

# Advocating for a fairer world through the medium of the Presentation message

## Dr. Despoina Afroditi Milaki



The International Presentation Association (IPA), as a network of Presentation Sisters and Presentation People present in twenty countries throughout six continents, speaks and acts for global justice through advocacy and direct service to people.

At the United Nations in New York, we aim to educate and influence policy makers at the global level to achieve a more just world and to bring the voices of people from the grassroots level. Our goal is “to honour and advance the rights of women and children, indigenous and tribal people and the Earth”.

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In early 2020, when we were collectively enduring and witnessing a time of great upheaval due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IPA identified “Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children” as its specific UN Advocacy Focus. The COVID-19 global pandemic, since its outbreak, only intensified and worsened violence against women.

The monumental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on entrenching gender roles and patterns of gender-based violence was the pressing reason for the first IPA publication titled “*Making Uncomfortable Conversations Comfortable. Gender Stereotypes and Domestic Violence in India, United States and Zimbabwe*”. (April 2022).

Our particular interest placed in providing a voice to women experiencing gender stereotypes and domestic violence - presenting not only their experiences, but also their needs going forward, as reflective of their culture and society. The second IPA publication titled “*Policies for Gender Justice. Practices in addressing domestic violence and gender stereotypes*” (November 2022) placed a focus on policy responses addressing domestic violence and gender stereotypes by the governments and NGOs in India, United

States and Zimbabwe.

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Patriarchal norms have been identified as embodying the gender stereotypes that privilege men over women; factors like relationships of subordination, dominance and unequal dependence, as well as emotional manipulation varied across the three countries. Socio-cultural factors such as cultures of silence, normalisation of violence, victim blaming behavior and intergenerational socialisation can also reinforce gender stereotypes and affect how domestic violence manifests.

The research further indicated how the role of kin and institutions affected the survivors' experiences of domestic violence. Our research highlighted the importance of having the support of family or a community for a survivor to leave a violent relationship.

### Socio-cultural factors

Additionally, some correlations between certain socio-cultural factors and patterns of gender stereotypes emerged from this research. For instance, there was a correlation between the level of educational attainment of the survivor and the ability to seek support for domestic violence, particularly when accessing channels of legal support.

It was identified that if a survivor had a low educational achievement, then it was more difficult to attain the resources and capability to leave an abusive relationship, especially the knowledge of how to seek legal or further support for domestic violence. Education is a tool to empower survivors with the courage to address domestic violence.

The second IPA research project has explored synergies and collaboration between governments and civil society organisations before and during COVID-19 aiming to address domestic violence and gender stereotypes.

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Dr. Despoina Afroditi Milaki outside of UN Headquarters.

Our research has identified the national strategies that governments of India, United States and Zimbabwe have designed and implemented and the local ways in which NGOs are furthering those strategies in these countries. At the same time, NGOs are planning and implementing their own strategies and launching campaigns to support survivors and address issues of domestic violence and gender stereotypes.

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Each country faced specific challenges relevant to their local context. This ranged from challenges of dowry being prominent in Indian society and the need to value the girl child, barriers to funding in the United States and insecure health and reproductive rights, to issues of child marriage in Zimbabwe.

Despite the various and different contexts of the three countries, a plethora of effective ways to address gender stereotypes and domestic violence emerged for both government and NGOs across those countries.

### Gender-focused

These include inter alia: collaborating on gender-focused training programmes and sharing knowledge and expertise; providing legal support and relevant information to survivors going through the legal system; ensuring safe, clear and affordable access to health and reproductive services; empowering individuals at the grassroots level to provide direct services to GBV survivors; working with local community leaders to ensure impactful initiatives and campaigns addressing gender stereotypes and domestic violence etc.

Our research indicated that there is general cohesion between the strategies national governments develop - whenever and to the extent and format that these policies are designed and implemented in each national framework - and the policies developed by NGOs. Often, the implementation of these government strategies relies on NGOs involvement in training and enabling those undertaking the policies or the

programmes.

As the global spotlight has turned more sharply on the persistence of violence against women and children, the need for more and better researched data to inform evidence-based programming and policies has escalated.

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Advocates, like us, as well as international organisations like the UN, or national policymakers want to understand the nature and magnitude of gender-based violence. They seek information and guidance on how sound data can be collected on a subject like this. Research is essential to help quantify and qualify problems, inform policies and design programs based on evidence.

We can better monitor and evaluate the advocacy actions we are taking by investing in the necessary research and data collection initiatives in order to further develop a solid evidence-based advocacy strategy.

Research will continue to be needed to raise awareness and to foster the political will at the UN and national levels; a will which is required to develop and implement effective strategies and action throughout societies.

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