



MINISTRY FOR JUSTICE,  
EQUALITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Breaking the Cycle of Violence



### **Training Pack for Victims of Domestic Violence**

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Co-funded by the Rights, Equality  
and Citizenship (REC) Programme  
of the European Union

## MESSAGE

The project *Breaking the Cycle of Violence* is co-financed by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union and builds on a previous project *Full Cooperation: Zero Violence* with the same theme. The project is aimed to complement Malta's plan of action to implement the Istanbul Convention, with the objective to raise awareness among victims of domestic violence as well as potential victims, with a particular focus on women with disabilities, LGBTI women and migrant women.

The identified objectives of this project were: 1) to carry out research in order to identify behaviours of target groups which need to be changed in order to break the cycle of violence; 2) to develop and implement an educational programme for children and young adults; 3) to raise awareness among the different target groups on violence prevention, victims' rights and support services available to them; and 4) to develop and implement mentoring workshops for victims of violence in a second stage shelter and female survivors who receive support services from the national agency.

These training packs are aimed to ensure the sustainability of the project and may thus be replicated. They include an outline and resources for eight mentoring workshops – which tackle topics such as self-awareness, communication and empowerment amongst others – and two one-to-one sessions. They also include recommendations based on an ongoing evaluation of the sessions themselves.

Despite the success in these sessions, they should not be viewed from a one-size-fits-all perspective. This project in fact tried to shift away from this approach by addressing the different needs of the different target groups identified for this project. Therefore, these training packs shall act as a guidance and may be tailored to suit the needs of a different audience.

Finally, let's hope that this training pack will serve as a practical tool that will break the cycle of violence.

**Commissioner on Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence**

**Audrey Friggieri**



## Testimonials

1. Regarding the course that we attended I would like to say that it was very empowering to us women. It was a relief to know that I was not imagining things nor was I crazy and know that apart from the physical abuse, it wasn't only me who experienced mental and emotional abuse which more than not is much subtler and difficult to pin it down. I felt very well understood, the ones who guided the course gave us time to talk about our problems which wasn't an easy thing to do, considering you have a schedule you want to follow. They gave us tasks to boost our self-esteem, to learn when to say "It's Enough", but most all how to feel loved and that 'Love' doesn't mean you have to compromise everything you believe in. It was nice to bring together a group of women who were once abused but chose to come out as survivors to learn and give support to each other. It was very well organized and its sessions had its own programme. We even had one to one sessions with one of the facilitators. I would like to conclude that it was greatly and fondly appreciated and the things I learned, would forever hold a special place in my heart.
2. I agree with having courses like this one. There are certain situations where you don't realise they are a form of abuse. It helps to raise your morale. Very positive. Should there be another course, I would like to attend. You meet people. The exercises were interesting. You cannot let anyone take advantage of you. There's a limit. This course helped me a lot.
3. Very interesting. The course is helpful, there are certain rights that you do not know that are yours, and certain things that you do not realise that are not normal in life. This course has helped me a lot and I made a lot of friends.



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# 1 Introduction

The objectives were to develop and implement mentoring workshops for victims of VAW residing in a second stage shelter (Group A) and women survivors who received support services from the national agency (Group B).

The project aimed:

- To provide a mentoring empowerment programme to victims of violence who reside in current shelters in Malta
- To provide them with the necessary skills of how to build their self-confidence and the belief that they can start a new life away from violence.

## 2 Summary

### 2.1 Mentoring Workshops (2.5 hours):

The aim of this activity is to provide a safe space for survivors of VAW to develop their self-esteem; creativity and independence that they need to have control over their lives. It will also provide independent living skills which will further strengthen their self-reliance to lead an independent life, breaking the cycle of violence.

#### 2.1.1 *Mentoring workshop sessions 1-4:*

These four sessions will address self-reflection as a core skill for women in order to start breaking the cycle of violence. Helping and supporting are also core skills which will enable women to feel more empowered to end the cycle of violence.

#### 2.1.2 *Mentoring workshop sessions 5-8:*

These four sessions will address independent living skills which will include budgeting skills, parental skills and employment skills. These skills will help women to be better equipped to find employment and live independently and free from violence.

### 2.2 One-to-one mentoring sessions (x 2):

Women participating in the mentoring workshops will participate in two one-to-one sessions with a professional mentor so as to have the opportunity to voice out any concerns and/or feelings which may rise during the mentoring workshops.

### 2.3 Certificate award ceremony:

A seminar will be held to bring together NGOs working in the field of VAW and DV. Participants will exchange information and knowledge about their experience of the mentoring workshops. Certificates will also be awarded to all the participants.

### **3 Logistics**

1. Comfortable room with a projector.
2. Chairs placed in semi-circle.
3. Child minding facilities were necessary.
4. Provision of catering for eight sessions



## 4 Sessions

### 4.1 Session 1: Introduction

*Aim:* To introduce selves and understanding scope of programme

#### 1. Introduction

- a) Round Robin – Introducing themselves.

#### 2. Ice breaker cards

- a) Getting to know each other's likes, dislikes, general questions.

*Example:*

- *What is your favourite colour you like to wear?*
- *If you had the opportunity to travel, where would you like to go?*
- *Which season do you like best?*
- *What type of music do you like to hear?*

- b) Take a few minutes to write your thoughts about where you wish to be in 10 years' time. This question gave us a better picture on their state of hope based on their responses.

- c) Rationale: To get a better idea of how well the groups knew each other and the dynamics between them.

#### 3. Exploration of expectations regarding the course:

- *What are your expectations of this course?*
- *How do you perceive/ imagine/ wish the course to be?*
- *How do you think that by strengthening your skills and abilities would help you?*

#### 4. Project introduction brief

- a) Topics - self-awareness, emotions, trust, communication, self-care, violence, empowerment of women
- b) One to one session mentoring each participant - to be discussed and agreed at later stage.

#### 5. Group rules and logistics discussed together with the group

- a) Confidentiality
- b) Punctuality
- c) Listening to each other
- d) Non-judgemental, to show respect
- e) One is not expected to speak about personal trauma/ experiences - sharing is optional
- f) Smoking inside the premises, break time and duration, start time and finish etc.

#### 6. BREAK

7. Divide participants in groups of 2 for voluntary sharing (15 minutes) - Think of 3 things that you like about yourselves and 3 things that you like less.

#### 8. Self-disclosure

- a) Mention 1 thing to take home from this session.

#### 9. Task: Extra exercise for next session

- a) To bring an object that is dear to them and to share with group in the next session.

### 4.2 Session 2: Self-awareness - Who am I?

*Aim:* Sharing with others about self

#### 1. Introduction

- a) Round robin

#### 2. Ice Breaker

- a) Participants were asked to present the object they brought and to share something about why they chose it.
- b) Rationale: To bring the group to focus on the here and now - to focus on themselves.

#### 3. Sharing and discussion

- a) You are going to leave the country and you can only take 5 things with you - what would you take with you? And why?

- b) Rationale: This was asked to encourage them to continue focusing on self-care and prioritise needs. To understand that we all have needs and priorities- which might be similar and/or different BUT they are all valid.

#### 4. BREAK

#### 5. Brainstorming Values Activity: Value Jars

- a) Three jars were placed in the middle of the room marked 'very important' 'important' and 'less important'. A set of different values was given to each participant. Each participant was asked to choose values according to importance and place them in the marked different jars accordingly. Open jars and discuss.
- b) Rationale: To understand that our values may be different but equally important to others. To understand that we are driven to take decisions according to our values.

#### 6. Activity: What would they do if? (divide participants into groups of 2)

- a) Different scenarios were discussed in groups:
- *What would you do if you.....?*
  - *What would you do if you became aware that .....?*
- b) Rationale: Highlight values/ strengths.

#### 7. Closure

- a) Round robin: How we feel now and why?

### 4.3 Session 3: Communication

*Aim:* How to communicate – Barriers to communication – Benefits of effective communication

#### 1. Game telephone

- a) Give them story to repeat. Process what they have noticed.
- b) Fun game - helped them realise how discourse changes along the line.

#### 2. Brainstorming on Communication

- a) What are the different ways to communication? Verbal/Non-Verbal Communication
- b) Barriers to Communication
  - The use of jargon. Over-complicated, unfamiliar and/or technical terms.
  - Emotional barriers and taboos.
  - Lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance to the receiver.
  - Differences in perception and viewpoint.
  - Physical disabilities.
  - Physical barriers to non-verbal communication.
- c) Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents or cultural Differences.
- d) Rationale: Help them realise the importance of communication and what is healthy communication.

#### 3. BREAK

#### 4. Artist's Exercise:

- a) In pairs back to back. One is to ask the other to draw a picture that she chose earlier. Person drawing cannot ask any questions. Persons are then given time to ask questions and reverse of roles
- b) Rationale: What is stated and what is perceived can be different and the importance of effective communication

#### 5. Processing

- a) How did it feel when there was one-way communication? What made communication more effective?

#### 4.4 Session 4: Emotions

*Aim:* To recognise and explore different emotions

##### 1. Ice Breaker

- a) Round robin re last week's session on communications. Do they have something to relate? Did they put something they learnt into practice?
- b) Rationale: Exploring grounds, moods, willingness to participate.

##### 2. Introduction to emotions

- a) A set of faces picturing different emotions were given out to participants and they were given time to reflect and mark those that they are familiar with?
- b) Rationale: Create more self-awareness and identify emotions

##### 3. Sharing and processing – Discuss the following in groups of 2:

- a) *When do you feel such feelings? What helps you to address/ control feelings?*
- b) Rationale: Explore what helps them to address feelings (encourage to see the positive/opportunities with the negative/problems).

##### 4. BREAK

##### 5. Earliest recollections

- a) How these recollections influence our lives today? Do we still feel the same emotions? Have they changed? How and why?
- b) Rationale: Sharing of stories and reflecting on our earliest experienced emotions.

##### 6. Closure:

- What makes us happy?
- How often do we do things that make us happy?
- What prevents us from doing things that make us happy?
- Commitment to self on controlling the most prevalent difficult emotion (work individually or brainstorm)

#### 4.5 Session 5: Self Care

*Aim:* How to take care of self

##### 1. Round Robin

- a) Reflection on the week: Any story/experience to be shared.
- b) Rationale: Sharing stories became a very strong way of bonding

##### 2. Activity

- a) How do I relax? We tried to introduce a mindfulness exercise with background music, however most were unable to handle the silence due to getting in touch with their raw feelings.
- b) Rationale: For those who find it difficult to relax or feel guilty to relax, explore ways and learn from others.

##### 3. Time

- a) Working on their own to come up with how their time is divided in 24hrs on a typical day.
- b) Sharing of time and examples from each other on how to manage time for self.
- c) Rationale: Awareness of their time-management.

##### 4. BREAK

##### 5. Facts on health and DV.

- a) What is Health? Why is health important? Health belongs to the individual.
- b) Topics discussed:
  - Physical health
  - Exercise
  - Nutrition
  - Smoking, alcohol
  - Sexual health
  - General health - how often should we monitor, when should we monitor, where can one go?
  - Screening

- Mental health
  - Our health and our children's health
- c) Rationale: DV is a health care problem. There is the immediate trauma caused by abuse, DV may contribute to a number of chronic health problems, including depression, alcohol and substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and may limit the ability of women to manage other chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension.

6. Round Robin

- a) What are you taking with you today?
- b) What changes are you going to do in your time-management to take more care of self?

#### 4.6 Session 6: Women and Relationships

*Aim:* To understand the journey of women, to put into context

##### 1. Ice Breaker:

- a) Mention one word that represents a woman in your eyes.

##### 2. Explanation of women's journey in Malta

- a) Show a video to introduce the topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lb3FwhlyRI>
- b) Important milestones
  - The right to vote 1947
  - Women in parliament
  - Women in Malta – pre-war, patriarchal society, over the parliament, house and family.
  - Catholic church and the role of the woman.
  - Education
  - Post-World war 2 - women's roles at work started to shift
  - Contribution to society - women became more independent, more knowledgeable and more aware of their rights
  - National milestones

##### 3. BREAK

##### 4. Exploring Relationships – Discussion:

- a) What makes a healthy relationship?

E.g. Giving the other space/freedom to develop own dreams/identity, Friendship and teamwork.

- b) What makes a relationship unhealthy?

E.g. Control, jealousy, manipulation, loose self-esteem, isolation

- c) Rationale: Exploring and understanding of relationships, why relationships are important

##### 5. Closure:

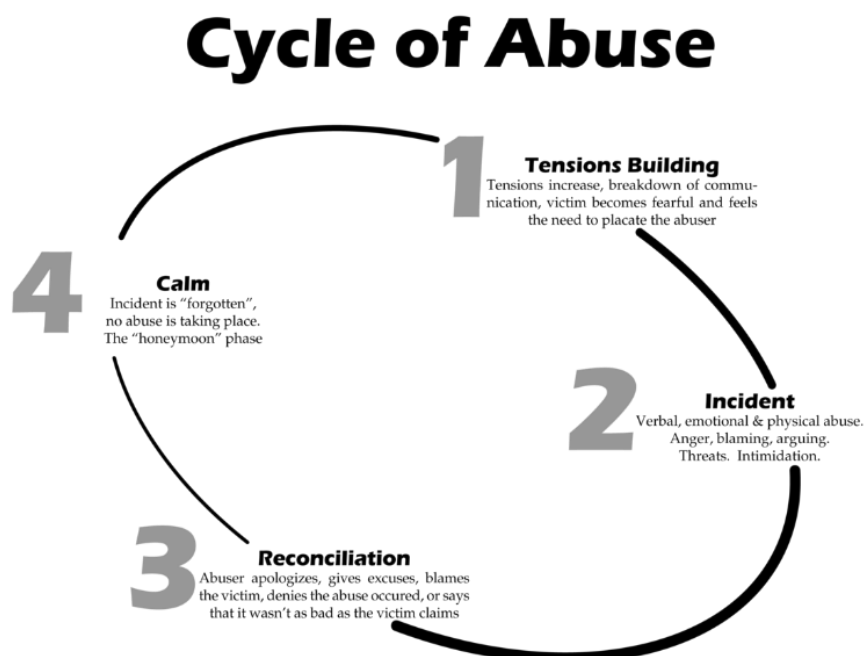
- a) Mention a person who inspires you and why?



## 4.7 Session 7: Violence

*Aim:* Trust and the cycle of violence

1. Trust fall exercise
  - a) One participant is blindfolded. The rest of the group surround blindfolded participant in a circle... and when indicated she is to drop backwards....
  - b) Processing: How did we feel when we let ourselves go? Why did we find it hard to let go? Who are the persons we trust and why?
  - c) Rationale: how much do we trust?
2. ‘Others treat us the way we treat ourselves’
  - a) Explore what should we do? How should we act? What are our needs? Discuss.
  - b) Rationale: Stay away from negative people. Focus on self.
3. BREAK
4. The cycle of Violence – explained:



- a) Rationale: To become aware of what happens in an abusive relationship. To better understand their behaviours and the nature of their relationships

5. Discussion – reactions and reflections

- a) This was a powerful exercise where many shared their stories with the added understanding of the reasons why they stayed in the relationship.

6. Final reflection:

- a) Be aware of your own reactions and actions.
- b) Find out what supports you and seek it.

#### 4.8 Session 8: Empowerment

*Aim:* To focus on positive attributes

##### 1. Ice Breaker:

- a) Round Robin: Express emotion today for the final session

##### 2. Consolidation and closure of group:

- a) Reflection on the following points:

- Who we wish to become and what helps us?
- What are our responsibilities?
- Taking ownership of our own life.
- Concrete plan of Action
- What we have learnt?
- Anything we have discovered on ourselves

- b) Rationale: To reflect on their progress and development. To reflect on areas that need to be strengthened. To mention a positive outcome.

##### 3. Celebrating the Ending – Tea Party

- a) Participants expressed the wish to bring some food and cakes some baked themselves to share with the group. This was the ending participants wished for and it was a very effective way of closing off the sessions.

## 5 One-to-One sessions

- All women attended one to one session for a duration of approximately 2 hours.
- All participants were given different options of different times and days to attend.
- Participants were informed that this is voluntary.
- Prior to commencement participants were informed of confidentiality and consent.
- They were invited to discuss whatever they wished in the time that was made available to them.
- Issues of relationship, fears, “stuckness”, work and career opportunities were amongst the topics discussed.
- All the participants were informed of the objectives of the one to one session i.e.: immediate needs and plans short term and long term.

The sessions were a mix of mentoring, coaching and immediacy counselling and we gave each individual what was needed at the time of the meeting.

## 6 Evaluation

### 6.1 Course Content

Meeting the groups for the first session enlightened us to immediately make some adaptations/changes to the course content to accommodate the different needs of the groups.

We quickly learnt that Group A lived together in the same community and thus knew each other quite well (some of them had been knowing each other for many years and had a history) whilst Group B had never met before. This alone affected the types of ice-breakers /exploratory questions to use with each group and the depth of sharing/trusting relationships within each group expected.

We also became very aware of the vulnerability of the women's emotional state. They found it difficult to work with silence and some exercises such as the Lifeline exercise had to be eliminated. This is because taking participants on a life journey reflection was too painful for most and not appropriate in the first sessions. It would have been an ideal exercise to conduct if there was a follow-up of sessions.

Whilst exploring content of sessions with the groups, we had to alter the 2nd set of workshops since the participants themselves expressed that the skills mentioned were being already addressed through participation at other workshops organised for them and also by their social workers i.e. management of personal finances. An ongoing evaluation with the course participants of the sessions was extremely helpful to us as trainers to continue providing useful and relevant content.

With both groups, we often had to address issues brought into the sessions that would otherwise have disrupted the flow of the sessions with the group. A few minutes was always reserved for a 'check-in' round to bring the group together for a session. For example, with group A, since participants were obliged to attend, there was a fair amount of resistance to participate especially in the first few sessions. Participants would often display strong emotions of anger, irritability, indifference or just sadness and as mentors we knew that we had to validate such emotions and often take the participant out of the session to work through the issue and give

them the attention they needed in that particular circumstance. For this reason alone, having two facilitators is imperative in such vulnerable groups.

Due to the nature of the two groups, there were similarities and differences in the two different groups with regards to development and participation in sessions. Monitoring of change, progress and development was ongoing during the sessions. We did this in our 'check-in exercise' by specifically asking whether they have used anything they learnt during the sessions in their relationship with self and others. Very often, this turned out to be a very powerful exercise as the women would relate an incident happening that week where they were more assertive than usual, more organised, did something for themselves, took an important decision etc.

Through the feedback received from the participants, we feel that the salient outcomes from sessions were: -

- Effective communication
- A greater awareness and sense of self - positive abilities, self-care, self esteem
- An understanding of behaviour, boundaries, trust and attachment
- Understanding the cycle of violence
- Measures how to protect themselves, where to go, what to do, their rights
- Learning is fruitful, empowering
- The power to succeed lies within each individual and change has to start from oneself
- Seeking help is very important
- Being aware of their rights, requesting to know, gathering the information of what is available
- The relational power between these women, how supporting each other is immensely rewarding

Knowing participants better prior to the start of the sessions would have proved highly beneficial so as to be more sensitive to the participants' needs and history. This would have been subsequently reflected in the course content.

Evaluating the participants' mind-set prior and after the course would have given a more genuine representation of the outcomes of sessions.

## 6.2 One-to-One Sessions

Having one session per participant, giving them the personal time at the end of the course was a good part of the closure. In these one-to-one meetings, we were careful that participants understood the purpose and nature of the meeting. We therefore guided them with questions to evaluate where they were at during that particular time in their lives. Having had only one session allocated per participant aroused a number of concerns such as: - types of follow-ups available, lack of information of services that would be available to the participants' needs, opening up certain wounds that would be

Our experience with working with these two groups was very powerful in many different ways.

- We worked on building a rapport so that the women could trust us and participate in the groups both on an individual basis and group work. It soon became evident that both groups had different characteristics and therefore required that we organized activities accordingly.
- The DQJ were a bigger group and their entry data varied, therefore there were persons who had just arrived and dealing with settling in, getting use to institution living. Issues they were dealing with included: letting go, trauma of violence, financial difficulties, work issues and some were preparing to move to another residences. Emotions were high and sometimes needed to be followed up by one of us by accompanying the participant out of the group to support accordingly.
- Understanding the background of the participants was essential to understand their reactions at times.
  - a) Some of them had been living in care since they were young and always dependent on the system
  - b) The understanding of their role as women vis a vis man: Submissiveness, lack of assertiveness, fear and guilt
  - c) Their understanding of men's power and role in the family: relationship with brothers, fathers and own sons.

During certificate reception: - we spoke to each and every one of the women. It was good to hear that from DQJ and Appoġġ there were developments and decisions taken in the last 3 months post sessions

- Moved out of residential home (DQJ)

- One studying for GCSEs (Appoġġ)
- Some started working (DQJ)
- Processing of separation (Appoġġ)
- Meet on regular basis (Appoġġ)

### 6.3 Summary of recommendations as voiced by participants

- Informed consent and selection of participants living within the residence - Ideally participants are not obliged to attend such courses as resistance creates an obstacle to learning.
- One-to-one sessions can also be offered to the course participants before the course begins to give an opportunity for the participants/trainers to get to know each other prior to the first session
- All the participants stated that they would attend to other similar sessions willingly. Ideally sessions of such nature would be continuous in the community.
- The most prominent issues are finances, work, lack of education and housing - there should exist a system to support such persons to provide alternative housing besides emergency shelters.
- Emotional support to persons living in domestic violence in the community should be offered as many a times these women remain in their own residence as they cannot go elsewhere because they have nowhere to go. They often do not have any finances of their own, might have minimal support and choose to continue to live in their own home, in abuse.

### 6.4 Summary of recommendations post sessions by facilitators

- The Location: - The decision to hold sessions within the same residential home had its advantages and disadvantages. It might have been convenient for the women to attend, most especially for the mothers of young child or women who finished work at that time, and thus had less commuting to do. However, breaking away from that environment may have proved beneficial for the general mood of the group, particularly for such a course that required a great deal of reflection and self-growth.



- Child-care facilities are to be selected to suit cultural requirements of cohort and experienced with such groups.
- Knowing participants: one to one session to be held prior to commencement of groups and after the sessions finish – More awareness, more sensitivity to needs, ability to plan according to needs and be able to measure individual outcome more effectively.
- We would recommend that there is no permanent representation from the administration during the sessions given the nature and scope of the sessions of these women. Trusting another person, particularly coming from a monitoring body, could disturb the dynamics of the group and desired outcome of the sessions. Ideally such monitoring should be done prior or after each session. Should there be a representative from the Ministry this person, should preferably be a woman and should be appointed carefully with prior experience of such groups. Such a person should be briefed on confidentiality and boundary issues.
- Follow up information about group: - We did not follow the women once the course was finished so we do not have specific information on any concrete changes such as finding a job, enrolling in a course, initiating separation proceedings, going into therapy etc. This information may be given by the service managers.

## **7 Resources**

1. Link 1
2. Link 2
3. Link 3
4. Link 4
5. Link 5
6. Link 6
7. Link 7
8. Link 8