

Samara-Stavropol Partners Host Domestic Violence Prevention Conference

For many people the world over — particularly women, children, and the elderly — the threat of physical and psychological violence at the hands of someone within their families is an ever-present reality. All too often, though, domestic violence is shrouded in shame, stigma, and the notion that it is simply the way things are.

AIHA and its Samara-Stavropol/Iowa partners hosted a regional conference in September 2001 to dispel some of the myths surrounding domestic violence and promote a greater understanding of the magnitude of the problem by fostering an open dialogue among a range of community-based organizations and groups, such as judicial and healthcare systems, government agencies, NGOs, law enforcement officials, and members of the mass media.



Vasily Pavlov gives opening remarks during the AIHA Domestic Violence Prevention Conference in Samara, Russia.

Some 110 people — including psychologists, police officers, social workers, prosecutors, physicians, and representatives from four Russian crisis centers and three AIHA Women's Wellness Centers — attended the conference. Deputy Head of the Samara Oblast Healthcare Department Vasily Pavlov provided opening remarks, as did USAID/Russia Health Division Chief Kerry Pelzman.

Sessions addressed the dynamics of domestic violence, the social and psychological impact it has on individuals, and strategies for developing proactive community-based programs to promote domestic violence prevention. Participants learned how violence in the media affects aggressive behavior, key rehabilitation methods that have proven effective at crisis centers, and the important role police, policy-makers, and community organizations can play in breaking the cycle of domestic violence. They had the opportunity to collect a wide variety of resources and public education materials, including brochures, posters, and a book about Samara's experience with domestic violence that provided clinical, legal, and grassroots perspectives on the topic. Participants also took part in small group exercises that included case studies of abuse and discussions of how their own community would respond to the victim's dilemma.

Allan Hoffman, dean of Des Moines University's College of Health Sciences and director of the Center for the Prevention of Community

Violence, shared statistics and trends with participants during his presentation on developing an appropriate response to domestic violence. Noting that spousal or partner abuse — whether physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological — is the most unreported crime in many nations, Hoffman provided several characteristics commonly exhibited by victims of abuse and abusers that clinicians and community stakeholders should look for. He stressed the importance of changing social perceptions of domestic violence from a private issue to public policy and encouraged a coordinated response from physicians, psychologists, legal professionals, religious leaders, and other community leaders.

Valentina Minsafina, Deputy Chief of Samara Oblast Police Department's Juvenile Delinquency Unit, told participants that domestic violence is a complex problem that requires the intervention of police and relevant government officials to promote prevention and eliminate violent acts against victims. She shared statistical data with participants and explained that legal intervention would require training for all those who come into contact with victims of abuse.

The event helped partners and other participants to identify key areas for intervention, including legal reform, education and training, networking and community mobilization, and accurate data collection and analysis. It also outlined several principles to guide strategies and interventions, namely prevention, protection, early intervention, support for abused victims, and accountability of abusers.

At the conclusion of the two-day conference, many participants said they returned home armed with knowledge and a strong desire to implement programs to raise public awareness about domestic violence and implement new or expanded services for its victims.