



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 November 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by American Mothers, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Breaking the culture of violence through community collaboration

Introduction

Mothers serve as change agents beginning in the home and at the family level; they shape the beliefs, morals and values of their children and instil a sense of responsibility for creating positive human relationships in both family and community. To reduce the global crisis of violence experienced against women and girls, change must begin in the home and at the local level.

Studies have demonstrated that using injunctive norms can begin the path to cultural change. Mothers who utilize injunctive norms in the home create a promising opportunity to redirect the attitudes of the next generation and establish new norms for gender relations. Armed with this knowledge, mothers also have the opportunity to create change around gendered norms within local communities. Working through parent-teacher association involvement, mothers are uniquely positioned to assist with redirecting attitudes in schools and at the education level to continue a path for re-establishing gender-based norms.

Addressing youth attitudes in the home and at school through injunctive norms may offer the greatest opportunity to change gendered interactions and, as a result, reduce violence against women and girls. As an organization dedicated to improving the lives of mothers, their children and families, American Mothers is well positioned to lead a campaign to encourage mothers to utilize injunctive norms in the home and to develop training from parent-teacher associations so that this method can be carried over into the education system. The present statement will identify how the use of injunctive norms promotes positive change and how mothers can collaborate with schools and local organizations committed to gender justice to create shared values and promote the larger goal of reducing violence against women and girls. Finally, an action plan will be presented with suggestions on how American Mothers can lead its implementation.

American Mothers

American Mothers is an organization that is dedicated to recognizing the crucial role of motherhood through education and outreach. Through its mission, American Mothers is focused on working towards ending violence against women and children. Recognizing the severity of gender-based violence and the lack of current services available for those suffering such brutalities, American Mothers is committed to creating an initiative to address this global crisis.

Injunctive norms and social change

Norms are understood as either descriptive or injunctive. A descriptive norm is the degree of uniformity within a group for a certain behaviour. For example, if most men watch sports, then the descriptive norm is for men to watch sports. An injunctive norm is concerned with group member's approval of behaviours. So if most men feel watching sports is good, then the injunctive norm is to approve of watching sports.

In an article on the subject, Steve Martin explains that people's behaviour is largely shaped by the behaviour of those around them--what behavioural scientists call social norms. In particular, people are often motivated by their desire to conform with the group, especially if it's a group with which they identify. Recognizing this phenomenon, Martin participated in a pilot study that used injunctive norms to increase on-time payment of taxes in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The project produced incredible results, with the clearance rate increasing from 57 per cent to 85 per cent.

Another article, by P. Wesley Schultz and others, describes a field experiment focused on household energy conservation in which descriptive norms were compared against injunctive norms in producing results. The study found that descriptive normative messages produced unreliable results; some households produced desirable energy savings and others produced an undesirable boomerang effect. However, when an injunctive norm was added to the message, the undesirable boomerang effect was eliminated. Based on these studies and other research, businesses are now beginning to experiment with injunctive norms as a means to increase profits.

It is the position of American Mothers that implementing a social norms campaign that utilizes injunctive norms could be a successful means of reducing violence against women and girls. Social norms campaigns function to reduce problematic behaviours or increase positive behaviours by conveying the message that harmful behaviours are much less frequent than is assumed. Whereas descriptive norms do not produce a reliable result, adding an injunctive norm indicating a desired behaviour can induce such behaviour. Thus a campaign that focuses on positive interaction and equal status between genders can have a positive impact in reducing violence against women and children.

Social norms campaign

Social norm change related to gender norms is possible through efforts spearheaded at the local and immediate community level. It requires clarity and long-term visioning from organizations and the education system, coupled with sustained commitment from those community members who take up the work as their personal mission.

American Mothers proposes bringing together mothers, parent-teacher associations and local representatives from organizations focused on gender-based violence to develop a campaign team. This team will implement a social norms campaign using injunctive norms within schools to create change around gendered interactions and reduce violence against women and girls. Utilizing a successful campaign that encourages the next generation to recognize the value of women and girls in the greater community can create a paradigm shift and reduce gender-based violence moving forward.

American Mothers believes that now is the time to change attitudes from the youngest levels about the correct treatment of girls and women. This begins and continues with respect and shifting the social norms in society.