

STORIES OF CHANGE

# PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL FOR SGBV SURVIVORS

 Asunción, Paraguay



Betty, a clinical psychologist, has been an activist in favor of women's rights since her academic training. Her involvement in the daily realities of women in her society through her profession, has helped her to realize that gender-based violence is one of the greatest obstacles for women to achieve equal rights and that this problem persisted as a global issue affecting many women around the world.

Inspired by a vision of an equitable world without violence, she shared how participating from a professional role in the Feminist Futures Free from Violence project allowed her to strengthen her commitment to improving the reality of the women and girls who come to the specialized support center “Serafina Dávalos”, through psychological care and the facilitation of training, talks and workshops with the aim of preventing this problem through raising awareness among the population.

**With her background in clinical psychology and her focus on evidence-based therapies, she offers support and guidance to women seeking support for SGBV.**

Her main task is to help survivors to understand the situations of violence in which they find themselves and recognize their own strengths. With her guidance, women can prioritize their well-being, recognize their state of vulnerability, and begin to face the psychological consequences of violence in their lives. During her work with women in situations of violence, Betty guide them to recognize the situation of violence in which they found themselves, a fundamental step to begin to free from the guilt and that often makes them stay in a violent situation. It further recognizes that, as women become aware of their own worth and their right to live free from violence, their self-esteem improves and they learn to set clear boundaries in their relationships, so that they recognize what they want and what they don't want within their interpersonal relationships

*My participation in this project has resulted in significant changes in both my life and the lives of the women I support. One of the most notable changes has been the strengthening of my commitment from a professional role, through interventions based on scientific evidence with a gender perspective. That, although I already had this perspective before, my participation in the project made me practice it from the direct responsibility with women in this difficult situation.*

Without SGBV care and services, many of these women were in a state of helplessness, a way of coping with the difficult situation in which they lived. However, Jessica has seen how when they feel supported, they manage to get out of that state and begin to decide for themselves.

*Previously, they were in a state of helplessness, understandable as the mechanism that allowed them to move forward in the situation they were in.*

These positive changes are proof of the importance of first-line psychological support and its impact on the lives of these women, who can now look to the future by viewing them as

subjects of rights and no longer as people who should only limit themselves to protecting themselves from the damage that can be exerted on them.

The psychological accompaniment provided by the “Serafina Dávalos” Center has influenced women's perception of themselves and their realities, their ability to face their circumstances and their desire to live a full life free of violence.

*We confront tunnel vision, without invalidating what the context makes them feel, we plan how to move forward despite it, and we pursue the goal of integral well-being through the resources that I offer them with psychological accompaniment.*

In this regard, a common trait among most of the women upon arrival at the center was the belief that there was no other way to live, that they had no options and that they could not escape their situation. However, simply seeking help was already an important step towards positive change.

*As an activist, fighting for the eradication of violence in our society has always been my main line of struggle, and now being able to make my profession provide tools to women who are being directly affected by this reality is very gratifying and makes my commitment much stronger*

Being able to access psychosocial support services in such a difficult situation has been a very significant opportunity to start working on the psychological consequences that violence has left in women. This is doubly valuable since service users can achieve transformative results in their lives without encountering the barrier of the costs of therapy, which is often an obstacle for people in the country to access mental health services.

The project has demonstrated changes in the outlook of service providers by witnessing how women go through a complex and non-linear process to overcome difficulties, while also allowing themselves to express what they want for their future.