

*“Love does not kill, it does not attack, it does not control.
True love liberates!”*



**TRAINING REFLECTION
July and August 2021**

Family Violence during the Pandemic

Introduction

Domestic violence is one of the saddest issues on earth. The place where people should feel safest, in their own home, often becomes a place of great pain.

We also know that during the current COVID-19 pandemic, this type of violence has increased terribly. It is for this reason that we are offering you this training reflection, in the hope that you and the people you serve can contribute to the healthy management of this crisis.

Lockdown measures have often led to intensified tensions over security, health and money. Last April, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for peace in homes around the world, and urged all governments to include prevention and action to combat violence against women in their national response plans for COVID-19. More than 140 governments have supported his call.

We will begin by giving you some figures we have compiled to give you an idea of the scale of this problem, which particularly affects women and girls.

In the last 12 months:

- 243 million women and girls, aged 15-49, have experienced some form of violence in their own homes.
- 137 women were murdered by a close family member every single day.
- The number of telephone calls for help for domestic violence has increased by 500%.
- Globally, 35% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or sexual violence perpetrated by someone other than an intimate partner.
- Less than 40% of women who experienced violence have sought any kind of help.
- Fifteen million adolescent girls aged 15-19 have experienced forced sex worldwide.



Intra-family Violence

The reasons for violence within families can be very diverse. Sadly, they are not new, and sometimes all family members may be part of the problem, meaning victims and perpetrators are intertwined.

Violence can have many faces, for example:

- Physical
- Psychological (direct insults or insults through other people)
- Economic (only one person manages the family's money, often using it in illogical ways)

Some of the most frequent causes are:

1. Strong machismo, where the man considers that he has every right to impose his will, especially within his family.
2. The low self-esteem of the victims, who believe that they are not worthy of having an opinion or making decisions for themselves.
3. Mismanaged stress that every human being can suffer from. Its origin can be economic, health-based, emotional, etc.
4. Experiences people have had in the early years of their lives, such as experiencing violence within their family, at school, in their neighbourhood, in their city or country.

We often notice or hear in the news that domestic violence has increased significantly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason may well be understandable in the face of the stress that this crisis has generated in a large number of families.

In many countries, children and young people have been unable to go to school for more than a year now. Many adults have lost their jobs, or are forced to work from home. Those of us who have remained indoors are feeling the strain of being under lockdown, while many of those who have to go out to work know the risk they run every day. In addition, many of us carry a lot of grief for the death of loved ones: family members, friends, neighbours, etc.

Some tips on how to deal with it

As volunteers, we are often in direct contact with a large number of women or children, so we would like to give you some ideas on how to deal with this huge challenge. We hope that by working alone or in your groups, you will be able to add to this list of suggestions.

In the volunteer-beneficiary relationship: It is of utmost importance to have a dialogue with the people we serve through our activities, and **listening** is the most important part of our communication.

Many expert psychologists mention that it is important to be aware that we can listen to people not only through words, but also by observing their behaviour:



- a) Expressions
- b) Silences
- c) Changes of attitude
- d) Etc.

If there is a sign that the person with whom we are interacting has a problem, we think it would be a good idea to approach them to see if it is possible for them to open up and talk to us about their situation.

The simple act of listening to a vulnerable person and taking an interest in them could be a great gift. Therefore, as volunteers, let us always think that we could be a good instrument of God and bring some peace to this person.

Talking to them about God and their dignity as his children would be a good point to include in our conversation.

Here are some guidelines that we consider useful for raising awareness or dealing with possible situations of domestic violence. We will look at three different approaches:

- Preventing it
- Reducing it
- Protecting people when they can't find a way out

Preventing violence within a family:

- ✓ Observe the interaction within the family, trying to detect their moods.
- ✓ Plan actions for change in case we detect depression, sadness, frustration, or something similar.
- ✓ Work directly with the person:
 - Take an interest in them: ask if they want to talk, or ask for something in particular.
 - If we consider it prudent, talk to them about God, about how loved we are by Him because we are His favourite children.
 - Tell them how much we care about them and what we admire about them.
- ✓ Organise activities at home, such as:
 - Family games that are appropriate for the ages of the members of the family,
 - Doing a jigsaw puzzle together,
 - Choosing a film together and then discussing it,
 - Encouraging conversations within the family,
 - Meetings with friends via Zoom, etc.

Reducing violence within a family:

If we have already detected violence within the home, we could start by carrying out any of the actions mentioned above.



In addition, we suggest:

- ✓ Reflecting with the family that we are all valuable human beings and that we can face any difficult situation.
- ✓ Proposing support with the help of psychologists and/or social workers.
- ✓ Talking to the person who is perpetrating the violence, explaining the discomfort that it is generating within the family.
- ✓ If the violence continues in spite of this, start setting barriers or limits that will not be tolerated. Think in advance what these actions could be (e.g. standing up and leaving the place where the perpetrator is interacting).
- ✓ Looking for the root causes of violence within the home and then planning solutions.
- ✓ Be aware that violence is usually not continuous. A possible cycle is:
 1. Insecurity of the aggressor and the person who is assaulted
 2. The aggressor looks for and/or finds a motive, and harasses the victim, generating pressure
 3. An explosion of violence
 4. Regret or feelings of guilt, even if they are not expressed
 5. Calm

Sadly, this cycle often repeats itself over and over again...

Protecting victims of violence:

If we have exhausted all possible solutions, we need to take the next step.

First, we should think about reaching out to victims. We can show empathy through active listening. We can encourage them to have self-confidence and remove any possibility for them to feel guilty for the causes.

In addition, we think that as volunteers we should have the details of a safe place at hand in case the victims do not have the option of staying with a family member or friend.

Such shelters exist in many countries.

Some recommendations made by the UN to the governments of each country:

- Increase investment in online support services and civil society organisations.
- Ensure that judicial systems continue to prosecute abusers.
- Establish emergency alert systems in pharmacies and grocery shops.
- Declare shelters as essential services.
- Create safe ways for women to seek support without alerting their abusers.
- Prevent the release of prisoners convicted of any form of violence against women.
- Expand public awareness campaigns, particularly those targeting men and boys.



Conclusion and work for reflection in groups:

The support we can give victims is fundamental.

It would not be fair or prudent to turn a blind eye, thinking that it is not our problem.

We suggest that you reflect on the following points in your groups:

1. What has this reflection made you think about?
2. What practical actions can you think of that could be implemented to tackle this form of poverty?
3. Has your group identified possible shelters in your city for victims of violence?



Here are a few AIC projects linked to the issue of domestic violence as a consequence of the pandemic:

▪ **ITALY, Torino: “Nobody is a foreigner”**

In a building in the city of Turin, 40 families who have arrived from all over the world, mainly single mothers with small children, learn to live together and integrate into society with the help of AIC volunteers. In order to promote their integration, independence and inclusion in the world of work, the volunteers offer various services: personal support, language courses, professional training, help with administrative procedures and various activities to promote integration. For the children, homework help and recreational activities are also provided.



Mothers are welcomed in the listening centre and follow different paths with psychologists and social workers. When a particular emergency situation arises, e.g. a case of domestic violence, the volunteers collaborate with the competent authorities to find sheltered accommodation.

With the pandemic, situations of domestic violence have greatly increased, which has required increased mobilisation of volunteers to provide targeted support to women who are victims of this kind of abuse.

▪ **ITALY, Rome: “Against all kinds of violence”**



After realising that the pandemic had led to an increase in situations of violence, particularly domestic violence, a group of AIC volunteers in Rome decided to start a new project to care for victims of violence. Most of them are fragile and vulnerable people who live in a context of family distress and/or violence, and suffer from addictions. Many of them are women.

To this end, the volunteers are preparing the opening of a listening centre in which they will work alongside professionals from the psychological and legal fields. The aim is to help the people who come to the centre by including them in a protection network of volunteers, psychologists and lawyers.

In setting up this project, the volunteers were inspired by a similar project that already exists in Sicily, in the city of Trapani. The volunteers who run this project pointed them to a network of professionals working in Rome who could share their experience and knowledge in offering people the psychological and legal support.



Other projects to combat domestic violence

- **CAMEROON, Léra: “Education to fight against early marriages”**

This project aims to promote the education of adolescent girls in rural areas of Cameroon. To pay for their studies, they are encouraged to engage in income-generating activities such as the collective cultivation of an onion field. The schooling of these girls enables them to escape early marriage and at the same time turns them into local “leaders”.



- **PHILIPPINES, Calauan: “Gardening training for young victims of sexual abuse”**

Thirty girls who have suffered sexual abuse and been placed in a government-run centre have learned how to grow vegetable gardens, following training offered by AIC volunteers.

Before the pandemic, the volunteers gave them spiritual, educational and psychological support during their weekly visits, a way of creating emotional bonds with these children who suffer from being away from their families.

During the pandemic and the lockdown, all visits and outings were forbidden, so the girls were especially appreciative of the garden, the maintenance of which became one of their daily activities. Twenty different vegetables and fruits have been grown and the garden has been expanded.



If you have set up a Vincentian service in your country or area to help victims of domestic violence, increased by the COVID-19 pandemic, please share your experience with us by sending information to the following address: gvergaramacip@gmail.com

