

10th Conference on Health Care of the Chinese in North America

Domestic Violence Education: Creating an Innovative Community-Based Model

May Tam, (San Francisco)



The Alliance Against Asian Domestic Violence (AAADV), a multi-disciplinary collaboration representing 18 community-based organizations, began as a project of the Chinese Community Health Education Council. It was formally established in 1997 to address domestic violence education and prevention in San Francisco's Asian community.

Domestic violence is a taboo subject in any society and culture. But it is especially so in Asian cultures. The Chinese saying, "Family shame is not to be heard outside of the home," illustrates the closely held tenet that family secrets, including domestic abuse and violence, have traditionally been regarded as private matters surrounded by silence. The rapidly growing immigrant population faces additional challenges: they face not only the culture of silence, but also the difficulties associated with survival in a new society.

Domestic violence in the immigrant community calls for a community-wide response. We therefore brought together 18 social service, legal and healthcare providers, and built a coalition that provides community-based culturally and linguistically appropriate education for the Chinese and other ethnic Asian populations.

This innovative approach has allowed us to provide effective community education about a very taboo subject. The broad-based coalition not only offers diverse expertise and experience; each member agency also donates staff time, mailing costs, use of office equipment and supplies, and meeting space. In addition to grants and donations, support has come from artists, printers, physicians, corporations, graphic designers, city government, individual volunteers and the media who have all donated their time and services. Together, we have raised our collective voice and increased awareness of domestic violence in the Chinese community.

For three years, media campaigns utilizing posters, Muni buses and grocery bags, followed by customized educational forums, have attracted widespread attention. For the first time, the silence surrounding domestic violence has been broken in the Chinese community, creating a safer environment for open discussion. The AAADV continues to employ creative methods and a grass-roots approach in providing domestic violence prevention education to the Chinese community.

AAADV's success demonstrates how a taboo social issue can be addressed in an ethnic minority population, by coalition building and creating a community-wide response. The methods and approach used with the Chinese community can be replicated for other ethnic Asian populations. In 1999, the AAADV began to address domestic violence in the Vietnamese community.