

OECS Supreme Court –
Colloquium on Gender and the Law
Thursday November 17, 2011.

Understanding Gender-based Violence:
The Psychology of the Abuser and Victim

A perspective from Grenada's Legal Aid and Counseling Clinic

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Background:

Legal Aid and Counseling Clinic (LACC) has been implementing the Man to Man Batterers Intervention programme since mid-2005. Man to Man is the Grenada-specific name of the now regional programme that is generically referred to as the Partnership for Peace (PFP). PFP is a sixteen (16) week violence prevention, psycho-educational programme for men who are abusive to women. The programme is court connected, which means that most of the referrals are from the court system, under both the civil and criminal jurisdiction.

The programme is guided by two basic principles:

- 1. The prioritization of the safety of the abused**
- 2. The acknowledgement of accountability and responsibility by the perpetrator.**

It has ten (10) goals:

1. To help participants stop violence in their lives.
2. To help participants understand that violence is a choice.
3. To encourage participants to examine where their violent behaviour originated
4. To help participants accept responsibility for their behavior and to choose new behaviours that are free of violence.
5. To help participants understand the cost of violence to themselves, their partners, their children, and society in general.
6. To teach participants skills for addressing conflict and responding to stress.
7. To establish and model an atmosphere of respect within the group and to challenge disrespectful behavior.
8. To promote self sufficiency among participants in taking steps towards improving their relationships and their lives by creating a supportive atmosphere.
9. To create a network of men who will advocate for non-violent relationships.
10. To prioritize the safety of victims

The programme is sixteen (16) weeks in duration and involves a thorough intake session that is geared at creating a comprehensive profile on each participant. Following the intake procedures, the substantive content of the programme is delivered during weekly two (2) hour sessions that address a wide range of topics.

The topics delivered are as follows:

- Orientation
 - Understanding and Managing Feelings Part 1: Anger Management
 - Understanding and Managing Feelings Part 2: Managing Life's Transitions
 - Effective Communication
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Family History
 - Manhood
 - Womanhood
 - Power and Control in Relationships
 - Sexuality, STIs and HIV Prevention
 - Fatherhood and the Effects of Violence on Children
 - Stress Management and Trauma Recovery
 - Substance Abuse Prevention
 - Domestic Violence and the Law
 - Spirituality
- Relapse Prevention and Personal Development

Statistics

From inception to July 2011, LACC has successfully completed thirteen (13) cycles of the programme. For these 13 cycles 157 men have been referred, mainly by the court, though in a few cases voluntary enrolment has been allowed. Of this number, 124 men have actually begun the programme (some are "lost" between referral and commencement often due to travel, dismissal of the matter, or a host of other reasons), and 119 have completed the full cycles. Fourteen (14) of the men are known to have re-offended, sometime either during or after completion of the programme. Eleven (11) have been imprisoned for non-compliance with the court's instructions.

Other initiatives

Over the period of implementing Man to Man, it became clear that a programme to address the needs of the victims/survivors was necessary. As a result, we developed a programme known as CHANGES, which began implementation in 2006. CHANGES is a ten (10) week psycho-education programme, which covers a variety of personal development and life skills topics. To date 13 cycles have been held, and 118 women have participated.

Observations

The two programmes described above have given us ample opportunity over the years to observe both the men (perpetrators) and women (victims/survivors) with who we have worked, both intimately and at a variety of levels. From these observations it has been possible to reach certain conclusions, as follows:

- There is no homogenous group of abusers: The men who have been involved in the programme have come from all walks of life, all religious persuasions, all economic levels, and a number of different academic and professions levels. They have ranged in age from early twenties to mid-fifties. Generally, before being brought before the court for the offence that got them referred to the programme, many have had no prior run-ins with the law.
- The use of alcohol and other drugs is high among the perpetrators we have seen in the programme. Many reported regular use of at least one substance, and in many cases the use of alcohol, marijuana, or both, occurs multiple times per day.
- The majority of perpetrators do not view violence against their partners, or children, as a crime. They by and large believe that, as the men in the relationships, it is their right, even their responsibility, to use whatever means they must to “discipline” or “manners” people in their care, often supporting this assertion by quoting passages from the bible “the man is the head of the house” and “do not spare the rod and spoil the child”.
- Many of the men have never been given the opportunity to discuss and examine their place, their roles and their responsibilities, as well as the myriad issues that can affect and impact on their lives and family relationships, in such a setting as the programme provides. Many have therefore remained closed up, unable to articulate their feelings or express their emotions, and therefore use their physical prowess, and violence, as their first means of expressing themselves.
- The majority of the perpetrators of gender based violence are ignorant of the provisions of the law, whether as it relates to violence, child care and support or other family and relationship related issues.

- Perpetrators use violence as a means of exercising power and control over persons they feel are dependent on them, usually women and children, and who will not turn away from them for fear of losing the perceived benefits of the relationship.

For the victims/survivors, the situation is similar to what is described above. Many feel that they have more to gain by remaining in the abusive relationship than getting out of it. This is motivated by a number of factors, among them fear of being alone, concerns for the safety and protection of themselves and their children, lack of awareness of the provisions of the law and availability of mechanisms (state and non-state) that can provide support for them, distrust and lack of confidence in the police and judicial system to afford them the protection they need when they do decide to get out of the situation.