



SYMPOSIUM 2001: GENDER VIOLENCE, HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN THE AMERICAS
Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico, June 4th - 7th 2001

PRESENTATION:

It is estimated that up to 50% of women in Latin America and the Caribbean suffer some type of violence in the home, and this does not include other forms of violence affecting women and girls in other settings. Gender violence systematically infringes on the human rights of women, affecting them throughout the entire cycle of their lives. The impact of this violence on the health of women and girls is critical, and the effects on their mental and physical states cannot be ignored. It is important to emphasize that gender violence does not only have an impact within the private sphere, but it also affects social, economic, cultural and educational conditions in the overall society. For these reasons, it is vitally important to address violence against women by linking it to public health and human rights, and from a perspective focusing on equality without regard to gender, socioeconomic level, ethnicity or age.

Symposium 2001 is a forum for bringing together governmental and nongovernmental organizations working in favor of women's equality, public health and human rights. *Symposium 2001* will present the opportunity to learn about and exchange experiences from across the hemisphere that deal with strategies, public policies, programs, research and case studies and that have assisted in making progress in eradicating gender violence and strengthening the rights of women and children. At this forum plans and strategies at the regional and subregional levels will be designed for facilitating and accelerating the response from the region's health sector, with the aim of preventing and eradicating gender violence, within an intersector and interdisciplinary framework.

It is recognized that the health sector has a privileged position for detecting cases of domestic and sexual violence in a timely way. Women who have suffered this violence can be connected with health processes, the judicial system and integrated services that permit access to information and resources for finding a way out of the violent situation, all within a framework in which citizen participation is enhanced and women are empowered. Given the magnitude and impact of gender violence, it is the responsibility of the health sector to create optimal conditions for detecting cases of violence and for providing the victims with support and guidance. Nevertheless, experience has shown that health personnel are frequently unfamiliar with methods for recognizing when violence has occurred and for assisting the women who have experienced such violence.

Because of all of the above, *Symposium 2001's* primary aim is to contribute toward strengthening the health sector's capacity for addressing gender violence, from a perspective of women's human rights and public health.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS:

During the last two decades the women's movement has denounced the enormous impact of gender violence on women's lives and has initiated the work of sensitizing the public and assisting victims. This has involved creating links with governments and international organizations such as the United Nations to see that States belonging to that organization recognize the dimension of the problem and the need to confront it. These efforts have begun to break through the "culture of silence" maintained around gender violence. The issue has been addressed in forums for public debate, where it has become indispensable to acknowledge that "every woman has the right to be

free from violence in both the public and private spheres" (Convention of Belem do Para, Article 3).

Gender violence came to be established as a violation of human rights at the international level as a result of the Conference of Human Rights in Vienna (1993) and the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the latter of which defines violence against women as: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

The approbation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women "Convention of Belem Do Para" (OAS, 1994) was fundamental for Latin American countries. Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) established obligations for protecting girls and female adolescents from all types of violence, abuse and sexual exploitation. The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo (1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) clearly established the framework for women's human rights and emphasized that violence against women and girls in all of its expressions constitutes an obstacle to their full participation in development and prevents them from fully enjoying their rights. In addition, gender violence was proclaimed by the General Assembly of the World Health Organization (1996) to be a public health priority.

All of these international instruments oblige the States which have signed them to promote public programs, services and budgets to fulfill what has been agreed upon.

Symposium 2001 is part of the "A Life without Violence: it's Our Right" campaign launched by UNIFEM in 1997 in coordination with other United Nations agencies with the objective of firmly placing gender violence on the public agenda as a health and human rights issue. It is hoped that the present forum will contribute toward the development of an integral vision of the problem to be used in promoting and implementing specific strategies by participating countries in the areas of health policies and programs and in intervention and prevention of gender violence.

GOALS:

- To hold a forum for exchanging experiences related to public policies, services, training and communication strategies aimed at preventing and eradicating gender violence in the region's countries.
- To identify strategies for strengthening the role of the health sector in detecting, addressing and preventing gender violence, in coordination with other government sectors and with the civil society, particularly specialized women's groups.
- To strengthen cooperative links with regard to this issue among governments, nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations, with the objective of enhancing the specific follow-up plans on gender violence, health and rights to be developed during the Symposium.

THE SYMPOSIUM'S PROGRAM WILL INCLUDE:

- Panels in which innovative experiences in health policies and programs related to the prevention of gender violence will be presented.
- Subregional Working Groups for developing action plans and follow-up strategies.

- Exhibition of materials, giving participants the opportunity to share experiences and tools developed by their institutions.

SPONSORED BY:

- United Nations Organizations:
 - United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
 - United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
 - United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
 - Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)
 - United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
- Canadian Center for Research on Women's Health / WHO Collaborating Center
- Inter-American Commission of Women, of the Organization of American States (CIM/OAS)
- Feminist Network of Latin America and the Caribbean Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (*Red Feminista Latinoamericana y del Caribe Contra la Violencia Doméstica y Sexual*, Isis International)
- Women's Health Network of Latin America and the Caribbean (*Red de Salud de las Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe—RSMLAC*)

ORGANIZERS:

The organization of this event is under the general direction of the regional group of cosponsors listed, in close collaboration with their offices in Mexico. The Local Coordination Group has the consent and support of the Mexican government, in coordination with the National Women's Institute (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres*), the Health Department and the Foreign Relations Department.

Technical and logistical support is being provided by two nongovernmental organizations that make up the Secretariat for *Symposium 2001*.

The event's languages will be English and Spanish, and all the presentations in plenary sessions will be simultaneously translated.

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