

Service Report 2008

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In 2008, WCC saw a small decline in face-to-face counselling as well as telephone counselling but we had an increase in online counselling. Despite the drop in clients, our staff were kept busy throughout the year with follow-up cases, in particular, seeing to the needs of shelter clients as well as the service outreach programme.

Provision of Services

Table 1: Services Provided and Numbers of Cases Handled in 2008

Type of Services	Total Number
1 Face-to-Face Counselling	434 counselling sessions
2 Telephone Counselling	977 calls
3 Online Counselling	94 emails
4 Shelter	7 women and 8 children
5 Service Outreach	340 participants attended our talks
6 Working with Men	5 men attended group sessions

Face-to-Face Counselling

In 2008, WCC saw a total of 250 new clients, a decrease of 7% compared to 2007. For our new and follow-up cases, a total of 434 counselling sessions were conducted.

In Table 2, out of the 296 clients who came to see us, 46 were from previous years. These clients returned for a total of 74 follow-up sessions with our social workers. There were many follow-up sessions with new clients and some were shelter clients who needed support throughout the process, like referring them to other agencies and finding homes for those who wanted to set up a new life. The social worker assisted shelter clients to find jobs as well.

Table 2: Face-to-Face Counselling in 2008

	Number of clients	Counselling sessions
New cases	250	250
Follow-up sessions*	44	110
Old cases (follow-up)	46	74
Total	296**	434

* Follow-up: Out of the 250 new cases, 44 clients came back for follow-up sessions.

** Total clients seen = 250 + 46 = 296

Table 3: Types of New Cases in 2008

Types of new cases	No. of clients	Percentage (%)
Domestic violence	86	34.0
Marital problems	53	21.0
Information seeking	24	10.0
Legal advice	30	12.0
Relationship problems	19	7.6
Rape	23	9.0
Child sexual abuse	1	0.4
Others	14	6.0
Total	250	100.0

In 2008, domestic violence cases accounted for 34% and remained as the highest category seen. Out of 86 cases, fewer than a third of the clients lodged police reports and only six applied for Interim Protection Order (IPO). Most of the clients said that they did not want to make it a big issue but would rather just file for divorce. Some asked to know their rights and the procedures involved in getting an IPO.

Clients with marital problems (53) also decreased to 21% from 29% in 2007. Half of the women complained that their husbands were having extra-marital affairs. Another 23% stated that they were already separated and needed to know how to go about getting a divorce. 15% of the clients had already filed for divorce but were facing problems because their husbands refused to pay maintenance. The rest were related to spousal behavior like alcoholism and gambling. 12% (30) of the clients approached WCC for legal advice. Most of the problems were related to maintenance, child custody, and property issues.

The number of rape cases rose to 23 compared to seven cases last year. The increased number reported was possibly due to our initiative of starting a rape support network for rape victims prompting the Penang General Hospital to refer these cases directly to WCC for immediate counselling.

WCC received 36 referrals from different agencies including the government hospital, police department, welfare department, Legal Aid Bureau, and political parties' service centres.

Clients' Profile

The ethnic distribution of WCC's clients is as follows: 53% Chinese, followed by Indian (32%), Malay (12%), and others (3%). This trend has remained largely unchanged over the years. There was a slight increase of Malay clients who sought help compared to 2007. 83% of WCC's clientele had secondary education, 9% primary education only and 4% were illiterate. In terms of

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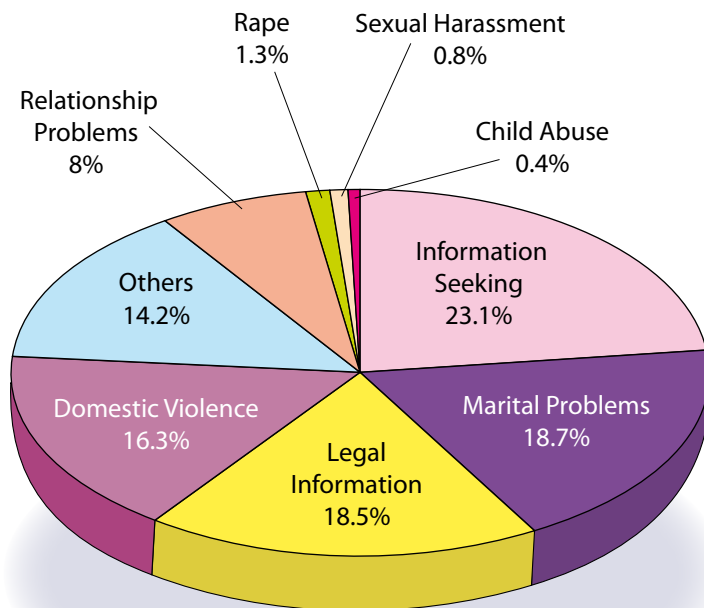
socio-economic background, 66% of the clients were working women, 18% housewives, 10% unemployed and 6% were students. In terms of income, 34% had no income, 40% earned less than RM1,500 per month, and 24% earned more than RM1,500. From the data collected, it was clear that WCC serves primarily women who have only secondary education and in the lower income group.

Telephone Counselling

WCC received a total of 977 calls in 2008 – 529 new calls and 448 follow-up calls. There was a decrease of 12% in telephone counselling compared to 2007 (1,120 calls).

23% of calls received related to information-seeking like job opportunities, financial support, etc. 19% to legal matters like divorce, maintenance and custody of children. Another 19% of the calls were regarding marital problems, e.g., extra-marital affairs and communication breakdown. 16% sought help on domestic violence. Most of them wanted to know their rights, the procedures for getting help and putting a stop to domestic violence.

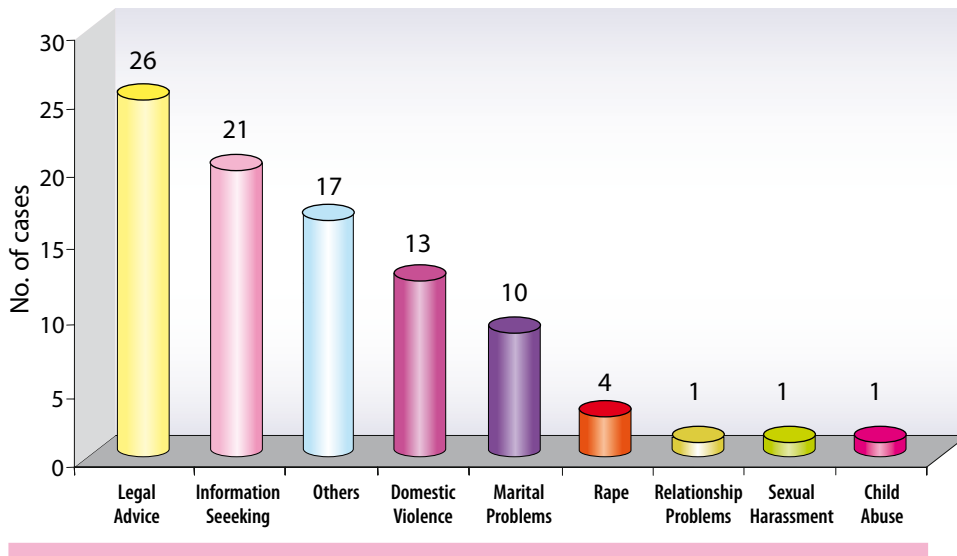
Figure 1: Types of Telephone Counselling



Online Counselling

Online counselling increased steadily over the last three years. In 2008, WCC received 94 emails compared to 61 emails in 2007 and 39 emails in 2006.

Figure 2: Types of Online Counselling



28% of them were about legal advice on divorce, children custody and maintenance. 14% sought advice on domestic violence and 11% on marital problems. 22% of the emails were from university or college students who asked for data relating to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and child sexual abuse for their research papers. 4% were related to rape cases whereas the rest were about relationship problems, sexual harassment, and child abuse. Another 18% wrote in regarding financial problems, job opportunities, employment rights, etc.

Shelter

The number of clients who sought shelter dropped to seven women and eight children. This was a 50% decrease compared to 2007. Five of the women who sought shelter were new cases and one of them had to return to the shelter twice this year.

Most of our shelter clients were housewives and only two were working women. More than half of the shelter clients were Indian and two were Malay. Half of the women who sought shelter were referred to WCC by government agencies like the welfare department and hospital. Their length of stay was from a minimum one day to a maximum of three weeks. Out of the seven, three decided to go back to their husbands; four left their abusive husbands.

Service Outreach

WCC conducts regular talks for medical personnel every year. In 2008, two lectures were given to student nurses from Lam Wah Ee Hospital in March and August. Another four lectures were conducted at the Penang Medical College in May, June, August, and November. The medical students and student nurses were very participatory and were able to debate the myths on domestic violence and rape. The common belief for most of the students was that alcohol caused violence. However, after going through the lively debate, they concluded that there did not have to be a reason for domestic violence. All in, WCC reached out to about 200 persons from the medical sector.



WCC also conducts regular sessions on gender for para-counsellors as part of the Penang Counselling Course. WCC sent two new staff and a few volunteers to attend training. The course is to help the para-counsellor acquire basic counselling skills. The course covered topics which included cognitive behavioral therapy, crisis intervention, counselling children and adolescents.

Initiating Rape Survivor Support

Responding to calls for support for rape victims in Penang General Hospital as well as recognizing the rising number of rape cases yearly, WCC initiated a project spanning three years, intended to provide a support network for these women. In its first year, the project began with consultations with medical personnel from One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC) in the Accident and Emergency Department at Penang General Hospital. WCC subsequently went on call where the OSCC staff would call WCC for counselling whenever a rape victim attended hospital for treatment.

Between April and December 2008, WCC staff, Prema Devaraj attended at ten different rape cases, visiting the women either warded at the OSCC or in their homes. These face-to-face visits enabled WCC staff to build rapport with the victims. WCC staff then made weekly follow-up phone calls to each victim for a period of three weeks.

WCC has become acutely aware of the different needs of rape victims and WCC staff have undergone training on trauma responses so that they may help rape victims handle their fears. Interestingly, approximately half the rape victims seen by WCC at the Penang General Hospital were statutory rape victims, many of whom had had consensual sex with their partners. However, rape reports had been lodged by family members because the children were underaged. These young women were ignorant of basic reproductive health and needed support in terms of self-esteem and direction. In some instances, the parents or family members of these young women were more upset than the girls themselves. Older rape victims had different concerns such as the possibility of pregnancy arising from rape, subsequent retaliation by the perpetrator, difficulties in sleeping and many worried about what would happen next.

In the second year of the project, WCC will continue to liaise with the OSCC in both Penang and Seberang Prai hospitals as well as begin to recruit and train a pool of volunteers who will then provide support for rape victims in the community.

Skills Training for Single Mothers

WCC has moved from being merely a support group for single mothers to empowering these women through financial independence. WCC initiated a project that focused on developing financially productive skills by training the women to sew handicrafts. 23 women from the lower income group participated.

The project was made possible through the help and expertise of our volunteer, Paridah Mokhsin, who conducted four training sessions. The Bayan Baru Community College was also helpful as they lent us the sewing machines and venue for classes.

Many women said that they would like to use their skills to start up small businesses while others said that they would take up employment in the field. Soroptimist International (SI) Penang supported our project with a request for sewing 100 bags for their environmental project. SI Penang went on to teach these women other skills using beads to make necklaces and bangles.



Workshop on 'Manage your Finances'



In the process of equipping single mothers and women with knowledge on budgeting, WCC organized a capacity-building workshop on 'Manage Your Finances' on 18 October at Kompleks Masyarakat Penyayang. The aim was to help single mothers learn how to budget. There was a turnout of 45.

The guest speaker, Ms Chong Ee Ee from *Agensi Kaunseling Pengurusan Kredit (AKPK)* Penang Branch, spoke about AKPK services and how they assist individuals in debt. She also gave participants tips on how to draw up monthly budgets. Three participants revealed their personal

budgets during the exercise and two of them expressed difficulty in managing their monthly income. They were taught how to tackle their spending habits and plan budgets more effectively.

Generally participants felt that it was a good workshop and hoped that WCC would organize similar workshop in the future.

Workshop for Care-Givers

Service providers are often regarded as individuals who offer care to those in need without realizing that they need care themselves. For the first time, WCC organized a workshop focused on caring for service providers, held on 15 & 16 November at Tanjung Bungah Beach Hotel.

The two-day workshop was conducted by Ms Koh Tan Peng who is a trainer and registered counsellor. There was a good turnout of 26 participants including WCC social workers. Participants from various NGOs such as Penang Care, Than Hsiang Mitra Welfare Centre, Hospice, Befrienders, Salvation Army and government agencies like Penang General Hospital attended.

The workshop not only provided space and time for participants to relax and enjoy but also helped them understand themselves and recognize symptoms of stress and burnout. There was much self-reflection and participants were able to consider both their strengths and weaknesses.



Muslim Women Workshop

Having identified the lack of awareness of rights among Muslim women, WCC embarked on a three-year awareness raising programme for them. WCC first reached out to different Muslim women's groups and shelters in Penang, offering to visit and work with them. These included groups such as Pertubuhan Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM) and Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam (LKPI). Shelters visited included Pusat Bimbingan Remaja Raudatus Sakinah and Rumah Darul Sakinah. In addition, WCC also made contact with four Single Mothers Associations from different districts in Penang. Some of the groups contacted were unaware of WCC's existence and services. Others were happy to hear from us and were enthusiastic about future collaboration.

On 23 May 2008, WCC organized a workshop for Muslim Women *Peranan Anda Untuk Perubahan* (Your Role for Change), at Hotel 1926. The objective of the programme was to create awareness of Islamic Family Law and introduce the topic of gender. Twenty participants attended the programme.

They were given a brief background to Islamic Family Law and the issues facing Muslim women. Case studies on domestic violence, maintenance, divorce, and faraid (division of property) were discussed and presented by the participants themselves. The workshop session on gender helped them understand the context in which they live, why gender discrimination exists and how it impacts on them.

In December, WCC with a local community group, *Badan Kebajikan Masyarakat Nibong Tebal* conducted a joint workshop for the Muslim women's community. Approximately 50 Muslim women attended. WCC's volunteer lawyer, Yuslinov Ahmad, conducted a session on Islamic Family Law. The main questions raised were on Nafkah (maintenance for wife and children), Nusyuz (disobedience) and Faraid (division of property). A small survey, using a simple questionnaire,

was conducted among the 20 participants to establish what problems they faced in their marriage. A number of them revealed that they were experiencing domestic violence. Examples include being hit, pressurized emotionally, not being allowed to mix with their own family members, being forced to have sex, verbal abuse and interrogation when they go out.

WCC will continue to liaise with Muslim women's community groups in the coming year.



Working with Men

In 2008, the male project officer counselled 13 men. Some of them were walk-in while others were called to attend for sessions at the request of their wives. A total of 16 face-to-face counselling sessions were conducted. Compared to 2007, the number of men seeking counselling had doubled. Most of the clients were counselled on issues relating to marital problems, verbal and social abuse and controlling behavior towards their partners.

In June, the WCC male social worker conducted a series of group sessions on “Understanding Violence” for men in Kulim organised by Sunshine Home. Five men from different backgrounds attended these group work sessions. The sessions help them explore domestic violence, the effects of violence and how to deal with it. The participants were open in their discussions and some even spoke of their personal struggles to control their anger. They found the sessions helped them identify the stages of anger and how to deal with it. The six sessions ended in July.

Overall, the participants were happy and appreciated the work of WCC. They said they would participate in future programmes.



Pusat Perkhidmatan Wanita

In 2008, with the new state government, two projects were initiated by the Penang State Women, Family and Community Development. One of them was to set up a women’s service centre on the mainland and another project was for a day care centre for school going children. WCC agreed to set up and manage a new centre named Pusat Perkhidmatan Wanita (PPW – Women’s Service Centre) Seberang Perai on behalf of the state government. The preparatory

work for the setting up of PPW began in the second half of the year, to identify a suitable location and recruit a new staff for PPW.

Lau Swee Li, a senior social worker was recruited to manage PPW. WCC began by conducting a series of training sessions to recruit new volunteers. The training was held at WCC and it covered topics like violence against women and basic counselling skills. WCC intends to start serving women in crisis for the mainland by early 2009.

Resource Development

WCC published a new brochure on family violence for women entitled “When There is Hurt at Home”. The aim of this brochure is to help women understand what family violence is and how they can help themselves when faced with the situation. WCC received good feedback from its members and shelter clients who found the information very helpful. The brochure will be translated into Malay and Chinese.

Conclusion

WCC carried out all of the programmes planned for 2008. In the coming year, WCC will continue to concentrate on capacity building for single mothers, conduct awareness workshops for Muslim women as well as programmes for men. As for improvement of services, WCC will continue to promote them and work closely with other agencies.

