

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-first session
New York, 26 February – 9 March 2007

PANEL I

**Key Policy initiatives to eliminate all forms of discrimination and
violence against the girl child**

submitted by

Michal Komem
Israel

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

February 20, 2007

Is it Possible to See the Girls?

Abstract: Discrimination and violence against adolescent girls takes place in the

discrimination, oppression and violence indicate that this service was not reaching all the girls in distress and was not sufficiently responsive to the girls' full range of needs. The situation facing young girls in distress described in this paper is based on findings of a study conducted by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute as part of the "Girls on the Map!" initiative, as well as on other studies conducted in Israel.

5. I will assert that there are three main reasons for discrimination against and oppression of young girls:

Girls are not "seen" by many people, and since they are invisible, there is no attention to them and to their needs. Violence against them becomes permissible, and their distress is imperceptible. Since they are raised while being socialized towards self-silencing, a coalition of invisibility is woven

9. This process can be illustrated with regard to a group of young girls defined by us professionals as “runaway girls” in acute distress and at high risk. These girls live away from home or on the streets due to severe neglect at home, exposure to physical and sexual violence at home or charged and conflict-ridden relationships with their parents. Upon leaving home, they are open to the dangers of the street: hunger, lack of personal security, violence and rape.

The first problem arises in our definition of these girls as “runaway girls.” First, the word “runaway” has pejorative connotations. Second, while professionals view these girls as “runaways,” the girls describe themselves as having been evicted from their homes or as having no home in which to live. Viewing a girl as a “runaway” hints at a need to restore her to the place from which she has fled. Yet, viewing the girl in a manner in which she describes herself could lead to a different work approach as well as to other forms of proposed assistance.

In addition, while girls described by professionals as being “runaways” are perceived to be a small group at the “extreme end of the risk continuum,” an examination of existing data reveals that about half of the girls in the care of a service dedicated to adolescent girls spent at least one night outside of their homes. Hence, the need to leave home due to hardship and violence, defined as running away, is not a marginal phenomenon among girls at risk, but just the opposite.

Further, a study that compared the helping relationships between the “runaway girls” and women professionals attests to the invisibility of these girls and to the lack of appropriate work approaches and suitable responses. The girls clearly described a variety of desires for help – a significant, existent helping relationship of a flexible nature, able to adapt itself to their needs and situation, caring, powerful though not necessarily coercive, and sensitive to their needs. In addition, the same “runaway girls” wanted the helpful relationship to offer significant outputs that would positively impact on their lives. In contrast to the assortment of needs and desires expressed by the girls, only a limited variety of responses were offered by the women professionals and the support systems. Also, the women professionals described their roles narrowly and with limitations, and differentiated between the girls’ needs and desires, with assistance programs determined according to needs rather than to the girls’ desires. The practices which the women professionals described using to assist the girls left the professionals uninvolved, and placed them in positions of observer, supervisor or interpreter. Examination and analysis of the helping relationships between the girls and the women professionals revealed gaps that warned of the likelihood that no helpful encounter would actually take place at all, despite th7(1)5.ed i4.8scribne4lto(th7(1.3(th7(14(e s6.4(i9w{e s6and d)88.2(e82.

Hebrew) revealed that although the girls tended to complete *Miftanim* with a greater measure of success than the boys, a much lower percentage of girls than boys managed to continue their studies or find a regular job. Moreover, a

Culture and Sport has an Unit for Equality Between the Sexes that has been operating

“Girls on the Map!” Pilot Programs

18. In all of the following eight current programs, girls from different sectors of Israeli society and socio-economic backgrounds participate: native-born Israelis, girls from immigrant families, Israeli Arabs, Bedouin, and Druze. The gender-based joint encounter serves as a strong cohesive fact

23. Interventions with girls who appear before the committees for the termination of unwanted pregnancies –

the Girls on the Map initiative, originally supported solely by the Ministry of Social Affairs, now receive additional Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, the Sacta-Rashi Foundation and Israel's National Insurance Institute.

Additionally, the professional and organizational cooperation is influencing government policy by involving government ministries in the joint development of innovative models to respond to previously unmet needs. These pilot models, which are accompanied by research studies, receive government funding and are implemented with the understanding that, if successful, they will be disseminated by the ministry through a combination of shifting priorities and budget allocations. For example, groundwork is being laid currently with the Ministry of Social Affairs to replicate the ADI Center in additional locations.

The initiative is motivating government ministries to develop their own training program for personnel working with adolescent girls. For example, the Ministry of Education is now training staff who work with teenagers to identify and care for high-risk adolescent girls.

“Girls on the Map!” – The Challenges Ahead

28. Despite the achievements and the successes of the “Girls on the Map!” initiative to date, we still confront three primary challenges. The first challenge is further strengthening the initiative and stabilizing the programs so that these opportunities and interventions become standard in the package of services offered to young girls. Moreover, the programs must be established as responses available to all girls who might require them, interventions practiced countrywide rather than a unique model applied in one location. The second challenge involves extending gender-sensitive approaches to all services and frameworks that work with children and youth, as well as educating professionals as to the differences between boys and girls and to the unique life situations of young girls which mandate sensitivity and appropriate responses. Finally, we need to address the reality that while girls from different backgrounds and cultures living in Israel share many common experiences, they also live in different worlds and hence have different needs. Therefore, we must improve the cultural sensitivity of our program for young girls.