

CYPRUS

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The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family was founded in 1990 in Nicosia, Cyprus and is a non-profit, non-governmental organization targeting to promote effective public services to the problem of domestic violence. The Association is managed by the Board of Directors that approves the services offered to the public such as activities and programs.

As such, the goals of the association include the prevention of domestic violence, the provision of direct help to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, the provision of housing (shelter) and protection to victims of domestic violence and their children, theoretical and practical training to people who are interested in voluntarily supporting the victims of domestic violence, informing and sensitizing, not just the appropriate governmental bodies, but also the public about domestic violence as well as identifying deficiencies or weaknesses of the relevant laws and legislations and submitting suggestions to the appropriate governmental bodies.

Nevertheless, the main keystone of the association's available services is the program 'Love without hurt', which is an intervention program designed to help perpetrators and victims of domestic violence, thus it targets to engage not only individuals but couples too. The program aims to teach people compassion and self-compassion techniques, designed to strengthen relations with loved ones and weaken negative thoughts and feelings, such as anger and frustration. To activate and strengthen this positive inner self, people shift their attention towards their self-worth to become stronger due to self-enhancement which stems from empathy and which is then exhibited towards oneself and others. In addition, the person can automatically overcome their negative mood, by composing a positive response that reinforces self-worth whenever negative feelings occur.

In general, the program's goals are to train people to prevent negative thoughts and feelings that may lead to violent behavior, prevent teaching their children violent behaviors identify and prevent violent acts to recuperate from emotional pain and abuse through the practice of specific self-healing techniques and communication skills.

Supplementary, 'Love without hurt' takes the form of a biannual psycho-educational program, which is devised to decrease the use of violence in the family. It is in the structure of seminars twice a week for a period of 12 -14 weeks, including compassion empowerment as well as in class focus on the inner child.

However, due to the lack of funding, within the last four years, the program has occurred only six times despite the public's great enthusiasm as well as other authorities' interest for running the program in various settings. Nonetheless, the main success of the program, apart from 'HEALS' exercise, which when practiced, enables people to shift from the system of unpleasant feelings to the system of self-worth, is the inclusion of relationship improvement classes which focus on communication skills.

As far as it concerns the obstacles faces within the last four years, it is assumed that the biggest barrier regarding violence prevention has possibly been the fact that getting help is still considered a taboo. Thus, the male population in the class is still somewhat less than the

female population. It would seem that women are apparently keener to get help with marital problems than men are. Fortunately, the legal system in Cyprus has been ammended since 2004 in order to force perpetrators to attend violence rehabilitation programs. The problem however comes when enforcing such laws and implementing them.

Thus far, 'Love without hurt' is the only program that deals with domestic violence in Cyprus and the Association for Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family is the only organization that runs educational seminars which are preventative, educating the public on domestic violence and assisting victims to deal with it.

As it is apparent, the program can easily be implemented in other countries when staffed by professional psychologists committed to bring change due to its benefits, while no other program offers compassion versus self-compassion techniques as well as communication skills, which are precious tools not only for enhancing human relationships but offering and promising healthy individual and familial life style.

At this point, advertising the program and ensuring it is properly enforced legally in the system is the first step. Perpetrators who are imprisoned for a substantial period of time will reconsider committing violent acts for a second or third time. The punishment must fit the crime.

The public needs to become better aware of what domestic violence is and that it is illegal. In particular, victims need to be educated on their rights and what they can do if they are faced with domestic violence as well as children to be educated of the dangers of violence and furthermore receive compassion programs in the school system as part of a weekly routine. Campaigns to eliminate the taboos and bring perpetrators in to voice their need for help and therapy is the number one target.