

Service Report 2007

by Annie Yeap

2007 was another hectic year for the service staff. We saw a small drop in the number of clients coming to see us but we had an increase in telephone calls and online counselling. The staff were kept busy with new and follow-up cases, seeing to the needs of shelter clients and conducting service programmes throughout the year. A new full time staff was recruited to help in the service work. Our male project officer and our shelter assistant worked on a part-time basis.

Table 1: Services Provided and Numbers of Cases Handled in 2007

Type of Services Provided	Total No
1 Face-to-Face Counselling	489 counselling sessions
2 Telephone Counselling	1,120 calls
3 Online Counselling	61 emails
4 Shelter	15 women and 25 children
5 Service Outreach	600 participants attended our talks
6 Single Mothers' Support Group	6 single mothers participated in 10 support group sessions
7 Working with Men	8 men attended 5 group sessions

Face-to-Face Counselling

In 2007, WCC saw a total of 268 new clients. Compared to 2006, the figure showed a 7% drop in face-to-face clientele. For our new and follow-up cases, a total of 489 counselling sessions were conducted.

As shown in Table 2, of the 311 clients who came to see us, 43 clients were from the previous years. These clients came back for 78 follow-up sessions with our social worker staff. There were many follow-up sessions with the shelter clients as most of the women needed to be referred to agencies like the police and the welfare department to apply for an Interim Protection Order (IPO) and financial aid.

Table 2: Face-to-Face Counselling in 2007

	Number of clients	Counselling sessions
New cases	268	268
Follow-up sessions*	45	143
Old cases (follow-up)	43	78
Total	311**	489

* Follow-up: Out of the 268 new cases, 45 clients came back for follow-up sessions.

** Total clients seen = 268 + 43 = 311

Table 3: Types of New Cases in 2007

Types of new cases	No. of clients	Percentage of total new cases seen (%)
Domestic violence	91	34.0
Marital problems	78	29.0
Information seeking	32	12.0
Legal advice	27	10.0
Relationship problems	22	8.0
Rape	7	3.0
Sexual harassment	2	0.7
Incest	1	0.3
Others	8	3.0
Total	268	100.0

In 2007, domestic violence cases remained the highest which recorded 34% followed by marital problems at 29%. This was a slight decrease of 6% in domestic violence cases compared to 2006. Out of the 91 cases of domestic violence handled, only 11 clients applied for an IPO. Most of them decided to file for divorce, some reconciled with their husbands citing reasons such as inability to cope with the social stigma of being divorced or separated, the need for financial support and the difficulty of starting a new life with the children.

Cases of marital problems (78), on the other hand, has increased by 7% compared to 62 cases in 2006. About 44% complained that their husbands were having extra marital affairs. Of these, 15% went on to file for divorce. Another 23% expressed that they were having communication problems with their spouses and hoped for a reconciliation. Most of our clients vented their frustrations that their husbands blamed them for not knowing how to “look after his heart”.

Another 12% of the clients approached WCC for information regarding low cost housing, job opportunities, children’s home, and financial aid. WCC referred them to the relevant agencies for help. Another 8% encountered relationship problems either with their boy friend or girl friend or with their in-laws. Only 4% of our cases were related to rape, sexual harassment and child sexual abuse.

WCC has been working very closely with the government agencies e.g. the police, welfare department and hospital as well as non government organisations (NGOs). We received 17 referrals from government agencies and 22 from NGOs. Most of the referred cases were related to domestic

“Suami saya ikat tangan dan kaki saya serta sumbat mulut saya dengan kain supaya saya tak dapat minta tolong. Kepala saya diketuk, ditampar dan ditumbuk olehnya. Dia teriak mahu saya jadi isteri yang baik dan dengar katanya.”

Domestic violence client, 30 years old, 2 children

violence. The media also played an important role in publicising WCC services. WCC staff were interviewed by the press on various issues including domestic violence, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse and the plight of single mothers. This publicity helped to encourage members of the public to come forward to seek help. Overall, most of the clients were referred to WCC by their relatives, friends or other agencies.

Clients' Profile

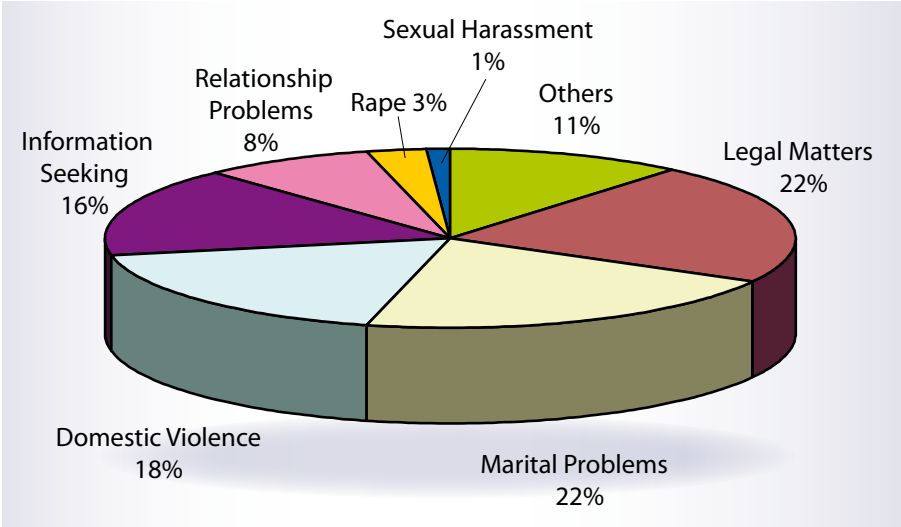
The ethnic distribution of WCC's clients is as follows: 51% of them were Chinese, followed by Indian (35%), Malay (9%) and others (5%). The majority (64%) of our clients had secondary school education, 23% of them had higher education from a college or a university, 12% had primary education and 1% were illiterate. In terms of socio-economic background, 65% of the clients who sought help were working women, 21% were housewives and 14% were unemployed. From the data we collected, 35% had little or no income, 35% earned less than RM1,500 per month and 30% earned more than RM1,500. From the figures, we can see that most of the women accessing WCC's services were literate with at least a basic secondary education (87%). However, their income levels were either low or non-existent.

Telephone Counselling

WCC received a total of 1,120 calls in 2007; 580 new calls and 540 follow-up calls. This was an increase of 12% in telephone counselling from 2006 (1,001 calls).

The increased numbers of calls were due in part to the follow-up calls from our old clients. 23% of the calls received were related to legal matters dealing with divorce proceedings, maintenance and children custody. 21% of the calls were on marital problems relating to extra-marital affairs. Another 18% sought help on domestic violence. Callers wanted to know their rights and how to put a stop to domestic violence. The social worker encouraged them to come to WCC and at the same time explained the Domestic Violence Act and its procedures.

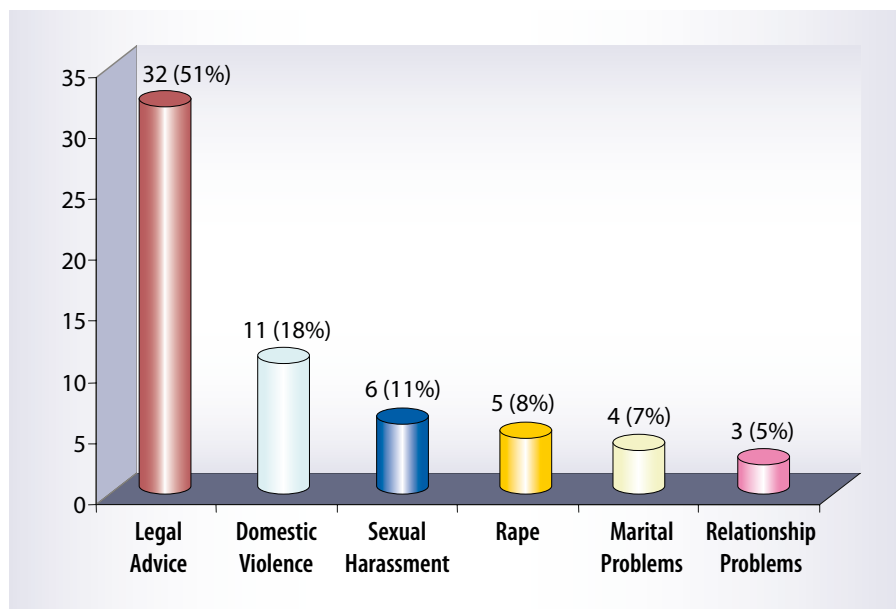
Figure 1: Types of Telephone Counselling



Online Counselling

Over the past three years, WCC received approximately 120 emails from people throughout Malaysia requesting online counselling. Online counselling is a convenient way for people to reach WCC without having to come to see us. We foresee that the trend of online counselling will increase in future. In 2007, the emails received increased by 56% (61 emails) compared to 39 emails in 2006.

Figure 2: Types of Online Counselling



51% of emails were about legal advice on divorce and custody matters, 18% on domestic violence and 11% on sexual harassment. Most of these emails were queries about procedures in handling these problems. 8% of the clients wrote in to ask about the rape cases on behalf of their friends. 7% were related to marital problems whereas 5% were on relationship problems with their boy friend or girl friend or in-laws.

For the e-clients in Penang, the social worker encouraged them to come to WCC for face-to-face counseling. For those who could not come, the social worker provided them with information on their rights.

Shelter

The shelter was well utilised in 2007. WCC sheltered 15 women and their 25 children. Their length of stay was from a minimum of three days to a maximum of two months.

60% of shelter clients were Indian women, a trend which continues to be of concern to us. Most of the women who required shelter did not have family support and some were afraid that their husbands might harass them at their

parents' house. 73% of shelter clients were housewives with no independent income while 27% were working women. 53% of them were in their 30s, 40% were in their 20s and 7% were below 20.

During their stay in the shelter, the women learnt how to make ear-rings which sold at one of our talks in a local church. The women were also encouraged to write their stories and many expressed their sadness in a book given to them. Writing their feelings and thoughts down helped them express their emotions.

Of the 15 shelter clients, only 6 applied for an IPO. After the shelter stay, 47% chose to go to their own family members, 40% found new jobs and started life on their own and only 13% went back to their husbands.

This year, WCC was very grateful to get sponsorship from the Toh Kian Chui Foundation to renovate the shelter. When WCC first bought the single-story terrace shelter in 2005, no major renovations were done due to limited funds. The International Women's Association (IWA) also chipped in to help us purchased some essential furnishings. The Shelter is now fully furnished and has a third room as well as a new kitchen area.

Service Outreach

In 2007, WCC conducted three training workshops and a series of talks on the issue of violence against women for service providers and the general public. Participants included representatives from government agencies (hospital, police) and NGOs.

Muslim Women Workshop

WCC carried out two workshops for Muslim women in Kedah and Perak. The workshop "Women and Law" raised participants' awareness and understanding on the gender issues in Islam, Muslim Law and the status of women in the family and society. The workshop in Kedah was jointly organised with the Persatuan Kesedaran Wanita Kedah at Hotel Seri Malaysia in Alor Setar on 27 January. This workshop was a follow-up from the one conducted in 2006. The second workshop was held on 12-13 May and was jointly organized with the Perak Women for Women in Ipoh.

These two workshops reached out to a total of 51 participants from various organisations. It was an eye opening experience for many of the participants. They were able to understand the role of human interpretation in Islamic law in Malaysia. The discussions were lively in these two workshops. Participants gave positive feedback and felt they had benefited from it. WCC volunteers helped make these workshops successful.

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Talks for Service Providers and Public

Every year, WCC conducts regular talks for our service providers on how to deal with the issue of violence against women. Two talks were given to student nurses from the Hospital Lam Wah Ee on 20 April and 6 September. Another three talks were conducted in Penang Medical College on 18 May, 13 July and 10 August for their medical students. Both these colleges have included violence against women as part of the course curriculum. In 2007, WCC reached out to 140 service providers from the health sector.



WCC also conducts a regular session on gender for para counsellors from June to September as part of the Penang Counselling Course. The course is open to the public and it covers topics like counselling theories and ethics, crisis intervention, cognitive behavioural therapy and advanced counselling skills. In 2007, we were able to reach out to 15 participants in this course.

WCC is recognised by most organisations in the northern region through our active involvement in our training, workshop and talks. In 2007, we received many invitations from various

organisations to give talks on the issue of violence against women. These organisations include:

- Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics (RECSAM)
- Wanita Gerakan Pulau Pinang
- Pusat Perkhidmatan Y.B. Ariff Shah
- Majlis Pembangunan Wanita dan Keluarga Pulau Pinang
- Penang Wesley Methodist Church
- Majlis Guru-guru Tadika Daerah Kota Setar, Perak
- Penang Bar Council
- USM radio community programme
- Hospital Sultan Abdul Halim, Sungai Petani
- Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman Penang
- Hospital Ipoh



Through these talks, we were able to reach out to 600 participants.

Police Training Workshop

This was the third time that WCC conducted a gender sensitising training for front desk police officers. The training was held on 4 December at the Kompleks Masyarakat Penyayang. This training was made possible through the support of the Penang Chief Police Officer Datuk Koh Hong Sun.

WCC felt that the training was very important

to create awareness and to sensitise the police officers. The police tend to be the first service providers abused women turn to when they seek help. Their role is to provide information and to take a report in a sensitive manner. The training was planned and carried out because WCC had received many complaints from women who were not happy with the way they were treated by front desk police officers when they lodged reports on domestic violence.

The training had an impact on the police officers. 96% expressed that they had gained new knowledge on the issue and 92% said the training would impact positively on their work. They felt they were now more sensitised towards women's problems.

Single Mothers' Support Group

WCC embarked on this project in 2006. Six single mothers went through 10 support group sessions with our facilitators.

In January 2007, a session on stress management and relaxation was held at the WCC office. Nine members and volunteers attended the session. This session was to get single mothers to share their ups and downs. Participants learnt from each other how to cope with stress.

The support sessions eventually stopped due to difficulties in getting single mothers to attend every session. We found that it was not effective to run a session with just two or three women. Although there are numerous single mothers groups in the community, WCC's focussed only on single mothers who had experienced domestic violence. This meant that the number of women we worked with was much smaller. Given the difficulties in ensuring sufficient numbers, WCC is planning to broaden the scope of the target group to encompass other single mother groups in the community.

Finance is one of the major concerns of single mothers. Many of them have limited incomes and face high expenditure especially when raising children. While WCC seeks ways to help women to learn how to manage their income, we also try to assist women upgrade their skills. In view of this, WCC plans to organise some skills building workshops for the next three years and reach out to more women and single mothers.

Working with Men

In 2006, WCC's male project officer was sent to Singapore for a study visit of the various family service centres. One of the objectives was to learn how some centres conducted group sessions with men who abused their partners.

WCC initial plan was to work with the inmates from Penang Prison who had been convicted of a domestic violence crime. WCC held a meeting with the Penang Prison director and personnel. While the prison authorities welcomed this idea, there were burueacratic difficult which hampered this effort.

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This brochure was to help children understand what family violence is and how to keep themselves safe ...

Due to this constraint, WCC decided to change the approach by conducting a series of group sessions on *Understanding Violence* for men from the community in February and March in Kulim. During the sessions, the men were able to interact and discuss various issues including types of violence, impact of violence on the victim and the family. Some of them even brought newspaper cuttings on domestic violence cases to discuss during the sessions. These sessions allowed WCC not only to make adjustments to the designed module, but get a better insight into men's views on domestic violence and women.

In 2007, the male project officer counseled six men at the request of their wives. All the cases were related to domestic violence. He found it challenging as most of their husbands were unable to take responsibility or their actions. Only a few came back for follow-up sessions.

Besides handling these cases, the male project officer also conducted a series of talks in schools, the details of which are in the outreach report.

Resource Development

WCC published a brochure on family violence for children entitled "Feeling Safe at Home". The aim of this brochure was to help children understand what family violence is and how to keep themselves safe and where they can seek help should violence occur in their homes. The brochure was printed in three languages (English, Malay and Chinese) and has been distributed to all primary schools in Penang.

Conclusion

In general, the service has carried out most of the programmes planned for 2007. WCC will continue to maintain our services as well as improve on our programme with single mothers. Besides helping women to empower themselves, WCC is planning to organise workshops on skills building, managing finances and parenting skills. As for our work with men, WCC will continue with the group sessions for men from different communities.

