

Anti-domestic violence workshop focuses on peripheral women

Disadvantaged women need to receive more attention and protection through the implementation of the country's first anti-domestic violence law ratified over a year ago, according to a workshop held on Aug. 9 in Beijing.

The workshop, jointly organized by UN Women, Equality NGO (Weiping) and Women's Network against AIDS (WNAC), allowed dozens of participants from UN agencies, governments, academic centers and grass-root organizations to exchange views about how to protect marginalized women suffering from AIDS, disabilities, abuse and violence.

According to Yuan Wenli, Secretary-General of WNAC, in China, almost half of the women living with HIV have undergone at least one form of domestic violence, the rate being about 23 percent higher than the number of ordinary women so affected.

"Disadvantaged women, such as, women living with HIV, are often more susceptible to violence and harm, and are more easily ignored," said, Julie Broussard, country program manager of UN Women China.

"To achieve the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment, stakeholders must pay close attention to disadvantaged groups, and speed up action."

Feng Yuan, co-founder of the charity organization Equality and Coordinator of the project funded by United Nations Trust Fund, said her research indicated that concerns over domestic violence have been showing signs of abating.

Pertinent reports and micro-blogs concerning domestic violence reached 1,454 during the first half this year, while, last year it was 4,186. The figure also fell from 615 to 376 in March year-on-year, when China's legislative and political advisory bodies held their annual meetings, known as the "two sessions."

China's anti-domestic violence law has empowered those threatened by domestic violence to file for court restraining orders within 48 hours. Once the order is mandated, it is effective for six months. Any violators of the order will face a fine of 1,000 yuan (US\$152.6) or detention of up to 15 days.

According to the Supreme People's Court, courts at all levels in the country had issued 1,284 orders by June, this year.

However, while briefing on the research, Feng revealed that the problems, such as, insufficient promulgation of gender equality in remote and underdeveloped regions, problems with victim privacy, unfriendly service attitudes and twisted views of domestic violence, still discourage women falling prey to domestic violence to seek legal protection.

WNAC representative Ming Mei said, research samples among women living near

the border between China's Yunnan Province and Myanmar have shown that those who found to be HIV positive probably undergo more domestic violence, which, to a certain extent, may result in severe and enduring depression.

According to Yuan, some victims of domestic violence have to put up with the bullying, abuse and stigma because they are not economically independent while the continuous insults and assaults have led to loss of personal dignity. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure they receive support, encouragement and hope.

Zhou Kai, National Program Officer of UNAIDS, said relevant authorities and organizations should form a concerted frontline to help disadvantaged women escape the shackle of domestic violence and prevent further bullying and abuse when they resort to public assistances. One of the services she exemplified is the buttressing of healthcare institutions.

"Doctors should ask more than simply prescribing medicines to people suspected of encountering domestic violence," Zhou explained.

Guo Ruixiang, Program Coordinator of UN Women in China, called for the Chinese government to accept major accountability by involving the entire society in enforcing the anti-domestic violence law to prevent the victims from being further hurt while speaking out to call for help.