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Policy Recommendations:

Collaboration between community-based perpetrator programmes, support services and prison & probation services for an effective victim-oriented response to domestic abuse

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1. Introduction

The European Union defines 'violence against women' as **"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"**.

Families affected by domestic violence and abuse have a wide range of complex needs. They live in an unsafe environment and as a consequence of such violence and abuse, can adopt negative coping strategies. Children within such families, and growing up in such environments, may then learn harmful behaviours that perpetuate further unhealthy relationships.

While there are services available for members within a family affected by domestic abuse, adequate services for the primary cause, the perpetrator, are sparse.

Community-based perpetrator programs usually have referrals from criminal justice agencies such as part of their sentence plan. This is usually mandatory and enforced, although not always. Agencies such as probation can include this in a prison setting or in the community. These programs are designed for men who have committed violent behaviour in an intimate relationship. The aim of the program is to accept abusive behaviour and a cessation of such abuse.

There is not enough collaboration and information sharing between statutory agencies, community-based perpetrator programs and other support services. There needs to be a robust development of a multi-agency infrastructure that actively engages with perpetrators of domestic abuse on the support-disrupt continuum principles¹.

As agencies who deal with perpetrators of domestic abuse, we sometimes work in silos and 'gatekeep', controlling and limiting access to information that may be vital for risk management and for more tailored and effective rehabilitation support. This is due to a lack of understanding of the use of information sharing protocols or the perception that it will be extra work. Some prison and probation staff do not understand the aims and objectives of perpetrator work.

¹ Support and disrupt continuum is used to assist and identify perpetrators allowing them to change their behaviour via support or, if they do not actively engage then a range of strategies can be employed to disrupt opportunities to perpetrate abuse, such as restraining orders or other protection orders both civil or criminal. Expedient information sharing between agencies regarding the breaking of such orders or other criminality can be very effective when used as a disrupt.



Sometimes there is an inherent distrust of third sector agencies, rehabilitation, and a cognitive distortion of the belief that ‘people can change’.

Historically, a ‘third sector’ or community-based agency was not deemed as important as a statutory agency and the information shared deemed not ‘as reliable’, with them often viewed as another organization or charity supporting offenders. There needs to be a realization that community-based organizations offering perpetrator programs or other support services can be expeditious in sharing timely, in-depth, critical information that informs the victims’ and associated children and young people’s safety plan.

The victim’s voice is not as intrinsic to perpetrator work as it should be. The victim’s reality needs to be understood all the way through any domestic abuse criminal justice process. By having this we promote cohesive inter-agency responses to domestic abuse and develop partnerships to work towards a society in which domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Some individuals referred are deemed unsuitable to participate in programs due to unmet and/or complex needs. These are anticipated to act as a significant barrier to engagement and result in the program having an adverse effect on the individual in terms of risk of harm to self and others.

To counteract this, there is a need for a well-coordinated, victim-oriented, and high-quality DV (domestic violence) criminal justice response system, incorporating a collaborative approach between statutory agencies such as prison and probation services, and community-based perpetrator programs and other support services. Collaboration is essential with community-based services to try ensuring long lasting, sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change, incorporating post penal support to service users to try avoiding relapse and a continuation of abusive behaviour.

By providing coordinated access to wider, specialist support services to address such barriers to engagement, i.e. substance use, mental health, financial support, trauma therapy, housing, and tenancy support, there is a greater chance of them entering a program and completing successfully. Only by collaboration will this succeed.

The objectives for this are to maintain the safety of victims and any associated children, encouragement of safe, positive parenting, reduction of abusive behaviour, promoting change and resilience, and keeping the victims voice at the forefront of all work done.

There is a need for a consistent approach between all agencies, from statutory government agencies such as prison and probation, through to community-based organizations offering perpetrator programs or support.

A good governance structure is essential to help ‘unblock’ obstacles to collaboration.



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2. Multi-Agency Working

- For any collaboration to work, all agencies involved should understand the importance of this collaboration for the safety and effectiveness of the work with the perpetrator. Of great importance is the development of a multi-agency forum so that the responses of statutory and non-statutory agencies are coordinated.
- It must be considered who the 'responsible authority' is for each case. Where, for example, a case is supervised by probation, statutory responsibilities should be reflected in the program's recorded input, as well as how communication is managed between probation and any other organizations.
- Most of this work will be led by the influence of people who believe in the importance of working with perpetrators to tackle domestic violence. It is critical to gain support from others if it is to succeed, and statutory agencies need to be brought 'onside' and open to collaborate to support rehabilitation.
- There is a need for obtaining 'buy in' from all partners and internal staff of prison and probation services who may not be directly involved in the work with the perpetrator. Workforce development days are very beneficial focusing on what the perpetrator program is. There needs to be information given on the benefits to victims and associated children, but also what the benefits are for those staff involved, explaining the benefit of positive outcomes in relation to future funding and a reduction in demand for them as a service. We are all human beings and there is a tendency to reflect on how a change in approach will affect us personally.
- Significant partners need to be involved in the creation of policy and key to success is that each agency representative has a vested interest in making this work.
- To achieve long lasting, sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change we will need to ensure that the subject has his/her basic needs met, only then will they be in the space to think about changing their behaviour. These needs can be housing, finances, drug misuse, mental health, immigration status, physical health, employment, social and community issues, and childcare and parenting skills, or a combination of the above. If we want someone who has misogynistic entrenched views to address and change, then we must make sure they have somewhere to live, food to eat, and are mentally well, as this will always take priority for them. This is where it is vital for community-based and government organizations to work together and not in silos.



- Mandatory perpetrator programs as part of a sentence, giving some form of control over attendance figures, and while this is beneficial, we need to be aware that the service users need to be engaged to realize the benefits of change. Initial case management work by the prison or probation officer on a 1–1 basis helps build rapport, trust, and a strong working relationship. This will also aid motivation for perpetrators to complete the perpetrator program and avoid ‘dropping out’. Involving non-statutory perpetrator programs to enable this 1–1 ‘pre-program’ work is better as there is an ingrained suspicion of government agencies in some perpetrators. Care should be taken that boundaries are clearly outlined and fixed in place with no deviation. Service users should be contracted before acceptance onto the course with clear boundaries and parameters explained.
- Disguised compliance must be anticipated with the service users and appropriate measures taken to detect and counteract this. This is where the alliance with partner support services is crucial.
- Service users value the continuity of having a supportive relationship that starts in custody, prepares them for release and continues in the community. For those who will do their program in the community upon release from prison, there must be a ‘seamless transition’ from prison back into the community.²
- Housing, probation, and substance misuse agencies must also be negotiated with to ensure the best chance of sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change post-prison.
- Care should be taken when negotiating any temporary accommodation upon release. The accommodation must be adequate, and if possible and appropriate, away from the service user’s local area (considering any support networks, etc). Inadequate accommodation can have a significant damaging effect on any progress made while in prison. Some temporary accommodation may be unsuitable because other residents there may not be as far along the cycle of change and show less commitment to refrain from substance misuse.

² Example: If mental health issues have been previously highlighted while in custody, a diagnosis given, and medication prescribed, there should be a specific point of contact who will work with the prison pharmacy and their local general practitioner, to try to ensure that there is no break of therapeutic intervention, thereby hopefully eliminating any unwanted behaviours such as self-medication with substances.





Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

- The importance of collaboration between the perpetrator program, other support services, and prison and probation services become obvious against the background of 'Maslow's hierarchy of need'. This is also something that needs to be considered when asking service users to attend a perpetrator program.³
- Very often, the service users have a chaotic presentation. This is due to a combination of significant needs, the most common ones being support with mental health issues, substance misuse and housing. If these needs are not met, it will be difficult if not impossible to attain long lasting, sustainable behavioural and attitudinal change. This is where collaboration is needed between community-based and government organizations. If we can develop a firm foundation from which to build off, then our service users will be able to focus on the program and subsequent behaviour change.
- Service users who attend this program must be vetted before attendance. Information sharing with all agencies (critical here are partner support services) is extremely important to maximize the potential for success. Attitude and behaviour need to be evaluated before they are allowed on the program. If doing the program in prison, a move to a drug-free wing for some weeks might be considered, with regular mandatory drug testing to ensure commitment.

³ Physiological needs: The first of the id-driven lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy are physiological needs. These most basic human survival needs include food and water, sufficient rest, clothing and shelter, overall health, and reproduction. Maslow states that these basic physiological needs must be addressed before humans move on to the next level of fulfilment.



3. Information Sharing

- Information sharing is vital for the durability and safety of the work with the perpetrator. Many domestic homicide reviews have highlighted a lack of information sharing as a contributory factor in the homicides.
- Types of information to be shared can be: pre-convictions for domestic abuse, any warning markers (e.g. mental health, weapons, risk to professionals), any current civil orders in place (e.g. non-molestation orders), whether the service user has a history of ignoring court orders, other criminality or links to organized crime (e.g. drug supply), relationship status of the service user, and any children and young people concerns.
- Information sharing protocols (ISP's) should be developed with the express intent of sharing vital information between agencies or between different parts of an organization in relation to safeguarding. Information should be shared between prison, probation, the community-based perpetrator programme, mental health (and any other support agencies with pertinent information), and partner support services.
- Typical information sharing could be around the service users' beliefs and attitude, their behaviour in prison (any disciplinary issues) and/or in the community. The victim's reality is vital in this. Agencies will need to be informed of any new types of perpetration such as coercive control or jealousy; this will need to be shared with all involved to inform the risk management plan and the behaviour monitored.
- Information will need to be shared between statutory agencies (probation, police, prison) and community-based organizations (e.g. partner support services, health, mental health, substance misuse and housing) when recruiting a service user onto the programme, as well as during and after the programme finishes.
- It is advised that the client confidentiality form is developed clearly and accurately, explaining the parameters for information sharing so that clients can provide informed consent. This should also apply to any victims/partners contacted as part of the programme delivery, and staff should explicitly consider how related information informs the management of their client so that it is accessed and held on a 'need to know' basis. The service users should be 'contracted' in this before being allowed on a perpetrator programme.
- GDPR should be adhered to and understood by all connected to the programme. Any criminal activity or safeguarding concerns must be shared with appropriate agencies.



4. Partner Support Services

- The victim voice will be intrinsic to the success and safety of the programme. Victim support services must be involved in the setup, roll out and governance. For any sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change to be done, there is a need for complete transparency.
- Victim feedback significantly contributes to this type of work: By ensuring a robust information sharing protocol directly with partner support services, statutory agencies will be expeditiously informed of new or changing behaviours. They can then adapt the behavioural change or disruption work to address these new behaviours before they become entrenched. Victim feedback also helps identify and counteract disguised compliance. The victim voice is critical to minimise risk, and to uncover any unintended consequences of work being done with the service user. An information sharing interface with the partner support services will hopefully discover this or any tokenism or disguised compliance.
- Partner support services should be informed if there are any ‘hidden victims’ (new and previous relationships) as and when they are discovered. Policies and procedures for identifying and coordinating support for secondary victims should be developed.
- Care should be taken that the professional (probation offender manager, police officer, perpetrator programme facilitator) does not inform the service user of any sensitive information that is given to them by the partner support service as this could significantly endanger the victim.
- Communication between the partner support service and the victim should be planned. It is suggested that this can be done when the service user is in a session, this will ensure they are not in the vicinity of the victim, so that the victim can hopefully speak freely.
- Information on the service user’s compliance and attitude while on the programme should be shared with the partner support officer and this information (if appropriate) can be shared with the victim. Victims are sometimes subjugated by the perpetrator telling them that they have “changed” and that they are working very hard on their behaviour, where actually there is little engagement and tokenism.
- Victim vulnerabilities: are there any inconsistent attitudes toward the service user? Are there any barriers to independence or security issues, inadequate living arrangements? Is the victim in meaningful engagement with the partner support services?



5. Governance – Leadership

- There must be significant strategic leadership to ensure a coherent and effective response to domestic violence perpetration. This requires a contracting of all agencies, statutory and NGO's, managing strategic and operational relationships with other key stakeholders. There is a need for a 'Governance Group' to help the strategic direction of the intervention. The purpose of a Governance Group is also to agree and authorize deliverables, make operational and strategic recommendations, and mitigate risks.
- The statutory agencies such as probation, prison, and police will always be the 'responsible authority' and will have the statutory holding and responsibility of the service user.
- Terms of reference (ToR) including information sharing protocols should be set out with a clear and concise direction of what is expected of all members, highlighting and defining tasks and duties of those involved, with a specific focus on the desired outcomes. A good ToR should also include background and objectives.
- Partner support agencies should be represented on this Governance Group to ensure the victim's voice is continually heard and that their expertise is considered.
- Quality assurance is needed to ensure compliance and uniformity of work, and to make sure it is as safe as possible. The reliability of the perpetrator intervention, outcomes, and quality control will ensure confidence with all partners.



6. Funding – Investment

- To be able to successfully initiate an effective strategy around work with perpetrators of domestic violence, there needs to be a significant resource investment. This could mean a collaboration to ensure a sound financing structure by several investors.
- Sustainable funding is needed for confidence building within the criminal justice sector and recruitment of the right people.
- A cost-benefit analysis could be crucial here to evidence the long-term savings and benefits to criminal justice services (police, courts, prisons, criminal legal, criminal civil) and health services (hospital, outpatients, general practitioners, mental health). Domestic violence has a significant drain the economy and society. There have been studies on this around Europe⁴.
- The University of Bristol was commissioned to do an evaluation on the DRIVE project (case management of prolific high-harm domestic abuse offenders). In this evaluation, they analysed the existing cost of high-harm, high-risk perpetrators to the public purse and cost of an effective intervention.⁵
- When we are looking for government agencies such as probation, prisons, police to contribute, we need to be evidencing not only the cost-benefit, but also the reduction of demand and the decreasing of pressure on their front-line services. More people that change mean less people coming into contact with criminal justice services.
- The above benefits must be used in relation to, and along with, the human cost of domestic abuse so we do not lose sight of the victims' voice.

⁴ Sylvia Walby, 2004.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/people/swdocs/researchsummarycosstdomesticviolence.pdf>

⁵ http://driveproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Executive-Summary_Final2020.pdf



7. Staff Recruitment

- Prison and probation staff must have the core values that a (prison) sentence does not and should not indefinitely define a person. They should have rehabilitation ethos and be non-judgmental. It is essential to ensure a commitment to collaborate with the perpetrator programme or other non-statutory services, and to avoid any behaviour that counteracts the attitude and behaviour change work of the programme.

Other values include

- Avoids assumptions
 - Professionally curious
 - Demonstrates warmth and empathy and can build rapport
 - Recognises role in facilitating change
 - An appreciation of evidence-based practice
 - Victim-centred
 - Maintains appropriate boundaries
 - Values team and multi-agency working
 - Recognises and acts on risk indicators
 - Works within remit and knows when to escalate issues
 - Effectively monitors and manages own well-being
 - Has unconditional positive regard
 - Must work with congruence
 - Be able to show genuine investment in the work and the service users
 - Must be able to work reflectively
- Recruiting the right people for this role is essential. Recruiting the wrong person could have a damaging effect on the work with the perpetrator, be very expensive and damage the reputation of the perpetrator programme. Looking for competencies is crucial, but looking for passion, commitment, and a desire to do this work is vital. Interviews should be conducted by 3–4 stakeholders (including victim services) and a ‘role play’ scenario can be beneficial before the actual interview.
 - The qualities and values above should not be just confined to the management staff, but all staff in contact with the perpetrator. That is from prison staff, probation staff to staff of community-based organizations.



- A specific point of contact in the governance group should be highlighted in each agency, all with the above competencies and values to ensure a uniform approach throughout, giving the best chance of success.
- Facilitators must be trained in how to detect disguised compliance and learn preventative measures to avoid them being manipulated into collusion with the service user.

Measures could include:

- Regular line management sessions, which include a review of their competency and training needs.
- Regular case management with supervisor and representation from partner support services.
- Regular case audits.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the "Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020" of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.



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