



WCC and PPW Service Report 2009

**Annie Yeap, Prema Devaraj, Lee Sook Foong,
Tasha Merican, Lau Swee Li**

Introduction

Full steam ahead! That's what 2009 was all about for the Service Team. Besides the usual crisis intervention work and service programmes, WCC embarked on making our long-time dream of a service centre on the mainland a reality.

The opportunity arose with the support of the Penang State Government through the Penang State Committee on Women, Family and Community Development. WCC undertook the task of setting up Pusat Perkhidmatan Wanita (PPW), Seberang Perai which took an enormous amount of time and planning but the end result was well worth the effort. Funded by the Penang state, PPW started operations on January 19, 2009. WCC is responsible for managing and running its PPW work programmes. Currently PPW is staffed by only one person and is fully supported by WCC staff and volunteers.

PPW is similar to WCC in that it provides counselling (both face-to-face and telephone) as well as service outreach work, i.e. conducting talks, training and activities for single mothers. This effectively provides women on the mainland with access to the same services WCC provides on the island. Since PPW's opening, WCC has referred many of our clients from the mainland to the PPW office and helped PPW in actively promoting the centre's services via press conferences, newspapers and distribution of PPW flyers in shopping malls. Both WCC and PPW staff have also visited the local government and non-government agencies on the mainland to help build PPW's networking.



“Contacting WCC & PPW has made me gain so much knowledge and information that I have not known before. I'm now aware of my rights, and have the confidence to fight for my rights as a human being.”

23 year old Sales Promoter

1. PROVISION OF SERVICES

Table 1: Services Provided and Number of Cases Handled in 2009 by WCC and PPW

	Type of services	WCC	PPW	Total
1	Face-to-Face Counselling Sessions*	445	251	696
2	Telephone Counselling Sessions	1,178	785	1,963
3	Online Counselling	50	-	50
4	Shelter	14 women and 14 children	-	
5	Service Outreach	759	225	984
6	Single Mothers Support Group**	-	5	-
7	Working with Men**	7	-	-

* For WCC, there were 248 new clients and 40 former clients; for PPW, there were 56 new clients

** 5-7 group sessions were carried out

In 2009, a total of 444 women (new and former clients) were counselled by WCC and PPW. The social workers at both centres conducted a total of 696 face-to-face counselling sessions. A total of 1,963 calls were made to PPW and WCC all together. WCC has maintained its workload compared to last year, and the number of women accessing services from PPW reinforces the need for similar services on the mainland. WCC's online counselling numbers dropped by almost half while our shelter clients have doubled. Both centres were also involved in outreach work extended to almost 1,000 individuals. In addition, PPW ran a support group for single mothers while WCC conducted a series of seven sessions for men on understanding violence.

Face-to-Face Counselling

In 2009, WCC saw a total of 248 new clients and 40 old clients with a total of 445 counselling sessions conducted. There were many follow-up sessions with clients who needed shelter. Support provided included accompanying them to hospitals, police stations, welfare offices as well as legal aid centres.

PPW, despite being newly set up, provided a total of 251 counselling sessions to 156 clients. Almost all their cases were either from mainland Penang or the northern states (Kedah, Perlis, Perak).

The total number of new cases handled by WCC and PPW was 404. In both centres, about 28% of the case load related to domestic violence or marital problems. Domestic violence made up a third of WCC's cases while marital problems were responsible for a third of PPW's cases.



Table 2: Types of New Cases in 2009

	Type of new cases	WCC		PPW		Total no. of cases
		No. of cases	%	No. of cases	%	
1	Domestic Violence	78	31	37	23	115
2	Marital problems	61	25	54	34	115
3	Rape	35	14	-	-	35
4	Legal Advice	24	10	19	12	43
5	Information seeking	20	8	15	10	35
6	Relationship	12	5	20	13	32
7	Child Sexual Abuse	6	2	4	3	10
8	Sexual harassment	4	2	1	1	5
9	Others	8	3	6	4	14
	Total	248	100	156	100	404

However, WCC domestic violence statistics showed a 10% drop compared to the year before. Out of these cases, 47% of the clients lodged police reports although only 9 applied for an Interim Protection Order (IPO). More than two thirds of these clients had experienced both physical and emotional violence, whereas almost a third had been subjected to emotional abuse only, including controlling behaviour by their husbands, such as not being allowed to visit their family or friends.

WCC saw a 15% increase in cases of marital problems compared to the year before. Out of the 61 cases, 44% stated that their husbands were engaging in extramarital affairs. Another 38% said they had communication problems with their husbands and were looking for ways to improve their relationship. The rest related to spousal behavioural problems such as alcohol addiction, gambling etc.

This year saw a substantial increase of 52% in rape cases that WCC attended to at the Penang Hospital. This was due to the on-going collaboration between Penang Hospital and WCC.

Suami saya mengikat tangan dan kaki saya serta menyumbat mulut saya dengan kain supaya saya tidak dapat meminta tolong. Kepala saya diketuk, ditampar dan ditumbuk olehnya sambil menyuruh saya supaya menjadi isteri yang baik dan mendengar katanya.

30 year old Sales Executive, domestic violence client

With regard to PPW, a third of the cases relate to marital problems. Nearly half of the clients stated that their spouses were having extramarital affairs and one third complained of communication problems with their husbands. The rest were facing difficulties due to their husbands' behaviour. Some planned to file for divorce on the grounds of irreconcilable differences.

Domestic violence cases made up almost a quarter of PPW cases. About 70% of the abused clients chose to leave their husbands instead of taking further action like lodging police reports. Fewer than 30% filed police reports or applied for IPOs.

Another 13% of the clients encountered relationship problems with their children, while 12% sought legal advice on child custody, maintenance and property issues. A further 10% requested information on health issues, specifically mental illness. Other queries related to obtaining birth certificates, school transfers for the children after divorce and applications for low cost housing.

Clients' Profile

The ethnic profile of WCC clientele is approximately 50% Chinese, 24% Malay, 23% Indians and 3% others. The number of Malay clients has shown a significant increase compared to last year because of the numbers of rape survivors seen at Penang Hospital. About 29% of WCC clients received college or tertiary education and slightly over half of the clients (54%) underwent secondary education; 8% attended primary school, while 2% were illiterate. In terms of their socio-economic background, 59% were working women, 16% housewives, 11% unemployed, 12% students and the remaining 2% is unknown. A third of WCC clients had no income; 21% of them earned less than RM1,000 per month; 10% earned between RM1,000 and RM1,500; 26% earned more than RM1,500 with the rest unknown. The socio-economic profile of WCC clients has remained relatively unchanged over the years.

PPW clientele is predominantly Chinese 65%, followed by Indians 28%, Malay 6% and others 1%. With regard to education, 5% were illiterate, 13% had primary education, 60% received secondary education, 12% had completed college while 10% held degrees from universities.

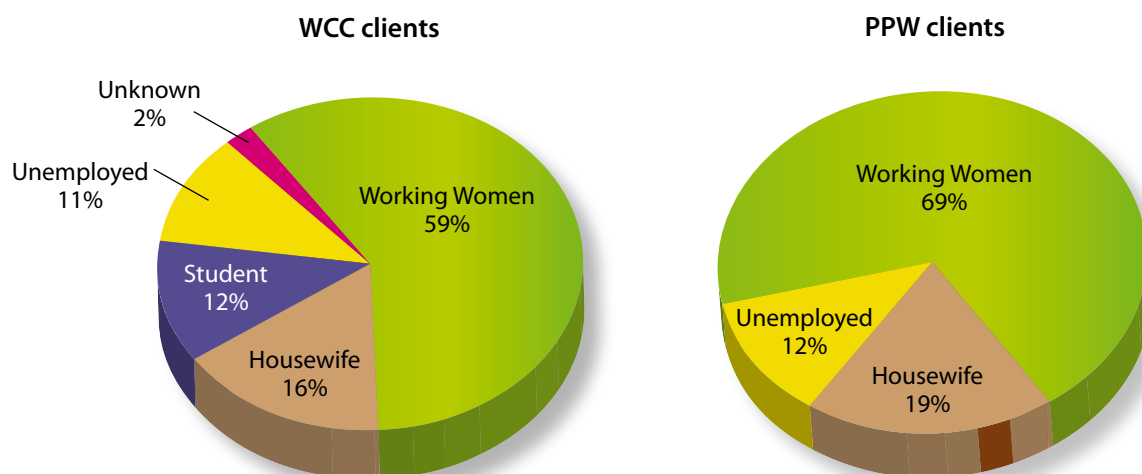
In terms of employment, 69% were working women, 19% housewives while 12% were unemployed. Out of this, 31% had no income, whereas 12% earned less than RM1,500 and 27% earned more than RM1,500.



My husband forced me to kneel in front of him at the airport, accusing me that I am a prostitute and threatening to ask the police officer to arrest me. When I knelt down, he said now I was his slave, hence I should obey his commands and orders. I felt so humiliated and degraded asking myself if I am still a human."

36 years Businesswoman

Figure 1: Socio-economic Background of WCC and PPW clients



Telephone Counselling

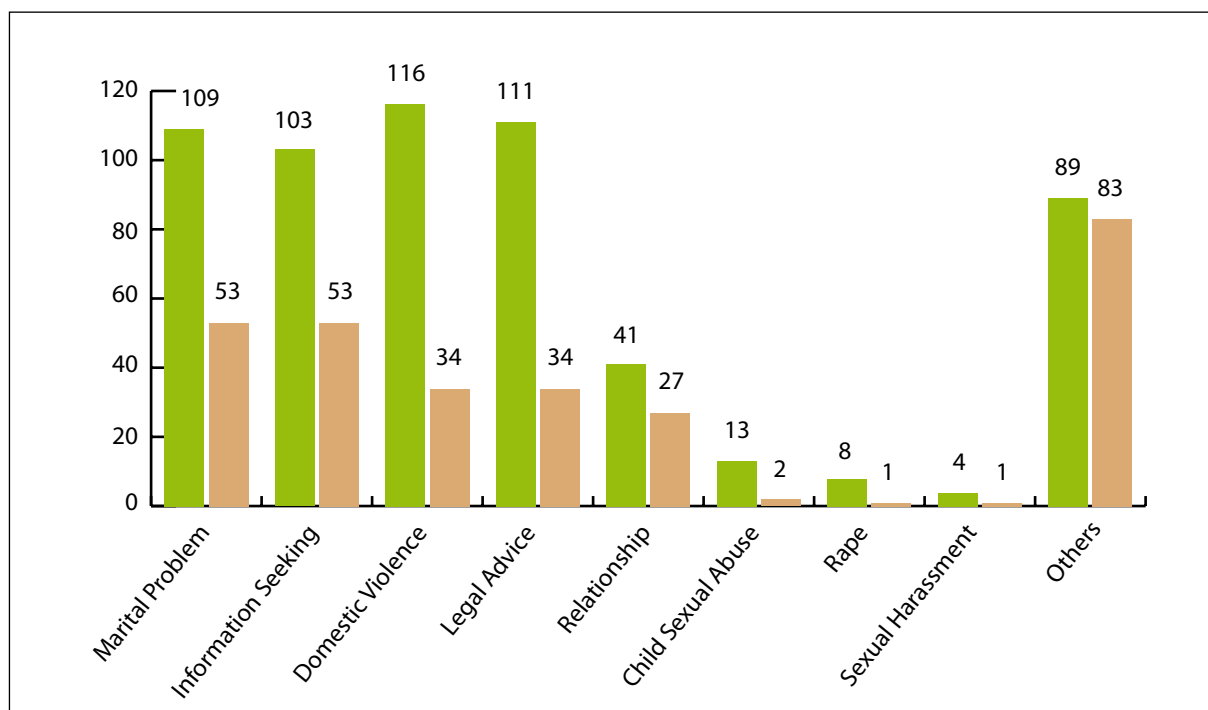
In 2009, WCC and PPW together handled a total of 1,963 telephone calls of which 882 were new and 1,081 were follow-up calls. WCC received a total of 1,178 telephone calls: 594 new and 584 follow-up, whereas PPW handled 785 calls: 288 new and 497 follow-up.

Figure 2 shows that the highest register of calls relate to marital problems (162 calls) followed by information seeking (156 calls) and domestic violence (150 calls). Most of the other callers required general information such as how to get financial aid, contact numbers for different agencies, job vacancies etc.

A closer look at the calls received by WCC reveals that 57% of the calls were from Penang island whereas 36% were from the mainland and other states. WCC refers callers to PPW if the caller wishes to attend counselling on the mainland. Domestic violence, legal enquiries (relating to divorce proceedings, maintenance and custody issues) and extramarital affairs account for approximately 20% of the new incoming calls to WCC.

It should be noted that at the beginning of the year, a large number of phone calls were about the location of PPW. Overall, calls relating to marital problems (communication breakdown, extra-marital affairs and spousal behavior) and information seeking make up 18% of the total calls to PPW with another 12% on legal matters pertaining to divorce, maintenance and custody of children. Calls

Figure 2: Distribution of Telephone Counselling Calls



from women facing depression, low self-esteem and financial difficulties were recorded under other issues (29%). Those with financial problems were referred to other agencies or helped to access existing resources available to them.

Online Counselling

Online counselling this year showed a drop of 46% (50 emails) compared to last year (94 emails). One of the reasons attributed to this was the revamping of the WCC website that inadvertently made access to the WCC email address for queries less obvious. This was corrected towards the end of the year and the numbers have begun to rise again.

A quarter of the email counselling enquiries (25%) related to legal advice (e.g., rights on divorce proceedings, children custody and maintenance); 21% needed information on child adoption, job vacancies, other relevant agencies to contact, financial problems, etc; while violence against women issues made up 20%. Many sought advice on domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment. 11% were related to marital problems and 7% were on relationship problems with boyfriends. Another 3% were from concerned public reporting child abuse cases in their neighbourhood. WCC refers these cases to the welfare department for investigation. Currently, PPW does not offer online counselling services.



Shelter

The number of clients who seek shelter has been unpredictable over the years. In 2009, WCC's clients doubled to 14 women and 14 children. Two of these had been referred by PPW and another two by the welfare department. A further two were WCC's former clients.

In terms of ethnicity, about two-thirds of the clients who sought shelter were Malay followed by Chinese, Indian and others. The number of Muslim women who sought shelter rose to eight compared to just two years ago.

The clients were varied in their profile. About 71% of them were housewives, while the remainder were working women. They ranged in age from their mid 20s to early 50s. Among the housewives, three were foreign wives: two returned to their own country, while the third went back to her husband. Among the local clients, five went to live with their family, three returned to their husbands, while two left their husbands to start a new life.



Working with Men

WCC provides counselling to their husbands if requested by our clients. This year there were only two such requests. In addition to offering this service, WCC has tried to build a small group of male community leaders with a greater understanding of the issue of domestic violence who could serve as a reference point for the men in their community. This year, WCC conducted seven sessions covering issues of domestic violence for five men.

Di sini saya merasa keselamatan saya terjamin dari keganasan suami. Semasa berada di WCC saya dapat melupakan masalah yang dialami saya. Saya dapat berkongsi masalah sesama rakan dan menceritakan masalah pada kaunselor di mana saya dapat serba-sedikit pengetahuan yang berguna.

61-year old WCC Shelter Client

2. SERVICE OUTREACH

Service outreach activities evolved as a proactive approach to addressing some of the issues WCC clientele raised, such as inadequate understanding and support from service providers (i.e., police, welfare officers and hospital staff) or the lack of emotional or financial support. WCC's service outreach is, therefore, geared towards working with service providers from both the government and non-government sectors, to raise their awareness on issues relating to violence against women and to build a better understanding and capacity of handling such issues thereby ensuring that women receive better assistance. In 2009, WCC reached out to 759 service providers through its activities such as seminars, training, lectures and community talks.

Rape Survivors Support Initiative

Since April 2008, with the starting of the Rape Survivors Support Initiative, WCC has collaborated with the Emergency and Trauma Department, Hospital Pulau Pinang (HPP) in providing support to rape survivors who come to its One-Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC).

Service Provided

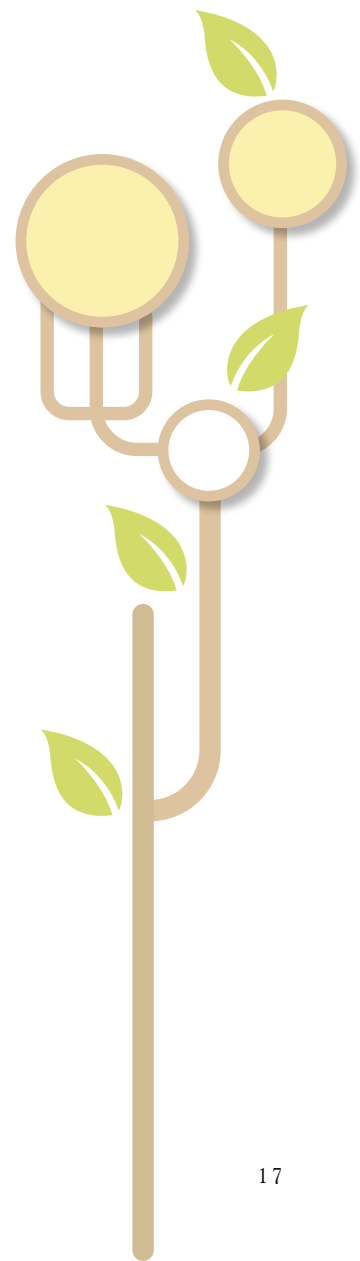
At the OSCC, rape survivors are offered WCC's services. WCC is contacted by HPP once consent has been obtained. A WCC staff member visits the survivor at the hospital, her home or at a location of her choice. After a face-to-face session, WCC follows up with a phone call to see how the survivor is coping or if she needs further counselling. In 2009, HPP received 72 rape cases and WCC was called to attend to 35 of them. Many generally do not want to speak to anyone during the critical time, so OSCC nurses distribute WCC pamphlets with information on help and support to the survivors before they are discharged. Of the 35 seen by WCC, their age distribution is shown below:

Age in years	<10	10-15	16-18	>18
Number of clients	4	14	5	12

Apart from basic counselling and support work, WCC staff contextualises the rape so that the woman does not blame herself. WCC also provides essential information on reproductive rights and relationships. On occasion, WCC staff have to lend support to the parents of the survivors as well.

Working with Hospital Personnel

While making support services available to rape survivors, WCC has endeavoured to also reach out to hospital personnel to raise awareness on the issue of rape and the necessity for support for rape survivors.





In May, WCC, working in partnership with the HPP and State Health Department, jointly organised a full-day seminar 'Understanding and Supporting the Rape Survivor', aimed at a) building a better understanding of rape survivors and their rights and b) strengthening interagency (government and NGOs) networking towards supporting rape victims. The seminar was well attended, with 200 participants consisting of medical personnel (doctors, medical social workers, counsellors, nurses) from the main hospitals in the northern states of Penang, Kedah, Perlis and Perak.

In addition, welfare officers, police officers and state prosecutors from these states were also represented. In July, WCC gave a talk to about 20 doctors and nurses at the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at the Penang Maternity Hospital regarding the ongoing collaboration with HPP as many of them were involved in attending to rape survivors at the OSCC. Later in November, as part of the Continuing Medical Education sessions at HPP, WCC gave a talk to 150 medical personnel at HPP regarding the rape support initiative as well as the difficulties encountered through this initiative.

Building a Support Network

Thus far, the bulk of the support work with rape survivors has been conducted by the staff of WCC on call from HPP. This has enabled difficulties to be identified and ironed out. To develop this support initiative further, WCC began training volunteers for this work. In July, WCC carried out a workshop for 25 volunteers comprising WCC staff, volunteers, as well as hospital staff interested in working with WCC to set up a volunteer support network for rape survivors. The workshop was aimed at giving participants a better understanding of the rape survivor and a more sensitised approach to supporting and empowering them. In December, WCC, in collaboration with PPW, conducted a one-day follow-up training for volunteers of the support network for rape survivors. Ten participants selected from the previous training workshop in July attended the session which dealt with not only a practical hands-on approach to working with rape survivors but also included an exposure trip to the OSCC at HPP and the ward where some rape survivors are treated.

Lectures for Trainee Service Providers

Since 2000, the issue of violence against women has been incorporated into the teaching curriculum of the nursing college at Lam Wah Ee Hospital and the medical curriculum of the Penang Medical College (PMC). WCC was instrumental in this and continues to give regular lectures to both student nurses (in March and August) and medical students (in March, May, July and September); a total of 203 students attended these sessions.

Since 2008, the nursing college at Penang Adventist Hospital has incorporated domestic violence into its teaching curriculum as part of the community health programme. A WCC member who is also a tutor nurse at the hospital, gave a talk to 42 students.



Talks for Para-Counsellors

WCC is part of the Penang Counselling Group (PCG) together with the National Cancer Society of Malaysia (Penang Branch), Befrienders Penang, the Women's Welfare Counsel, Penang Family Health Development Association and Young Women's Christian Association of Penang. Annually, PCG organises a three-month counselling course for para-counsellors to equip them with basic counselling skills. WCC regularly conducts a session on 'Gender' to participants to ensure gender-conscious counselling. This year the course had 14 participants from various NGOs and the public, including two volunteers from PPW.

Talks for Police


In 2009, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) organised two human rights training workshops in March and July for Officers in Charge of the Police Stations (OCS) from Perlis, Kedah and Penang. At each session, WCC spoke on the violation of women's rights. A total of 90 OCS attended both training workshops. The talks covered the topics of violation of women's rights through domestic violence, rape and gender discrimination. The OCS were made aware that the victims were not to be blamed, and that they should not make fun of or criticise the women who come to lodge reports at the police station. During the training, some of the participants spoke of their frustration when handling these types of cases e.g., repeated reports or complainants withdrawing the case. WCC stressed the need to be professional at all times.

Through these talks, WCC was able to build rapport with the officers. There were also requests for WCC leaflets for distribution at their police stations.

Training of PPW Volunteers

WCC staff acted as resource persons for the in-house training of volunteers organised by PPW in April, August, September and October. The aim was to build up the organisation on the mainland.





Seven training sessions were conducted on topics such as gender, violence against women, domestic violence, marriage and family, counselling techniques and working with women in crisis. WCC staff and volunteers conducted separate sessions in English and Chinese to 50 participants. Through the training, PPW was able to recruit several committed volunteers now involved in its counselling work.

PPW Single Mother Support Group

PPW organised a Single Mothers Support Group for the Chinese community in November 2009. Through this group, the women were able to receive emotional support and education to manage their emotions, improve their parenting skills, build self-esteem and channel them to other community resources. Five sessions were held at PPW. Eight women registered, although only five attended. These single mothers were mainly divorcées who had suffered from physical and/or emotional abuse or whose husbands were engaging in extramarital affairs.

Domestic Violence Research

A nationwide research studying the health impact of domestic violence on women was undertaken by USM Kubang Kerian in partnership with women's NGOs in Malaysia. The research team is led by WCC member, Associate Professor Puan Siti Hawa Ali. The objectives of this research are to study the different types of domestic violence cases, their health consequences and the coping strategies used by these women.

WCC is one of the key partners of the project and several staff and volunteers were trained through a three-day workshop to be enumerators in order to conduct the interviews. Following the training, WCC staff conducted the interviews with our former domestic violence clients using the comprehensive questionnaire supplied by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Some 70 respondents were interviewed by year end.

My husband will wake me up at night and he will force me to say I'm a prostitute. If I refused, he will slap me. After he slapped me, I will oblige what he wants me to do. Then he will say that I myself have admitted that I'm a prostitute.

Administrative worker, 21 years old

Internship

WCC and PPW received two psychology students from University of Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Kuala Lumpur and one intern from University College Sedaya International (UCDI) for practical training. The interns were trained in our service and outreach work including counselling sessions, preparation for talks and workshops, and developing posters.

Since 2009, WCC has been receiving more requests for internship from private universities and more students from the psychology field have shown interest in doing their practicum with WCC. The internship programme has been of mutual benefit to both WCC and interns.

Conclusion

In its quest to address the needs of women both on the island and mainland, WCC took two significant steps: the extension of its services to the mainland through PPW and the efforts of working to support rape survivors in the community. As the number of women requiring such support increases, both WCC and PPW will strive to ensure the quality of the services provided to these women.

