

# Domestic Affairs

“ (...) the police always come late / if they come at all.”

Tracy Chapman

## THEMES



GENDER EQUALITY



PEACE AND VIOLENCE



HEALTH

## COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 3

## GROUP SIZE



6-30

## TIME



120 MINUTES

<b>Themes</b>	Gender Equality, Peace and Violence, Health
<b>Complexity</b>	Level 3
<b>Group size</b>	6 - 30
<b>Time</b>	120 minutes
<b>Overview</b>	This activity looks at domestic violence as one of the most common and least spoken about forms of violence.
<b>Related rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The right to protection from violence, torture and degrading treatment.</li> <li>▪ The right to equality and non-discrimination.</li> <li>▪ The right to equal protection by the law (or to fair treatment from the courts)</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To raise awareness of domestic violence and knowledge about violations of women's human rights</li> <li>▪ To develop skills of discussing and analysing human rights violations</li> <li>▪ To promote empathy and the self-confidence to take a stand against domestic violence</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Large sheets of paper or a board and pens or markers for the brainstorm and group work.</li> <li>▪ Choose one or more of the “Crime witness reports” below or write your own. Make enough copies for one per participant.</li> <li>▪ Copies of the “Guidelines for group discussions” (one per small group)</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Compile information about existing centres and organisations active in the support of victims of domestic violence and find out what the main issues are in your local community or area.</li> <li>▪ Consider carefully the issues you wish to work on, taking into account the personal experiences of the participants.</li> </ul>

## Instructions

1. Prepare the group for the activity by conducting a brainstorm of “the most common forms of violence in our neighbourhood”. Write down everything that the participants say but do not discuss anything at this stage. Leave the flipchart or board where everyone can see it. (10 minutes)
2. Ask people to get into small groups of between two and six people per group. There should be at least three groups.
3. Hand out the copies of the “Crime witness report” cards. There are three different cards/cases but the same case may be given to more than one group. Also hand out a copy of the “Guidelines for group discussions”.

4. Give participants five minutes to read through the crime witness reports. Stress that their discussions should be focused on these case studies. Participants should be aware that discussions about these issues can be very personal and that no one should feel under pressure to disclose more than they want.
5. Allow the participants one hour for their group work.
6. At the end, come into plenary and move on to the evaluation and debriefing.

## Debriefing and evaluation

Start with a short review of how the group work went. How realistic were the crime witness reports and how relevant were the questions? If different groups worked with different case studies, let the groups feedback on their analyses of the different crimes. Then go on to talk about the transfer to social reality:

- How prevalent is domestic violence in your community and in your country as a whole?
- Which human rights are at stake?
- What are the causes of domestic violence?
- Why is it that there are more cases of men being violent towards women than of women being violent towards men?
- How can domestic violence be stopped? What could/should be done by:
  - the public authorities?
  - the local community?
  - the people involved?
  - friends and neighbours?
- Check the output of the groups and the points raised in discussion against the list from the initial brainstorm. Was domestic violence on the list? If not, why not?
- What other forms of violence against women have come up in the course of the discussion? Add them to the list.

Ask if anyone would like to work further on any of the issues raised and discuss how they would like to follow up or take action.

## Tips for facilitators

Be aware of issues of sensitivity and anonymity/privacy (some participants may have personal experiences of domestic violence at home or in the family). Make it clear to everyone that no one should feel under pressure to disclose more than they want. You should feel free to adapt the activity according to the concerns of the participants.

The activity is called “domestic affairs” because most acts of violence against women occur in the home or between people who are in a relationship. One of the most common forms of domestic violence is that of physical violence, which is why these particular “Crime witness reports” were chosen. The stories are all based on actual cases about real victims and crimes. You may want to change some of the details or to substitute other case studies in order to make the activity more relevant to your local situation and the concerns of the participants.

People’s opinions will vary in what they consider constitutes an act of violence. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, defines violence against women as “*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 private life". It encompasses, but is not limited to, "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring 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 occurring 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; and physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs."

If you have difficulties in finding out about your local support centres, there is a database of centres at the European Information Centre Against Violence web-site: [www.wave-network.org](http://www.wave-network.org).

Male participants may react strongly to the activity or some of the discussions. It is important to bear in mind that the purpose is not to make men or boys feel guilty for what other men do; however, it is important to acknowledge, or discuss, the idea that men are part of an oppressive patriarchal system and thus play a part in it. In this context, it may also be interesting to explore the consequences of violence against women on men, directly and indirectly.

You may wish to end the session with a minute's silence for the victims of domestic violence. It is a powerful way to close the activity and promote empathy and solidarity.

### **Variations**

There are many forms of violence against women (see below under "further information"). You can develop your own case studies to explore any of the other aspects of the issue.

### **Suggestions for follow-up**

The group could get in touch with the local police and find out what they do when they receive calls for help in cases of domestic violence. Another possibility is to contact their nearest women's help organisation or centre and invite a speaker to present facts and figures about the situation in their local community.

Another almost taboo subject in many countries is sexuality - and homosexuality in particular. If the group would like to explore these issues, they could look at the activity "Let's talk about sex", on page 156.

### **Taking action**

Contact a local women's refuge or information centre or an organisation working for women's rights and find out what their needs are and how you can help them.

### **Further information**

#### ***A universal challenge to human rights***

Women's and young women's rights are inalienable and indivisible and an integral part of human rights. Nonetheless, this does not imply that they are in any way sacred or secure. On the contrary, violence against women is a problem of enormous proportions. Young women in particular run a much higher risk of having their fundamental rights violated than men do.

“Violence against women and girls is a major health and human rights issue. At least one in five of the world’s female population has been physically or sexually abused by a man (or men) at some time in their life. Many, including pregnant women and young girls, are subject to severe, sustained or repeated attacks.

Worldwide, it has been estimated that violence against women is as common a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined. The problem with violence against young women is a global one that does not recognise borders; trafficking, for example, is an obvious example of this. “There is not one single country in the world where women are free from violence. There is not one single area in any woman’s life where she is not exposed to threats or to actual acts of violence against her. Violence against women knows no geographical boundary, no age limit, no class distinction, no race, no cultural difference and manifests itself in many different ways.”<sup>1</sup>

Violence against women is clearly political, in the sense that it constitutes a serious obstacle to equality between women and men and perpetuates inequality.<sup>2</sup> It is also clearly political in the sense that it constitutes a major threat to democracy, since, as is stated in a Council of Europe resolution, “inequality and disparities between women and men in the field of human rights are inconsistent with the principles of genuine democracy”.<sup>3</sup>

## Key date

### 25 November

International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

## Violence across the life span

### Violence against women throughout the life cycle

Phase	Type of violence
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; effects of battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes
Infancy	Female infanticide; physical, sexual and psychological abuse
Childhood	Child marriage; female genital mutilation; physical, sexual and psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography
Adolescence and adulthood	Dating and courtship violence (e.g. acid-throwing and date rape); economically coerced sex (e.g. school girls having sex with “sugar daddies” in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy
Elderly	Forced “suicide” or homicide of widows for economic reasons; sexual, physical and psychological abuse

Source: Violence Against Women Information Pack – World Health Organisation, 1997

## Some figures on the size of the problem

The figures on violence against women, and specifically on domestic violence, can be astonishing, showing the extent and universality of the problem and its relative invisibility. Every day in Europe one woman in five is a victim of violence. More women in Europe die or are seriously injured every year through domestic violence than through cancer or road accidents.<sup>4</sup> Every year 14,500 Russian women are killed as a result of domestic violence.<sup>5</sup>

A study conducted by the European Women’s Lobby in 1999 on domestic violence in the European Union reached the conclusion that 1 in 4 women in the EU experience some form of violence by their intimate partner. 95% of all acts of violence take place within home. A Finnish study (1998) showed that 52% of adult women had been victims of violence or physical or sexual threats from the age of 15, and 20 % had been within the past year. A Portuguese study (1997) revealed that 53.3% of women living in the suburbs of large cities, 55.4% of women

**Additional resources  
on the Internet:**

The site of Women Against Violence in Europe Network:  
[www.wave-network.org](http://www.wave-network.org).

The European Women's Lobby: [www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org) where the report "Unveiling the hidden data on domestic violence in the European Union" can also be ordered.

The White Ribbon Campaign is "the largest effort of men working to end men's violence against women".  
[www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca).

EuroPRO-Fem, European Pro-feminist Men's Network is a network of organisations and projects of men concerned with male domination, violence and oppression of women  
[www.europrofem.org](http://www.europrofem.org).

Many of the statistics have been taken from the seminar report "Violence against young women in Europe", by Ingrid Ramberg, Council of Europe, 2001 – available at [www.coe.int/hre](http://www.coe.int/hre).

living in cities and 37.9% of women living in the countryside had been subjected to violence; 43% of acts of violence were committed within the family. A Belgian study (1998) indicated that 68% of women had been the victims of physical and/or sexual violence.<sup>6</sup>

**Domestic violence**

Violation of women's human rights of is not something that only happens in war. It is something that happens first and foremost at home. "The 'private' nature of this violence is exactly what has always made and still makes intervention and action so difficult."<sup>7</sup>

Research consistently demonstrates that a women is more likely to be injured, raped or killed by a current of former partner than by any other person. Domestic violence affects not only the woman but also the children, with a particularly high incidence amongst girls and young women.

**Silent Witnesses exhibition**

This activity was inspired by an exhibition on domestic violence and the murder of women, which was brought to the European Youth Centre Budapest by NANE Women's Rights Association (Budapest, Hungary), including the stories about *Eszter* and *Kati*. This exhibition was aimed at raising public awareness of the dimensions and brutality of domestic violence and murder by telling the stories of murdered women, the 'silent witnesses'.

The Silent Witnesses originated in Minnesota, USA, where it has now achieved a nationwide dimension and is part of a movement to bring an end to domestic murder by 2010. Organising a Silent Witnesses exhibition can be a very practical and effective way of addressing domestic violence in your community, in your town or in your region. There are books on how to make the witnesses and how to organise the exhibition, including a book called "Results" which tells about the first years of the campaign in the USA and lists a handful of stories which could be used as examples. The website's address is [www.silentwitness.net](http://www.silentwitness.net). It also contains a long list of international contacts who already have such exhibits.

*Note: The cases of Kati and Eszter are reported by Morvai Krisztina in Terror a családban – A feleségbántalmazás és a jog (Terror in the Family – Wife Battering and the Law), Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest 1998.*

<sup>1</sup> European Women's Lobby ([www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org))

<sup>2</sup> Fact Sheet. "Violence against women. Action undertaken by the Council of Europe". Division Equality between Women and Men, DG II, Council of Europe, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 1216 (2000) Follow-up action to the United Nations 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

<sup>4</sup> Recommendation 1450 (2000) Violence against women in Europe. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

<sup>5</sup> The Unicef Report on Women in Countries in Transition, September 1999.

<sup>6</sup> European Women's Lobby.

<sup>7</sup> Ending domestic violence: actions and measures. Proceedings of the Forum Bucharest (Romania), 26-28 November 1998. Steering Committee for equality between women and men. (EG/BUC (99) 1) Council of Europe 2000, p. 13.

## HANDOUTS

### Crime witness report 1

#### Eszter

On November 1995 Eszter's husband arrived home slightly drunk. He discovered that she and her daughter were visiting a neighbour. He ordered them to come home immediately.

When they got in, he locked the door and told their daughter: "I'm gonna have a little talk with your mother now". He got out an axe, a broom and a knife.

He started an argument with his wife, accusing her of not having done any washing, cooking and other housework. All the same time he kept beating her; he hit her head and face with his bare hands. He tore out handfuls of her hair and kicked her with his boots. Then he stripped the clothes from her upper body and threw her on the bed with the intention of beating her further.

All this happened in front of their 8-year-old daughter who begged him to stop. Then he did stop. He threw Eszter out of the bed and fell asleep.

Eszter died that night.

### Crime witness report 2

#### Kati

Kati tried to escape from her fiancé who was becoming increasingly abusive. She found a flat to rent in another city but he kept phoning and harassing her. Kati's mental state deteriorated.

One day, the fiancé went to get her after work to make her move back. He took her to a nearby forest, where he tried to strangle her with her pullover. The next day Kati told her colleagues at work that she was afraid he would one day strangle and kill her.

Four days later the fiancé had a few drinks. Again, he waited for her after work and when she came out he started to beat her. In the evening, he decided that they should visit relatives. On the way they stopped the car several times. Kati, seeing the state he was in, agreed to have sex with him but he was too drunk.

Kati told her fiancé that she was not interested in him any more. This made him very angry. He grabbed a long leather belt and strangled her.

He then pulled her dead body into a ditch and covered her with tree branches.

### Crime witness report 3

#### Z

Z is a woman living in your neighbourhood; she is married and has two small children. Sometimes her husband gets angry and beats her, mostly with his hands and fists. However, lately he has also resorted to using a belt and broomstick. Two months ago he broke a bottle on her head. Z wants to leave home but her husband threatens to kill her if she "even thinks of it". She has two young sons to look after and she is horrified at the prospect of having to leave them.

Yesterday she reported to the local hospital with a broken nose and bruises which, she explained, were caused by falling down the stairs.

### Guidelines for the group discussions

#### I The analysis of the crime (20 minutes)

1. What do you think of the crime as reported?
2. Where might such a crime have happened? Could it be in your neighbourhood?
3. Why has the crime happened?
4. Is there anything that could justify such a crime?
5. How could the victim have defended herself?

#### II – Transfer to social reality (40 minutes)

1. Do you know, or have you heard of any cases of domestic violence recently?
2. What forms does domestic violence take in our society?
3. What can the victims do if they need help?
4. Should the police intervene if they hear of violence or should such intervention be considered as interference in domestic affairs and should they "allow time for the wounds to heal"?
5. What power does the woman have in such situations? What power does the man have?
6. Do you know of cases of domestic violence in which a man is the victim?
7. How can domestic violence be prevented and stopped?
8. What could/should be done by:
  - a. the public authorities?
  - b. the local community?
  - c. the people involved?
  - d. friends and neighbours?