

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

January 1995



3-day conference leads to common objectives

"POINTS FOR DOMESTIC WORK, POINTS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS!" IS RALLYING CRY FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS IN CANADA

Forty-seven domestic workers and advocates ended a three-day INTERCEDE conference with a decision to work closely together to achieve equality for domestic workers under the Immigration point system.

"Points for Domestic Work, Points for Domestic Workers!" was a slogan they adopted to highlight the demand that skills needed to do paid domestic and caregiving labour in the home must be recognized.

At present, these skills are not recognized under the Immigration point system and, therefore, domestic work and related experience or training are not accorded any points.

This is one reason why domestic workers are not able to get enough points when they apply to come to Canada as independent immigrants and why they must enter as temporary workers under so-called "special programs" such as the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and the one preceding it, the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program.

"There is clear discrimination against domestic and caregiver workers in the way that the Immigration point system is applied against our work and against us as workers," said Julie Diesta of the Vancouver Committee for Domestic Workers' and Caregivers' Rights (CDWCR).

Rare opportunity to share experiences and strategies

The three-day conference held from November 11 to 13, 1994 at the Chestnut Park Hotel in Toronto brought

together domestic workers and advocates from Vancouver, Montreal, Ottawa, London, Cobourg and the Metro Toronto area.

Board Directors and members of INTERCEDE welcomed participants representing various organizations including the International Caregivers of Regina, Inc., L'Association pour la defense des droits du personnel domestique, Vancouver CDWCR the Ottawa Multicultural Homemakers Association, London Filipino-Canadian Nannies and domestic workers from Cobourg, Ontario.

It was a rare occasion to share not only their experiences with labour and immigration rules but also to share methods of education, community organizing, skills training and advocacy strategies.

"It was important for us to know what creative ideas women were applying to improve our living and working condition," said Jean Jovero, a Board member of INTERCEDE, "for example, we were able to learn some lessons from the Regina participants who are about to take over the management and care of a nursing home, while we in Toronto were able to share our incentives and experience in forming a workers' cooperative.

Most importantly, the conference concluded with positive decisions to strengthen networking and coordination based on firm principles of unity, and to launch a campaign for landed status for domestic workers centred around the Immigration point system.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL, from the Board and Staff of INTERCEDE

ALL WELCOME:

CAREGIVERS & DOMESTIC WORKERS
LIVE-IN, WORKING IN HOSPITALS, NURSING HOMES ETC.
ON TEMPORARY, OPEN PERMIT OR IMMIGRANT STATUS

at INTERCEDE meeting, **Sunday, January 8, 1995**
3 - 5 pm, Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street (corner Spadina/Cecil)

Topic: **"Plan '95 - What Services & Programs INTERCEDE Can Offer"**

2 - 4 pm, New member application & renewal of Member ID 94-001 to 94-022

Judith Elizabeth Pilowsky

A Population at Risk (Continued)

Many Immigrant Women live in situations of continuous emotional distress. The few available studies conducted on this issue show that immigrant, refugee and visible minority women are indeed a population at risk in the field of mental health.



Barbara Pasternak

Therapeutic programs for survivors of wife assault: Conservative statistics indicate that in Canada one million women are assaulted every year by their male spouses and that between 10 and 50 per cent of all women who live with a male partner will be assaulted at least once during the relationship.

Immigrant women, like many other women, are frequently involved in socio-economically dependent relationships. Wife-battering is a long-existing problem in the immigrant communities as well as in mainstream Canada. But the factors which keep immigrant women from accessing services force them to stay in abusive relationships, heightening the risk to their well-being and mental health.

Incest survivors: Incest has been defined as any act with sexual overtones perpetrated by a needed and/or trusted adult, whom a child is unable to refuse because of age, lack of knowledge or the context of the relationship (O'Hara & Taylor, 1983).

Incest affects both male and female children. Even though reliable statistics regarding incest are lacking, conservative statistics compiled on female incest survivors (without isolating any particular ethnic group) indicate that 25 per cent of female children have

experienced incestuous sexual abuse before the age of 14. Well over 33 per cent have had such an experience by the age of 18 (Russell, 1984).

Incest survivors, repeatedly and over long periods of time, are subjected to coercion by their abusers. This coercion, which ranges from subtle to brutal forms, makes them prone to developing an array of emotional difficulties. It has been pointed out that some of the psychological difficulties that incest survivors experience are phobias, severe difficulties with intimacy and trust, sexual problems, poor body image and fear of losing control.

Low self esteem: Therapy or support groups for women with low self-esteem should be a component of mental health services for immigrant, refugee and minority women.

Self-esteem is the ability of an individual to value and feel proud of herself, her skills, qualities and traits. Moreover, a high level of self-esteem is a powerful component in our personal life, social interactions and roles. Our self-esteem is developed through our interactions with others. It has been argued that feeling good about one's self or having a high level of self-esteem is directly related to believing in one's self, that is, one's capacity to exert power.

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Many immigrant women, as a result of our social experiences, have been devalued and punished if we take control over our own bodies and lives. For example, some immigrant women come from cultures where the hold of patriarchy does not allow us to make decisions. I believe this directly contributes to feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem.

Refugee women who have been tortured, experience psychological trauma and feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness which can reduce self-esteem. Often we find ourselves needing psychological treatment geared towards building a more positive view of ourselves.

Coping with loss: Many immigrant women have left behind family, friends and relatives in our countries of origin. For many women, direct contact with these significant others is limited to a "once in a lifetime" visit to their countries. In addition, many immigrant women, particularly refugees, have experienced many other losses ranging from cultural traits, material possessions, support networks and systems and of course, loved ones. It is not surprising then, that loss and grief are common themes experienced by immigrant women.

Parenting: There is also a need to assist immigrant and refugee women with some of the difficulties we experience with our children. For example, mothers who

have experienced incest are in need of psychological assistance, to enable them to deal with the aftermath of their trauma.

Moreover, some of our cultures regard physical punishment of children as an acceptable method of discipline. In Canada, when immigrant women are chastised for using such methods, we are left without alternative ways of dealing with the problems of discipline—left to cope with our guilt and a sense of maternal incompetence.

Anger: Immigrant and refugee women encounter many sources of stress and anger, largely resulting from poorly paid jobs, family difficulties, adaptation to new roles, racism and discrimination.

It has been argued that women lack legitimate, socially-sanctioned outlets for our anger and traditional societal views of femininity reinforce the notion that women must not experience or express anger.

Psychotherapists and other mental health professionals serving women acknowledge that many women experience difficulties with anger. These difficulties include turning anger inward to the point of becoming severely depressed, showing self-destructive forms of anger such as suicidal gestures and being unable to express anger or expressing it in a negative and uncontrollable manner.

Addressing the Needs

Despite the enormous need for therapy and support programs for immigrant and refugee women, there is a clear under-representation of counselors and personnel who have the necessary language capabilities and knowledge of women's issues to serve this population. Also there is a lack of culturally-appropriate services and culturally-sensitive personnel serving immigrant women.

It is essential that mainstream and community agencies develop therapy programs to address all of these needs—filling the long-existing gaps in mental health services for immigrant and refugee women. This can only be achieved if mainstream and community mental health agencies hire non-sexist, culturally-sensitive, women-centred staff, who have languages other than the two official languages and who are aware of the dangers of racism in mental health. Mental health services must also be affordable, assuring that all women have equal access to those services.

Originally from Chile, Judith Pilowsky is currently a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. Much of her research and practical work with women has been in the areas of mental health and violence against women.

From Pg 1

Campaign for points for domestic workers

A domestic worker will not be able to get the passing mark of 70 (out of 100 points) an applicant needs to become a landed immigrant in Canada as long as domestic work is not considered skilled work and accorded appropriate points.

A point system is used by Canada immigration to determine whether a person can enter the country as a permanent resident. Based on priorities set by Immigration policy, applicants for permanent residence - (except those being sponsored under Family Class and those seeking refugee status) - are assessed and given a number of points.

A maximum number of points are given for each of nine categories: education, experience, occupation, pre-arranged employment, preparation or training, age, language, personal suitability and immigration levels. An applicant must get at least 70 points out of a maximum

100 points in order to pass and qualify to become a landed immigrant in Canada.

Even if domestic work is in demand in Canada, as an occupation domestic work gets zero points out of a maximum 10. It follows that experience and training or preparation for domestic work would also get zero out of eight and 18 points respectively.

Domestic workers, unlike other immigrants, are admitted to work in Canada on temporary visitor's visa; the Live-in Caregiver Program requires them to renew their work permit every year and allows them to apply for landed status only after working as live-in domestic caregiver workers for two years.

As a result of their discussions, participants at the INTERCEDE conference were unanimous in calling for a campaign to stop discrimination against domestic workers under the Immigration point system.

The campaign will be launched with a postcard lobby beginning in January and will take various forms of organizing throughout the year.

"In the year of the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, when the world's governments will be meeting in September 1995 in Beijing to account for the advancement of women's equality in the last five years and for the next five, this campaign by domestic workers in Canada takes on added significance," said INTERCEDE president, Denyse Stewart, "not only because the struggle for migrant women's rights is being intensified, but more so because of the great effort by women worldwide to win recognition for women's work, paid and unpaid."

Worker protection compared in discussions

Conference participants had a chance to compare and contrast working conditions prevailing in B.C., Quebec, Saskatchewan and Ontario and they updated each other about changes that were being sought to improve labour protection laws.

In B.C., domestic workers are seeking coverage under minimum wage and overtime provisions and asking for stronger enforcement measures, among others. In Quebec, live-in workers are not covered under minimum wage the way live-out workers are.

The B.C. labour ministry recently adopted some of the recommendations made by advocates for domestic workers including CDWCR.

Sharing of methods enrich all

On the last day of the conference, representatives of the different advocacy and service organizations described the different kinds of services, forms of organizing and education, and types of skills training they offered to members and clients.

The problems and needs they identified - such as funding, rights enforcement, equal treatment - turned out to

We wish to thank the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program); Canadian Heritage; Multiculturalism and Citizenship; Ontario Ministry of Citizenship; Ontario Ministry of Health; Ontario Ministry of the Environment; Ontario Women's Directorate; the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Community and Social Services); and the City of Toronto Grants Review Board for their continuing support.

be positive impetus for the most inspired and creative ideas for community organizing, training and advocacy.

Whether it was gathering recyclable pop cans to raise funds, forming a workers' cooperative to improve working conditions, taking over a senior nursing home to provide training, having coffee time to break their isolation or holding regular workshops to build their confidence, the women had valuable lessons to learn from each other.

But the main lesson they had from the conference is that they must facilitate better communication among domestic workers and their organizations and maintain a national network based on three unifying principles:

1. *work to improve conditions of domestic workers in Canada;*
2. *recognize that domestic workers are skilled workers whose occupation is in demand, therefore domestic work and domestic workers must be properly valued.*
3. *struggle for equal rights for domestic workers as for other workers.*

The conference ended with a promise to launch a vigorous "Points" campaign, tighten the national network and meet again in Vancouver next year!

INTERCEDE acknowledges the financial assistance for the INTERCEDE CONFERENCE generously given by:

- * *Multiculturalism Programs, Dept. of Canadian Heritage*
- * *Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)*
- * *Current and former members of INTERCEDE*

VANCOUVER CDWCR

Committee for Domestic Workers' & Caregivers' Rights
(an INTERCEDE Affiliate)
Contact Julie or Lorina (604) 739-1894

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