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“UN Women works on several fronts towards ending violence against women and girls. This includes tackling its main root: gender inequality.” -- UN Women [Unifem.org]

“Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence — yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.” — UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon

“Gender-based violence may involve intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or strangers. Though it was long regarded a private matter, it is now recognized by the international community as a violation of human rights, rooted in women’s subordinate status.” -- United Nations Population Fund

Monthly Theme: The Costs and Causes of Gender-based Violence

Violence against women includes, but is not limited to, domestic violence, rape and human trafficking.

- **Domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence.** Based on survey data from UN Women, between 10 per cent of women in some countries and 69 per cent in others are subjected to domestic violence.
- **Sexual violence by non-partners** is also a common form of gender-based violence in many parts of the world.
- **Human trafficking**, sometimes called the “largest slave trade in history,” is overtaking drug smuggling as one of the world’s fastest growing illegal enterprises. The majority of victims are female.

The Impact of World-wide Violence Against Women

- Worldwide, an estimated **one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime.**
- **One in three will have been beaten,** coerced into sex or otherwise abused, usually by a family member or an acquaintance.
- More often than not, perpetrators go unpunished.
- Each year, hundreds of thousands of women and children are trafficked and enslaved, millions more are subjected to harmful practices.
- **Violence kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer.** And its toll on women’s health surpasses that of traffic accidents and malaria combined.
- In **102 countries there are no specific legal provisions against domestic violence, and marital rape is not a prosecutable offense in at least 53 nations.**
In addition to the emotional and physical costs, the economic cost of violence against women is considerable, and “impoverishes individuals, families and communities, reducing the economic development of each nation.” [http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php)

- In India, a survey showed that for each incidence of violence, women lost an average of 7 working days.
- A study of abused women in Managua, Nicaragua, found that abused women earned 46 per cent less than women who did not suffer abuse, even after controlling for other factors that affect earnings.

**When the Law is No Help**

In many societies, the legal system and community attitudes add to the trauma that rape survivors experience. “Women are often held responsible for the violence against them, and in many places laws contain loopholes which allow the perpetrators to act with impunity. In a number of countries, a rapist can go free under the Penal Code if he proposes to marry the victim.”

--UN Women

Our featured program this month addresses the problem of gender-based violence in Cambodia, a society in which women are considered inferior, and where laws do not protect women nearly enough. For example, laws to prevent sex trafficking of females in Cambodia are few or not enforced.

“Lotus Outreach rejects the Cambodian assumption that women are inherently less valuable than men . . . improving the circumstances of one woman provides an exponential return for her family, her community and her nation.”--Lotus Outreach International

Some graduates of Lotus Outreach International's programs for victims of violence learn a skill and support their entire families.
United Nations Millennium Development Goals
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight objectives designed by the UN to improve social and economic conditions in developing countries by the end of 2015. Each month we focus on the MDGs impacted by our theme and our monthly featured project.

This month we highlight MDG #3, recognizing its impact on the other 7 Goals.

MDG Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
“Gender-based violence is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. The cost to women, their children, families and communities is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, achieving gender equality and meeting the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Violence is a traumatic experience for any man or woman, but gender-based violence is preponderantly inflicted by men on women and girls. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.”

--www.unifem.org

Grant-making to Eliminate Gender-based Violence
In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly established the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women. The Trust Fund is managed by UN Women and is the only multilateral grant-making mechanism that supports local, national and regional efforts to combat violence.

Since it began operations in 1997, the Trust Fund has awarded more than $19 million to 263 initiatives to address violence against women in 115 countries.

Raising awareness of women’s human rights, these UN Women-supported efforts have linked activists and advocates from all parts of the world; shown how small, innovative projects impact laws, policies and attitudes; and has begun to break the wall of silence by moving the issue onto public agendas everywhere.

Meeting the Challenges
Among the ways to combat violence against women are:

- Providing counseling and support of victims and safe havens away from abusers
- Financial assistance via micro-credit and micro-loans to victims and at-risk females to ensure they are self-sufficient
- Providing education and job skills training to victims to empower them
- Aftercare and support of victims’ reintegration into society through individual and group counseling
- Advocacy on the local, national, and international levels, to change the laws that fail to punish male abusers, rapists and traffickers, and to ensure all women achieve equal legal protection with men (See UN Trust Fund Grant to Combat Gender-based Violence, at left.)
- Prevention and outreach to teach girls and women how to avoid becoming victims of violence

Lotus Outreach International offers a multi-layered solution to helping Cambodian girls and women who are victims of violence, or at risk for becoming victims, including the “Consoling Through Counseling (CTC) and Reintegration” program, delivered in partnership with their local partner, the Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center (CWCC)— designed to provide a safe haven for the dispossessed by providing the physical and emotional protection, support, and sustenance that victims need to heal and recover.
As Lotus Outreach writes, "Social justice may still be out of reach, but we don't believe an emotional sanctuary should be."

Questions for Discussion:
1. Until the late 1970’s, most of the states in the U.S. did not consider spousal rape a crime. In Canada, sexual assault against one's wife wasn't an offense until 1983. According to the National Center for Victim of Crime in the United States, "While spousal rape is now considered a crime, victims often have to overcome additional legal hurdles to prosecution not present for other victims of rape." Are there laws in your community and your government that you think should be changed to better protect and support women who are victims of violence from their spouses and intimate partners?

2. In the Netherlands (where prostitution is legal), statistics show that over 80 percent of sex workers are trafficked in from other countries. At least 100,000 and perhaps as many as 300,000 children in the U.S. are victims of sex trafficking each year. Illicit trade in women is driven by war, displacement, and economic and social inequities between and within countries, and the demand for low-wage labor and sex work. What does the Western World need to do to combat the demand for trafficking of women and girls?

3. According to the United Nations Population Fund: "Disparities in the way girls and boys are raised and treated are at the root of many sexual and reproductive health problems and development challenges." Is it possible to apply “culturally sensitive” approaches to empowering women in societies where decisions about women's marriages, reproduction, education, etc. are controlled by men?

Voices: Women We Serve

All women at the shelter in Cambodia are provided individual and or group counseling. (All photos provided by Lotus Outreach International.)

Women at the shelter need to learn ABCs as part of preparation to support themselves when they return to their villages.

Lotus Outreach International provided the following interviews of victims they have helped. *The names of the victims have been changed.

The Life of a Child Migrant: Sophie's Story

Sophie* fled the very poor province of Prey-Veng at the tender age of 12 after an attempted rape by her father. She was able to stay with a friend in Poipet, Banteay Meanchey where she looked for work, but faced sexual harassment from her friend's husband. Years later, she was raped by a taxi driver, after which she was trafficked to Bangkok for construction work. When she was arrested by police, they returned her to Cambodia, depressed and hopeless.
"I never went to school," Sophie says, “as I was busy trying to support my seven siblings. I kept working at whatever I had to, but my father was violent and raped my children so I had to leave.”

Sophie ran away and found herself in Poipet where she was procured by labor recruiters to work in Bangkok on a construction site cutting heavy metals. As illegal immigrants, she and two friends were eventually arrested and returned to Cambodia. They were not paid their back wages, and found themselves back in Poipet, alone without food or shelter. Lacking basic job skills, Sophie was encouraged to enter the entertainment industry and become a “beer promotion girl”—an occasional front for prostitution. “Thankfully, I visited the CWCC/Lotus Outreach SMART counter-trafficking vehicle and met Som Art, who gave me food and convinced me not to lose hope. He referred me and my friend Chandra to the safe shelter in Sisophon, where we learned cooking and food preparation instead.”

Sophie and Chandra just finished their six-month culinary training at the shelter. “During the course we’ve learned so much more than cooking, like life skills, mathematics, and how to create a business plan,” they tell us. “Now we’re going to join with some other friends and start our own restaurant, preparing Green papaya salad, egg dishes, noodles, rice and chicken.” Chandra shares that the shelter has given them a newfound sense of hope, “We would have had a very difficult life had we not come here. We don’t even have clothes to wear.” Both girls, in tears, express their gratitude for the support: “Thank you so much, WE ARE SO HAPPY!!”

When we consider Sophie’s story, we are reminded of the extent of exploitation that continues in Cambodia, with many hundreds of children abused ruthlessly every day through seemingly countless avenues. The goal of the aftercare project is to empower girls like Sophie and Chandra to reclaim their self esteem and become contributing members of society through the provision of therapy, skills training and small business grants.

**Jorani’s Untold Trauma**

Jorani* left home at age 19, traumatized and pregnant. She didn’t know whose child she was carrying because she had been repeatedly raped by both her father and older brother. Unable to defend herself from the very men who should have protected her, Jorani appealed to the village chief and police for help. Bravely, Jorani filed a formal complaint against her own kin, which met with tragic consequences. Both men were arrested and detained, but her brother escaped and her father hung himself in prison. After a painful miscarriage that left her in need of medical attention, Jorani was referred by local police to our shelter in Sisophon.

Physically drained, overwhelmed with guilt and a staggering burden of shame, Jorani kept to herself at the shelter. She rarely spoke and shied from others’ attempts to interact with her. She felt alienated by the abuse she had suffered, believing her story was rare and isolated. Depressed at the thought of the stigma she would suffer in her society, Jorani assumed her future was destroyed. She suffered from violent nightmares, and remained listless and anxious during waking hours.
It took many hours of individual counseling to coax Jorani back into the social arena. Very gradually building a relationship with her counselors, she began to share her feelings of isolation and terror. As she gained confidence in them, and in herself, Jorani became more comfortable seeking support from her peers and joined in group therapy. Most recently, Jorani has cultivated a talent for making souvenir jewelry, and has enrolled in a sewing course at the shelter. Through these crafts, she has rediscovered a sense of self-worth and dignity, and now looks forward to the possibilities her new life has to offer.

Women and girls receive thorough training in skills that will provide a livelihood through small business and employment.

Marie’s Story: From Slavery to Freedom

Like many girls and women at the shelter, poverty and desperation pushed Marie* into the margins of society. In her case, it was at the hands of her own mother. The Cambodian government’s anti-trafficking taskforce referred the 13-year-old Marie to the CWCC shelter a few months ago, where our counselors learned that at age 8 she had been sold by her mother to a European man known to be a pedophile. In the five years that elapsed between her sale and her rescue, Marie was kept with approximately six other children of various ages in the pedophile’s home. It is difficult to imagine the degree of abuse that was suffered at the hands of a deviant operating with impunity over such a long duration.

Since the man was apprehended by authorities a few months ago, Marie has struggled to communicate verbally. This presented a rare challenge for our counselor, Sokny, who has had to seek and develop creative methods for helping Marie heal from her trauma. Sokny believes that Marie struggles with two immense emotional conflicts: the confusion of love and rage towards a mother who abandoned her and has since been put behind bars; and the same twisted feelings towards a man who used and molested her, yet provided her with food, shelter and companionship. Sokny uses several associative techniques which allow Marie to communicate non-verbally. One includes asking Marie to choose animal figurines to represent people in her life, and then to place them in a model paddock in front of her according to her relationship with each person. In this way, she can demonstrate her thoughts and feelings in a medium she is comfortable with.

While it is difficult to comprehend the depth of Marie’s emotional trauma and the challenges she faces, her resilience is evident. Those working with her find her to be a highly intelligent, sophisticated thinker with a superior education to her peers. Our director of field operations, Australian Glenn Fawcett, was surprised to find that Marie was perfectly comfortable in the

A 6-month cooking course prepared these girls to fulfill their dream of running their own restaurant with assistance from a loan fund.
presence of someone so similar in appearance to her captor. The two communicated via Glenn’s camera, which Marie quickly learned to operate. These factors bode well for her return to school at an age appropriate level, which Marie has agreed to when her counselors deem she is ready.

The hope that a victim like Marie can be reintegrated into society after such an atrocious and prolonged experience is the very basis for our Consoling Through Counseling program. As the only institution in the border region offering therapy to victims of abuse and trafficking, CTC is currently an isolated spot of light in a sordid sphere of neglect and abuse. Lotus Outreach is deeply dedicated to supporting this laudable endeavor.

Small business grants can be used to set up hair and makeup salons. Services are in high demand even in small villages.

Sources:
All photographs provided by Lotus Outreach International
http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/
Lotus Outreach International

Changing the world one dinner at a time