

MARINA PISKLAKOVA

“A WOMAN CALLED THE HOT LINE AND SAID HER HUSBAND PLANNED TO KILL HER. I CALLED THE POLICE BUT THE OFFICER IMMEDIATELY CALLED THE HUSBAND, SAYING, ‘LOOK , IF YOU DO IT, DO IT QUIETLY.’ AND I REALIZED THERE WAS NO HOPE.”

Marina Pisklakova is Russia's leading women's rights activist. She studied aeronautical engineering in Moscow, and while conducting research at the Russian Academy of Sciences, was startled to discover family violence had reached epidemic proportions. Because of her efforts, Russian officials started tracking domestic abuse and estimate that, in a single year, close to 15,000 women were killed and 50,000 were hospitalized, while only one-third to one-fifth of all battered women received medical assistance. With no legislation outlawing the abuse, there were no enforcement mechanisms, support groups, or protective agencies for victims. In July 1993, Pisklakova founded a hot line for women in distress, later expanding her work to establish the first women's crisis center in the country. She lobbied for legislation banning abuse, and worked with an openly hostile law enforcement establishment to bring aid to victims and prosecution to criminals. She began a media campaign to expose the violence against women and to educate women about their rights, and regularly appears on radio and television promoting respect for women's rights. Today her organization ANNA (National Center for the Prevention of Violence) operates a network of 170 crisis centers across Russia and the former Soviet Union. She is now active not only in combating the scourge of violence against women, but also in trafficking of women and children. In 2004 she was the recipient of the Human Rights Global Leadership Award. Pisklakova's efforts have saved countless lives, at great risk to her own.



Marina Pisklakova, ©2000 Eddie Adams

When I started the first domestic violence hot line in Russia in 1993 (we named it Anna, Association No to Violence), I was alone, answering calls four hours a day, every day, for six months. I was counseling people in person the other four hours. I couldn't say no; there were so many women. I had no training, no distance, no boundaries. But at the same time, I don't know how I could have done anything differently.

Without realizing what I was embarking upon, I began this work while a researcher at the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of the Population within the Russian Academy of Sciences. While coordinating a national survey on women's issues, one day I received a survey response I did not know how to classify. It described a woman's pain and suffering at the hands of her husband. I showed it to some colleagues and one of them told me, "You have just read a case of domestic violence." I had never heard this term before. It was not something even recognized in our post-Soviet society, much less discussed. I decided I needed to learn more about this mysterious phenomenon.

Shortly thereafter, I encountered the mother of one of my son's classmates in front of the school. Half of her face was severely bruised. She wouldn't tell me what had happened. One evening a few days later, she called me. Her story shocked me. When her husband was wearing a suit and the button fell off, and it was not fixed quickly, he took a shoe and slapped his wife in the face. For two weeks she couldn't go out. She was really distressed, and hurt—physically and emotionally hurt—because half her face was black and blue. I asked her, "Why don't you just leave him?" A very typical question. And she said, "Where would I go?" I said, "Divorce him. Get another apartment." She said, "I depend on him completely." And in this exchange, I saw everything: the way the abuser was consolidating control, decreasing self-confidence, and diminishing self-esteem. I also heard her story of how he would come home and go to the kitchen, touch the floor with his finger, and, if there was the slightest dirt, ask sneeringly, "What did you do all day?" The floors in Russian kitchens always have some dirt, especially if you have kids at home

who are running around—the kitchen is often the center of family life in our small apartments. For outsiders, scenes such as I have just described might seem ridiculous, but I was to soon discover that they were commonplace. For this woman, our conversation was an opportunity to communicate with someone who didn't judge her, who didn't say, "What did you do wrong?" I didn't realize that I had actually started counseling her. But I did realize from her story that from psychological violence comes physical violence.

So I started thinking that I should help her; I should refer her to somebody. And then I realized that there was nowhere to go. I cannot tell you my feelings. I really felt hopeless and helpless. In Russia there is a saying, "He beats you, that means he loves you." I now knew the meaning of that saying. I asked myself, "What can you do about a cultural attitude?" But I knew what I had to do. I started the hot line. One cold January day, a woman called in and I started talking with her. After a few minutes, she stopped, saying, "I am not going to talk to you on the phone. I need to see you." So I said, "Okay," and when she came in, her first tearful words were, "I'm afraid my husband is going to kill me and nobody will know." She told me her story. Her husband was very nice until she told him she was pregnant. At that point, everything turned upside down. He became very controlling. She was vulnerable and dependent: "I was terrified; his face was not happy. It was like he'd won. As though he was thinking, 'It's my turn. Now I can do whatever I want to you.'" The danger was real.

My first reaction was, "Oh, my God, what am I going to do now?" I knew the police would do nothing. But I called the police in her district anyway. The officer seemed nice, but then he immediately called the husband and said to him, "What is your wife doing? And why is she going around talking about family matters? Look, if you do it, do it quietly." I realized how hopeless the problem really was for her. Her problem became mine. I could not walk away. I called a woman I knew who was a retired lawyer and said, "I don't have any money and this woman doesn't have any money. But she needs help. She needs a divorce and a place to live." In Moscow, housing is a big problem. When this woman married her husband, she traded her apartment to his family and now his brother lived there. So she had nowhere to go. She was trapped. Her story got worse. When their first baby was nine months old, her husband tried to kill her. "I don't know how I survived," she told me. The lawyer and I helped her file for divorce. That's when the husband told her, "I will kill you and nobody will know. And I will just say to everybody that you ran off with another man and left your baby." I started calling her every morning just to make sure that she was alive. For three months, the lawyer counseled us at each stage and helped us develop a plan.

In the midst of all of this, the situation took a scary turn. The woman called and said: "They know everything we are talking about!" Her mother-in-law worked at the phone company and we quickly figured out that she was listening to her calls. I said, "You know, maybe it's better. Let them hear about all the support that you have outside." So we started pretending we

had done more than we actually had. On the next phone call, I started saying, "Okay, so this police officer is not helpful, but there are lots of other police I am going to talk to about it and your lawyer will, too. So don't worry." The next time she came to see me, and she said, "They became much more careful after we started talking that way." Eventually her husband left their apartment, partly because the lawyer told us how to get him out, and partly because he and his family realized that she was educated about her rights now. Ultimately, they got a divorce. Her father-in-law came to see her and said, "You have won, take the divorce, and take back the apartment; you will never see my son again."

Soon after this success, a friend of hers in a similar situation started legal proceedings against her own ex-husband and also got her apartment back. I was elated, and for the first time, encouraged! Even in Russian society, where there were few legal precedents, a woman who is willing to do so can stand up for her rights and win. But these stories are just a small fraction of the thousands we continue to hear day after day. Unfortunately, most of the women who call us do not know their rights, nor do they know that they do not have to accept the unacceptable.

There have been some bad moments along the way. One time I picked up the phone and a male voice started saying, "What is this number?" I was cautious since it was not common for a man to call our hot line like that. I responded with "Well, what number did you dial?" And he said, "I found this phone number in the notes of my wife and I am just checking—what is it?" I told him, "Why don't you ask your wife? Why are you calling?" And at first he tried to be calm and polite, saying, "Look, I'd just like you to tell me what it is." And I said, "If you don't trust your wife, it's your problem. I am not going to tell you what it is and I am not asking your name. If you introduce yourself maybe we can talk." And then he started being really aggressive and verbally abusive and he said, "I know who you are. I know your name. I know where you are located. I know where you live. And I am going to come there with some guys and kill you." My husband was there with me at the time and saw I was really scared, though I said to the man on the phone, "I am not afraid of you," and just hung up. I still don't know whose husband it was. He never came. Another time, my phone at home rang late at night and a man said, "If you don't stop, you'd better watch out for your son." This really scared me. I moved my son to my parents' home for a few months. That was tough for a mother to do.

There are different estimations of domestic violence in Russia. Some say now that 30 to 40 percent of families have experienced it. In 1995, in the aftermath of the Beijing Women's Conference, the first reliable statistics were published in Russia indicating that 14,500 women a year had been killed by their husbands. But even today, the police do not keep such statistics, yet their official estimates are that perhaps 12,000 women per year are killed in Russia from domestic violence. Some recognition of the dimensions of this problem is finally surfacing.

Under Russian law, however, only domestic violence that results either in injuries causing the person to be out of work

for at least two years, or in murder, can be considered a crime. There are no other laws addressing domestic violence in spite of years of effort to have such laws enacted by the Duma. But, in my work and in our fledgling women's movement, we have on our own expanded the functional definition of domestic violence to include marital rape, sexual violence in the marriage or partnership, psychological violence, isolation, and economic control. This latter area has become perhaps one of the most insidious and hidden forms of domestic violence because women comprise 60 percent of the unemployed population—and the salary of a woman is about 60 percent of a man's for the same work.

A friend started working with me in January 1994, and by that summer we had trained our first group of women who began to work with us as telephone counselors. In 1995, I started going to other cities in Russia putting on training sessions for other women's groups that were starting to emerge and who wanted to start hot lines or crisis centers. Next, we started developing programs to provide psychological and legal counseling for the victims of domestic violence.

By 1997, we had also started a new program to train lawyers in how to handle domestic abuse cases. Under present Russian law, the provocation of violence is a defense which can be argued in court to decrease punishment. This is perhaps the most cruel form of psychological abuse, because it all happens in the courtroom right in front of the victim. She is made to look responsible. The victim is blamed openly by the perpetrator. Regrettably, there are still many judges who will readily accept the notion that she was in some way responsible, and let the perpetrator avoid being held accountable for his actions. The final trauma has been inflicted.

At the start of the new millennium, we have over forty women's crisis centers operating throughout Russia and have recently formed the Russian Association of Women's Crisis Centers, which is officially registered with and recognized by the Russian government. I am honored to have been elected as its first president.

My parents have been incredibly supportive of my work. My father, a retired military officer, once said to me, "In Soviet times you would have been a dissident, right?" And my reply to him was, "Probably, because the Soviets maintained the myth of the ideal—where domestic violence couldn't exist, officially." The attitude during Soviet times was that if you are a battered wife, then you had failed as a woman and as a wife. It was the woman's responsibility in our society to create a family atmosphere. It was up to her to maintain the ideal. That's why women came to me who had been brutalized for twenty-six years. I was the first person they could turn to openly, and confide something they had to hide within themselves throughout their life. This is still true to a great extent today.

I am not an extraordinary person. Any woman in my position would do the same. I feel, however, that I am really lucky because I was at the beginning of something new, a great development in Russia, a new attitude. Now, everybody is talking about domestic violence. And many are doing something about it.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

MARINA PISKLAKOVA

LESSON GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES: WOMEN'S RIGHTS, FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, INDIVIDUAL INTEGRITY

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

- **Article 3:** Right to Life, Liberty, and Personal Security
- **Article 5:** Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment

TIME REQUIREMENT: 80 minutes

TEACHER TIP:

Domestic violence is a difficult subject to address because it is often hidden and is often a cause of shame for the victim and those close to the victim. In preparing to teach this subject, make sure to have available the names and contact details of community programs to support individuals affected by domestic violence. It is also important to explain what domestic violence is. Domestic violence is any of a series of behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Partners may be married or not married; heterosexual, gay, or lesbian; living together, separated or dating.

WHAT KIND OF BEHAVIORS CAN BE CONSIDERED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

If your partner:

- Intentionally insults or embarrasses you
- Controls any of your actions, including who you see or talk to or where you go
- Tells you that you are a bad parent or threatens to take away or hurt your children
- Makes all of your decisions for you
- Prevents you from seeing loved ones, like your friends and family
- Physically assaults you in any way
- Takes your possessions or money and withholds it from you
- Intimidates you with weapons
- Destroys your possessions or threatens to kill your pets
- Attempts to scare you
- Threatens to do physical harm to themselves or threaten you with physical violence
- Prevents you from going to work or school

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What does it mean to be safe?
- Where does one expect to be safe?
- Why did the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights use the language "Personal Security"?
- Where does domestic violence occur?

OBJECTIVES

After this lesson Students will be able to:

- Define and understand the term "gender-based violence"
- Examine and analyze the facts and figures related to domestic violence.
- Know who Marina Pisklakova is and the enormity of her work for survivors of violence.

STUDENT SKILLS:

- Drawing inferences
- Making conclusions
- Organizing and interpreting information;
- Participating in group planning and discussion
- Critical thinking

NEW YORK STATE

LEARNING STANDARDS:

- Social Studies Standard 2: World History
 - Commencement KI I PI 1, 5; KI 2 PI 3, 4, 5; KI 3 PI 1, 2, 3; KI 4 PI 1, 2, 3, 4
- Social Studies Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government
 - Commencement KI I PI 1, 3; KI 4 PI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- English Language Arts Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding
 - Commencement Reading PI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; Writing PI 1, 2, 3, 4
- English Language Arts Standard 3: Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation
 - Commencement Reading PI 1, 2, 3, 4; Writing PI 1, 2

- English Language Arts Standard 4: Language for Social Interaction
 - Commencement Listening/Speaking PI 1, 2, 3; Reading/Writing PI 2, 3

VOCABULARY:

- **Gender-based violence**
- **Personal security**
- **Domestic violence**
- **Prevention**
- **Relationship**
- **Dissident**

CONCEPTS:

- **Empathy**
- **Identity**
- **Justice**
- **Power**
- **Decision making**
- **Civic values**
- **Human rights**

TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED:

- Internet access

MATERIALS:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>
- Domestic Violence <http://www.domesticviolence.org/>
- Domestic violence facts and figures [http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet\(National\).pdf](http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet(National).pdf)
- Interview with Marina Pisklakova <http://www.speaktruth.org/> Click Defenders/Click interview/scroll to Defender

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

ANTICIPATORY SET:

- Instruct the students to read Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Instruct the students to read the definition of domestic violence and the facts and figures.
- After reading, instruct the students to rephrase the Article 3 based on their understanding of domestic violence.
- Ask the students to report out orally to class via teacher-facilitated discussion.

ACTIVITY 1

- Distribute to the class the interview with Marina Pisklakova from the *Speak Truth to Power* website. (symbol for link)
- Ask students the following questions:
 - Why did Marina Pisklakova begin her work to end domestic violence in Russia?
 - What are some characteristics of domestic violence that are similar from case to case?
 - What is Marina's functioning definition of domestic violence?
 - What is a dissident? Why would Marina's father call her a dissident?
 - Describe how Marina has helped Russian women.

ACTIVITY 2

- Conduct a community mapping exercise to learn about where a survivor of domestic violence can get help and support in your community. Include the health care providers, law enforcement, community non-profits, and the justice system.
- After the mapping project is complete, pair students off and have them select one organization to interview.
- Prior to conducting the interview, the class, as a whole, should develop at least 10 questions to ask each organization. A common set of questions will enable the class to create a report on the community's capacity to assist victims of domestic violence.

BECOME A DEFENDER

- Host a Personal Safety Day. Include speakers and presenters from some of the community organizations you learned about in your community mapping exercise. Make available a self-defense class.
- Invite a speaker to address the issue of dating violence.
- Set up a table at a popular neighborhood site and provide information about domestic violence, organizations working to stop it and opportunities for individuals to take action
- Have a petition-signing in support of both U.S and International laws to protect women and to stop violence against women and girls.

TELL US ABOUT IT

The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights is sponsoring an annual contest honoring a student who submits the best advocacy activity based upon the lesson studied. A goal of the lesson is to instill into each student that one voice, one person can make monumental changes in the lives of many. Tell us how you "Became a Defender"!

THE CRITERIA FOR THE CONTEST ARE:

- A one-page summary of the advocacy activity
- Digitized copies of materials that can be sent electronically
- Photos of the activity (please include parental consent form)
- A one-page summary of how the activity made a change in the lives of one person or many

THE PRIZES INCLUDE:

- A week long "virtual" internship at RFK Center
- An opportunity to meet the defender through a SKYPE visit,
- A visit from Kerry Kennedy or a defender to your school
- A poster of a *Speak Truth to Power* Human Rights Defender
- A donation of a signed copy of *Speak Truth to Power* for the school library

The application and instructions for entry can be downloaded here (link for materials)

The deadline for all applications is the third week in November.

The winning student and teacher will be notified by the last week of January.

- Once the interviews are complete, students should work in groups of four to review their interview responses and draft a common document.
- After the groups have met, convene the full class to draft one document outlining the similarities and differences, based on the interview questions, on how each community organization fulfills its mission to assist victims of domestic violence.
- Students may share this document with the organizations.
- As a result of this activity students could develop an action plan to change some aspect of the community safety net or, an acknowledgement to the city or town for doing a good job.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WHO World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/en/>

The World Health Organization publishes periodic reports on gender discrimination and domestic violence. Their website is a good source for teachers or students to find statistics and other information.

UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women

<http://www.unifem.org/>

UNIFEM is a part of UN Women, and features information about gender equality and women's empowerment on an international level.

UNFPA United Nations Population Fund

<http://www.unfpa.org/public/>

The UNFPA is an international development agency that works to promote every individual's right to health and equal opportunities. They focus on population data to develop policies and programs that reduce poverty and promote overall health and well-being.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<http://www.ncadv.org/>

NCADV is an American-based non-profit that organizes women and their allies to end violence against women and children on a national level by addressing perpetuating conditions that condone this kind of violence.

UNICEF report on domestic violence

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest6e.pdf>

This report from UNICEF covers domestic violence from numerous angles. It addresses the current scope and magnitude through statistics, while also examining the causes and consequences. The UNICEF report also addresses the obligations of the state and suggests strategies and interventions.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

www.thehotline.org

A website built around the National Domestic Violence Hotline that raises awareness of domestic violence and provides services to victims, survivors and their families.