NEWSLETTER

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

MAY 1993
Editorial

Greetings fellow members..

Another year is here and the new Committee Members are bursting with ideas and energy to try and make this yet another resourceful and meaningful year for SWWS.

The Resource / Newsletter team will try their very best to produce four issues of the "Newsletter" for the members and we welcome any ideas / suggestions to further improve the contents for the benefit of the readers.

Under "Resource", the materials (books/magazines etc) which were moved from the Satok premises are still in the boxes pending our forthcoming move to new premises in late June 1993. Therefore we apologise for any inconvenience caused, especially to those members who would like to borrow a book or two from the Center. Please bear with us until we have settled in the new premises.

For those members with books long outstanding, kindly be reminded to return them to the Centre.

Until the next issue, happy reading!!

Sheila Kho
5/93
CONGRATULATIONS
TO
THE NEW
COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 1993

PRESIDENT : JOANNE LAU
VICE PRESIDENT : HEW CHENG SIM
HON. SECRETARY : RITA SAKAI
ASST. HON SECRETARY : LILIAN TEO
HON. TREASURER : MARY WONG
ASST. HON. TREASURER : LEONARA LIONG
COMMITTEE MEMBERS : ITA LING

SHEILA KHO
GILL RAJA
SAHRULBARIAH HJ YASSIN

NEWS UP-DATE ....

A VERY BIG THANK YOU TO A GROUP OF SPECIAL PEOPLE
' SANZA ' FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE SWWS DROP-IN CENTRE

CONGRATULATIONS TO DORIS SOH ON HER FIRST BORN

AND

MARGARET YEO ON THE BIRTH OF HER FIRST GRANDCHILD...

AND FOR BEING THE YOUNGEST GRANDMOTHER !!!! "

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SWWS ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR 1993

1. To look for a new base for SWWS, preferably in the city centre which is easily accessible (along bus routes)

2. To establish and fully utilise our Drop-In Centre (DIC) via monthly talks and Outreach Programmes

3. To consolidate existing sub-groups e.g. The Crisis Phoneline (CPL) and Resource curn Newsletter

4. A Fund Raising Sub Committee to be formed to look into means of scounting for funds

5. Membership Drive for SWWS and CPL (including re-activating existing members)

Up-date....Up-date....Up-date....Up-date....Up-date....Up-date.....

The new base for the SWWS will be a few doors down from the existing premises, above Mega Motors (Top floor). We will be doing the packing on the 21st May 1993 at 2.00 p.m. and we would appreciate if members would volunteer their time to help in the task...MORE HANDS LESS WORK !!!!

We will be moving to the new premises on the 29th May 1993 at 2.00 p.m. and again we appeal to members to come and help out.

The numbers of the phonelines will remain the same.
SWWS DROP-IN CENTRE

The SWWS Women's Drop-In Centre was officially opened on October 14th 1992. It is located at No. 139 1st Floor Bangunan STU, Jalan Rock, Kuching (however we will be moving to a new premises by June 1993).

It was officiated by the Member of Parliament, Santubong, Puan Rohani Abdul Karim. In her speech she urged the women's groups in Kuching to work together to strengthen their inter-organisation relationships. She also praised our Society for taking the initiative to set up the Centre to help women. Puan Rohani also urged other groups to support one another by publicising the services offered by other women's groups to their members.

The following are the objectives of the Drop-In Centre:

OBJECTIVES OF THE DROP-IN CENTRE

1. To provide information and when necessary, help, by supporting women in traditionally low paid jobs e.g. domestic helpers, petrol pump attendants, hotel workers, factory workers.

2. To reach out to young women from rural areas who are attracted to jobs in town and to help them adapt to their new life style.

3. To encourage self-development of women through educational programmes, skill building sessions, social activities and involvement of the women themselves in the running and development of the Drop-In Centre.

Compiled by Margaret Bedus
Crisis Phoneline Report for 1992

(1) Recruitment Drive for CPL Volunteers

A recruitment drive for CPL volunteers was held on the third week of May 1992 through press release and radio. There were 19 callers interested in being CPL volunteers.

(2) Training for CPL Volunteers

Out of the 19 callers who called CPL only 10 participants came for the Phase 1 Training which ran from the 18 July – 1 August 1992 and Phase 2 Training from the 15 August – 14th September 1992. The Phase 3 Training was attended by 9 participants from the 26 September – 14 November 1992 which only 8 qualified to be CPL volunteers. This year the observation period was held simultaneously with the Phase 3 Training in order to shorten the length of time for the training. The facilitators who helped in the training were Kee and Gill, Angle, Joanne and Ita.

(3) Extension of CPL Opening Hours

As from 1st October 1992 the opening hours for CPL have increased from 8 hours (4 sessions) a week to 10 hours (5 sessions) a week.

The new opening hours are:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.
Wednesday: 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

One of the morning sessions on Tuesday had to be closed because there were not enough volunteers in the morning. At present there are 22 volunteers running the CPL, 20 doing the evening sessions and only 2 doing the morning session.

(4) Statistics

4.1. A total of 139 calls were received from 174 sessions for the whole year of 1992. 62 sessions in the morning received 53 calls and 112 sessions in the evening received 86 calls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total of sessions</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of calls</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to the previous four years the total no. of calls has reduced slightly as the number of sessions also reduced. Even though the no. of sessions has increased as from 1/10, in the middle of the year there were quite a number of volunteers taking leave resulting in many sessions being closed.

4.2 The classification of calls is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of Calls / / Year</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>1992</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Information</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Silent call</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alcoholism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Study/examination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Battered wife</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Boy/girl relationship</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Health</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Loneliness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Marital</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Psychological</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Others — male callers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-in lover</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table above calls asking for information rank the highest because there were two press releases for 1992. The first was on the recruitment drive for CPL volunteers and the second was concerning the extension time of CPL opening hours. Martial problem calls still rank the second highest but have reduced greatly compared to 1991.

Report prepared by

Angie Garet
Date: 10-12 July 1992

Place: Furama Hotel, Jalan Sultan, Kuala Lumpur

SWWS representatives: Adeline Phang and Angie Garet

Organiser: All Women's Action Society (AWAM)

**************************************************************************

1. Objectives of the coalition
   i. To build a progressive alternative women's movement.
   ii. To liberate women from all forms of oppression.
   iii. To work towards the realisation of a just, peaceful and genuine society.

2. Principles of coalition
   i. Mutual respect for each other
   ii. Consensus in decision making.
   iii. New members must be introduced by at least one existing member and approved by all members before accepted into the coalition.
   iv. Any member requesting financial assistance or funding must do so only after the agreement of all coalition members. (in the name of the coalition)

3. Suggested Structure
   i. National Coalition Meeting (Assembly)
      -2 representatives from each member organisation
      -meet once in 2 years
   ii. National Coalition Co-ordinating Committee
      -7 elected members and 5 non-voting commission co-ordinators.
   iii. Suggested Commissions
      a. Land: Machan, Angie
      b. Labour: ALAIGAL, CAT, AWL, AWAM.
      c. Violence Against Women: SWWS, SAWO, WAO, AWAM, WCC, AWL
      d. Women's / Human Rights: WCC, AWAM, SWWS, AWL
      e. Culture and Religion: WCC, MWMT, Machan, Shina

   iv. Functions
      - Advocacy
      - Training Education
      - Liaison

   v. Membership
      - Women's groups
      - Community groups (women concerns, programmes, unit)
      - Individual (associate)
vi. Secretariat
-Information
-Resources

vii. Funding
-Membership fee of $50,000 per year per organisation

4. **Pro-tem Planning Committee (KL Based) Before Coalition Assembly**

AWAM: Suasana, Cecilia
SWWS: Irene
CAT: Dominica
MWMT: Sharon
ALAGAIL: Ranya, Shara
WCC: Rohana
WAO: Shina

5. **Proposed Date for the Coalition Assembly**: 8 MARCH 1993

COMPiled BY : ANGIE GARET
SWWS REPRESENTATIVE
Seminar on Child Abuse  
(held from the 30th – 31st July 1992)  

The Seminar on Child Abuse was organised jointly by the Sarawak Welfare Department and the Kuching Jaycees. It was held at the Government training Centre at Jalan Simpang Tiga, Kuching. The participants of the said seminar were from various government departments e.g. the Medical & Health Department, the Divisional Welfare offices, the Police Department, the Education Department and various voluntary organisations e.g. Dayak Bidayuh National Association, Womens Institute etc...  

The said seminar was a very meaningful one because the papers on related topics were presented by professional speakers from Kuala Lumpur and local professionals.  

The resolutions from the above seminar are as on the attached list.  

Seminar attended and reported on by Shah
1. To extend the Child Protection Act, 1991 to Sarawak as soon as possible by providing the infrastructure, financial allocation and sufficient staff by the Federal or State Governments.

2. Even though the Child Protection Act, 1991 has not been extended, a Children Protection Team has to be established at all levels i.e. Divisions and Districts, in order to standardise the methods of handling the increased abuse cases.

3. As for prevention measures, the seminar was of the opinion that all levels of the public have to be made aware of:

   i. The Child Protection Act, 1991
   ii. Ways of detecting of child abuse
   iii. Ways to stop the child abuse problem.

This awareness can be spread through publicity campaigns and the mass media.

5. A system which is more complete and effective has created in handling the cases in the agencies and among the agencies involved.

   i. Protocol for a system of reporting has to be standardised for usage by the agencies involved before the implementation of the Child Protection Act, 1991.

   ii. The registration center to be handled by the Welfare office before the implementation of the Child Protection Act, 1991.

   iii. Case conference between the agencies involved should be held from time to time.

6. The seminar agreed that the mass media has played an effective role in increasing the public awareness concerning the cases of abuse. But they have to be careful in displaying the confidential information on the abused and abuser before the case is brought to the court in order to avoid the two parties being emotionally pressured as a result of the publicity e.g. by their neighbours.
1992 has been an eventful year for our Society. Besides the usual committee meetings, below is the calendar of activities for our society.

March 28th
31st
: AGM meeting for 1992 held.
: Some of our members had a meeting cum dinner with Kathy Hendrix from Global Fund, California U.S.A. At the same time she handed us a grant of US$5,000.00 for a one year period.

April 10th - 12th
: 'Women and Law' training conducted in KL organised by AWL (All Women Lawyers). The objectives of this training was to empower women on legal matters. Training was attended by Doris Soh and Rita Sakai.

18th
: 'Majlis Perjumpaan Y.B. Dato Napsiah Omar, Menteri Perpaduan Negara dan Pembangunan Masyarakat with all members of Women's organisations in Malaysia', in KL. Attended by Margaret Bedus.

June 13th
: The Drop-In Centre started operating but was not officially opened.

July 10th-12th
: 'National Coalition Meeting' in KL. Initiated by the All Women's Action Society (AWAM). Objectives of the meeting were to build a progressive alternative women's movement, to liberate women from all forms of oppression, to work towards the realisation of a just peaceful and genuine society. SWWS was represented by Angie Garet and Adeline Phang.

July 30th-31st
: Seminar on Child Abuse jointly organised by the Sarawak Welfare Department and the Kuching Jaycees. Among the resolutions made during the Seminar were the extension of the Child Protection Act 1991 to Sarawak as soon as possible, public awareness of the Act, ways of detecting child abuse, methods to stop child abuse problem.

July 18th
: CPL training started at SWWS Centre

July 26th
: SWWS held interviews for Drop-In Centre Co-ordinator.
August 2nd  : SWWS participated in the Cheshire Home Open Day by setting up a game stall. We collected $239.00 which we donated to the Home.

August 12th : Constance, our new co-ordinator started work at the Drop-In Centre.

August 31st : SWWS participated in the Salvation Army Open Day. We set up a game stall. The blow-pipe was popular. We collected $375.00 which we donated to the Home.

Sept 4th - 6th : "National Legal Literacy and Paralegal Training for Women and the Law". Conducted in KL. This training was a follow-up to the training conducted in April. The Theme- Women and Economic Rights. Objectives of the workshop were to: Create awareness and stimulate consciousness in economic rights of female workers and women generally, review and identify gaps in the existing legislation vis a vis female employment, propose new legislation measures for the better protection of women workers, explore alternative measures and mechanisms with regard to organisation support. Attended by Rita and Joanne Lau.

Sept 5th : A dialogue with SWWS and Sarakup Indu Sarawak was held in Kuching. SWWS represented by Margaret Bedus and Angie Garet.

October 12th : A visit to YB Alfred Yap, Assistant Minister for Culture Youth and Sport, in view of the Public Forum on Domestic Violence and the Proposed Act to be held in Kuching. SWWS represented by Angie, Aminah, Rita and Constance.

October 14th : The Women's Drop-In Centre was officially opened by YB Rohani Karim at 2.30 p.m.

Our speakers were Rita Reddy from KL and our own Ling How Kee.

November 9th: Rabuyah (a new CPL recruit) took over from Constance to run the DIC for a temporary period.

November 13th: A talk by Dr Abang Bennet on "Mental Health" was held at the DIC as part of the CPL training. He touched on:
1. How we feel about ourselves
2. How we feel about others
3. How we handle daily stresses in life.

November 28th: We held a Pot Luck cum CPL meeting at DIC. During the meeting it was decided that we move the main office and the CPL phone from Satok to the DIC at Batu Lintang. It was felt that the new location will be more centralised.

Work was delegated to members, packing on the 12th December 1992 and moving on the 19th December 1992.

February 23rd: We had a 'Thank You' dinner for Datuk Hafsah Harun for letting us use her place without rent for some years. The food was great.
Domestic violence: Public education important, says Yap

KUCHING — Eighty-seven domestic violence cases were reported to the police in Sarawak between 1990 and 1992, Assistant Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports Alfred Yap disclosed yesterday.

This number however does not reflect the actual figures on domestic violence as many other cases were not reported, he told reporters after declaring open the Public Forum on Domestic Violence and its proposed Act here.

Many cases were unreported, because the present legal system does not assist and provide enough protection to the victims as well as the social constraints and stigma attached to the issue, he explained.

Yap also believed that legislation alone would not be enough to prevent domestic violence as the courts could not look after a family's affairs all the time.

'Even though a restraining order may have been placed on a husband, he may win the wife's confidence and move back in with her. After a while he may start beating her again,' he said.

Yap called for more public education to instill the caring attitude among the people. With development, cases of child abuse and wife battering seemed to be on the rise in society, he added.

'Iconically, while society has great intolerance and imposes great sanction against violent acts from one person to another, violence within the family is often viewed differently,' he said.

As long as children are viewed as properties of parents, women as subordinates to husbands, the problem of child abuse and wife battering will continue to be hidden and the victims will continue to suffer in silence,' he stated.

The level of violence in today's society, he said, represented a general disregard for the well-being of others and itself.

He believed that the proposed Domestic Violence Act is the step in the right direction to ensure a society which upholds the rights of men, women, children and elderly persons to be treated with dignity, respect and free of violence.

People should examine their values and attitudes, he advised to control the problem and make domestic violence a public concern rather than private matter.

The proposed Act will protect battered victims from their assailants, improve police response to domestic violence and facilitate speedy relief to the victims with simple legal procedures.

By SEMAN ENDAWIE
Staff Correspondent
DOMESTIC violence was considered a "closed issue" in Malaysia until 1984, when a group of concerned Malaysian women brought it into the open with the formation of the Joint Action Group Against Violence Against Women (JAG-VAW).

This same group began with a public exhibition named "WAO" in 1985, attended by 2000 members of the public in Kuala Lumpur. The big turnout is an indication that it is about time the issue of violence against women (VAW) was made public — and equally about time the harmful effects it can cause the families concerned and the society, generally — is dealt with. The result is the proposed Domestic Violence Act (DVA) which is to be tabled in the April sitting of the Dewan Rakyat here.

In Sarawak, before the need to implement the Act was fully realised, the Sarawak Women's Association (SWWS) has organised a similar workshop as their counterparts in Kuala Lumpur, at the Dewan Tun Razak in Kuching. The beating has continued in spasms. One day she called the Women's Crisis Phone, a befriending service run by the SWWS.

"To be able to help Su Ling, we need to understand the issue of domestic violence and to support the proposed Act," stressed Joanne.

The Act aims to protect women with such plights as Su Ling and also to enable them to share their woes of domestic violence with the concerned women organisations — merely in the interest of their own welfare.

One of the changes made in the Act is the right for the victims to seek protection order whereby it provides "restraining the respondent and/or the abuser from causing violence to the applicant, child or incapacitated adult." This is also to grant the victims protection from the attacker whether personal or by telephone.

The protection is extended to cover spouse, parent, child or other persons within the domestic set up. It also covers persons who have been within the domestic set up and are no longer within it.

The need to propose the Act, which carries a punishment of an imprisonment term of up to three years or a fine of up to $5000 or both to do with the reason that through time and time again many battered wives are still left unprotected from the harm that surrounds her and her family.

Over a period of three years, from 1990 to 1992, 87 cases were reported in Sarawak. Once again, Joanne pointed out that this is not indicative of the actual figure of the victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is identified as "repeated spousal battering, beat it physical, sexual or mental." Although it does not affect some families it is a reality.

Joanne Lau, chairperson of the SWWS public forum, "The Proposed Domestic Violence Act 1992", held in Kuching in October, shared a typical case of domestic violence, relating the story of Su Ling (fictitious name) who has been married for 20 years.

"She was married in agony with a fractured nose. What had happened? She had come home late after an afternoon session of badminton with her friends which was her routine twice a week. She had rushed home to cook dinner.

"Unfortunately, her husband was home before she got in. A shouting match ensued, followed by an outbreak of violence. This has been going on for the past 15 years. Su Ling has been in and out of hospital with different kinds of injuries and even lodged police reports against her husband.

"That made him angrier and she received more beatings. In the end, she left him. The beatings continued in spasms. One day she called the Women's Crisis Phone, a befriending service run by the SWWS."

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Nationwide, domestic violence reportedly "occurs in one out of every 15 marriages, a rate considered very rampant and high."

Towards this end, the Malaysian government has begun to recognise the desire need to implement the Act and indirectly, it is a step towards moulding its "survival policy" to every Malaysian.

When officiating at the October forum the Assistant Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports Alfred Yap said: "the proposed Domestic Violence Act is a step in the right direction in ensuring a society which upholds the fundamental right of each human being, whether men, women, child or elderly person, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be free from violence.

THERAPY

"In addition, the provision in the proposed Act for those involved in domestic violence, be referred to counselling or rehabilitation therapy actually seeks to enhance the functioning of the family as the basic institutions of the society," he also said in his speech.

He stressed that in this connection, the relevant agencies involved specifically such as the Legal Department, Police Department, Welfare Division and Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Social Development would need to examine the provisions and requirement of the Act to gear themselves for the implementation of the Act.

"Ironically, while society has great intolerance and imposes great sanctions against violence acts from one person to another, person, violence within the family is often viewed differently. As long as children are viewed as property of their parents, women viewed as subordinate to their husbands, the problems of child abuse and wife battering will continue to be "hidden" and the victim of each abuse will continue to suffer in silence," he pointed out.

With these views, the Assistant Minister also urged for values and attitudes to be examined as he opined that "some of the prevailing community attitudes can actually help to perpetuate the problems."

"This takes honesty and courage, and it can be a long process. But when this process succeeds, the problem of domestic violence will no longer be seen as a private matter, instead it will become a public concern," he added.
Enough Is Enough

More Women Are Speaking Up About Violence in the Home

"He beat me every day," recalls Sharidah, 26, a soft-spoken Malaysian factory worker. "He threw knives at me, and broke my leg and poured boiling water on my hands." She pauses to show her crooked limb and scarred fingers. "He didn't give me any money, and we had no food. One night he beat me and threw me out," she continues. "He said if I stayed with him, he would sell me [into prostitution]. It was raining so I waited outside. When he went to work, I packed my bags, took the children and ran away."

Like other women who have fled abusive spouses, Sharidah (not her real name) now lives in a shelter run by the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) in Kuala Lumpur. She feels safe at the facility. Its fences are lined with barbed wire and its walls topped with broken glass. The protection is not meant to deter thieves, but to keep out violent husbands and boyfriends.

Stories like Sharidah's are becoming more common in much of Asia. "Cases of wife beating have increased through the years," says Philippine Congresswoman Teresa Aquino Oreta. Last year the Manila Women's Crisis Centre (WCC) polled four poor neighbourhoods in the city. The findings shocked even the most jaded of social workers. All fifteen of the women questioned said they had been emotionally or physically abused by their husbands at one time or another.

It is hard to know exactly why domestic violence is on the rise. But one thing seems certain: more people are talking about it. To a certain extent, Oreta believes that abuse continues because of the "high regard for family unity" in Asia. Society is reluctant to interfere, she says, "because of its prejudice against meddling in familial affairs." In the Indian community, says Malaysian lawyer L. Raman, "it is socially unacceptable for a woman to leave her husband." And in many areas, popular wisdom holds that if a husband hits his wife, she must have deserved it. Says WAO president Ivy Josiah: "Many people still believe a man has the right to
believe with Pitra's husband and cilrs dcgrcc burns."

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burned. Her eyes, lips and ears were bruised and swollen and she was in a state of shock. Petra's husband had beat her senseless with a stick and poured boiling water on her head.

The kind of violence experienced by Sharidah, K.V. and Petra occurs in all kinds of homes in all kinds of neighbourhoods. "You would like to believe that only poor alcoholics beat for abuse." Last May, for example, the wife of the home secretary of India's Maharashtra state filed a complaint with the police. She accused her husband of "terrible physical and mental cruelty." She says he once beat her for sending a servant to the market without his permission. She also blames him for the loss of one of her kidneys. He had refused to allow her to seek medical treatment because he feared that the doctor might make romantic overtures.

Fortunately, the taboo that has long kept people from talking openly about wife-battering is beginning to erode. Dr. Alfred Choi, a sociologist at the National University of Singapore, says that communities are slowly starting to see wife-beating as "a more serious offence." Adds Mary Yee, deputy chairman of the Befrienders, a voluntary counseling service in Kuala Lumpur: "It is more acceptable now to discuss emotional problems." As a result, record numbers of women are speaking out against battering. More importantly, they're seeking help — at centres like those in Kuala Lumpur and Manila (see box, next page). Malaysian police received 419 reports of domestic violence in 1991, and more than 200 in the first half of this year. Some 100 women call the Manila centre each week. More than half report violent physical assault.

It's impossible to stereotype couples trapped in abusive relationships. But Dr. Abdul Aziz Abdullah, head of psychiatry at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, says the husbands are frequently younger than 40. They "are often dependent on their wives, have low self-esteem and are jealous" of the time

forms of "dowry violence" are also on the rise in India. She suggests that many are reluctant to actually kill wives who bring home a salary. So far, the legal system has failed miserably in bringing justice to dowry crimes. Says Reena Banerjee of Shakti Shalini, a shelter for battered women: "The law has too many loopholes. Police sympathies, especially at the lower levels of the force, are largely with the husband." Many cases, says Hazarika, "end in acquitsals because the witnesses turn hostile. I suspect financial settlements take place through the back door."

One case still haunts the minds of Delhi residents. Thirteen years ago, a pregnant woman named Sashibala was burned to death by her husband. Says Sashibala's mother Satyaran Chadha: "On the day she died I had told her husband that I was not able to buy him the scooter [he wanted] just then. He said: 'In that case, take a last look at your daughter.'" Adds Chadha: "Sometimes I wish I had taken the law into my own hands and killed my daughter's husband."
their wives devote to their children or careers. Some men have a history of alcohol or drug abuse. The battered women tend to become “chronically depressed and anxious.” Many of them grew up in violent families. Most abused women, says Abdul, continue to hope that things will one day get better.

Unfortunately, the legal system offers abused wives limited options. “The culture and the laws are stacked against women,” says Raquel Tiglao, president of Manila’s WCC. “Police usually ignore complaints of battering. They consider it a personal problem between husband and wife.” Uma (not her real name) left her home in Kuala Lumpur after her husband became so violent that she “couldn’t tolerate it.” She went to the police and asked for help. “But,” she says, “they told me, it’s a family dispute.” Admits Hashim Sharat, a superintendent with the Royal Malaysian Police: “Our hands are tied.” His officers can only arrest an offender if he uses a weapon. But most injuries reported, says Hashim, are caused by hitting, slapping, pushing and kicking.

Some women attempt to fend off their husbands’ attacks by asking a court for a restraining order. But such legal protection can be difficult to arrange. In Malaysia, the necessary fees can cost some $1,000. Moreover, a woman must prove physical and medical reports and prove she is under threat of grave and imminent physical violence. Raman advocates “self-help” instead of court action. “Either face up to the man or move to a safe place,” she says. In the past four years, only two of her clients have succeeded in getting their husbands convicted. One man had tried to throw his wife from the thirteenth floor of a building. The other had hit his spouse with a chair, leaving her with a gash that needed 21 stitches.

In Malaysia, the Muslim shariah court system governs family issues such as marriage and divorce. After lodging a complaint with an arbiter, a woman may request a “time out” — a separation of time or space from her husband. Eventually, this can lead to a divorce. Shariah law differs from state to state, but in most cases it metes out punishment to the abusers. Offenders in Kuala Lumpur, for example, face a fine of up to $400 or six months in prison — or both. Non-Muslims seeking divorce in Malaysia must appeal to a reconciliation tribunal. Only if the tribunal certifies that a couple has irreconcilable differences may a woman apply for legal protection from her husband.

New rights for abused women may soon be written into the law books around the region. A women’s group in Malaysia has put together a proposal for a “Domestic Violence Act.” Drafted by activists, religious authorities, attorneys and police, it was submitted to the government in March. If all goes well it will be debated in Parliament before year’s end. The new law, which applies equally to abused men and women, would make it easier to get a restraining order. Says Hashim, the legislation’s co-author, “With the new act, we would have more services to render.”

The Philippines, too, may soon sport a tough anti-abuse law. Congressman Oreta is backing a bill that would “provide a comprehensive program against wife-beating and increase penalties for habitual offenders.” Oreta wrote the legislation after meeting a woman in a beauty salon who was beaten by her husband on the slightest pretext. “I realised such women needed help,” she says. The new law would ensure victims round-the-clock protection. A wife would have the right to demand that her husband move out of their home. In some instances, she would be allowed to collect up to 75% of his pay. If convicted, he would face fines or three months in jail. The bill has already been turned down once by Manila’s male-dominated House of Representatives. But Oreta isn’t giving up. In a marriage, “you can have a lot of fights and a lot of arguments,” she says. “But man-handling should not be an option.”

Some believe that the problem is too complex for laws alone to remedy. Jessie Eustaquio, a Manila attorney who assists victims of domestic violence, thinks that women will still be reluctant to take their husbands to court. The WAO’s Josiah agrees. Malaysia’s proposed legislation, she says, would merely serve as “a Band-aid to stop the threat of immediate violence and remove the person from the home. We want this law to be passed, but public education is equally important.”

In many ways, domestic abuse is a personal expression of the public oppression millions of women face daily. Because it often occurs between people who actually love each other, it is also one of the most tragic forms of violence. Josiah laments that Malaysians are ready to protect abused children, but not abused wives. “There is no respect for women. They are [treated as] second-class citizens.” More important than law, she says, is “a change of attitude.” Sums up attorney Raman: “Nobody has the right to hit anybody else. Violence is unacceptable. It is not the answer to any problem.”

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"Many people still believe a man has the right to beat his wife")
Menstruation is a problem because it is considered 'dirty' or 'unclean'. Menstruating Muslim women cannot touch the Quran and Indians are not allowed to go into temples while the Chinese believe it brings bad luck. This entirely natural phenomenon is seen as perverse and almost evil. Interestingly, there is no corresponding taboo against semen.

The problem of women's bodies is contrasted with the superiority of men's bodies. Indeed the argument that women are physically inferior to men is an excuse which has been used to deny women equal access to opportunities and self-determination.

In the late nineteenth century, women were not allowed into higher education because it was feared that women would break their health with the arduous mental labour of studying.

The pathology of hysteria was and continues to be unique to women. In medieval Europe, it was thought to be the wandering womb which rose into the throat of a girl and choked her. It was assumed that unmarried women and widows suffered most from hysteria, and that a good husband could fix it.

The outbreak of mass hysteria among factory workers in a shoe factory in Malacca in 1977 was well documented in the media. Much was made of supernatural explanations but little was mentioned of the worker's frustration at low wages (RM3 a day) and strict rules or their fear of the male production supervisors.

Possibly the best gems about women's physical inferiority to men came from Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. The cornerstone of Freudian theory is that a woman is a castrated man and thus suffers from 'penis envy'.

Man is the complete body and woman is lacking.

Therefore the logical conclusion is that she must have a guardian or a patron who would protect her from the cruel world, from other men, from her own neurosis, for her own good.

The male protection has a flip side. Once a woman ceases to be an independent being, she becomes a wholly-owned subsidiary.

One social institution that enforces this concept of women being the property of men is marriage. 'Bride price' is very much a commercial transaction where a husband buys a wife like any other piece of property. It is still practised today in some Indian and African communities.

Chinese families traditionally viewed daughters to be held as property 'in trust' until she was transferred into the family of her husband.

The laws on rape were formed via the circuitous route of this concept of ownership. The very definition of rape means the 'theft of virginity' which signals it as a law basically to stop men stealing each other's property.

The theft of a daughter's virginity made her damaged goods and meant the loss of the daughter's fair price on the market. Even today, an intact hymen is a valuable commodity.

Rape within marriage was not recognised as a crime because it was viewed as the equivalent of a man stealing his own property. (Malaysian courts recognise the offence of rape within marriage only when the couple has been legally separated.)

The Ten Commandments conspicuously misses out "Thou shall not rape" but it does warn against coveting thy neighbour's wife, lumped along with his house, field, ox and ass. She is a chattel as much as the other objects of his possession.

The concept of women's bodies being the property of men still has resonance today. In today's consumer culture, 'sex appeal' in the form of women's bodies is used to sell everything from cars to alcohol.

The joke "If I buy the product, will I get the girl too?" sums up how advertisers use the psychology of female bodies as objects to be possessed and used. The epitaphism 'long cool Dane' refers both to the blond as well as the beer.
The politics of beauty, as feminist scholars have called it, involves consumerism, power and the objectification of women’s bodies.

How many times have we seen that scene when a stunning woman walks into the room and all the men whistle enviously, “You’re a lucky guy” to her escort? Feminine beauty is a male trophy; something which proclaims a man’s own prowess in conquering an exotic prize.

Yet the dynamics of women and beauty is more complex than the simple imposition of a set of values and expectations. What do women themselves think? Plenty of them want to wear make-up or look attractive. They are not coerced to do so, the argument runs.

Author Naomi Wolf calls it the “Beauty Myth.” Other feminist scholars like Germaine Greer have analysed how the consumer culture woos women as the Ultimate Consumer.

Apart from buying most of the goods a household uses, women are a whole market by themselves. They are encouraged to buy into the dominant image of feminine beauty. With mass advertising everywhere, one sees how women are exhorted to be consumers of products that will make themselves more physically appealing.

From make-up to washing liquid that will leave your hands soft and without wrinkles, women are sold an image of beauty to aspire to. That image is always demure, slim, fair of skin and high cheek-boned. Anyone who does not fit into this stereotype is made to feel dowdy and deficient.

A book called Fat Is A Feminist Issue was published in the 70s. It has become the classic text for the argument that women face a subtle but persistent coercion to be thin and beautiful.

It concluded that the women have to put on the agenda the right to self-determination.

“The personal is political” is perhaps one of the most far-reaching illuminations that the women’s movement has brought us.

It is the idea that all the instances of inequality against women are not merely a huge coincidence. Rather there is institutionalised discrimination against women as a group.

As individuals we must examine our own lives. We have to be critical of norms and the status quo which are largely taken for granted. Asking ‘why?’ is the first step to asking ‘what can we do?’

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**BECAUSE WE’RE WOMEN**

Because woman’s work is never done and is underpaid or unpaid or boring or repetitious and we’re the first to get the sack and what we look like is more important than what we do and if we get raped it’s our fault and if we get bashed we must have provoked it and if we raise our voices we’re nagging bitches and if we enjoy sex we’re nymphos and if we don’t we’re frigid and if we love women it’s because we can’t get a “real” man and if we ask our doctor too many questions we’re neurotic and/or pushy and if we expect community care for children we’re selfish and if we stand up for our rights we’re aggressive and “unfeminine” and if we don’t we’re typical weak females and if we want to get married we’re out to trap a man and if we don’t we’re unnatural and because we still can’t get walk on the moon and if we can’t cope or don’t want a pregnancy we’re made to feel guilty about abortion and... for lots and lots of other reasons we are part of the women’s liberation movement.

— Joyce Stevens

(Written for Women’s Liberation Broadsheet, International Women’s Day, 1975)

**SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE**

By CHAN YUEN-LI
SOME GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS .......

Unclaimed prizes

Two unclaimed prizes from our lottery sale is still up for sale at bargain prices.

Sanyo Rice Cooker - $80/=  
(Medium size, market value $130)

Fuji Instamatic Camera - $70/=  
(market value $130)

Interested, please call Margaret Bedus, tel: 455614

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SWWS Weekend Getaway,

We are organizing a weekend relaxation time on 27th and 28th July in Camp Permai. This is open to all members for us to have an opportunity to get to know each other better, and to burn away our tensions and stresses.

On Sunday morning, the 27th, we welcome members to do some reflection together on upcoming programs in SWWS. Your thoughts to this is warmly encouraged.

Please contact Margaret Bedus or Lee Kwan to indicate your interest. Hopefully in the next two weeks.

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Editorial comment

This issue of the newsletter is a collective effort but still a long way to go in terms of improving our quality. Therefore, we are working out a system where members can volunteer to work on an issue and we will rotate the involvement. We welcome comments and feedback.

Many thanks and happy reading....