

Guidelines to develop standards for programmes working with male perpetrators of domestic violence

Version 1.1

Introduction

Male violence against women occurs in every European country and is a serious and widespread problem. Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and represents a pervasive violation of human rights and a major obstacle to achieving gender equality¹. Member states of international organisations like the UN and the Council of Europe as well as the EU countries are bound by international and national law to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or private persons, and provide protection to victims². Domestic violence against women is a pattern of controlling behaviour by the intimate partner or ex-partner, which includes but is not limited to physical and sexual violence, emotional abuse, isolation economic abuse, threats, intimidation, and stalking³. Violence against women in the family also affects the children who also have the right to be protected and to receive support.

Agencies running perpetrator programmes carry a great responsibility for all persons involved. Work with male perpetrators of domestic violence aims to stop the violence and enhance the safety of victims of domestic violence (women and children), but it should also be seen as embedded in a wider process of cultural and political change towards abolishing gender hierarchies, gendered violence and gender discrimination as well as other forms of personal and structural violence and discrimination. Standards are necessary to assure the quality of work and especially that the safety for victims is a priority and that the work does not endanger the partners or children of their participants. The following guidelines for developing standards in the work with male perpetrators have been compiled by the consortium of the Daphne II Project “Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence in Europe – WWP” and have been further developed during an international expert workshop in Berlin in 2008. The guidelines address programmes for male perpetrators who use violence against their partners and children living in these relationships.

Programmes in the European countries are different in tasks, target group, funding, legal basis, and in many other aspects and conditions of work. Therefore these guidelines do not intend to give detailed instructions. Instead, they intend to offer perpetrator programmes a framework for developing specific standards for responsible work. The following section describes the goal and the preconditions for perpetrator programmes to operate and the second part presents the main principals which have to be considered to conduct responsible work with male perpetrators of domestic violence.

Standards for the work with perpetrators of domestic violence should integrate new research findings and best practice experiences. This is an ongoing process trying to answer the general question ‘what works for which men under what circumstances’?

A Preconditions for the work with male perpetrators

A.1. Goal

The main goal of the work with male perpetrators is to increase the safety of the victims of violence. Perpetrator programmes must give priority to the safety of the women partners and their children at every level of the programme. The goal of perpetrator programmes should be explicit both for the facilitators and for the men they work with.

A.2. Collaboration with victim support services and intervention systems

¹ See United Nations Declaration on Violence against women 1993

² See Recommendation Rec(2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of women against violence adopted on 30 April 2002

³ See Respect Statement of Principles and Minimum Standards of Practice 2004

Perpetrator programmes are only one part of a necessary wider system of intervention against domestic violence and should not be run in isolation nor be implemented where specific victim support services do not exist. Perpetrator programmes should be funded by additional sources and not at the expense of the victim support services.

To effectively deal with domestic violence, perpetrator programmes should be an integrated part of an intervention system and actively participate in inter-agency alliances and networks against domestic violence. It is particularly important to cooperate closely with services for women victims and their children to ensure their safety as well as to achieve an integrated approach to domestic violence. These principles of co-operation should be implemented by including representatives from women's support services as experts in steering committees and advisory boards of perpetrator programmes. Collaboration and networking with all other services, agencies and professionals working with domestic violence (e.g., the justice system, social services, health services, and child protection services) are also important. Cooperation and participation in alliances and networks should be acknowledged and funded.

A.3. Theoretical understanding and explicit concept

Perpetrator programmes have to be based on the understanding and attitude, that violence against women and children is unacceptable and that violent men are responsible for their use of violence. All staff of perpetrator programmes has to refrain from excusing, condoning or minimising and condemn any form of victim blaming. Each perpetrator programme further needs to have explicit theoretical understandings, which include the following aspects, but are not limited to them:

- gender theory - understanding of gender hierarchy and masculinities, including social, cultural, religious, ethnic, and political influences,
- definition of domestic violence and types of abuse,
- origins of violence - understanding of causes and mechanisms which lead to violence,
- theory of intervention / theory of change – understanding of why the proposed interventions are supposed to change the participants' violent attitudes and behaviours.

These theoretical considerations should lead into an explicit and written concept of the work with perpetrators. As an orientation for the development of such a concept, some well described models are available.

A.4. Focus on relevant dimensions for the use of violence

To appropriately address the complexity of the violence men use against their partners, intervention should focus on the different relevant dimensions of factors related to this phenomenon that can be organized in an ecological model⁴:

–*Socio-cultural factors* including the gendered social context, the unequal power relationship between men and women in our societies, the pervasiveness of violence as a method to deal with conflicts in our cultures, the justice system's and social sanctions for the use of domestic violence, etc.

–*Relationship factors* including the gendered power relations in the couple, patterns of conflict resolution and communication, etc.

–*Individual factors* that can be divided into the following categories:

1. *Cognitive factors* including the beliefs and attitudes about gender relations and roles, the expectations of the relationship (e.g., romantic love), of the partner and of the children (e.g., entitlement to services), and of themselves (e.g., masculinity, identity),
2. *Emotional factors* including the gender based regulation (identification, understanding and expression) of feelings of anger, frustration, failure, shame, jealousy, fear, etc. and the experiential patterns they are based on (attachment styles, sense of identity, expectations, etc.),
3. *Behavioural factors* including the substitution of violent and controlling gender based behaviours by skills and abilities for respectful and equal relationships like empathy, communication and conflict resolution, stress and anger management, etc.

⁴ See Bronfenbrenner 1979, Dahlberg & Krug 2002

B Important principals for the work with male perpetrators

B.1. Partner contact and support

To increase the partner's safety perpetrator programmes have to assure that the men's partners are informed about the goals and the content of the programme, about its limitations (e.g. no guarantee for non-violence), about how her partner can use his programme attendance to manipulate or further control her and about the possibilities to receive support and safety planning themselves. Information provided by the partner should be included in risk assessment and evaluation of the perpetrator. Women should be warned if their partner drops out of the programme or if facilitators perceive a risk to the woman or children.

It has to be made sure that contact with the partners is absolutely voluntary for them and does not imply any responsibility for the men's participation or progress in the programme. The women's needs should be respected and efforts have to be made to minimize any possible risk related to contacting them. Contact with the partner can be provided by an associated victims' support service or by the perpetrator programme itself.

B.2. Child protection policy

Children living in abusive relationships are always (directly or indirectly) affected by domestic violence. Therefore the perspective of these children should be a priority of perpetrator programmes both in the direct work with the men and at the level of integration in a wider intervention system and cooperation with other agencies. A specific child protection policy including the concrete steps to be taken when a child is at risk should be established for the programme, according to the local context and legal situation. The effects of domestic violence on children and the participants' fathering should be part of the curriculum of perpetrator programmes.

B.3. Approaches and attitudes in the direct work with perpetrators

Perpetrator programmes are based on the belief in the ability of people to change.

Perpetrator programmes should hold the men they work with accountable for the violence they use and emphasise the need to take on responsibility for their violent behaviour and its consequences. Even so it is essential that practitioners treat the perpetrator with respect and as persons of intrinsic worth.

One of the basic assumptions of programmes should be that the use of violence is a choice. Therefore one of the first aims of the work with the men should be supporting perpetrators to recognize that they choose to use violence. Discourses of denial, justification, excuses or blaming others or the circumstances should be challenged and deconstructed.

A detailed focus on the violent behaviour reconstructing their concrete actions, thoughts and feelings, helps men to recognize their active role in the use of violence. A close exploration of the many different impacts and consequences of their violence on their partners and children helps to foster men's empathy, accountability and motivation to change.

Practitioners need to ensure that the clients, victims as well as perpetrators, do not come to any harm through the approaches of the programme. They should recognise that in some cases (e.g. alcohol abuse, personal disorders) it may be more appropriate to refer the person to some service which is in their best interest.

B.4. Risk assessment

Systematic risk assessment should be implemented. Identifying men with a high risk of being violent enables facilitators to initiate appropriate measures for victims' safety and provides important information on special treatment needs. Risk assessment should be undertaken and documented both in the intake phase of the programme and whenever the perpetrator's behaviour or situation indicates a possible change in risk. As many sources of information as possible should be included in risk assessment, especially the partner's perspective, but also police records and information from any other agency attending to the participant or his family. The limitations in accuracy of risk assessments should be taken into account.

B.5. Staff qualification

For a high quality of work with perpetrators facilitators should possess following qualifications in addition to their basic training:

- Commitment to violence free relationships and to gender equality
- Special violence awareness training
- Reflection on own relationship to gender roles and identities and sensitivity for gender hierarchies and sexism
- Reflection on tendencies of own violent and dominant behaviour, knowledge of own history of violence
- Comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of violent relationships
- Continuing education and supervision
- Group work skills (for group facilitators)

If facilitators are not professionals with a regulated code of ethics (e.g. approbated psychologists / psychotherapists) ethical issues such as confidentiality, data privacy, facilitator-client relationship, etc. should be regulated specifically.

B.6. Quality assurance, documentation and evaluation

Quality Assurance, documentation and evaluation of the work should be integral parts of each programme. Perpetrator programmes should document and evaluate the programmes' processes and outcomes.

Facilitators should create and implement measures to continuously monitor the processes and outcomes of their work and relate it to national and if possible international findings of best practice and research. These measures should include:

- regular team sessions und supervision,
- ongoing documentation of the work,
- analysis of this documentation,
- internal and external evaluation of the outcome of the programme.

A more detailed description of important aspects regarding documentation and evaluation can be found at the website (see below).

C. More information

These guidelines for programmes working with male perpetrators of domestic violence can be used to develop or revise programmes' standards. Links to existing standard papers that can serve as an example for working out standards in detail and further information can be found at www.work-with-perpetrators.eu.

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