NO MORE!
A VAW Event
VAW - Violence Against Women

By Women Unbounded

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Resource Booklet
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CONVERSATIONS ON VIOLENCE
AWARE

Mission: To remove all gender-based barriers so as to allow individuals in Singapore to develop their potential to the fullest and realise their personal visions and hopes, through:

- Research and advocacy
- Education and training – Consulting with companies regarding workplace policies, sex education, first responder training
- Support services – helpline, sexual assault care centre, legal clinic

S.H.E. Project

- Research-based service that provides transformational support programme and stable and decent housing and for low-income families headed by single mothers
- Most come from situations of family violence or abuse, prior to moving in
- Transitional housing programmes typically provide housing for 3-6 months
- S.H.E. provides housing for up to 2 years, to ensure the families a longer-term stability with rental payments and utilities fully covered
Types of abuse

1. **Physical Abuse**
2. **Financial Abuse**
3. **Sexual Abuse**
4. **Visa Abuse** - common amongst migrant spouses as they are on long term visa pass. Often times, they are reliant on their Singaporean partners to sponsor it, creating a vulnerable state for women and their children.
5. **Psychological Abuse** - when abuser makes one question their sanity or reconciliation of reality through manipulation
6. **Controlling Behaviour** - abuser justifies controlling behaviour as concern
7. **Digital Abuse** - A form of controlling behaviour that involves the use of technology as a means to coerce, stalk or harass another person
8. **Emotional Abuse** - Any act intended to undermine one’s self-esteem, intimidate them or isolate them
Why women find it hard to leave their abusers

1. **Fear** – The perpetrators may threaten to kill them or harm their children if they choose to leave. Many also stalk their movements from their workplace or friend’s house. It is especially hard when Singapore is so small.

2. **Visa Status** – Victims who are reliant on their employers or spouses for their status may choose to put up with the abuse in fear that they may not be able to continue staying in Singapore. Victims with children may even have to leave their children behind if deported.

3. **Oblivious to the situation** – Victims may believe that the abuse is normal and may even blame themselves for it. Abuse may also be seen as a normal part of a relationship due to internalised generational/ cultural beliefs.

4. **Cultural/Religious reasons** – Victims may fear “bringing shame” to the family or ruining the idea of having an intact family for the child, whom society deems needs both parents.

5. **Financial Dependency** – Victims may be financially dependent on the abusive partner, making them think they have no choice but to stay. It is likely that Covid-19 has exacerbated this situation.
Signs of abuse

• **Victim may:**
  - Appear to be afraid of their partner or always anxious to please them
  - No longer see friends or family, or cut phone conversations short when their partner is in the room
  - Talk about their partner’s ‘jealousy’, ‘bad temper’ or ‘possessiveness’
  - Have physical injuries (bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts, etc)
  - Become anxious or depressed, lose confidence, or be unusually quiet.
  - Have children who seem afraid of their partner, have behavioural problems, or be withdrawn or anxious.
  - Be reluctant to leave children with their partner.

• **Partner often:**
  - Criticises or humiliates victim in front of other people.
  - Forces them to engage in sexual activities when the victim is unwilling
  - Displays controlling behavior (e.g. orders them about or makes all the decisions, controls money)
  - Texts or calls to check up on her
Combating abuse

Education & Advocacy

- Open discussions of consent & respect for individual boundaries from a young age
- Addressing misconceptions about sexual violence & victim blaming
- Instilling confidence in the system (Policies must provide for no-retaliation and all complaints must be professionally investigated. Wrongdoers must be held accountable and there should be no attempts to “hush up” any wrongdoing)
- Having clear, written policies accessible to all (workplace, events, clubs, institution)
- Running anti-harassment public education campaigns
- Advocate for more timely, trauma-informed processes for protection / divorce, and access to housing
- Donate / volunteer
Combating abuse

What can you do?

If you suspect that someone you know is experiencing any form of abuse or violence, remember that it is important that you be available & non judgemental. Continue to invite them out as violence may make the victim feel emotionally isolated.

Here are some things you can do:

- **Look out for opportunities where the person is trying to reach for safety**
  If it’s a case of physical abuse, check if the person would like your company for medical treatment. If they’re stressed about the abuse and want to see a doctor or psychologist.

- **Show empathy**
  Reassure them that whatever is discussed stays between the two of you and nothing will be shared without their permission. Do not be discouraged if your friend is not ready for a certain step.

- **Empower them**
  It’s important to emphasize that they did not do anything to deserve this.

- **Suggest resources** (e.g. Helplines, National Organisations, Professional help)

- **Check in with them periodically**
  Check if they are safe at the moment, have anyone they trust that they can go to for support
Combating abuse

Remember!

- **Never text the victim about violence** as their phone may be tracked/in the hands of the perpetrator.

- **Never contact the abuser** especially without the person’s consent, as such confrontation may endanger the victim and put her in a very vulnerable situation.

- Seek professional help if necessary - Call the National Anti Violence Hotline (1800 777 0000) where you can receive advice on the next steps and whether a social service professional would be of assistance’

- If there are children or vulnerable people (elderly/disabled) in the family that could be harmed, call the hotline as soon as possible to get advice.

For more information, check out: https://www.aware.org.sg/2020/06/video-how-to-respond-when-your-friend-is-experiencing-domestic-violence/
Queer women are often not seen as women and deemed “scary” and “different”. They are seen as a political liability and even excluded from women’s movements despite having contributed greatly towards the causes. This is the complicated reality where many of them are.

Society grooms women by dictating what their body should like like, what they should desire and their reproductive rights. It punishes those who are different in any sense; from looks (e.g. a butch) to martial status (single mothers/women), both structurally and culturally.

The idea of women choosing their own sexuality and fighting for the right to have unconventional desires is not palatable to most of society.

Thus, queer women are regarded by the patriarchy as most non-conformist as they do not subject themselves to male desires (only).

Research is so important to explain and give a framework on how violence manifests in different communities.

As feminists, we are familiar with the concept of intersectionality. Being queer subjects you to new and different kinds of oppression as a result of the intersectionality of different forms of oppression.
Intersectionality of oppression: Corrective rape

- Targeted at queer women because of their sexual orientation and gender
- Perpetrator seeks to punish or change their sexual orientation
  - Preceded by comments such as “Maybe you should have sex with men or be raped by one so will you know how great d*** is.”
  - The mere suggestion of sexual assault against queer women is a patriarchal response to deviating from the “norm”
- Occurs in Singapore but not reported because of two big issues - gender and victim shaming.
  - Reporting requires victims to come out as queer, which some victims wish to avoid

Why is gender-based violence prevalent in our society?

- The patriarchy and the manner in which society polices gender are two fundamental reasons for this. This is an issue faced across the world and is underpinned by patriarchy. It manifests differently in different societies but is a global problem.
- That said, we should also acknowledge the struggles men go through as a result of toxic masculinity entrenched by traditional views on gender.
- Many queer women do not realise that gender based violence does not just revolve around physical violence. They think that it is acceptable for society to treat them badly because they are queer.
Violence as a reality for queer women

Queer women need a language and framework, in order to properly analyse and recognise the range of violence.

Research also found that 60% of the LGBTQ community encountered sexual violence when they were younger but are unaware that it constituted sexual violence. This can be attributed to the fact that our sex education system fails to address issues surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals.
Violence Against Foreign Domestic Workers (FDW)

- About 1 in 5 households in Singapore has a worker/helper and this is no longer a luxury [1]
- Some of the issues FDW face include, being overworked, underfed, verbal abuse (which is a very common complaint)
- Almost every week, TWC2 receives reports surrounding physical abuse which is the worst of the pan of abuse these workers face
  - If you someone is being physically abused, it is likely that they being subjected to quite a range of other abuse as well.
- While the media often focuses on the physical abuse, sexual abuse does also occur but is hardly ever mentioned, as it is a sensitive issue for Singapore families and domestic workers themselves
- Cases of abuse are found to happen more frequently amongst families that only just manage to afford a FDW, which in itself is an added stress

Has Covid-19 resulted in an increase in incidences of violence?

- There is not much difference as employers who are normally considerate of the workers remain considerate of them
- A substantial number of FDWs (35% - 40%) were however not allowed out on their days off even before covid
Female Abusers

It is disturbing to hear that in most cases, women are responsible for the physical violence and other abuses inflicted on FDWs.

Why is this so?

It is important to understand the context as to why this occurs. While it does not excuse the abuse, it enables us to perhaps understand the situation better and come up with suitable responses.

1. Societal Pressures

Historically, housework was done by female members of the household, often unpaid work. Despite housework being vital, the job does not bring in money, and is thus undervalued as “unimportant” work. This is then associated with domestic workers who perform this work.

The authorisation of employment of FDWs in 1987 was aimed at mobilising educated women into the workforce in light of the labour shortage. A FDW was employed to do the work regarded as “unimportant”. Despite the gender allocation of housework being seriously challenged by the presence of FDWs, women were still seen to be responsible that housework got done. They would then be the ones primarily interacting with these workers. Familial and societal pressure to ensure that everything is kept clean and well, manifests in the form of female employers abusing FDWs.

2. Power

To give anybody absolute power over another human being is never a good idea, but this is what government policies have enabled. When a domestic worker arrives in Singapore, she depends entirely on the goodwill of her employer for her existence (i.e. to retain her job, accommodation, food). Employers are aware of this power disparity and tend to abuse this to various extents.
Seeking help

NGOs are best placed to offer assistance as they frequently engage in outreach.

FDWs often turn to the following alternatives, although they are not necessarily the most helpful:

1. **Their embassy**: Many cases, they simply wish to settle the worker’s case quickly and send them home which is not the most ideal solution.

2. **Agencies**: This help varies as some agencies will remain ignorant and advise these FDW to bear with it and carry on working while some will intervene.

3. **MOM**: While MOM may help, the ways things are handled may not be the most satisfactory.

### Lack of accessibility to help

FDWs who require the most amount of help have the greatest difficulty seeking it. Without days off (and sometimes even without their phones!), they are cut off from advice and help.

There have been cases where it is a condition of their going out that these FDWs are accompanied by a member of the household, making it difficult to ask for help.

Steps to remedy this situation:

1. **Short Term**: We need to ensure that all employers observe the mandatory day off for all domestic workers which is non-negotiable.

2. **Long Term**: We need to have a serious debate and new policy initiatives about house work and care provisions.
HEALING
Journey of Healing

It differs for everyone and some may require professional help. Bear in mind that the progress or rate of recovery of healing depends on a variety of factors, including but not limited to:

- The length and intensity of abuse endured
- Whether or not you are living with the consequences of abuse (e.g. unwanted pregnancy, STDs, loss of financial support)
- Availability of governmental / community intervention to remove the victim from the abuser
- Mindset of society (e.g. Does society blame the victim for the abuse she suffered?)
- The rapport and how comfortable the victim is with their therapist (if any).
The primary goal of trauma therapy is to ensure the safety of the client - for the client to feel safe in their own body, their emotions, their environment and their relationships. Here are some of the goals of therapy:

- Learning skills and strategies to cope with and process trauma.
- Learn healthy adaptive patterns of behaviour
- Learn to identify patterns of abuse (e.g. gaslighting, manipulation) so that client does not fall for it in the future
  - Allows client to also identify any (e.g. that the abuser was acting that way because “they had a bad day”)
- Improve client’s social connectedness
- Process client’s emotions so that the traumatic incident no longer holds power over them

And most importantly,

- To help the client reclaim their sense of control and choice in life so that they may start to lead more empowered lives
Acknowledging and processing the traumatic incident

It is important to note that once the victim begins to acknowledge and process the incident, that’s when the healing process will also begin.

It is normal for a victim of trauma to question the need to put themselves through the traumatic incident. However, the reason for not wanting to revisit the incident must be clear.

- Are they avoiding revisiting the incident because they are truly past the traumatic incident and feel that it is no longer affecting their present?
- Or are they afraid to revisit it for fear of opening the pandora’s box?

The latter of the scenarios comes with dire consequences as one would not know how to deal with the trauma and it may manifest in ways they least expect. This could take the form of

- Inability to form relationships
- Anything with minimal semblance to the traumatic event being a trigger (e.g. sound, taste, word, smell)
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms (e.g. drugs / alcohol)
- Severe anxiety or uncontrollable rage
The difference one’s attitude can make

Victim of Abuse vs Being Stuck in a Victim Mindset

A victim of abuse acknowledges that an unfortunate incident happened to them, but that it does not define them - that there is so much more to them than the past traumatic incident.

A victim that is stuck in a victim mindset lets the traumatic incident define them. The incident still holds so much power over them that it diminishes their ability to channel their inner strengths and resources, convincing them that they are helpless.

Traumatic incidents often greatly impact one’s self-esteem. But one has to overcome it and put themselves out there in spite of the incident. For instance, they may find solidarity in support groups or communities with other survivors.
How to help oneself

- Join communities with other survivors
- Join mindfulness sessions
- Meditate
- Get adequate rest and sleep
- Exercise or engage in any type of enjoyable movement (e.g. dancing, running)
- Forgiveness of oneself
- Self-compassion

Above all, never never never self-isolate.

Having survived violence and living with trauma would have caused immense pain, but remember that what is not transformed is transmitted. The pain transmitted to a victim by their abuser is their pain that was not transformed.

When one transforms the violence, they transform their life. Do not transform pain into hatred towards men - educate them, because they are also getting mixed messages in the form of toxic masculinity.

YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR TRAUMA
Love and Kindness for a Friend: A Self-Compassion Exercise

1) Find a posture that’s upright but not rigid - let your arms rest on your lap and let your feet be supported by the floor

2) Very gently, becoming aware of the sensation of the breath in your body connecting to the flow of the breath in the belly, the chest, the nostrils - try to be aware of the air around you

3) Begin by thinking back to a time in your life when you experienced kindness, warmth or connection with another person - could be when you felt this way towards another person or experienced this from another person, which was directed towards you. Try to recall the unconditional love.

4) Allow yourself to imagine this sensation or feeling - can you picture this person? What does their face look like? What do they sound like in the moment?

5) As you remember this experience, notice how you feel in your body. See if you can notice what’s happening in your body with an attitude of curiosity as you engage in this practice.

6) Bring to mind an image of someone you care about and have warm feelings about. You might imagine that you are with them as they go about their daily activities.

7) Now we will begin to wish this being well by offering some words of kindness. Silently say these to yourself and repeat.
   - May you be well
   - May you be kind to yourself
   - May you be joyful
   - May you be safe and at ease
About Women Unbounded

Women Unbounded (WU) is a volunteer-based community headquartered in Singapore, working for women's empowerment through connections, mutual aid, ideas, and events. WU is proudly feminist; our approach to intersectional feminist activism is grounded in our beliefs in fairness, respect, and empiricism. One step at a time, we work to break down psychological, intellectual, socio-cultural, and economic barriers to gender equality.

WU’s Teams

Connections
Provide a safe space for mentorship and guidance

Mutual Aid
Empower women with knowledge and skills to excel

Ideas
Start conversations on what it means to be a woman and the norms that constrain us

Events
Host meaningful events to empower the individual and bond the community

Join Our Community!

Our Website
@women.unbounded
Women Unbounded
Women Unbounded

You may reach us at hello@womenunbounded.com

Resource Booklet: Special Mentions

The ideas in this booklet were developed by the panelists from WU’s No More event held on 27th March 2021. The contents do not represent the views of any company or organization.

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