

SheCanHeCan Interview of the Month to mark 25 November



Vibeke Brask Thomsen,
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SheCanHeCan Director Vibeke Brask Thomsen and Project Manager Kasey Robinson were given the chance to interview M. Didier Gamerdinger, Minister for Health and Social Affairs in Monaco, to ask him questions about his views on ending domestic violence and the importance of an official day to mark the fight against domestic violence in Monaco.

SheCanHeCan: The UN estimates that 35% of women experience sexual and/or physical violence at least once in their lifetimes. What do you think the role of men should be in addressing this statistic?

M Didier Gamerdinger: Indeed, "where are the men?" Half of humanity, half of the population, half of the residents in the Principality are men but we see very few men in the process of mobilising awareness against domestic violence. It is vital that there is an expectation for men to be present and to feel concerned because these men are the children of a woman, they are married to or are cohabiting with a woman and they are the fathers to young girls. Despite this reality it seems very few feel concerned and it's very shocking.

Therefore it's important for men to realise that spousal abuse is not a women's problem, but a man's problem. In the majority of cases, it is men who are perpetrators of violence so they cannot lose interest in this subject. Men aren't present enough and one of the messages to push is precisely the fact that they must care because spousal violence is not a simply women's rights issue, but a human rights issue. It is especially important during the awareness campaigns this month to spread the message not only to women, but also to men.

One of our missions is to make women aware of their rights in the Principality, but also the emergency services available to them such as the telephone hotline and the social service personnel available to them. Additionally, it is equally important for men to understand that violence is unacceptable. It is therefore necessary that men's voices are heard. If there are only women who participate in this discourse it may seem as it uniquely a female feminist cause but that's not the case: it is a humanitarian cause, one which concerns us all.

To really feel concerned men must contribute and present their understanding and opinion on the situation. Right now, in this discourse we do not hear them [men], we don't know what they think or what they say and even if they find it normal or not. For some, is it simply that their culture that dictates that some women are oppressed, insulted, beaten or abused. But we must hear male voices protest against these abuses and condemn them together.

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SCHC: From the countries who produce data on women who experience violence, it is estimated that less than 40% of them seek help. Those who do seek help tend to turn to friends and other family member for help, but few seek the help of the police.

Do these facts mean that we should look for new, effective ways to reach out to women who experience violence? What sort of community based programme do you envision?

DG: Seeking help or advice from friends or family first is understandable. In these situations when a woman is suffering and is in a difficult situation it is normal that she first turns to the most trusted people around her. Talking about the abuse is often the first step to getting out of it, like a small click, speech frees people. Talking to loved ones is often more reassuring than calling a number where you do not know who is going to pick up.

We must also remember that domestic violence is a criminal offense and so it is important that the person who has been entrusted by the woman encourages her to approach the police to report the incident. I would in this moment like to acknowledge the work done by the Association of Victims of Criminal Offenses (AVIP), which provides early support to women wishing to speak out about incidents of domestic violence. The AVIP allows women to reach out and to speak up and receive advice on the procedures that follow according to her wishes as the victim of violence.

I also wish to underline that within the Public Security sector people are specially trained to welcome and move forward with these women. A police officer will take the time to explain the criminal procedure, which can be a difficult step but here we see how during this process various associations also have an important supporting role to play. I think it important to go further, for example; reporting the incident to the Public Security sector in order to make sure that there is the possibility for criminal prosecution and conviction because it's important for society to recognise the fact that this type of crime is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Our mission, therefore, is to help free the voices of women and to make them feel confident. Associations have an important role to play in that.

SCHC: In 2016, Monaco did a public awareness raising campaign to address domestic violence. What are your plans for the future of Domestic Violence prevention in Monaco?

DG: We have information campaigns but also a new approach that relates more to the school sector, in short; going into schools and talking to young people and children because that's where it begins. We have to explain to children that they must respect each other, boys and boys, girls and girls and too boys and girls, they need to know that we do not use violence as a response and most importantly for them to keep relaying these messages year after year.

A good education changes the way that we think. We have to in still in the mindset of young boys that women and men are equal and that they must continue to respect that.

It can take time and therefore it's important to start with them at an early age. In particular, during adolescence when the aggressive behaviour begins so we must try to eradicate this this type of behaviour such as insulting language or sexist texting. This approach, like the poster campaign and the conference, is part of a general awareness campaign that we want the public here in Monaco to respond to with real enthusiasm.



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SCHC: November 25 is the official day to recognise the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. What is the Government of Monaco doing this year to support this?

DG: The Government supports the work from various associations in the region and remains actively involved with them. From the Principality the poster campaign we launched can be seen on the buses, in other various parts of the city in the streets and too in several media outlets. Other advertisers and partners including the Monaco City Hall also felt concerned by this day and therefore this year the campaign has ran over a two week period instead of one like last year in 2016. We also plan to go much further next year with the poster campaigns with strong messages and images that will engage the public.

