



**POVERTY AND VIOLENCE- THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS**  
**MHE Position** on the occasion of  
**THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**  
**25<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2009**

It is estimated that one in three women worldwide suffers some form of gender-based violence during the course of her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Violence against women is multifaceted and linked to unequal gender norms and socio-economic power structures. It serves to reinforce and perpetuate gender inequity. Thus, violence against women is a key issue in addressing gender inequality and discrimination against women as well as in effectively addressing key development issues such as health and poverty.

***Violence undermines and destroys women's dignity and self-respect.***

Women are more than half of the world population, every day around the world women are working, being wives, mothers and carers of others, frequently women are doing all these things simultaneously, yet women are undervalued, overworked and underpaid. Women are 70% of the world's poorest and two thirds of them are illiterate.

80% of the world's trafficked people are girls under 18 years old. Human trafficking is the second largest growing industry in the world and the third most profitable illegal activity yet it receives comparatively little press attention. Traffickers primarily target young women because they are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination thus effecting their access to employment, educational opportunities and other resources to improve their lives. Women from the Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are widely trafficked due to the ease in which they can cross borders but mostly due to their absolute poverty and lack of opportunities to escape from it. Girls as young as 16 years old answer job advertisements for positions abroad such as dancers, waitresses, and nannies to find a better life only to find themselves held against their will and forced into prostitution and sexual slavery. In the destination countries, women are subjected to physical violence, sexual assault and rape, battery, imprisonment, threats and other forms of coercion.

***Being victim of violence is widely recognized as a cause of mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. Being abused also plays a strong role in developing or worsening substance abuse problems.***

MHE recognizes the steps already being taken towards the elimination of violence against women. Various actions have been undertaken at different international levels. At EU level, the Roadmap for equality 2005-2010, the ratification of the United Nations Treaty on the elimination of all forms of discrimination violence against women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf>  
[www.who.int/gender/other\\_health/en/genderMH.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/other_health/en/genderMH.pdf)

and the European Institute for Gender Equality [European agency to support the Member States and the European institutions (in particular the Commission) are undertaking significant efforts to promote gender equality, to fight discrimination based on sex and to raise awareness of gender issues] Moreover, at their 1044th meeting on 10 December 2008, the Deputies<sup>2</sup> of the Council of Europe approved the terms of reference of the Ad hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence which is responsible for drafting a new Convention on this issue. ....**but there is still much work to do ...**

Violence against women at the hands of men is a reflection of societal gender roles in general, although many women are now working, men still remain the breadwinner, and women as mothers and /or carers of elderly relatives remain more or less dependent on the husband. The roots of violence against women lie in historically unequal power relations between men and women, and persistent discrimination against women and this is compounded by a lack of opportunities in both training and education, contributing to lower incomes for women and higher levels of poverty<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, MHE calls upon policy makers to keep challenging deep rooted patriarchal attitudes and to ensure the fight against gender based violence and discrimination issues are kept high on the agenda by:

- Ensuring women are trained for secure quality employment
- Providing child friendly training courses
- Providing free literacy classes
- Government funded nursery places
- Teaching life skills to women
- Better social security benefits and Social housing

There should be an emphasis on breaking the unequal power relations in society by:

- Encouraging men to share the responsibility of child care by making wider provisions for child care
- Giving the opportunity to work flexible hours or work from home thus allowing men and women to reconcile work and family life equally
- Educating boys to reject violence, reject gender stereotypes, to respect women as equals, and to work against all systems that are based on concepts of dominance
- Providing early years education and community programmes with the emphasis on citizenship and social conscience
- Personal and social education courses with the aim of preparing both boys and girls for the roles of carers and supporters of families, disabled and sick people and make both genders aware of inequalities at an early educational stage
- encouraging transnational projects ("Violence against women in the workplace...Let's talk about it!" Funded by the Daphne III Programme) in the field of gender based violence and its impact on women's mental health in order to raise awareness about this issue, and to promote the mental health and well being of women in Europe. The importance of strengthening their voice when being subjected to violence and harassment in workplace should remain a key priority

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.epacvaw.org/spip.php?article301>  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dgh/standardsetting/violence/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dgh/standardsetting/violence/default_en.asp)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>  
[www.who.int/gender/other\\_health/en/genderMH.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/other_health/en/genderMH.pdf)

***Between 40% and 50% of women in the European Union reported some form of sexual harassment in the workplace.***

#### **About Mental Health Europe**

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is an organisation committed to the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of mental distress, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of human rights for people with mental health problems, their families and carers. MHE vision is of a Europe where mental health and well-being is given high priority in the political spectrum and on the European health and social agenda, where people with mental health problems live as full citizens with access to appropriate services and support when needed, and where meaningful participation is guaranteed at all levels of decision-making and administration. MHE's values are based on dignity and respect, equal opportunities, freedom of choice, anti-discrimination, social inclusion, democracy and participation.

[www.mhe-sme.org](http://www.mhe-sme.org)