ENHANCING THE YOUTH'S AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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Abstract: The paper analyzes generally the actual state of the domestic violence against women in Vietnam at present, from the perspectives of people's behavior, awareness and attitude. Based on findings of the previous research works, the author highlights factors involved with the maintenance of domestic violence activities against women, such as gender inequality, which is considered as the root of the domestic violence, and some direct causes, for example the drunkenness, contradictions in business and daily life, and difficult economic conditions. The paper provides detailed analyses of negative consequences caused by domestic violence against women to individual, family, community and society. The author emphasizes that it is greatly significant to make people fully aware of harmful effects caused by domestic violence activities and make the youth take part in anti-domestic violence movements. It is important to make the youth be interested in having the right conceptions on gender equality, recognizing clearly domestic violence behavior and measures to prevent domestic violence, and taking part actively in anti-domestic violence activities.

Key words: The youth, women, family, domestic violence, and gender equality.

1. Domestic violence prevention: An important and urgent task of the whole society

Domestic violence, especially violence against women, is a phenomenon, which is still taking place in all countries at present. As it violates human body and dignity, domestic violence has been impacting on a considerable number of women in the world and has been also a great obstacle to achieving gender equality.

According to the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (2007), domestic violence is defined as purposeful acts of certain family members that cause or may possibly cause physical, mental, or economic injuries to other family members.

The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control clearly specifies 9 types of acts that are considered as domestic violence. Domestic violence acts can be visible or invisible as well. Visible acts of domestic violence consist of the acts, which cause injuries to other's body, and forced sex. Invisible acts of domestic violence consist of psychological, emotional and mental behaviors. However, there is no clear line

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between these two types of domestic violence, because some domestic violence acts, for example forced sex, can be viewed as visible through impacts on body and health status, but they also can be viewed as invisible through mental and emotional injuries.

The State of Vietnam has issued a lot of legal documents relating closely to domestic violence prevention. Signing in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Vietnam shows its full commitment to elimination of all forms of violence against women's rights and discrimination against women. Many legal documents and policies obviously show the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination of any forms. The 1992 Constitution regulates: "Any discrimination against women and violation of women's dignity are strictly prohibited" (Article No.63). The Penal Code 1999 also regulates: "Those who use violence or commit serious acts to prevent women from participating in political, economic, scientific, cultural and social activities shall be subject to warning, non-custodial reform for up to one year or a long term of imprisonment between three months and one year" (Article No.130). According to the Law on Organization of Government (1992), governments at all levels have to "adopt policies and measures to ensure the equality between men and women in all aspects and adopt measures for prevention of and fight against all acts of violence against women and children, which hurt their dignity".

On 16 May 2005, the Prime Minister of Vietnam signed the Decision No.106/2005/QD-TTg on approval of the Strategy on Building the Vietnamese Family for the period 2005 – 2010. The second target of the Strategy specifies the aim of strengthening domestic violence prevention, promoting good customs and practices, and encouraging people to eliminate unsound and backward customs involved with marriage and family.

Together with issuance of the above-mentioned documents, governmental institutions, social organizations and communities have carried out a lot of activities to prevent domestic violence for the past years. Propaganda activities, which aim at improving people's awareness of harmful effects as well as disseminate information about strict penalties for domestic violence, have made a considerable contribution towards eliminating domestic violence, improving the status and role of women, and protecting as well as taking care further of women in family and society.

A significant advance in the struggle against domestic violence is the Law on Gender Equality passed on 29 November 2006 by the 11th National Assembly. The Law provides a legal framework for implementation of gender equality, which is the basis for domestic violence prevention in our country. In addition, the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control was also approved by the 12th National Assembly in November 2007. And then, on 5 December 2007, it was officially signed by the President of the Socialist Republic of

Vietnam for enforcement. That was the first time in the legal history of Vietnam a legal document on domestic violence prevention was promulgated.

The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control regulates clearly types of domestic violence, principles of domestic violence prevention; obligations of those who use domestic violence; rights and duties of domestic violence victims; and major issues in the State policy on domestic violence prevention. The Law emphasizes that it is firstly necessary to carry out domestic violence prevention via propagandizing information on: (1) policy and laws on domestic violence prevention and gender equality; (2) rights and duties of family members; (3) good traditions of Vietnamese family and people; (4) harmful effects of domestic violence; (5) measures, solutions, models and experience in domestic violence prevention; (6) knowledge of marriage and family; (7) behavior skills; (8) building cultural family; and (9) other issues relating to domestic violence prevention. At the same time, the Law also highlights other issues, such as: appropriate methods to carry our propaganda on domestic violence prevention; principles and measures to reconcile contradictions or conflicts between family members; community-based domestic violence prevention through advice, comments and criticism; measures to protect and support domestic violence victims; and regulations relating to provision of supports for domestic violence victims. The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control also regulates clearly responsibilities of individuals, families, organizations, and institutions in conducting domestic violence prevention. Penalties to be imposed for the acts that break the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control as well as the denouncing and complaining procedures are also specified in the Law.

By now, the Prime Minister has already issued different Decrees to regulate and instruct in detail how to implement some articles of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control. At the same time, the Decree regulating how to carry out administrative penalties in the field of domestic violence prevention has been also promulgated.

Building and promulgation of the above-mentioned legal documents show great efforts and determination of Vietnam's State in domestic violence prevention. This has great significance for enhancement of women's status and role as well as for protection and the care of women. The legal framework will make it favorable for us to expand and strengthen effectively domestic violence prevention in Vietnam.

2. Actual state of domestic violence against women

By now, domestic violence against women, especially in rural areas, still remains relatively serious and attracts attention from the whole society. According to the Vietnamese Family Nationwide Survey 2006, 21.2% of all married women in the survey revealed that they experienced at least one of the three types of domestic

violence, including beating, scolding, and forced sex, during the previous 12 months.

According to the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY) 1, of all married female respondents (aged from 14 to 25), 21% revealed that they were scolded by husband at least once; 12.8% ever were forbidden from doing something by husband; and 5.8% ever were beaten by husband. If we pay attention to the fact that it was just a short period from the wedding to the survey, we can realize the seriousness of domestic violence against women in our country. According to the Survey on the Current Situation of Gender Equality 2004-2005 conducted by Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, in the meanwhile, 21.2% of all married women in the survey revealed that they ever were scolded by husband and 5.7% revealed that they ever were beaten by husband during the previous 12 months. Thus, the rate of domestic violence victims among the youth is almost the same as the general rate.

It is surprising that the rate of domestic violence victims among the youth in the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth 2, which was conducted 5 years later (2008-2009), did not reduce at all (5.8%, exactly the same as the rate in 2003). Estimating the rate of married women, who were beaten by husband during the previous 12 months of the survey (when the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control became effective), we see that 3.9% of all respondents acknowledged the fact that wives were beaten by husbands. In reality, the proportion of wives, who acknowledged this, is higher than the corresponding proportion of husbands (they are 4.8 and 2.2 respectively). This figure is not different from the results of SAVY 1 and the Survey on Family in Vietnam 2006. The proportion of wives beaten by husband among just married young couples did not change for 5 years after the survey. This illustrates that there are still difficulties in dealing with domestic violence.

Data of the National Survey on Domestic Violence against Women in 2010 (conducted with 4,828 women aged from 18 to 60) demonstrate that 58.3% of all women in the survey experienced at least one type of physically, mentally or sexually domestic violence; 27% experienced at least one type of domestic violence during the previous 12 months; 32% of all married women revealed that they had ever experienced physically domestic violence, in which 6% experienced it during the previous 12 months.

The above-mentioned data shows a reality that a lot of domestic violence acts are silently taking place inside families; whereas intervention from the State and social organizations still remains very limited.

Attached with the serious situation of domestic violence against women is a low proportion of those, who are rightly aware of domestic violence acts and behaviors, including also the young ones.

Many people think that only "*systematic and serious abuse against women that causes considerable harmful effects on the*

marital relationship is acknowledged by respondents as domestic violence". When a husband has a bad behavior or action towards his wife, but it is just temporary and does not cause a serious consequence, it will be viewed as an undesired act; it will not be necessarily viewed as domestic violence. If a wife has a fault, domestic violence acts of her husband will be seen as undesirable, but can be "justified".

Paradoxically, some types of domestic violence are considered *acceptable* by a lot of social classes (including even women). In a survey conducted by Vietnam Women's Union in 2001, for example, many respondents considered domestic violence behaviors as "*acceptable in family life"*. The proportion of the respondents, who accepted: scolding is 45% and 45.1%; slapping on face is 7.9% and 8.4%; insulting is 4.6% and 6.2%; forbidding from having relationships with other people is 3.8% and 4.3% for women and men respectively. Moreover, some respondents in the survey also accepted beating with the hand, the leg or rods as well as some still accepted forced sex, although those respondents just make a little proportion.

The survey conducted by Vietnam Women's Union (2001) provides noticeable findings on a remarkable proportion of respondents, who accepted that husbands could beat, scold or insult wives, when the wives made some "faults". A husband can insult his wife, when she "*does something against her husband's will*" (51.3%); "*does not take care of her husband and children"* (50.2%); "*has insolent behavior towards her husband*" (46.0%); *"waste money*" (44.6%); "*is too lazy*" (40.1%); and "*does not know how to do business*" (32.8%)... It is more surprising that the proportion of women, who accepted punishments, when they did some "fault" according to the common opinion or even when she "*refused to have sex with her husband"*, is higher than that of men. A female respondent in Tien Giang Province stated: "*when a wife is insolent to her husband, the husband has the right to beat her. Normally, he has no right to beat his wife*".

A recent research conducted by the Family Department (the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) and the Institute for Family and Gender Studies (2012) shows that a considerable proportion of people even agree that a husband can use violence against his wife, when she "does not obey him", no matter he is right or wrong.

As the very women and those, who have the responsibility to help them, still have such a conception, the situation of "living together with domestic violence" persists longer.

3. Factors involved with persistence of domestic violence against women

Previous research works have pointed out many factors involved with the persistence of domestic violence against women at the level of individual, family, community and society. It is necessary, however, to emphasize two factors, including gender stereotypes and drunkenness.

Firstly, it is necessary to realize that inequality in gender relationships is the root

of gender-based domestic violence. Some traditional conceptions, which are full of gender stereotypes, penetrated into the mind of Vietnamese people from generation to generation. The conception that "*husbands are lords; whereas wives are slaves"* and the three subjections of a woman (*daughter to her parents, wife to her husband, and widow to her children*) give husbands the entire right to make decisions about important activities of the family. In the meanwhile, wives just have to perform the decisions and undertake the duty of taking care of husbands and children. In many situations, husbands use violence to keep the right. When disagreements about some family issues, such as labor allocation, resource usage, childbearing or upbringing, haven't been solved by dialogues, husbands usually use violence to force everyone to obey him.

Gender inequality is obviously expressed in the stereotype of male chauvinism that "*to have one son means to have a child anyway, but to have ten daughters still means to have no child*". This values too extremely sons above daughters. A husband, therefore, can pick a quarrel or use violence against his wife, when they have no son. In 1996, local courts dealt with 49,711 divorce proceedings, of which 18% petitioned for a divorce because of having no son.

For the past years, the government has made a lot of efforts to minimize the differentiation between sons and daughters. The Marriage and Family Law of 2000 regulates that the state and society shall not accept the discrimination among children, between sons and daughters (Section 5, Article 2). Besides, a lot of disseminating and educational activities that aim at non-discrimination between sons and daughters have been carried out. Yet, those who attach much importance to having a son still make up a certain proportion among the youth (12.6%). The conception that highly values sons above daughters is more popular among rural young people than among urban ones, and among male young people than among female ones. It is even more popular among the youth of ethnic minorities. This shows that it is necessary to focus on enhancement of awareness for young people, especially through communicational programs.

Because of the above - mentioned stereotypes, women are considered to be responsible for domestic violence made by husbands, although they are beaten by the very husbands. Many women do not report violence acts of their husbands, as they are afraid that others would think they were beaten because of doing something wrong. Even, some female consultants also think that women are partly responsible for being beaten. This attitude indirectly encourages those, who abuse violence, and prevents victims of domestic violence from seeking help, since they are afraid that they will be reproached or blamed.

Although gender inequality is the basic cause of husbands' violence against wives, it is necessary to pay attention to direct causes, which lead to violence between

husbands and wives, such as the drunkenness, contradictions in business and living conditions, and economic difficulties. It is especially important to emphasize here a factor involved much with the youth - the drunkenness. In the drunk-state, many husbands lose their self-control and they therefore have acts of violence towards their wife and children. The fact that domestic violence was caused by drunken husbands was mentioned a lot in most of the surveys on domestic violence conducted in the past years. Statistic data shows that the alcohol beverage consumption per capita in Vietnam is ranked very high in the world and the alcoholic beverage abuse among men has been at an alarming rate for years. The alcoholic beverage abuse is the most common factor of the increase in domestic violence recently.

A recent research conducted by the Department of Family (the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) and the Institute for Family and Gender Studies (2012) shows that for all domestic violence cases, in which husbands beat wives due to direct causes, the number of the cases, in which husbands are in the drunkenness, makes up over 50%. For all domestic violence cases, in which husbands insult wives, the number of the cases, in which husbands are in the drunkenness, also makes up a third. Although the drunkenness is sometimes used as "a visible reason" (because the real reason may be jealousness in love or difficulties in family life; however, the husbands can do nothing to solve but to have a drink), the high proportion of domestic violence cases, which are directly related to the drunkenness, demonstrates that one of important measures to prevent domestic violence is to limit alcoholic beverage drinking.

4. Consequences of domestic violence against women

Domestic violence results in many negative consequences for individuals, families, communities and the whole society as well. Family is where ones look after their happiness; where children are brought up and educated; and where ones can come back after failures. For many cases, however, domestic violence is one of things that potentially make family become "Hell on Earth". Victims of domestic violence feel threatened and insecure at home, which normally should have been the most secure place for them. For most of domestic violence cases, women and children are main victims. Some major consequences of domestic violence are enumerated as below:

Firstly, it threatens security of family members

An obviously recognizable consequence of domestic violence is the physical consequence. Many victims of domestic violence reveal that they are often hit in the head, face, and eyes, which are very easily injured in the body. This can cause serious harm to life. Consequently, victims often have to suffer from long-term after-effects; and, their health, working ability, and living activities will be considerably impacted.

Particularly, if the victims are pregnant at the time of domestic violence, the consequences will be much more serious. Some research works conducted by international scholars show that if a woman suffered from domestic violence during pregnancy, it will be difficult for her to put on weight; she may have anaemia; she may catch infectious diseases; she may have a premature birth; and she may be sluggish after giving birth.

According to the survey conducted by Vietnam Women's Union in 2001, of all women, who ever were beaten by husband, about 6% used to stay in hospital for treatment and 51.8% were beaten black and blue. Apart from hurting women, the violence acts also cause damage to the family economy and social cost due to treatment. In the spiritual term, victims of domestic violence often suffer from stress; they easily become alcoholic or smoking addicts; they may be plunged in melancholy; they may have cardio-vascular diseases and digestive problems. That they are beaten during pregnancy may result in a miscarriage or a premature birth. This is also a factor that makes many women reach an impasse and commit suicide. In addition, it also deprives many children of a normal living and educational environment.

Many women feel self-pity and shameful, when becoming undesirably pregnant or catching sexually transmitted diseases (STD) - which are consequences of forced sex. In addition to physical injuries, forced sex also causes long-term psychological and spiritual hurt. The obsession of savage domestic violence and physical hurt make the women have a psychological complex and feel afraid of the very husbands, who should have been the closest in common sense. A woman, who used to be beaten by her husband revealed: *"I sometimes have a dream, in which I am beaten by my husband. Other times, I have a dream, in which I have to run away from him; my leg bends up like this, but I cannot run, anyway".*

Secondly, it makes marital relationship cracked and broken.

Domestic violence is the major cause of broken marriages. Divorce may affect indirectly women's health through causing the risk of poverty to them. Yet, divorce is thought to be the last choice, when a wife is no longer able to suffer from the persecution from her husband. According to statistic data provided by the People's Supreme Court of Vietnam, of all divorces at the provincial and district's courts, the number of the divorces, in which wives petitioned for divorce because of "family contradictions and being beaten, persecuted", usually accounts for over 50%.

Domestic violence is also a factor that causes cracks in the marital relationship and makes the family atmosphere more tense and stuffy. Love is replaced gradually by fear. Children are afraid of their father and wives lose the trust in their husbands.

In many cases, women try to suffer from domestic violence in order to keep the marriage so that their children can live with both mother and father. This also means

that their misery and unhappiness will last long till the end of life. Family, at that time, is no longer a happy home, but it becomes "a hell". Like "homeless" people, the family members have a house to stay, but they do not have a home.

Thus, domestic violence makes women not only to suffer from a lot of both physical and spiritual injuries at present, but they will also have to suffer from after-effects in future. Moreover, it also cracks the husband and wife relationship as well as negatively impacts on the family stability and development.

Thirdly, it negatively affects development of children's personality

Of all risks that children may encounter, it is the most difficult for them to get over the risk that stems from domestic violence. Children completely depend on their parents and domestic violence not only affects them at present, but it also will impact on their life in future.

Children can be direct victims of physical violence made by father or can be injured, when they try to protect other family members (usually their mothers) or when they try to stop violence acts of their parents. Sometimes, they just witness the situation of their parents' fighting. Although they are not direct victims of domestic violence, what they have witnessed may be kept forever in their mind, resulting in negative impacts on the entire childhood and their life in future as well.

Many scholars have shown the deep relationship between domestic violence and the neglect of taking care of children. At the same time, when children have to suffer from or have to witness domestic violence, they will not find love in family and they will tend to keep away from family members and have an inferiority complex in relationships with friends and neighbors. This makes the children taciturn, reticent and timorous; they do not want to communicate with others etc.

As parents do not take care of them and additionally they have to witness the fact that parents no longer love each other, children become sad and they neglect their schooling; consequently, they are easy to catch negative impacts and become victims of social evils. Recently, newspapers often mention "little" criminals, whose action is not less horrible than adults' gangsters; they also use daggers and scimitars to thrust and kill people. A lot of such little criminals grew up in unhappy families and they often witnessed violence not only in movies but also in reality of their family. The fact that parents use violence against children or let children witness domestic violence will make the children accustomed to using violence against others.

Fourthly, it causes negative impacts on community stability

Domestic violence is not only "a nightmare" to family members, but it also causes negative impacts on community security and social order. Quarrels, insults and fighting inside a family also negatively affect life of neighboring

families; it seems that the neighboring families have to suffer indirectly from domestic violence. As neighboring children also witness the domestic violence, furthermore, this makes a negative influence on formation and development of their personality. For some situations, neighbors become real victims of domestic violence, when they come to give dissuasion.

At present, domestic violence still remains a great challenge to the whole community. Everyday, there are still a lot of women and children suffering from violence by their husbands/fathers. This drives them into an impasse and dark future.

Fifthly, it increases social cost

For the whole society, the loss caused by domestic violence against women in Vietnam (estimated opportunity cost, including direct cost as well as loss in income and other economic values of activities) is equivalent to 1.41% of GDP. In addition, domestic violence that husbands/lovers use against women affects significantly income through productivity. According to data of the survey conducted in 7 cities/provinces in Vietnam on the estimates of the loss caused by domestic violence against women, domestic violence reduces 35% of income, when all factors of education, assets, and age are the same. Estimated loss in labor productivity is probably 1.78% of GDP.

Thus, domestic violence not only causes negative consequences for specific individuals or families, but it also becomes a social serious problem, especially for women and children, resulting in negative corollaries for community and society. It not only influences negatively those, who directly suffer from domestic violence, but it also causes negative consequences for next generations. To struggle against domestic violence is an absolutely urgent task at present.

5. Participation of the youth in domestic violence prevention

The youth is a powerful social force, which is one of the most important and decisive factors for future of our nation. Participation of the youth in the struggle against domestic violence, therefore, is greatly significant. In this aspect, enhancement of the youth's awareness, owing to which their behavior will be improved, plays a very important role. Based on the above-mentioned analyses, we can specify what the youth necessarily should do as below:

Firstly, they should have the right conception on gender equality. As analyzed clearly in the above part, the root of domestic violence acts is the gender stereotype with the conception that "husbands are the lords; whereas wives are slaves" or "the male chauvinism", in which husbands have the right to do anything to their wives. Therefore, the youth firstly should get right awareness of gender equality, realizing that men and women are equal in family as well as social work without sex discriminations. One of necessary tasks of the youth at the moment is to read

and fully understand the Law on Gender Equality, and then disseminate it to others.

Secondly, they should have a sound understanding of domestic violence acts as well as measures to prevent domestic violence. Research findings show that a considerable part of people, including free or migrant laborers, low-educated or poor people, and especially those in rural and mountainous areas as well as areas of ethnic minorities, are not aware of domestic violence and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control. Specifically, many people consider an act as domestic violence, only when family members have injuries after beating each other. They do not see it as domestic violence, when husbands scold or insult their wives; or when husbands force their wives to have sex; or when they do not take care of material and spiritual conditions of their elderly parents; or when husbands give wives a slap; or when parents beat their children etc... As a result, all acts of slightly domestic violence still exist and haven't been penalized yet. In some cases, moreover, domestic violence acts, which cause injuries, are not strictly judged, because it is rather common that local people and officials consider the acts as the family private affair. Consequently, many domestic violence acts that cause injuries (mainly done by husband towards his wife) are hidden without any reporting.

If the youth neither change basically their awareness of domestic violence nor understand fully the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, it will be difficult for them to participate actively and effectively in domestic violence prevention. Thus, it is necessary for them to: (1) determine types of domestic violence; (2) consider domestic violence as a task of the whole society, but not a private affair of each family; (3) learn how to behave harmoniously in family; and (4) realize fully serious harmful effects of getting drunk on wine/beer towards family happiness. These will result in positive changes in their behavior.

The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control specifies different types of domestic violence acts and requires participation of the whole society in domestic violence prevention. The youth, therefore, need to learn and understand clearly all regulations of the Law in order to enhance their awareness as well as to help others realize better domestic violence prevention.

Thirdly, they should take part in activities of domestic violence prevention. In addition to enhancement of awareness, the youth also need to take part actively in activities of domestic violence prevention, at first at their own family and then the community where they are living. In daily life of marriage, they should behave harmoniously towards each other and respect each other as well. At the same time, they should learn necessary skills to solve husband and wife contradictions. At home, the youth should help to improve

awareness and behavior of other family members, especially their parents. A lot of research works show that children play an important role in preventing the father's violence against the mother as well as in repairing their parents' relationship. The youth often get higher education, so they are easier to learn knowledge of this issue. Their positive impacts on parents are, therefore, very necessary.

The youth plays a very significant role in campaigns, which aim at enhancing community awareness of domestic violence prevention. In reality, direct communications are very important to improve public awareness of domestic violence prevention, especially in mountainous and remote areas as well as in areas of ethnic minorities. They have to take part actively in those communication campaigns, heightening public awareness of domestic violence prevention through groups of friends or other forms such as club and community activities. They should help local people to: (1) realize that domestic violence is not the family private affair; (2) recognize different types of domestic violence acts; (3) have measures to prevent and intervene domestic violence acts, when necessary; (4) know where to get advice, if domestic violence happens; and (5) comprehend the right and responsibility in family and society as well.

Moreover, it is greatly significant that the youth take part in early finding out acts of domestic violence and actively intervening in domestic violence (there should be community-based networks for criminal detection and squads of prompt intervention etc.). To do this well, the youth need to improve their knowledge and skills of domestic violence prevention in order to help victims most effectively. To struggle against social evils such as the drunken and drug addiction will contribute a part towards building a healthy and stable social environment, preventing indirectly acts of violence.

Domestic violence against women is taking place in families of all different types as well as in all social classes and areas of Vietnam. Although the State and the Communist Party show profound concerns about it, the struggle against domestic violence is still encountering a lot of challenges. Together with other social classes, the youth need to enhance their awareness and actively take part in the struggle, making a significant contribution towards effective prevention of domestic violence in our country.

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