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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Prevention and intervention: family-centred proactive approaches

Most programmes around the world involved with women and girls and related issues tend to weigh heavily on the atrocities that befall them, the evils and negativism that surround the girl child and how we can fight them and get organized to stop these crimes. It is, in short, a “disaster management approach”. While these approaches need to continue in present circumstances and situations, there is an urgent need to engage in long-term systemic approaches that foster an empowerment paradigm that is proactive, culture-based and family-centred.

Distinguishing characteristics of violence

In general:

- Violence is a multifaceted, hydra-headed human experience that wreaks havoc on its victims/survivors.
- As culture, traditions and values are passed on to successive generations, so too is violence. It is intergenerational and systemic; in short, families repeat themselves.
- Gender-based violence occurs both in the private and public spheres. Data indicate that there is more violence in families than in communities at large.
- Violence against women is not particular to any given socioeconomic class or region but prevalent in varying degrees across the socioeconomic spectrum in different parts of the world.
- Violence is addictive.
- Violence is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Salient considerations with regard to violence against women and girls:

- In many societies and from ancient times, females were considered a liability, with their rights not met and their expectations and wishes denied or curtailed.
- Violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women and a powerful social mechanism by which women are forced into subordination.
- Violence in the form of deprivation in all its forms often takes place within the family, community, workplace and religion.
- There is a preference for males over females.
- There is an absence of historical data that indicate discrimination against women (where, how and why it happened).
- Violence, irrespective of the degree and nature, has serious consequences and has often led to suicide.

The way forward: a proactive approach

Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, with its 26 years of experience working with families at different social levels in different countries of

the world, observes that family is the missing link in programmes related to preventing violence against women and girls and needs to be urgently addressed in all development programmes. The organization recognizes that family breakdown is a major contributing factor to violence, which, if protracted and frequent, can become addictive because of vulnerability and dependence within the family system. Such behaviour becomes an implicit model for the next generation. Families repeat themselves.

It is from these experiences that Service and Research Institute on Family and Children offers its family-centred approach, in which intergenerational and cultural components are recognized. On the basis of these experiences, the organization has developed an innovative approach to reducing violence against women and girls in the family and the community.

What is family-centred practice?

Family-centred practice is based on a radical set of principles, values and beliefs that recognize the critical role of the family as a constant focus in preventing violence. It offers therapeutic counselling services during recovery. Family-centred practice involves working with families from a strengths-based perspective, relying and building on the resources within the family itself. Such an approach employs an empowerment paradigm and develops collaborative partnership and dialogue within families. Families are essential to humanity's future and are indispensable social units in addressing violence against women and girls/children in the family and the community. In most social circumstances, the state of the family reflects the fragmentation of society — its strengths and its weaknesses. Mahatma Gandhi said that the state of a nation was reflected in the state of its families. Hence, strengthening the quality of families is an intrinsic and highly proactive approach to reducing and eliminating violence against women and girls in the family, the community and the larger society.

Concrete programmes envisaged by Service and Research Institute on Family and Children

- Counselling prior to marriage
- Parenting
- At least two years of six-monthly follow-up after marriage
- Teaching fertility awareness, sexuality education to adolescents, young adults and the Billings ovulation method of natural family planning to prospective and married couples for birth spacing and control
- Therapeutic counselling for individuals, couples and families
- Projects at the village level in India, including poverty reduction
- Study on the prevalence of violence in families in India

Service and Research Institute on Family and Children will be able to launch another study (which is in preparation) on the intergenerational transmission of negativism and violence towards women and girls in India. This study can be enlarged to a cross-cultural study on violence in other countries. The outcome reports will significantly contribute to a clearer understanding of the problem(s) involved and

offer the United Nations, multinational agencies, Governments, leadership groups and society at large a rationale for policymaking and implementation.

Recommendation

Service and Research Institute on Family and Children strongly recommends that urgent attention be paid in research to the role of the media and their influence with regard to violence in society, with a focus on women.
