



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Domestic violence is no longer a private matter

It is of concern to read:

Domestic Violence has continued its steady increase reaching 1272 instances in 2016 up from 1205 reports in 2015, which points to a 183% increase between 2008 (450 reports) and 2016, when specific statistics on Domestic Violence became available due to changes in legislation (in 'CrimeMalta Annual Crime Review for 2016' - 2007)

(http://crimemalta.com/documents/CrimeMalta_Annual_Report_SF_2016.pdf)

Naturally these do not include the unreported cases, or better still, the dark figures of crime. The law to implement the legal changes required to be in line with the Istanbul Convention has not been enacted yet. We also lack awareness on this matter in the public domain. This needs to be complimented with more dissuasive penalties that reflect this serious crime.

As a Faculty (for Social Wellbeing) we expressed our concerns through the publication of this Press Release and condemned violence against women (and men) in all its forms and appeal to the authorities to strengthen its infrastructure to combat this malice effectively.

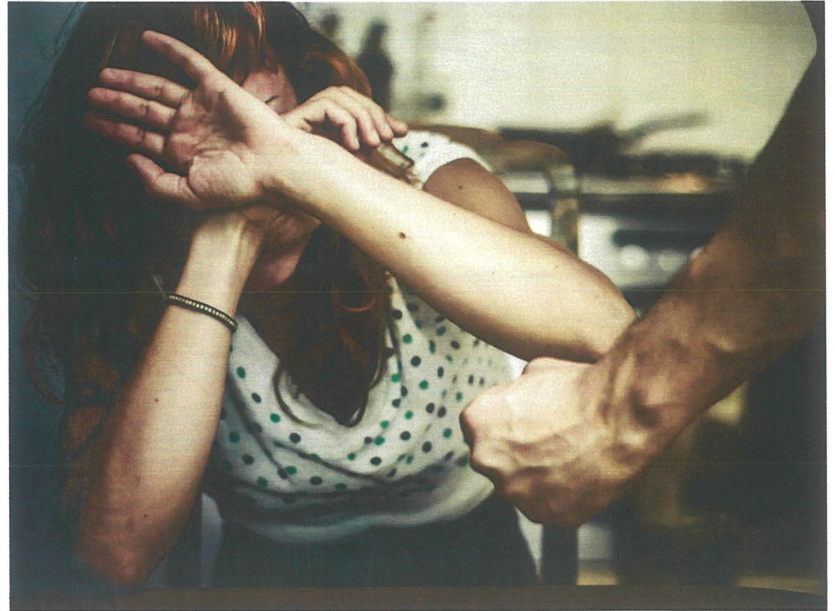
Reports of such incidents are on the increase and this in itself is a good sign. It clearly indicates that people are more aware of domestic violence, recognise it, and are finding it unacceptable. It is also positive that the media is picking up on the cases being reported.

We also applaud the Police Force who have introduced the Victims Support Unit led by Inspector Sharon Tanti, a team that will also include a Youth Worker for the first time.

Domestic violence against women has a lasting impact on children once they are exposed to intimate partner violence both in the short-term and also in the longer term when these children become adults (Sammut Scerri, 2015). In addition, we also know that there is a significant overlap between intimate partner violence and child abuse with rates of occurrence in the range of 6% and 18% in community samples.

We would like to highlight some more worrying facts;

- In Europe 1 in 3 women experience physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner (F.R.A., 2014);
- A Europe-wide survey by FRA (2014) found that 15% of women in Malta over the age of 15 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a current or former partner;
- Domestic violence has now become the third most reported crime after theft and damages and has pushed bodily harm to 4th place;



- If one looks at the national prevalence study held in Malta by the Commission for Domestic Violence in 2011, 26.5% of women have experienced one or more acts of violence by a current or former partner which includes, physical, emotional or sexual violence;
- Domestic violence has seen an exponential increase in the "psychological violence" category;
- It is worrying that 54% of women in Malta who have experienced violence did not seek assistance (Commission on Domestic Violence, 2011);
- The most extreme form of violence against women and domestic violence is femicide and we have seen that in the past 10 years in Malta, there have been 15 women killed at the hands of a current or former partner or family member;
- Consequences of domestic violence are significantly worse for female survivors who are of low income, and/or are unemployed/inactive;
- In Malta the cost of domestic violence amounts to millions of euros per year, when taking into account the lost economic output, the health and legal services costs, social welfare services, other specialised services and the physical and emotional impact on the victims;
- To date, women and children have had to leave their homes, their belongings and their lives as they knew it to seek refuge and to top it up women and girls are still being harassed and stalked by their ex-partners;

- High cost of rent is making it additionally difficult for women to leave the abusive relationship and we have been provided with information that women and their children are at times constrained to sleep in cars.

We recommend the following actions;

- One-stop-shop with a multi-disciplinary specialised response team trained to address the situation holistically (police, legal, social work, health, psychological);
- A well-resourced National Action Plan, in-line with the Istanbul Convention, that is comprehensive and evidence-based;
- An active inter ministerial committee to strengthen collaboration and more financial and human resources to shelters and services;
- A National programme on Relationship Education, targeting different age groups and genders to address gender stereotypes and issues around power and control;
- A training programme for professionals involved in this matter to be further sensitised about violence in families and action that can and should be taken;
- Strengthening of the Legal Aid Service with specialised lawyers in this field;
- Court sentencing need to be significantly harsher to reflect the seriousness of this crime and protection orders and treatment orders need to be supported by the related punishment if these are not adhered to;
- Safe spaces in the Court build-

- ing for social workers and clients during case hearing;
- Ensure the full implementation of national legislation and international human rights treaties and standards;
- Set up databases of court decisions to raise awareness and ensure a better understanding among legal professionals of issues related to women's access to justice;
- Alleviating some of the financial burdens of domestic violence victims: namely, Social Assistance cheques to be issued promptly, social housing availability needs to be improved, uninterrupted flow of child support contributions to be ensured;
- Studying potential intergenerational violence related phenomena.

When addressing a meeting of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality at the European Parliament in Brussels last June, the President of Malta also focused on the need to tackle the urgent issues of violence against women.

Her Excellency also called for and supported the creation of a Europe-wide observatory on Femicide to prioritise the well-being and dignity of women and girls and thus supporting the well-being of society, an initiative that the Faculty through its Department of Gender Studies is working on.

We need to realise that this is no longer a private matter but a community responsibility that needs to be addressed by academia, civil society and the State in a coherent and well thought-out way.

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