

Buenos Aires, May 7, 2011 - "If I had only known that when I was young," or "if they had only told me" are just some of the statements made by many women who seek assistance at the centre for victims of gender violence set up by the local government in a town on the outskirts of the Argentine capital.

The frequency with which women arriving at the centre expressed such sentiments eventually led to the creation of the Programme for the Prevention of Gender Violence among Adolescents in Tigre, a town north of Buenos Aires, to help youngsters be on the alert for red flags

"The aim is to raise awareness about adolescents, both boys and girls, about gender roles, and to promote healthy personal relationships," Laura Ferreira, the programme's technical coordinator, told IPS.

Tigre, a city of 340,000 people 35 km north of the Argentine capital, was shaken by the 1996 murder of a 17-year-old girl, whose boyfriend stabbed her 113 times.

The brutal killing prompted authorities to develop a city policy focusing on the issue of gender violence and to establish public institutions to address the problem.

The policy is now specifically targeting teenagers. Experts carried out a survey in the city's secondary schools and held workshops to discuss gender roles and stereotypes.

The survey on gender violence among adolescents noted that one out of four women in Argentina has been the victim of some kind of violence, and that in 2010, at least 260 "femicides" – murders in a context of gender violence – were committed in this country of 40 million people, almost all of them by the victims' current or former partners.

"The ages of the victims ranged between 19 and 50, which shows that violence in relationships appears at early ages and that the consequences can be fatal," the study says.

It also mentions the work of the Supreme Court's Office on Domestic Violence, which in January 2011 received 657 reports of violence, involving female victims in 78 percent of the cases.

"A woman is murdered every two days in the province of Buenos Aires," the report says.

It also states that a woman in the province is more likely to die at the hands of her partner or former partner than in a traffic accident or as the victim of a robbery.

Because red flags tend to appear early on in relationships, "prevention of violence must be carried out not only among adult women but in all age groups, and among both sexes," the report says.

Adolescents are considered "particularly vulnerable due to the fragility characteristic of that stage of life, and because it is the time when they start getting involved in relationships."

The Tigre city government thus designed a plan to provide assistance to women who are victims of violence, creating special women's units in the police and the prosecutor's office to handle reports of domestic violence.

In October, the local police unit received 700 complaints of gender violence, and around 100 reports of mistreatment of children.

Later the authorities began to work with teachers at the preschool and primary school levels, to reflect on stereotyped gender roles in textbooks, play corners and the playground.

Finally, the focus turned to adolescents. The programme is not only limited to diagnosing and reflecting on the problem. "We began to work on awareness-raising and training among teachers, to give the task continuity," said Ferreira.

The work with teenagers revealed that when a woman is raised to be "weak" or "submissive" and a man is raised to be "strong" and "macho", the foundations are laid for a relationship based on a power imbalance that can open the door to violence.

Among the respondents to the survey, more than twice the number of men as women were violent towards their partners, because "they are socialised to respond to a model of male dominance that emphasises sexual prowess and physical strength, the role of provider, the repression of feelings and emotions, and risk-taking behaviour."

The study also noted the close link between suffering mistreatment and abuse as a child and either practicing or suffering domestic violence in adolescent relationships.

With the same aim of prevention of gender violence among adolescents, as a key stage of development, a non-governmental organisation, Women in Equality, also launched a programme titled "the digital generation against gender violence".

The idea is to use the tools offered by the Internet in prevention efforts, the group's director, Monique Altschul, told IPS. The proposal includes the creation of a blog, and a campaign carried out over social networking sites.

In addition, secondary school students will be invited to take part in a contest by submitting jingles, posters, stickers, videos or short films urging young people to report violent partners, or to at least get out of the relationship.

Source: [IPS](#)