



Soroptimist White Papers: Raising Awareness About Issues Affecting Women and Girls Worldwide

Soroptimist has been researching and publishing white papers on issues important to women and girls for several years. Each year, new white papers are added and existing papers are updated to ensure the information is current. A white paper is an authoritative report or guide that addresses issues and offers suggestions for how to solve them. Soroptimist white papers focus on topics important to Soroptimists and women and girls worldwide. Currently, Soroptimist white papers are offered free of charge on the Soroptimist website (<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>). The specific goal of the Soroptimist white papers is to raise awareness of issues important to Soroptimist, and influence others to work to improve the lives of women and girls in local communities and throughout the world. Also, the white papers help to promote Soroptimist as an expert on international women's issues and as an organization addressing those issues.

Soroptimist white papers can be used by Soroptimist members and clubs in a number of different ways. This resource contains a number of suggestions for club use. In addition, this resource includes abstracts for each of the current papers, the URL address, significant dates with which to use the white papers, and suggestions for other federation resources to use in conjunction with the papers.

Soroptimist Club Use for White Papers

1. Educate club members. Using white papers as the center of a club program meeting is a simple and easy way to educate members about an issue of interest to them. Some specific ideas:

- Design a quiz on the white paper and give awards to those members scoring the highest. Appoint a member to lead the discussion.
- Email the white paper to all members prior to the club meeting. Have a member-lead a discussion—like a book club.
- Hand out or email a white paper to all members. Ask members to read the paper, highlighting information they did not previously know. Go around the room asking each member to discuss what she learned.
- Use the white papers to launch a discussion about ideas for new club projects. After presenting the information in the paper, brainstorm with members about ways the club could address the issue in the community or worldwide.

2. Promote Soroptimist programs. Because white papers focus on topics important to Soroptimists, frequently a tie exists between federation projects and the white papers. When promoting Soroptimist programs in the community, use the white papers to give depth to an argument about why the programs are important. For instance, white papers are available on women and education (Women's Opportunity Awards), women and disaster relief (the Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls), domestic violence in the workplace (Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence), and women and trafficking (Soroptimists STOP Trafficking). The white papers can help the club to promote the importance of Soroptimist programs in the community. If applicable, use the white papers to promote local club projects as well.

3. Educate the community. White papers can serve as the centerpiece of awareness activities in the community. For example, if a club wants to present a program to a local school about women and education, use the white paper as a starting point to build a compelling case about the importance of women's education. Oftentimes, club members are asked to speak on topics important to women in their local communities. To find out important

background information about a topic—and what Soroptimist is doing about it—check to see if Soroptimist offers a white paper on the topic.

4. Interest the media. The best time to announce these white papers is when related topics come up in the media. Clubs can also use the dates below, which correspond with each of the white papers, to determine when to announce them. These white papers can be used to create impressive opinion editorials or letters to the editor around these dates or when the topics are in the news. In addition, if the club is holding an event and inviting media, include a white paper addressing the theme of the event in the press kit.

5. Strengthen advocacy efforts. When the club chooses a topic to advocate for or against, the Soroptimist white papers can provide the information needed to prepare an advocacy statement and plan a campaign. It can provide the background information needed to build a coherent argument and an effective campaign.

6. Raise funds. Donors want to know why their contributions are needed and where they are being used. If the club is holding a community event or giving out federation awards, appeal to the audience to support the Soroptimist programs. Distribute white papers that correspond to the topic of the event or the award. For example, if the club is disbursing Women’s Opportunity Awards, distribute the *Women and Education* white paper to educate donors about the importance of the award and provide information about what Soroptimist is doing to ensure women’s access to education. Or, if the club is holding a breast cancer event, distribute the *Breast Cancer and Low Income Women* to possible donors. White papers can also be distributed to donors as a thank you. If a donation is received from a community member who was responding to a specific club project, send them the white paper on that topic along with a thank-you for the donation.

Current White Papers

Working Women

Women at Work

Over the last century, women’s participation in the work force has increased steadily and dramatically. Despite this, many women do not see improvements in job quality, and their working conditions have not led to true social and economic empowerment—especially in the world’s poorer regions. Today, women worldwide on average earn approximately two-thirds of what men earn, with the gender wage gap existing universally. As such, women are left behind when it comes to retirement and pensions. Working women also still face sexual harassment and domestic violence in the workplace, as well as issues around promotion and breaking through the “glass ceiling.” In addition, working women who are mothers often disrupt work and career paths to raise children. Decent work and wages help lift women and their children out of poverty, and contribute to the living standards and economies of countries everywhere. Until policy makers and employers place women’s employment at the center of social and economic policies, women will remain second-class citizens in the world of work and the feminization of poverty will continue into future generations.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_workingwomen.html

Dates: Labor Day, Mother’s Day (different dates in different countries)

Use with: Other white papers addressing women and work.

Domestic Violence as a Workplace Concern

When a woman is being abused by her intimate partner, she does not leave the abuse when she leaves her home. Abusers often harass their victims at work via telephone or e-mail, or they may come into the workplace to harass their victims and co-workers. This situation can give rise to untold financial hardships for the employer and create a dangerous workplace for the victim and her co-workers. Companies should be proactive and have policies in place for dealing with domestic violence in the workplace, create awareness about domestic abuse, and teach employees how to recognize signs and reach out to victims.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_dv.html

Dates: October: U.S.-based Domestic Violence Awareness Month

<http://dvam.vawnet.org/about/index.php>

November 25: International Day to End Violence against Women

<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/violence/>

November 25 to December 10: 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence

<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>

Use with: The Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence

http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_WorkplaceCampaign.html

Model Program Kits: Violence Against Women and Girls Action Projects and Domestic Violence Shelters: Beginning a Life Without Violence

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>

The Gender Wage Gap

Despite decades of anti-discrimination laws and changes in the policies of companies and businesses worldwide, women are still not earning as much as men. This pay gap exists across the globe. The size of that gap varies from country to country and is dependent on many variables. The sobering reality remains, however, that on average, women continue to work for lower earnings than men. While the gender pay gap is a complex and multi-layered problem, it nonetheless requires the political and collective will from governments, employers, employees and their representatives in order to improve the situation. Soroptimist's exploration of the gender wage gap worldwide is a starting point for dialogue and education, given the reality that most of the world's women are poor. Pay equity addresses that poverty, which ripples out to impact women as well as their families, communities, and the economies of their nations.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_genderwagegap.html

Dates: April 12, 2011: U.S.-based Equal Pay Day

<http://www.pay-equity.org/day.html>

Use with: Other white papers addressing women and work.

Work/Family Life Balance

In this white paper, the issue of work/family life balance is explored. While women have entered the work force in increasing numbers throughout the world, their responsibility for family care has not declined in proportion. Today in many parts of the world, working mothers are part of a two-earner couple with children, and must typically juggle multiple forms of childcare and their work schedule, along with unpaid household responsibilities. If working mothers cannot achieve their desired work/family life balance not only is their income curtailed by virtue of working part-time or opting out of the workforce to care for children, but so is the economic development of countries through a reduced labor supply. Implementation of family-friendly workplace policies will help reduce poverty and enhance equity between women and men. In addition, as parenting is also crucial to child development and the shape of future societies, decision makers—those in government and private firms—have many reasons to want to help working mothers and fathers find a better work/family balance.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_family_balance.html

Dates: October: U.S.-based National Work and Family Month

<http://www.awlp.org/awlp/nwfm/nwfm-history.jsp>

Use with: Other white papers addressing women and work.

Trafficking

The New Face of Slavery

Sex trafficking involves coercion and fraud, with women and girls forced into sex work within their own country or transported to other countries. Poverty is a common bond among nearly all trafficking victims. Sex trafficking involves victims, suppliers (such as organized crime rings), as well as the demand side (those who purchase sex acts). In order to end sex trafficking of women and girls, efforts must be made on both the supply side and demand side. This white paper examines the complex issue of trafficking, including its effect on victims and society as a whole.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_womentrafficking.html

Dates: December 2: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/slavery/>

January 11: U.S.-based National Human Trafficking Awareness Day

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=sc110-40>

July: Release of U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report

<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/index.htm>

Use with: Soroptimists STOP Trafficking

http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_Trafficking.html

Model Program Kits: Trafficking: Assisting Victims and Advocating for Change and Violence Against Women and Girls Action Projects

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>

Other Issues:

Breast Cancer and Low-Income Women

Breast cancer adversely impacts millions of women of all ages, races and geographic origins. However, it most severely impacts low-income women who are disproportionately undereducated and underinsured, and who live in developing countries. These women lack financial resources, health education and access to preventive procedures and appropriate treatments—not only for breast cancer, but for all health issues. Currently, 75 percent of global deaths attributed to breast cancer occur in the developing world. Efforts aimed at raising awareness of breast cancer in conjunction with providing affordable early detection procedures, such as clinical breast exams and mammography, are likely to have the greatest overall benefit in terms of breast cancer control among low-income women worldwide.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_bcliw.html

Dates: October: U.S.-based National Breast Cancer Awareness Month
<http://www.nbcam.org/>

Use with: Model Program Kit: Early Detection of Breast Cancer

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>

Reaching Out to Women When Disaster Strikes

Natural disasters are a tragedy in their own right, but because women occupy a more tenuous position in society prior to disaster, they are hit the hardest. When disaster strikes, women lack mobility and access to resources, have increased family responsibilities, and are susceptible to physical danger. Despite the vulnerable position of women prior to and following a disaster, their special needs are often ignored—as are their unique abilities to respond. International and national organizations point to the need for better research concerning the impact of disasters on women, as well as disaster recovery programs and policies that better incorporate gender-specific needs.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_disaster.html

Dates: Anniversaries of large-scale disasters
Any time disaster strikes

Use with: Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls

http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_DisasterGrants.html

Women and Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the number one cause of death in women worldwide, causing 8.6 million deaths annually. In the United States, heart disease and stroke cause nearly twice as many deaths for women than those caused by all cancers combined, including breast cancer. However, heart disease continues to be categorized as a “man’s disease” and is often misdiagnosed or overlooked in women. Heart disease presents itself differently in women than men and often needs different types of treatment, but only 34 percent of participants in all heart-related studies are women. In order for women to receive the medical care and treatment they need and deserve, both the medical community and women need to be better educated. In addition, it is also critical that women take control of their health by knowing their risk factors and communicating these factors with their doctor.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_womencardio.html

Dates: Valentine’s Day (dates vary)
September 27: World Heart Day
<http://www.world-heart-federation.org/what-we-do/awareness/world-heart-day/>

Use with: Model Program Kit: Women and Heart Health

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>

Women and Education

In 1948, the United Nations declared basic education to be a fundamental human right. Despite that, more than 115 million children do not attend school, 62 million of whom are girls. Two-thirds of the world’s 776 million illiterates are women. The benefits of education for women and girls are many, resulting in the social and economic advancement of children, families and communities. Educated women are more likely to enter the formal labor market, learn what they and their children need to do to stay healthy, and are more likely to send their children to school. Unfortunately, sexist cultural norms, poverty, poor health, child labor and safety issues keep many girls from receiving an education. The United Nations, through the Millennium Development Goals,

reports some progress, but governments still have work to do to improve access to and quality of education for girls and women.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_education.html

Dates: Around high school and college graduations

Use with: Women's Opportunity Awards

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistWOA.html>

Women and Poverty

Of the 1.2 billion people worldwide living in abject poverty (less than \$1 a day), 70 percent are women. Women worldwide are denied opportunities needed to improve their economic and social condition, including property and inheritance rights, and access to education and jobs. They also face discrimination through cultural traditions that perpetuate social exclusion. At the same time, they have the responsibility for care of children, the elderly and disabled. These many conditions contribute to the "feminization of poverty" and explain why a growing number of women and single female-headed families are living in poverty. Governments, NGOs and international institutions must be committed to addressing the myriad issues keeping women in poverty. Fortunately, a growing understanding in the international aid community demonstrates that assisting women has the added benefit of helping families, communities, nations and the world.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_womenpoverty.html

Dates: October 17: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/intldays/IntlDay/index.html>

Use with: Women's Opportunity Awards

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistWOA.html>

Women and HIV/AIDS

Today, HIV/AIDS infects and affects more women than ever before, accounting for nearly half the 40 million people living with the disease worldwide. While a variety of economic, cultural, religious, political, biological and sexual factors make women more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than men, pervasive gender inequality is at the root of the spread of the pandemic, especially in developing countries. This white paper explores the many factors rendering women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, as well as the devastating consequences of the disease. Unless the global and national communities respond immediately to the pandemic, women will have a bleak future. Solutions discussed in this white paper are actions that must be taken seriously and begin without delay.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_HIVAIDS.html

Dates: December 1: World AIDS Day

<http://www.worldaidsday.org>

Use with: Club projects addressing HIV/AIDS

Teen Dating Violence

Dating and intimate relationships are a normal part of growing up for many adolescents. Yet teenagers frequently form their first romantic relationship without a clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy versus an unhealthy relationship. As a result, they are particularly vulnerable to becoming targets of dating abuse. Fifty-seven percent of teens know someone who has been verbally, physically, or sexually abused in a dating relationship. Moreover, females ages 16 to 24 are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence than any other age group. Although the patterns and signs of teen dating violence tend to mirror those exhibited in adult abusive relationships, teens face some unique issues. This white paper examines those issues as they relate to the factors that influence teen dating violence, as well as the consequences thereof. The paper also addresses the obstacles teens face when seeking help and/or deciding to end an abusive relationship.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_teendating.html

Dates: October: U.S.-based Domestic Violence Awareness Month

<http://dvam.vawnet.org/about/index.php>

November 25: International Day to End Violence against Women

<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/violence/>

November 25 to December 10: 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence

<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>

February: Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month

<http://teendvmonth.org/>

Valentine's Day (dates vary)

Use with: Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Project

http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_TDV.html

Model Program Kits: Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Awareness Campaign and Soroptimist Teen Dating Violence Awareness Day

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>

Unhappily Ever After: The Plight of Child and Mail-Order Brides

The practices of child and mail-order marriage rely upon the historical, social and cultural assumptions and beliefs that support marriage as an economic transaction – whereby a woman, or girl, is merely an object for exchange. These practices inflict great harm upon women and girls. Child marriage traps young girls in relationships that deprive them of their childhood and education while putting them at risk for abuse, disease and even death. Mail-order brides, who “consent” to marriage and may view it as the promise of a better and happier future, also face similar fates. Marriage for these women and girls is often nothing less than slavery, their lives revolving around physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. Recommendations for preventing child and mail-order bride marriages include: conducting research on the topic and providing support for the findings; increasing girls’ access to education; creating income-generating job opportunities for women; and challenging gender stereotypes and male demand for child and mail-order brides.

URL: http://www.soroptimist.org/whitepapers/wp_marriage.html

Dates: October: U.S.-based Domestic Violence Awareness Month

<http://dvam.vawnet.org/about/index.php>

November 20: Universal Children’s Day

http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/children_day/

November 25: International Day to End Violence against Women

<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/violence/>

November 25 to December 10: 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence

<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>

December 2: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/slavery/>

January 11: U.S.-based National Human Trafficking Awareness Day

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=sc110-40>

July: Release of U.S. State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Report

<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/index.htm>

Use with: Women’s Opportunity Awards

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistWOA.html>

Soroptimists STOP Trafficking

http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/Program_Trafficking.html

Model Program Kits: Violence Against Women and Girls Action Projects and Trafficking: Assisting Victims and Advocating for Change

<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClubProjects.html>

Please send any questions or comments about the white papers to program@soroptimist.org. Please advise the program department of additional topics that could be addressed in a Soroptimist white paper.