

Practice in the treatment of domestic violence

Slovenian Probation Administration

The Probation Administration was established as a body within the Ministry of Justice in January 2018 and began operating in April of that same year. Probation service deals with perpetrators of criminal offences, while assistance to victims of domestic violence and their treatment are provided by social work centres and non-governmental organisations.

In Slovenia, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act was passed in 2008 and upgraded and amended in 2017. Prior to the adoption of the Act, Slovenian legislation did not recognise domestic violence as a special category. The police and the court dealt with domestic violence if the act of violence was of such a nature that it could be considered a criminal offence or the police intervened if the violence resulted in violations of law and order or other types of offences. The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim was irrelevant. Following the adoption of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, Slovenia also ratified two important Council of Europe conventions on domestic violence, namely the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) and the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

On the basis of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, regional services have been established to deal with domestic violence in a coordinated manner. Their task is to convene multidisciplinary teams, which include centres for social work, the police, health care, non-governmental organisations and other services dealing with victims or perpetrators of violence. Participation is legally mandatory. At the meeting, multidisciplinary teams adopt an assistance plan for the victim (family) and define the means of exchanging information and managing the situation.

In Slovenia, the legal bases and formal frameworks are relatively well established; however, the Probation Administration encounters both good and bad practices in this field. The case described below is an example of the probation treatment of a perpetrator of violence.

A perpetrator, MK, aged 33, had been sentenced to imprisonment for domestic violence in the past, and the probation treatment began in 2018 in compliance with the sentence imposed: "suspended sentence with probation supervision, including the following instructions: No. 1: treatment of addiction in a medical institution; No. 2: a restraining order; No. 3: prohibition of establishing contacts; and No. 4: prohibition of access to a specific place for a period of five years". The case is dealt with in a following multidisciplinary manner:

- In accordance with the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, the social work centre organised a multidisciplinary team composed of representatives of the social work centre, victims, representatives of a kindergarten and child protection institute, representatives of the non-governmental organisation Society for Non-violent Communication, a police station and the Probation Administration;
- Victims (the partner and children) are treated by a non-governmental organisation;

- The perpetrator visits a psychiatrist for alcohol addiction treatment in accordance with instruction No. 1;
- The police supervise three instructions, namely the restraining order, the prohibition of establishing contacts and the prohibition of access to a specific place;
- The probation officer carries out probation supervision (assistance and supervision) in accordance with the Probation Act, while maintaining contact with all services and reporting to the court on how the sanction is enforced.

The perpetrator achieved many positive developments during the probation treatment and during his imprisonment. He has established abstinence from alcohol, which he maintains without relapsing, he regularly visits a psychiatrist, he has re-established contacts with his ex-wife and children, after serving his prison sentence he found employment and is still employed, and in addition to working on a farm, he regularly visits the probation officer, where interviews are focused on managing anger and changing attitudes and values that affect behavioural patterns. He does not violate the prohibitions imposed.

Despite many good examples of treatment of domestic violence in Slovenia, there is also a need for a certain degree of criticality, as this is the only way to improve activities in this field. Integration among individual services and coordinated action are not yet at the right level. The reason for this is the fragmentation of competences between several services. The operation of the multidisciplinary team should be carried out by all competent authorities sitting at the same table at the same time, agreeing on a method of operation and smoothly exchanging information, and in this manner monitoring a case throughout the treatment. Therefore, planning and action should be carried out by a single centre; in other words, it should be joined under one roof.

Since the Probation Administration is a new body, during the initial period of operation it devoted attention mainly to the establishment of the organisation and all processes required for the operation and establishment of the staffing structure, whereas now the service is mainly focused on the further provision of education and training to the staff and the development of special programmes. In addition, the first activities for developing a model for assessing risk factors and needs were initiated. The development of individual fields of expertise is also being strengthened. One of the most important and demanding areas of work is the treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence. In this field, an analysis of the situation and problems detected in the field of probation treatment is being prepared; protocols for cooperation with the police and the regional service for addressing violence are in preparation. We perceive that domestic violence is often combined with alcohol and drug dependence, and therefore organisations dealing with these issues also play an important role in addressing perpetrators and families. During the Covid-19 epidemic in spring 2020 the number of cases of domestic violence has increased in Slovenia. These data impose on the Probation Administration and other competent services the responsibility to be particularly committed and professional in this field, to act in a coordinated manner, and to play a connecting role.

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