

Education through Radio

by Ivy Josiah

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) in Malaysia opened the first refuge in the country in 1982 for battered women and their children. Besides providing shelter, telephone counselling and face-to-face counselling, WAO plays a lead role in advocacy work, public education and law reform on domestic violence and continues to play an important role in the women's movement in Malaysia.

The organisation has, over the years, organised innovative public education programmes on violence against women on radio, television and newspapers. In 1997 and in 1998, WAO discovered the use of radio as an effective means of communicating issues surrounding domestic violence.

LIVE TALK SHOWS ON RADIO

In 1997, WAO was approached by Sony Music Malaysia. Sony offered the use of the song "How Come How Long," written and performed by Babyface and Stevie Wonder, is a poignant rendition of a woman's abuse by her husband while their son watches helplessly. Neighbours ignore the cries and screams until, one day, catastrophe occurs.

"How Come How Long" was already popular in Malaysia during that period as it was played not only on radio but also on television, accompanied by a dramatic video. We knew the song when played on radio will attract the attention of the listeners. Sony Music offered us free use of the song and 200 autographed CDs by Babyface.

So, we came up with idea to have a live talk show on radio. Live talk shows are immensely popular but their discussions range from rearing children to saving money to self-improvement. If there were any discussions on violence against women, they were usually one-off events.

WAO approached the government radio station since we knew that the private stations will charge us. We managed to persuade two radio networks: Radio 6 which broadcasts in Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, and Radio 4, an English language network.

Both networks offered us only five hours, i.e. five one-hour talk shows over five weeks. The

programme on Radio 6 began on 1 July 1997, while airing over Radio 4 began 2 September 1997.

The show opened with the song, followed by an interview cum discussion centered on one particular aspect of domestic violence proceeded between the host and two guests. The discussions centered on one particular aspect of domestic violence. Following the discussion, the phone lines were then opened to the public for questions and comments. The hour ended with the theme song, with an appeal for listeners to buy the CDs at specific shop outlets to benefit WAO's fundraising efforts.

Because we had only five weeks, we wanted to attack some of the myths surrounding domestic violence that were still seen as truths and to provide information on help for battered woman. Posing these myths as questions the five topics were:

- *Should no one interfere in the domestic affairs of man and wife?*
- *Does alcohol cause battering ?*
- *Is it only poor and uneducated men who beat up their wives?*
- *Do husbands have the right to beat their wives?*
- *Is there help out there for victims of domestic violence?*

In each episode, we made sure that all our speakers always brought up these two points:

1. Domestic violence is an outcome of power and control and
2. Domestic violence is a crime under Malaysian Law/ Domestic Violence Act 1994. We also made it a point to clearly give out the WAO telephone counselling number.

LISTENERS' RESPONSE

The response was tremendous, not only during the shows but for weeks after the shows, with women calling WAO for counseling and information. During the "call-ins," men and women called to agree, ask questions and challenge these myths. Invariably, on every show we were asked "What about men who are beaten up?" or "What about women who provoke men?"

We made sure that we had workers stationed at the phones throughout the five weeks and the following weeks after. There was a 150 percent increase

(from 5 to 15 calls per day) in telephone inquires and counseling calls. We even had women interested in volunteering or offering donations.

There were difficult moments on air. A few callers derided feminism and our perspective on violence against women. It takes a lot to be patient with outright sexism. The impact of this public education program far outweighs the difficulties.

COMMUNITY MESSAGES OVER THE RADIO

Realising that to bring about long-term changes, our public education programmes must be sustained and continued. We took on a different approach with radio in 1998. When AMP Radio Networks, which ran five FM radio networks (AMP Radio Networks is part of ASTRO, Malaysia's first digital satellite radio and television broadcast) approached WAO to develop community messages on domestic violence, we responded eagerly.

The objective was primarily to raise awareness on the Domestic Violence Act, which was implemented only in June 1996. The radio messages were designed to impress upon the Malayesian mindset that domestic violence is a crime, and that one can get information and help for victims.

Starting February 1998, the messages were aired two to three times a day on three networks: Hitz FM, Mix FM and Talk Radio. While Hitz FM had half a million listeners, the other two networks had a following of 300,000 listeners.

AMP Radio networks used their own recording studios and aired these following community messages free.

"A colleague reports for work with bruises on her face, arms and legs. This is not the first time and she is reluctant to talk about it. What could this mean?

She is probably a victim of Domestic Violence. What can you do to help? Encourage or help her make a police report so that necessary action or protection can be done before it is too late. For more information, call your local Welfare Officer at toll-free 1800-3040. For immediate counselling, call WAO at 03-7563488."

"What is Domestic Violence? Domestic violence is



courtesy of New Straits Times

Aziana Zainal Ali (left), general manager of Sony Music Malaysia and Ivy Josiah, executive secretary of Women's Aid Organisation in Malaysia at the press conference to launch the radio show tackling domestic violence

an abuse of power. It is when one partner in a relationship (usually a man) uses violence or the threat of violence to control the other partner. The abusive partner will probably maintain control of the couple's finances and social life. For more information call your local Welfare Office at 1800-3040. For immediate counselling call WAO at 03-755-4426 or 756-3488."

IF YOU LISTEN TO IT MORE THAN ONCE

It was estimated that 800,000 Malaysians, mostly young people, listened to these messages at least once a day. While we are unable to conduct a social impact survey, we can reckon that, for a start, WAO's profile was raised as more people came to recognise that WAO is synonymous with domestic violence aid. This years, we have been receiving more phone calls for either information or counselling. For the last few years we received an average of five calls. We now have an average of eight calls per day.

FUTURE PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Our future plans with radio includes negotiating for sponsorship for an exclusive radio programme to be aired once a week where we will discuss all forms of violence against women.

While we will continue to use radio, WAO also wants to embark on plans for an integrated, sustained public education programme using all forms of media (television, advertisements and billboards). Enough cannot be said or done to eliminate violence against women.☺

Ivy Josiah is a pioneer member and the current executive director of Women's Aid Organisation aside from being a long time activist on violence against issues.