

Daphne II - Date Rape Cases among Young Women

Information Seminar

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) conducted the information seminar "Date Rape Cases among Young Women" on the 23rd May 2008, at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus. The seminar was organized within the framework of the project Date Rape Cases among Young Women and the Development of Strategies for Support and Prevention", Daphne II Programme, European Commission.

The main aim of the seminar was to provide general information on date rape and sexual violence among young women in order to raise awareness on the issue, discuss the results of the research conducted in Cyprus, as well as exchange information and experience among relevant stakeholders with the aim to develop recommendations for the prevention of date rape and support of victims on a national and European level.

The information seminar was targeted toward policy makers and NGOs working in the field of violence against women. Participants included representatives of NGO, the police and the social welfare services as well as representatives of women's organizations, and the National Machinery for Women's Rights. The seminar also attracted the participation of individuals such as researchers and students interested in the topic.

The seminar facilitators were Dr. Christiana Kouta, Main Research and Project Coordinator, Susana Pavlou, Project Administrator and Assistant Researcher, and Georgina Christou, Research Associate at MIGS.

The seminar began with a brief presentation on gender roles and stereotypes and its links to gender based violence by Georgina Christou. She outlined how gender inequality is inextricably linked to violence against women, and emphasized that measures to combat VAW must take into account the unequal power relations between men and women, and patriarchal structures in society. Susana Pavlou gave a short presentation on sexual assault and rape pointing out the uniqueness of this form of gender based violence that is not only a violation of bodily integrity but a violation of personal intimate and psychological boundaries. She also pointed out the particularly low rates of reporting for rape and sexual assault, as well as and the high rates of attrition in reported rape cases across Europe. She emphasized the case of Cyprus which is the only country in Europe where reported rape cases have more than doubled during the periods 1990-1996 and 2000-2003. Despite this, Cyprus has the lowest conviction rate of all EU member states. Finally, some myths and realities in relation to date rape were noted such as the myth that 'real' rape only takes place in dark alleys and by strangers. In fact, research has shown that in the majority of rape cases the rapist is known to the victim.

Dr. Christiana Kouta then proceeded to present the results of the research carried out in Cyprus that aimed to investigate the incidence of date rape among young women in tertiary education and to explore their attitudes, dating experiences and level of awareness. According to the research results, 12% of the questionnaire respondents reported having an unwanted sexual experience, 4% reported having been victim to some form of sexual assault, and 2% reported having been victim to rape in their relationship. The research revealed other forms of violence within relationships including physical and psychological violence. Furthermore, low levels of reporting were revealed with focus group participants citing fear of not being believed and fear of blame/judgment among some of the reasons for this. In many cases the victim herself does not define the attack as rape.

The seminar was concluded with recommendations drafted by the project researchers for more effective strategies to prevent and combat sexual violence and date rape in Europe. Recommendations targeted national governments, European Institutions, and the European Women's Lobby. These included the recommendation for a unified European legal framework to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women, the introduction of sex education at all levels of public education on a national, systematic research and data collection on gender-based violence, including sexual violence and rape on a national and European level, and comprehensive awareness-raising and education programmes to challenge negative gender stereotypes as well as discriminatory cultural norms that legitimise and perpetuate violence against women.