

When the safety of the haven is breached...

The word "*Kutumbam*" brings to mind words like love, care, a sense of security and belonging; while "*vanmurai*" paints an exactly opposite picture of pain, betrayal and insecurity. It is indeed hard to imagine that these two contrasting words can actually be put together to represent the reality that 1 in 5 married Indian women face today. The workshop on Domestic Violence conducted for unorganised sector women workers on Friday, 5th December 2008, began with this grim reality. The workshop was a joint initiative of International Foundation for Prevention of Crime and Victim Care (PCVC) and The Prajnya Trust, conducted as part of The Prajnya 16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence.

The workshop explored the myths and facts relating to this form of gender violence and also analysed its impact on survivors, including women and children. The 13 participants which included women domestic workers, SHG members and NGO workers, sent in by three organisations - Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR), Kaingkarya and ARUWE - were more than happy to find a space where they could discuss this common problem they all faced and share their personal experiences as well.

Stressing that a violent response **cannot** be justified, no matter what the wife has done, the workshop also discussed the common "excuses" and real reasons behind incidents of domestic violence. It also went on to explore non-physical violence, like the "silent treatment", verbal abuse, blaming and emotional blackmail, control over every aspect of a woman's life, including her familial contacts, restrictions on her movements and even choice of clothing. The women could relate to all these examples and experienced a sense of solidarity that they were not alone, but at the same time agreed that just because it is common, it should not be dismissed as "a natural part of married life". The profound impact it has on the women, other family members and especially children needs to be taken seriously and dealt with accordingly.

Considering that many of the participants could not read and write, the workshop used methodologies like case-studies, diagrammatic presentations, group work and film screenings to get the messages across in an easy and effective way. It was heartening for the organisers to learn that some of the women had taken leave from the houses where they work, even missing a day's wage, in order to attend the workshop and found it worthwhile at the end of the day.

As one woman said, "*if only I had known more about this earlier and sought support, my life would not have got ruined.*" But everybody agreed that all was not lost, they had got a better understanding of the issue and were now equipped with information. They all eagerly took down the helpline number 43111143 saying they would pass it around to anybody in need of it.

Please find Photos below in the next page



Sudaroli addressing domestic workers at the domestic violence workshop organised by Prajnya and PCVC



Domestic workers attending a workshop on domestic violence organised by Prajnya and PCVC