

Huong:

0:09

I want to share with you a real story of a Vietnamese woman. Her name is Ha. Ha is a brilliant woman; she is smart, she's very generous, and she is very kind. However, since she entered into her marriage, she found herself checked, and she became a very different person. She is more aggressive, less confident, and very much has low self-esteem.

0:44

Every time she got beaten by her husband she had no one to go to; she had nowhere to report the abuse. It was pretty much considered a family issue, something very private. So she thought that was her destiny. With some support from her sister, Ha was able to escape to the city with her two daughters—one was only 10 months old and the other was only 3 years old.

1:11

She had no job, no income, and her future was very unclear, with two daughters. The only thing she could do at that time was to return to her abusive husband. For several times she did it. There is evidence that shows it takes a woman an average of seven attempts to really leave their abusive partner.

1:47

Ha's story is actually my sister's. She is one of the many women in Vietnam who have been blamed by their society, their in-laws, and even by their families and relatives for the issues that they find themselves in—the issue here is gender-based violence. Ha was a victim for seven years, and she couldn't find her way out.

2:24

To give you more context, in Vietnam, 63% of women experience gender-based violence, and of those, 90% did not seek help at the time it happened. In Vietnam, a country of 100 million people, we only have three shelters located in big cities. This means that women living in rural areas cannot access these services. I think this number needs to change.

3:05

After many years of helping my sister, I knew this problem needed to be confronted and solved. I just didn't know how at that time. So I spent a lot of time talking to social workers in the space and learned about how services really operate in Vietnam.

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I came to a conclusion that in order to support survivors of gender-based violence, it requires economic empowerment. That's how I started my social enterprise, Hopeout—the first social enterprise in Vietnam that provides employment, training and support to this group of women.

4:00

Ha was actually my first staff members. She built a new venture and a new dream with me while she was rebuilding her life with stable income, dignity, and empowerment. She finally left her abusive husband behind.

4:12

But running a social enterprise is not that easy in the space of gender-based violence. I made two

wrong assumptions when I started my enterprise. The first assumption was that every woman could cope, which was not always true. The second assumption was that my friend promised I could get an order of 500 lunch boxes for their staff after I launched. They disappeared, which was a big lesson learned.

4:49

Through our training program and employment, many women have transformed their lives. But to create a bigger impact, I wanted to move into prevention because that's where radical change can happen. I don't have a complete answer to this problem, but this is what I know; the number one challenge is the taboo. In my culture, People don't really talk about gender-based violence; it's still considered very private, and they probably don't know how to start the conversation.

5:25

To address this, I and my team started a series of events that bring the people together, bring the community together. Our idea is to use these events to talk about gender-based violence in a fun and engaging way. The goal is to normalize the topic and model how to talk about it.

5:57

I really like the idea of bringing the community together in community events because it could reach children, it could reach students, it could reach men, women, policymakers, and change-makers. Because gender-based violence is not just a women's issue; it's our issue.

6:14

The second challenge is around social norms in Vietnam around relationships. Men cannot express emotions; they have to be strong and they got to earn money, being the breadwinner of the house. Women are expected to stay married no matter what. I think this problem can best be solved through preventative educational programs.

6:44

Here in Australia, there's a program called Respectful Relationships that I really like. We hope that one day we bring this concept to Vietnam. And I and my team at the moment are building an e-learning platform and a Vietnamese curriculum based on this model of Respectful Relationships. We hope to bring it to our first school within the next 24 months.

7:11

I share this with you today because I think if you are tackling any widespread problem in society, look for successful models that work elsewhere and bring them home. This is what we are trying to do.

7:30

Today I shared with you the story of my sister and how her situation catalysed my action. I share with you about the changes we can make to address taboos and adopt best practices from elsewhere to make things better.

7:54

Today as I stand here, I'm filled with hope—hope for a future where every woman, whether in Vietnam or anywhere in the world, can live free from the threat of gender-based violence. I hope that my sister's story can inspire you in someway, to create action and consider the actions you could join or participate in within your community.

8:26

Because this is not something any of us can solve alone; it's a collective effort to end gender-based violence.

8:33

Thank you.