to violence and exploitation. In refugee camps, they are raped and abused by military and immigration personnel, bandit groups, male refugees and rival ethnic groups. They are also forced into prostitution.

V. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE CHURCH

A.SPEAKING OUT

Many denominations and communities of faith recognize the urgent need to end the violence against women and to bring about justice. Many have created, or support, organizations working to create awareness, to educate the public, and to find ways to stop the violence. For example, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches [WARC] expressed concern, especially in light of the current world economic crisis and its effect on violence against women. “We cannot continue to ignore the plight of women and girls who are attacked in their homes or are targets of war crimes. WARC calls for renewed commitment to accelerate rather than slow down the process of seeking to end violence against women and girls and to bring about justice.” Poor women in poor countries suffer the most from the impact of the economic crisis. Increased social unrest leads to rising levels of violence, with women and girls most vulnerable to attack. Yet funding for program designed to protect and empower women is being reduced, points out a spokesperson for WARC. (*From WARC statement issued March 4, 2009, to mark International Women’s Day*)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is also speaking out about violence against women. We recognize that as believers in a heavenly Father, we must become agents of change, helping to end the evils of abuse and gender-based violence—both in society and within the church itself. The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s position is clear in the following statement:

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the dignity and worth of each human being and decry all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and family violence.

We recognize the global extent of this problem and the serious, long-term effects upon the lives of all involved. We believe that Christians must respond to abuse and family violence both within the church and in the community. We take seriously reports of abuse and violence and have highlighted these issues for discussion at this international assembly. We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behavior.

We accept our responsibility to cooperate with other professional services, to listen and care for those suffering from abuse and family violence, to highlight the injustices, and to speak out in defense of victims. We will help persons in need to identify and access the range of available professional services. (Voted by General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee, at the general Conference session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July, 1995.)

B. Abuse within the Flock

Even though as Christians we abhor abuse and violence against women, it is necessary to recognize that a congregation is made up of human beings, not saints; and that humans have failings and weaknesses. We must not close our eyes to the fact that domestic abuse and violence against women are not limited to certain areas, economic groups, countries, areas, or social classes. Our churches are not immune.

While little research has been done, studies indicate that abusers and victims of abuse are found within our congregations.

“Significant levels of physical, emotional and sexual abuse were reported by the nearly 8,000 randomly selected respondents to the Adventist Family Survey initiated by the General Conference Family Ministries office, [and] completed in parts of seven world divisions. A range of 8-18% of female respondents reported being sexually abused....Reports of physical (15-43%) and emotional abuse (27-69%) among women were considerably higher than for sexual abuse.

“The *Adventist Review* (August 1994) reported on a study [by a Family Ministries Committee in one U.S. conference] in which over 500 randomly selected church members responded. Forty percent answered affirmatively to the question ‘Were you ever the victim of physical abuse in

your home up to age 18? ... Verbal and emotional abuse was reported by 43% of the respondents.

“Certainly these wounded individuals and families deserve a compassionate response from the Church. To remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behavior.” [“Abuse and Family Violence: A Global Affliction,” <http://familyministries.gc.adventist.org>]

A more recent study conducted in one North American conference “surveyed 1,431 adults—men and women—and found some startling results. Nearly 34 percent of women and more than 20 percent of men reported being assaulted by an intimate partner.”

The researcher points out that, recognizing the prevalence of abuse within the church, we must do more than talk about it. “It is our ethical and moral responsibility to promote peace and healing to ultimately end abuse in the Adventist Church.”

The importance of this topic was underscored by Jan Paulsen, president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church. Paulsen emphasized that “violence of any kind in the church” is unacceptable: “We need to develop a culture of kindness, care, consideration, [and] non-abuse....[It] is not just physical; mental [emotional] abuse can be just as bad.” (“Culture of Kindness Can Help Stop...,” *Adventist World-NAD*, August 2007, pp. 6-7)

As a church, we must find ways to change attitudes and traditions that condone or excuse abuse. We must consciously work to eliminate the attitudes as well as the practices.

“Changing people's attitude and mentality towards women will take a long time—at least a generation, many believe, and perhaps longer. Nevertheless, raising awareness of the issue of violence against women, and educating boys and men to view women as valuable partners in life, in the development of a society and in the attainment of peace are just as important as taking legal steps to protect women's human rights.”

VI. GLOBAL AND LOCAL

A. THINKING GLOBALLY

The meaning of gender and sexuality and the balance of power between women and men at all levels of society must be reviewed. Combating violence against women requires challenging the way that gender roles and power relations are articulated in society.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that “discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or

nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

It also states that "'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

■ Activity 2: Violence against Women as a Human Rights Violation

1. Facilitator divides participants into small groups of 4 or 5 and hands out to each group the text of the CEDAW declaration and United Nations statement. Facilitator allows the participants 10 minutes to read and discuss the two documents and answer the questions below:
 - What definition of the term "violence against women" is given in *the UN statement*?
 - What human rights are violated by violence against women?
 - What actions does CEDAW recommend to the States in this document regarding discrimination against women?
 - What parts of these documents are most relevant to our local community?

B. THINKING LOCALLY

If there is to be global change, we must confront the problems locally. The impact we can make locally can have an influence globally, but change must begin locally. Each of us must realize "I can be a change agent. I can make a difference"

■ Activity 3: Here and Now

It is important to raise awareness of global aspects of gender-based violence. It is also important to look at problems of abuse and violence which are close to us. What are the causes, the needs, the obstacles in my area?

1. Needs: Facilitator will ask small discussion groups of 4 to 6 to list four local gender-based violence issues and then rank them in order of importance by voting. Each group member may vote twice. Ask a few groups to share their rankings with the entire congregation if there is time and they are comfortable doing so.

2. Resources: Facilitators will ask members of the same small groups to compile a list of four or more organizations or resources available in the local area relevant to abuse and gender-based violence. (Might include sources of victim assistance, as well as literacy, budgeting, parenting or relationship classes, etc.)

VII. ACTION

A. WHAT CAN I DO?

During this presentation, we have heard about many types of gender violence. We recognize the harm such abuse does—to our families, our community, and our society. Together, we can find ways to address some issues most relevant to our community or society. Let's list some of your ideas.

Facilitator: *ask for suggestions from your discussion group. If possible write them on a chalkboard or flip chart. Then add items from the following list, allowing time for comment if possible.]*

We can:

- Educate ourselves about the gender-based violence most prevalent in our community.
- Evaluate our culture and traditions. Are there beliefs or practices that encourage gender-based violence and discrimination, such as male dominance, son preference, lack of education for girls, female genital mutilation, heavy work loads for women, blaming the rape victim, forced early marriage for girls, financial dependence, lack of safe havens, etc.
- Question the beliefs and traditions that undergird gender violence and discrimination.
- Support an organization working to eradicate gender-based violence such as sex trafficking, domestic violence, and prostitution. Donate regularly or hold a fundraiser.
- Encourage local law enforcement agencies to receive specialized training for dealing with domestic abuse, and to devote resources to prevention of gender-based violence.
- Pray for victims of abuse, gender-based violence, and exploitation. Pray for a change in the hearts of their abusers.
- Host a weekly prayer group or book study group on some aspect of gender-based violence
- Volunteer my time and talents to a group or ministry serving victims of violence or abuse.

B. WHAT CAN MY LOCAL CHURCH DO?

When we hear of the evil and violence in our world, it is vital not to be “overcome by evil,” but rather to ask ourselves, “What can I do?” It is also good to ask, “What can my local church do?” As a community of believers who recognize the value God places on each person, we have an opportunity to work as Christ did, to free the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Let us take a little time to answer the question, “What can my local church do to help prevent gender violence and to help victims heal?”

[Facilitator: *ask for suggestions from your discussion group. If possible write them on a chalkboard or flip chart. Then add items from the following list, allowing time for comment if possible.]*

- One small but vital principle the church must apply is that of **confidentiality**. It is imperative that any victim of gender-based violence may speak with an appropriate church leader in total confidence. If there is ever a situation in which the church leader is required to report to law enforcement or other appropriate authorities, s/he will disclose this to the person seeking counsel or assistance, and will treat the matter with utmost care and discretion. The victim's safety is of supreme importance.

- Recognize that gender-based violence is a tremendous evil, that it is never acceptable and cannot be condoned.
- Compile complete, up-to-date information about all resources in your community available to victims of any type of gender-based violence. Make sure the information is easily available to members and others. Get acquainted with shelters and referral sources to learn what services they offer and when they are open.
- Collect funds and provide your church leaders with educational materials on gender violence.
- Create a church lending library of materials on gender-based violence issues relevant to your community so members and leaders may become educated on this vital topic.
- Organize a group to assess the needs in the local community. What is one need our group can address that may help reduce gender-based violence?
- Create one or more “safe houses” where abuse victims can find emergency shelter.
- Present sermons and workshops to the congregation and the community on issues of gender-based violence relevant to your community. Offer to present age-appropriate information in local schools.
- Examine church policies and practices to be sure none foster or encourage hurtful or discriminatory attitudes towards women.
- Provide ongoing support to a local women’s shelter or other organization benefitting victims of gender-based violence.
- Care for hurting people in our church. Be non-judgmental. Develop support groups.
- Help raise awareness. Share materials about gender-based violence with your community.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A. OUR OPPORTUNITY

During this seminar we have become more aware of the tremendous problem of gender-based violence. Believing that we must indeed act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God, we each have an opportunity to find a way to commit ourselves to making a difference.

I urge you to take the [commitment card or slip of paper] being handed out. Prayerfully decide what YOU will do to help combat this evil. Mark your card (or write down what you will do). Sign your name, and keep your commitment pledge in a special place, perhaps your Bible, where you will be reminded every day that YOU can make a difference! Let us pray that God, the father of us all, will strengthen each one of us to address the immense issue of gender-based violence.

B. PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

SAMPLE COMMITMENT CARD

My Commitment

Recognizing the immense harm of gender-based violence [GBV], I pledge to...

Educate myself about gender-based violence Help provide my church or community with material on GBV

Support legislation/legislators opposing GBV Volunteer my time and talents to a group or ministry

RESOURCES

“Abuse and Family Violence: A Global Affliction,” <http://familyministries.gc.adventist.org>

The World Bank. www.worldbank.org “International Statistics.”
www.sexualassault.virginia.edu/statistics_international.htm

United Nations Development Fund for Women. “Facts and Figures: Sexual Violence in Non-Conflict Situations.” www.unifem.org/campaigns/november25/facts_figures_3.php

The World Health Organization. “Sexual Violence Facts.”
www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention

“Culture of Kindness Can Help Stop...,” *Adventist World-NAD*, August 2007, pp. 6-7.

United Nations’ General Assembly *Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104 of December 1993)*.

World Alliance of Reformed Churches, statement issued March 4, 2009, to mark International Women’s Day.

Gender and Violence: <http://www.unifem.org/attachments/gender>

United Nations Development Fund for Women. “Stop Violence against Women: Prevalence of Sexual Assault.” www.stopvaw.org

Prevalence of SexualAssault.html or www.unifem.org National Center for Victims of Crime (2004)

George mason University Sexual Assault services: Worldwide Sexual Assault Statistics:

<http://www2.gmu.edu/dpt/unilife/sexual//brochures/WorldStats2005.pdf>

The Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation, Donna M. Hughes, Laura Joy Sporcic, Nadine Z. Mendelsohn, Vanessa Chirgwin, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 1999. <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/factbook.htm>

Stop Violence: http://www.stopvaw.org/Prevalence_of_Domestic_Violence.html

Division for the Advancement of Women, *Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them*. Expert group meeting, DAW, ECE and WHO. Geneva, 11–14 April, 2005 (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-stat-2005)

World Health Organization - Handbook for the documentation of interpersonal violence prevention programs. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2004.

WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence: Summary report

Human Rights - Women and Violence: <http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm>

United Nations Millennium Declaration General Assembly Resolution, 55th session, document A/RES/55/2, Chapter III, number 11, September 2000.

The Riley Center – 24 Hour Crisis Line About Domestic Abuse
<http://www.rileycenter.org.domestic-violence-statistics>

Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network: <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexualassault-victims>

Progress in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research. www.un.org

Female genital mutilation: a joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA statement – Geneva: World health Organization; 1997 http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/FGM-C_final_10_October.pdf

Seventh-day Adventist Statement Guidelines <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/>

Eliminating female genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2008/eliminating_fgm.pdf

Violence Against Women. <http://www.womenthrive.org>

Glossary of Terms

- **Dowry**, also known as trousseau or tocher, is the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage.
- **Female genital cutting** (FGC), also known as **female genital mutilation** (FGM), **female circumcision** or **female genital mutilation/cutting** (FGM/C), refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the [external female genitalia](#) or other injury to the female [genital organs](#) whether for [cultural](#), [religious](#) or other non-therapeutic reasons.
- **Honor Killings** is the [murder](#) of a family or clan member by one or more fellow family members, when the murderers (and potentially the wider community) believe the victim to have brought [dishonor](#) upon the family, clan, or community, normally by (a) utilizing dress codes unacceptable to certain people or (b) engaging in certain sexual acts. These killings result from the perception that defense of honor justifies killing a person whose behavior dishonors their clan or family.
- **Human trafficking** is the recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of people for the purposes of slavery, forced labor (including bonded labor or debt bondage), and servitude. It is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world, with the total annual revenue for trafficking in persons estimated to be between \$5 billion and \$9 billion.
- **Rape**, also referred to as [sexual assault](#), is an **assault upon** a person involving [sexual intercourse](#) without that person's [consent](#). Rape is generally considered a serious [sex crime](#), as well as a civil assault.
- **Sexual harassment** is unwelcome attention of a [sexual](#) nature and is a form of illegal and social [harassment](#). It includes a range of behaviors from seemingly mild transgressions and annoyances to actual [sexual abuse](#) or [sexual assault](#). Sexual harassment is considered a form of [illegal discrimination](#) in many countries, and is a form of [abuse](#) ([sexual](#) and [psychological](#)) and [bullying](#).

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
ITS SCOPE AND RELEVANCE FOR
THE CHURCH TODAY**

HANDOUTS

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN - DEFINITION

The most widely used definition of violence against women (VAW) is:

"...violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." United Nations' General Assembly *Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104 of December 1993)*

EXPANDED

The definition for violence against women is amplified in article 2 of the UN Declaration, which identifies three areas in which violence commonly takes place:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs in the family, including battering; sexual abuse of female children in the household; dowry-related violence; marital rape; female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; and violence related to exploitation;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs within the general community, including rape; sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women; and forced prostitution;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Here are a few general examples of gender-based violence:

4. Women often suffer harm which is either unique to their gender, such as **female genital mutilation** or **forced non-choice abortion**, or which is more commonly inflicted upon women than men, such as **rape** or **domestic violence**.
5. Women may also suffer harm solely or exclusively because they are women, i.e. as a result of their gender, such as the **policies of the Taliban in Afghanistan**.
6. Women often suffer harm at the hands of private individuals, such as family members who threaten them with **honor killings**, or abusive spouses who **batter** them.

KINDS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A. Violence Against Women in the Family Setting

Within the family is generally where the following types of violence against women occur:

- Domestic violence
- Traditional practices
- Female genital mutilation
- Son preference
- Dowry-related violence and early marriage

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the dignity and worth of each human being and decry all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and family violence.

We recognize the global extent of this problem and the serious, long-term effects upon the lives of all involved. We believe that Christians must respond to abuse and family violence both within the church and in the community. We take seriously reports of abuse and violence and have highlighted these issues for discussion at this international assembly. We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behavior.

We accept our responsibility to cooperate with other professional services, to listen and care for those suffering from abuse and family violence, to highlight the injustices, and to speak out in defense of victims. We will help persons in need to identify and access the range of available professional services. (Voted by General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee, at the general Conference session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July, 1995.)

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GLOBAL AND LOCAL

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that "'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

It also states that "'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

THINKING LOCALLY

WHAT CAN I DO?

We can:

- Educate ourselves about the gender-based violence most prevalent in our community.
- Evaluate our culture and traditions. Are there beliefs or practices that encourage gender-based violence and discrimination, such as male dominance, son preference, lack of education for girls, female genital mutilation, heavy work loads for women, blaming the rape victim, forced early marriage for girls, financial dependence, lack of safe havens, etc.
- Question the beliefs and traditions that undergird gender violence and discrimination.
- Support an organization working to eradicate gender-based violence such as sex trafficking, domestic violence, and prostitution. Donate regularly or hold a fundraiser.
- Encourage local law enforcement agencies to receive specialized training for dealing with domestic abuse, and to devote resources to prevention of gender-based violence.
- Pray for victims of abuse, gender-based violence, and exploitation. Pray for a change in the hearts of their abusers.
- Host a weekly prayer group or book study group on some aspect of gender-based violence
- Volunteer my time and talents to a group or ministry serving victims of violence or abuse.

WHAT CAN MY LOCAL CHURCH DO?

- One small but vital principle the church must apply is that of **confidentiality**. It is imperative that any victim of gender-based violence may speak with an appropriate church leader in total confidence. If there is ever a situation in which the church leader is required to report to law enforcement or other appropriate authorities, s/he will disclose this to the person seeking counsel or assistance, and will treat the matter with utmost care and discretion. The victim's safety is of supreme importance.
- Recognize that gender-based violence is a tremendous evil, that it is never acceptable and cannot be condoned.
- Compile complete, up-to-date information about all resources in your community available to victims of any type of gender-based violence. Make sure the information is easily available to members and others. Get acquainted with shelters and referral sources to learn what services they offer and when they are open.
- Collect funds and provide your church leaders with educational materials on gender violence.
- Create a church lending library of materials on gender-based violence issues relevant to your community so members and leaders may become educated on this vital topic.
- Organize a group to assess the needs in the local community. What is one need our group can address that may help reduce gender-based violence?
- Create one or more "safe houses" where abuse victims can find emergency shelter.
- Present sermons and workshops to the congregation and the community on issues of gender-based violence relevant to your community. Offer to present age-appropriate information in local schools.
- Examine church policies and practices to be sure none foster or encourage hurtful or discriminatory attitudes towards women.
- Provide ongoing support to a local women's shelter or other organization benefitting victims of gender-based violence.
- Care for hurting people in our church. Be non-judgmental. Develop support groups.
- Help raise awareness. Share materials about gender-based violence with your community.

SAMPLE COMMITMENT CARD

My Commitment

Recognizing the immense harm of gender-based violence [GBV], I pledge to...

- Educate myself about gender-based violence
- Support legislation/legislators opposing GBV
- Support an organization working to prevent GBV
- Refrain from all words or actions harmful or demeaning to my spouse or family
- Help provide my church or community with material on GBV
- Volunteer my time and talents to a group or ministry serving victims of violence or abuse
- Pray for victims of GBV and for change of heart for abusers
- Help create a "safe house" for abuse victims

Other

Signed Date