

Domestic violence - Staff training for the probation and prison services

The EU's most comprehensive survey¹ to date revealed that the violence against women is one of the most extensive and wide-ranging violation of human rights that we cannot afford to overlook. A report based on interviews with 42,000 women across 28 states in Europe showed that one in 10 women experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in 20 has been raped. Overall, the prevalence of physical and sexual violence is astonishing, because **one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence** since the age of 15.

What makes the task of tackling domestic violence especially difficult is that this phenomenon is specifically hidden from professionals, other family members and from society in general. **Only 14 % of women reported their most serious incident of intimate partner violence to police.**² This number indicates that we need to tackle domestic violence (DV) from as many quarters as possible and also that we also need to explore new innovative ways of how to increase this shockingly low level of reporting. In light of these findings, the probation and prison service are important parts of the judiciary initiative to make noticeable change in DV.

Probation and prisons professionals are responsible for work with perpetrators of DV. This duty cannot be limited to risk management and to restraining violent behaviour of perpetrators against women, or children, but instead, we are equally responsible for extending our efforts to stop violent behaviour altogether. Perpetrators programmes aim to stop abuse and protect future victims. If we only protect the current victim, perpetrator will later find a new partner and the vicious cycle of violence will continue with another, new victim to suffer.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (hereinafter Istanbul Convention)³ embedded perpetrators programmes as a very important element of an integrated and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating domestic violence, and this should be an important part of the field of all probation and prisons activities (Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention). The majority of existing domestic violence perpetrator programmes take a cognitive-behavioural or psycho-educational approach to perpetrator treatment and tend to be situated in the criminal justice field (offered through the probation or prison service).⁴ Some of the crucial elements of the programme should be based on confronting perpetrators for their violence and leading them to accept responsibility for violence without allowing them to blame victim, or circumstances for

¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Violence against women (2014): an EU-wide survey Results at a glance Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

²Ibid. 1

³Council of Europe (2011): *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*.

⁴Hester, M., Lilley, S.J. (2014). *Domestic and sexual violence perpetrator programmes: Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

it. Perpetrators programmes work through overcoming belief systems that tolerate, justify or outright condone violence against women.⁵

The hidden nature of the domestic violence makes it very difficult to prosecute and sanction, but what is even more important, is that it makes it impossible to focus on the perpetrators' attitudinal and behavioural change. If tactical effort of perpetrator is to hide violent behaviour, society must do the exact opposite and to expose this violence to public whenever possible. This principle may involve a heterogeneous and a large-scale variety of actions such as: educating children, teachers, law – enforcement and judiciary professionals as well as the health care professionals, but also prosecute DV, perform perpetrators programmes, raise awareness, let society to face it, be active, take initiative, and speak up louder against violence at every level possible. To sum it up, zero tolerance towards violence might eventually lead to zero violence, which is of course an ideal outcome, but we have to strive to achieve it.

To build on the previous argument, it must be acknowledged that it is difficult to make any substantive difference with working with perpetrators with limited knowledge and without appropriate training of professionals. Working with perpetrators without adequate training can actually cause more harm and be even dangerous or insensitive towards victims. As a result, it is vital to provide special training for staff within the field of probation and prisons. All parties involved need to be aware that multidisciplinary approach and close inter-agency cooperation of relevant subjects involved (networking) are fundamental part of successful work with perpetrators. Work with perpetrators also means multilevel and multi-angle confronting of perpetrators cognitions, values, beliefs and behaviour against women and children. If this **“coordinated intervention against DV”** is systematically performed by majority of professionals, this structurally institutionalized effort of community may lead toward prosocial, nonviolent change (“eradication of violence”).

All professionals involved need to understand what the socio-ecological model is, and how the individual, the relationship, the community and the societal levels interact and contribute in creating and maintaining domestic violence. Socio-ecological framework helps us understand that no single factor can explain why some people are at higher risk to become violent against their partner and children, and also how patriarchal model of society and values are fuelling violence against women and how this gendered nature of violence is persisting due to gender-based inequality in society in general.

When talking about effective programmes for perpetrators (article 16 of Istanbul Convention) by well trained staff (Article 15 of Istanbul Convention), it is necessary to work within level of minimum standards as proposed by Council of Europe⁶ and within guidelines and principles proposed by The European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP EN)⁷ funded by European Union. Hester and Lilley⁸ asserted that ensuring a

⁵Ibid. 4

⁶Kelly L. and Dubois L. (2008), *Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe

⁷ European Network for Work with Perpetrators (WWP EN) (2017) *Guidelines to develop standards for programmes working with perpetrators of domestic violence*, Version 2.

high level of qualification and training for facilitators (including a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of violent relationships alongside a commitment to violence-free relationships and to gender equality) of perpetrators programmes is necessary.

From our perspective it seems appropriate to adopt multileveled training for probation and prison staff depends on their duties and a complexity of social interaction they have with perpetrators of DV.

1. Sensitivity training for prison or probation staff, who deal with cases of perpetrators of DV within their scope of duties, or participate in perpetrators' programmes indirectly.
2. Training for co-facilitators / junior facilitators of perpetrators' programmes (entry level) – 30 hours training
3. Training for senior facilitators / trainers' trainers (advanced level) - minimum 100 hours of specific certified training

Domestic violence is vastly under-reported, and professionals within field of probation and prison need to be educated and professionally trained to be able to act against this devastating phenomenon safely, professionally and sensitively.

⁸Hester, M., Lilley, S.J. (2014). *Domestic and sexual violence perpetrator programmes: Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe