



The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights Campaign Against Sexual Harassment

"Making Our Streets Safer for Everyone," ECWR's campaign to stop sexual harassment began in October 2005 in response to the increasing number and severity of complaints women brought to us about their experience being harassed on the streets. Since no organization had dealt with this issue at the time and there was very little public dialogue on it, we began researching the issue to discover what was really happening on the street, how often and how severe harassment happened, where it was happening, who are the perpetrators, what men and women think about the issue and how to best address the problem.

Our campaign aims to reduce sexual harassment by

- Raising awareness about what sexual harassment means, that it is a crime and what their rights are
- Raising men's awareness of the consequences of sexual harassment on women
- Encouraging society at large to intervene when women are harassed
- Improving the legal and enforcement mechanisms to better protect women
- Sensitizing school children to the issue

Main Activities

I. Research

Our research began in 2005 with informal questionnaires distributed throughout Egypt by email, volunteers and ECWR project staff. These initial surveys were completely voluntary, giving women their first formal opportunity to speak out about their experiences, and teaching us about what's really happening in the street. Later, we specifically targeted women from different regions (including Greater Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Giza, Kalubya, and the New Valley), backgrounds and social classes in order to fill in gaps in our knowledge and create the first set of data on the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment in Egypt.

We succeeded in collecting over 3,500 surveys and reports of sexual harassment. The overwhelming majority of respondents told us that they experience sexual harassment as a part of life. Less than 2% of women reported going to the police for help.

Also with the help of volunteer experts, we conducted many focus group discussions with different groups of women, men and teenagers. These discussions challenged women's reluctance to speak about their experiences due to feelings of shame, fear of blame, and a general lack of public dialogue on the issue.

II. Public awareness

Our public awareness activities are aimed at breaking the silence concerning sexual harassment, increasing men's understanding of the effects of harassment on women, bringing the issue of sexual harassment to public debate, and encouraging active involvement

through volunteerism and independent activism. Some examples of our awareness activities include:

Awareness materials: We printed flyers about existing laws on sexual harassment, how to file a police report, definitions of harassment, what to do in case you're harassed and information about how campaign; booklets; posters; and give away items. These were distributed widely to friends and families, volunteers, universities, clubs, ECWR events, other NGOs and the media. We got good feedback on them and heard from many people that before reading our information, they didn't know what sexual harassment meant, and that it includes verbal harassment as well as physical. Our booklet, "Sexual Harassment the Social Cancer," contains stories of harassment and an analysis of our research results, was also distributed to NGOs and the media.

Public Service Announcements: Nile FM, Nugoom FM and El Horrytna radio stations have all helped our campaign by recording and airing public service announcements we developed with them on the topic of sexual harassment.

Public Awareness Events: In order to increase public awareness of sexual harassment by increasing dialogue and breaking taboos, encourage officials to take the issue seriously; reach people outside of our normal NGO circles; gain media coverage; provide information about sexual harassment to men and women; and help volunteers to take action, we organize periodic public events. In addition to planning a demonstration on the steps of the Press Syndicate, volunteers and ECWR staff have organized press conferences and public awareness days at Sakiat El Sawy Cultural Center, Goethe Institute and the Pyramisa Hotel. Our events have featured: presentations and discussions on sexual harassment laws in Egypt and other countries, the Egyptian law, women's image in the media, results of ECWR's survey, and the sociological and psychological impacts of harassment; group discussions on the law, the role of NGOs, and the role of volunteers; self defense workshops; and live music and film to draw attendance.

III. Advocacy

Our advocacy plan is to advise officials using our experience, information and statistics, and reach out using the media. There has been a high level of interest from the media and ECWR has succeeded in keeping the topic fresh by continuing to produce new information. Coverage of sexual harassment has appeared in newspapers like Al Ahram, Al Ahram Weekly, El Dostour, El Masri El Youm, El Hayaa, El Karama, Hawaa's Magazine, Nahdet Misr, Nesf el Donia Magazine, Identity Magazine, What Women Want Magazine, and The Daily Star Egypt. TV coverage includes Channel 1: Hadith El-Madina Program, Maana (Together) TV program, Heya (Her) program; El Mehwar Channel: 90 minutes program; Nile news; Orbit channel (El Haya'a program); Channel 2, Safsafa program, from five to six program, El Beit Betak; Nile TV.

In addition to media outreach, our group of volunteer lawyers and legal experts drafted a new law and are now working on monitoring the political scene to advocate it at the right time. We are also preparing a roundtable discussion with ministry of interior representatives, who have recently admitted that sexual harassment in the Egyptian streets is a problem. NGO representatives will be invited to advocate the issue and work together in a front to discuss the role of security forces in protecting citizens in streets.

IV. Youth outreach

We are reaching the next generation through outreach in schools and to youth volunteers. To reach schools, we have trained teachers and social workers sensitizing them and helping them approach this topic with their students. We are also producing an animated 5 minute educational film and workbook for teachers.

Volunteers have formed the core and driving force of our campaign. Our experience in working with volunteers showed us that engaging individuals in the campaign not only inspires us with their creative ideas and enthusiasm, but it also is incomparably effective for spreading

information and developing a real popular movement, and contributes to cultivating the spirit of independent, non-violent activism in Egypt. Our volunteers meet monthly to discuss ideas, plan initiatives and divide work. We also try to enrich their skill by incorporating presentations on topics relevant to volunteer work (for example: development, human rights, civil and social work).

Future Plans

As our campaign grows and develops, we will expand our activities to reach more people with:

- Radio and Television Ads, expanding the radio ads
- Begin the teachers and social workers training with the new academic year 2007/2008
- Continuing the volunteers program
- Establishing a hotline service in ECWR to offer women psychological and legal referrals in case they are harassed
- Work in communities with partner organizations to talk about the issue, suggest ideas and recruit volunteers in new communities
- A new study will be published evaluating the campaign so far and measuring the impact of our activities