

How to Start a Perpetrator Programme? Issues and Dilemmas of the “Start Up” Process

written by

Dean Ajdukovic & Alessandra Pauncz

Introduction

As Work with Perpetrators European Network (WWP-EN) we know that violence against women occurs in every European country and is a serious and widespread problem. Violence against women (VAW) 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 equality. 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 victims. Domestic violence (DV) 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 stalking. Violence against women in the family also affects the children who 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.

(WWP – Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence in Europe – Daphne II Project 2006 – 2008, Guidelines to develop standards for programmes working with male perpetrators of domestic violence)

Motivational aspects in setting up a perpetrator programme

If you are starting up a perpetrator programme in a country that has no provision for this kind of work, chances are you have quite a vision for change. It may not then come as a surprise that one of the most important aspects in setting up successful perpetrator programmes is linked to the set of motivations of the person or group of people that are at the core of the idea.

Not only is motivation important for setting up a perpetrator programme, it also plays an important role in driving institutions and partners to share a common goal and sustain the innovative process.

Obviously motivation is also key to the change that men need to make in order to prevent future violence. So this key factor plays an important role in at least 3 aspects: sustaining the promoters of the programme, acquiring fundamental partnerships from key social players, motivating men to access the programme and remain in treatment. All of these are important, but we are going to concentrate on the first one that is more directly related with the process of setting up a perpetrator programme.

If you are going to be successful at setting up a programme you will be leading a paradigm shift that centres responsibility of violence on men, rather than focusing only on victim services. The primary focus of perpetrator programmes is the safety of women and children, as is well represented in all guidelines, so you will be sharing a common goal of the elimination of violence against women with other services. At the same time putting the focus on the perpetrator is sometimes seen by victim support services as subtracting something from the attention to victims. There may be concerns on competition for resources or fixed ideas of “who” the perpetrator “is” and his ability to change. It is very important to have a collaborative framework at all times, giving services time to get to know the aim and focus of the perpetrator programme, and to make it very clear that there is a shared mission in contrasting violence against women, that the principle aim is the protection of women and children and that the abusers are held accountable for their behaviour at all times.

In this sense anybody setting out to lead a paradigm shift and face the resistance that goes against change must be ready to face a long term challenge that will hold up only if there is a sufficient motivation that needs to be grounded in different aspects.

The most common motivational aspects of people working in the field of domestic violence are:

- 1) Personal
- 2) Professional
- 3) Social and political
- 4) Economical

So what is the most powerful kind of motivation that sustains the lead for social change? It might be helpful to look in the field of social entrepreneurship in search of aspects that can shed light on the issue. Social entrepreneurship is defined as the process of pursuing innovative solutions to social problems. More specifically, social entrepreneurs adopt a mission to create and sustain social value. They draw upon appropriate thinking in both the business and non-profit worlds and operate in a variety of organizations.

If we adapt this kind of definition to the specific field of domestic violence, we see how we need to “pursue innovative solutions – perpetrator programmes, holding the men that are being violent accountable - to create and sustain social value - eradicate domestic violence from the social and cultural context”. It seems thus that having a balanced mix of the four main motivational aspects that we mentioned earlier is the most efficient recipe for sustaining long term change. Each typology of motivation feeds a particular aspect of the task needed: the personal drives the passion, the professional drives the credibility, the political drives a deeper underlying commitment to long term change and challenge, and the economical drives maintaining a sustainable model that can also have a revenue flow that guarantees continuity in the programme.

It is very important to have a clear idea of the leading group's main motivation, because this will inform not only how the programme is set up but also the ideas on how it should be financed and the kind of support, whether public or private, it should search. Many of the strategic issues, the methodology that is chosen, how the programmes are developed and the funding options that will be considered are strongly linked to motivation.

Knowing your legal context

As we have seen in the introduction, our working definition of DV is very broad. This means that in each country there will be different legal implications that deal with what is considered a criminal felony and the legal provisions and consequences. There are also legal implications regarding privacy and ethical ideas of what is considered right or wrong within different professions (deontological issues).

It is thus important that one of the first steps in considering setting up a service for perpetrators is to gather information on three major areas:

- A. What is the legal context of domestic violence in terms of what is considered a crime (including sexual violence among married couples, psychological and economical abuse, sexual abuse and child protection policies)? If any of the areas that define domestic violence is not considered a crime, you might want to consider lobbying with groups that are addressing the issues.
- B. What are the legal measures that can be applied to situations of domestic violence: i.e. restraining orders, protection orders, family courts, children protection services, arrest policies?
- C. What are the legal obligations of the service providers in terms of
 - a. *Legal obligations as service providers*: Different professions in different European countries respond to different legal obligations. On top of this sometimes it is the work context that defines the legal measures that are required of professionals (for example nurses and medical doctors may have protocols in E.R. 's that require them to report all DV suspect incidents to police, while other professionals working in private sectors may not have the same requirements)
 - b. *Ethical and deontological obligations as service providers for the perpetrators, but also as concerned with priority to safety of victims*: In working with perpetrators there may be confidentiality issues that arise in terms of creating a safe therapeutic alliance that may be in conflict with communication to the victims regarding their safety. It must be clear that the priority must always be the victim safety, but in some countries that may require redefining the position of professionals in terms of their requirements with professional boards and institutions. There also might be issues to deal with regarding deontological obligations as belonging to certain professions with policies on information sharing

Point A is an important starting point to consider because the definition of DV is an important indicator of how a culture and society view the issue of DV. Many European countries have insufficient legal provision for victim protection. As perpetrator programmes we can and

should lobby for an efficient legal system that protects victims and holds perpetrators accountable.

Depending on the legal provision of point B there is another major area that will need to be addressed that refers to mandatory or voluntary access to the programme. In the case of mandatory access you will need to involve the key subjects that will be your leading referral system: police, courts, social services. It might be a good idea to consider writing a protocol to provide clear indications for the steps to follow in cases of referral.

It is also important to consider how the referring services are structured and who will actually be involved because these service providers need clear information on how a perpetrator programme really works and what they can realistically expect.

Another issue that needs to be evaluated and incorporated into the perpetrator programme is if there are minimum standards for their delivery. Often if you are starting this kind of service they may not be any in place yet. In this case it would be advisable to use European or international guidelines (as for example WWP-EN guidelines¹) and consider envisioning actions to lobby or advocate for the development and subsequent implementation of national guidelines.

In the case of voluntary referrals there needs to be careful implementation of all regulations linked to breach of privacy and confidentiality issues balancing with protection of victims of violence and legal requirements for professionals dealing with criminal offences.

There also needs to be a particular attention to how you advertise the centre because you need a communication plan that addresses men in a non-threatening way. It should be clear that if you are counting only on self-referred men, the success of your programme depends on your capability of attracting men and keeping them in treatment on the basis of what they might gain from the programme. You might think that men arriving on their own to a programme have a strong motivation to change. This is not always the case, because men often arrive on the verge of a crisis that threatens to break their relationship. The motivation is thus often quite external and consistent initial work needs to be done to ensure that motivation for change becomes an authentic drive at completing the programme.

If the referral systems are the courts and there is a mandatory legal frame, the issue of funding of the services should probably be linked to the judicial system. Thus the issue of voluntary and mandatory clients is also important in setting up a fund raising plan and addressing the relevant stakeholders of the service. If there is no legal mandatory referral system again you might consider lobbying for laws that allow these provisions.

Methodology

What are the guiding principles that should orient the theoretical basis for working with men that perpetrate violence against their partners?

1) Domestic violence is unacceptable and a violation of human rights.

¹ <http://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/index.php?id=29>

As stated by the Istanbul convention and preceding European and international treaties, women's rights are to be seen in the context of human rights and all violations to women's self-realization and self-determination must be seen as a violation of human rights. All forms of violence: physical, psychological, economical, spiritual, sexual are major and consistent barriers to the realization of women's human rights. It is also very important that all work regarding DV have a very clear understanding of the fact that violence is never acceptable and justifiable. This might become challenging in practice since it involves taking a very clear position on all forms of violence against children, including disciplining with the use of force (i.e. slapping, spanking) that is considered "normal educational methods" in many cultural contexts. It also involves working consistently on spreading these ideas in social and cultural contexts.

2) Priority is given to safety of women and children, victims of violence.

Giving priority to the safety of women and children is a main concern for perpetrator work. This means that appropriate measures should be ensured at all times to make sure the victims of violence receive adequate support and that they have access to help and appropriate services.

3) 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.

In addressing the specific work with men that perpetrate violence against women it is paramount to see the violence within the power relations of society. The impact of violence against a single woman cannot be understood without understanding the underlying social unequal relations between women and men in a historical view. Consistent social discrimination informs power relations that shape how partner violence is sustained within the social context.

4) Stopping DV is part of a cultural, social and political change that must take place at all levels for gender equality.

Perpetrator programmes that provide services for men that are violent in interpersonal relationships should also be engaged in activities that support gender equality and promote social and political change. Core mission of perpetrator programmes should thus be: working with boys and girls in schools, promoting gender equality in all social arenas.

5) The focus of perpetrator programmes should be on the interruption of violence.

Giving priority to women and children's safety in practice means interrupting the violence immediately and providing programmes that reduce recidivism.

6) Perpetrator programmes should hold perpetrators accountable for their violence and have as a main aim to build alternatives to violence and avoid recidivism.

First goal of all perpetrator programmes should be the immediate interruption of violence by holding the perpetrators accountable and helping them gain insight into the patterns of control that lead to violence as well as management techniques (i.e. time out, emotional log).

- 7) Perpetrator programmes should be built in collaboration with women's support service for victims and other community services that increase the safety of DV victims.**

At all times support and services should be available to women and children that are in situations of DV. Partner contact enables perpetrator programmes to access women that may never have any chance to access help services. It is crucial that a good collaboration with victim support services be in place to enable smooth and efficient access to safety for victims.

- 8) Perpetrator programmes should be funded by additional sources and not at the expense of the victim support services.**

Perpetrator programmes represent an important pillar in the work on DV, but should never be seen by institution and funding agencies as competing with victim support. Also very close evaluation must be made by service providers in deciding on their funding strategies to not subtract needed victim support service funds.

- 9) Perpetrator programmes should have services for partner contact and support.**

Perpetrator programmes should always ensure partner contact and directly or indirectly support for victim. It is important that victims are contacted by a programme and are able to give an evaluation of their perceived level of violence. Partner contact are part of a serious risk evaluation protocol as well as a important way of contacting victims of domestic violence that might not have had the chance to access any services. Strong competencies of DV work with victims must form core-training aspect of any well run perpetrator programme. However, in some countries this may be prevented by the legal constraints regarding data privacy and confidentiality issues.

- 10) Perpetrator programmes should have child protection policies.**

Every perpetrator programme must give specific thought to policies and relationships with child protection services. The well-being and safety of children must be always carefully evaluated and specifically assessed with ongoing procedures.

- 11) Perpetrator programmes should include risk assessment and development of a victim's safety plan and procedures.**

As the core issue of perpetrator programmes is the safety of women and children it is fundamental to have accurate, reliable and scientifically sound ways of assessing danger, risk and recidivism.

- 12) Perpetrator programmes should be developed on a full understanding of gender theory, and of gender hierarchy and masculinities, including social, cultural and religious, ethnic and political influences. It should have a complete definition of domestic violence and types of abuse, an understanding of the causes and mechanisms which lead to violence and a theory of intervention and change.**

In developing a perpetrator programme it is necessary to take into account not only the issues directly related to behaviour change, but also the social and political implications of inequality structures in society. Without a clear understanding of the gendered nature of

violence the answer provided by the programme will necessarily be limited in terms of the treatment and services provided. Stemming from the gendered origin of violence it is fundamental to have a definition of DV that encompasses all forms of violence even those hidden behind gender inequality. For example gender inequality might render invisible the consequences of economical violence as many forms of psychological abuse including sexual pressure and more subtle forms of coercion and control.

13) Perpetrator programmes should collect data and adopt methods of evaluation.

It is important to set up a way of collecting data and evaluation of programmes. This is important to present the results of the work and for looking for funders of supporting and innovative practice. It is also a way of being accountable to the community and to victims of the work that is being done.

14) Adopting an ecological model

To appropriately address the complexity of the violence perpetrators use against their partners, organizations should make sure that their programmes respond to the different relevant dimensions that can be organized in an ecological model. This kind of approach will give a comprehensive understanding of the factors at play in sustaining or deconstructing violent behaviours. Programmes should carefully assess how each relevant factor is dealt with at different levels in their organizations and how these aspects are included in the core curriculum of the activities that are part of the change programme for abusive men. The factors at play are: 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:

- a. 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).
- b. 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.).
- c. 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.

Pilot projects & setting up a service versus unfocused projects & losing credibility and resources.

What to do if you are setting up a pilot project

Start with a pilot project that has carefully thought through all the issues that have been raised in this document. You will probably not have all the answers, but try and always be aware of what the issues are and what your proposal for a solution of unclear issues is. For example if you are starting a perpetrator programme in a country that does not have a legal obligation for perpetrators to attend the programme, you should have a strategy for engaging men voluntarily. You should also have an idea of how other countries have set up compulsory programmes and you should be able to have a proposal as to how your legal system could be amended to provide for compulsory attendance. You should also have a clear understanding of the social and cultural implications of having a different pathway to responding to DV other than arrest and jail, and you should reflect on how the system is going to continue to guarantee accountability and safety for the victims if alternative measures are applied.

By doing this you are building the credibility to sustain not only your programme, but also the long-term social change around the importance of creating perpetrator programmes as part of an integrated response to DV. It will then be possible to lobby for legal changes that make programmes part of the stable and on-going response to DV. The issues that we have briefly sketched need to be detailed and examined to be able to transform an innovative idea into a stable practice of response to DV.

What to avoid at all costs

Do not start a perpetrator programme if:

1) There is no victim support system.

If there is no victim's support system in your country and you are interested in working with perpetrators, you should work with women's organizations to help set up reliable support for victims. This is an absolute priority and necessity. Victim's safety needs to be prioritized.

2) You are not quite sure of what you want to do, but you would like to just try and experiment with some kind of service.

This is a very risky position. If there are not serious and well thought out provisions for safety and sound methodological choices, not only will a perpetrator programme be ineffective, but it can also pose victims at major risk of victimization. This can be harmful for the DV victims and it can set the work with perpetrators way back on the political agenda.

3) You don't have a professional team of people working together with a gender sensitive perspective.

4) You don't have specific training in area of DV, work with victims and work with perpetrators.

It is important to think that when you are pioneering with a new kind of service, whatever you manage to do or fail to do will have a lasting impact on future interventions and for the framing of this kind of programme. It is really important to stress the necessity to use all

resources available to collect significant information and relevant guidelines to be able to respond at best to questions regarding all issues related to perpetrator programmes.

What to look for if you are a funder or trying to evaluate projects

If you are an institution looking to set up a programme or a funder trying to evaluate the credibility of a new project here are the main aspects you should be looking for:

- 1) The project must be part of an integrated effort to support the elimination of violence against women.
- 2) There must be a focus on victim's and children's safety, not only as mission statement but also in the practice of how the work is carried out.
- 3) There must be social and cultural understanding of the gendered nature of violence.
- 4) The programme must be well thought out in terms of structure and format.
- 5) Programme should include all aspects included in the description of methodology.
- 6) Programme should be cost-effective and sustainable.
- 7) None of the aspects contained in "What to avoid at all costs" are present.

Strategic issues

How to promote perpetrator programmes in the community

- 1) Participate in debates and public presentation on DV.
- 2) Be sure to launch your programme with attention to provide adequate information to the press. Stress the fact that it is a NEW service for the FIRST TIME in your country. Media and press are always looking for news. Try to formulate the service in terms of news.
- 3) Monitor your work and collect data and set up evaluation procedures.
- 4) Try and set up collaboration with research institutions to be able to present your work at professional conferences and in publications.
- 5) Find creative ways of engaging the community about DV and the responsibility of men and boys in interrupting the violence.
- 6) Publish easy and accessible material for: community, professionals, services, perpetrators, and victims.

Lobbying: The definition of lobbying is that of an organized group of people seeking to influence legislators on a particular issue. How this is done and the level of involvement on the political level of promoters of social change will vary from country to country, but the core issue is that if work with perpetrators is introduced for the first time as a part of the joint effort to contrast VAW, the legal system will most probably need to change to help shape a better response to perpetrator accountability. The lobbying aspect of the perpetrator programme is strongly linked to the previous parts of this document since efforts towards change regard all legal, cultural and social aspects linked to VAW. Depending on the level of awareness that is present in your country you will need to sensibly and networking with other services raise attention on the issue of DV. Each of the points of the Methodology section could be a critical starting point for lobbying for change. There are various levels at which this will be necessary: local, provincial, regional, national.

Local authorities: It is crucial that perpetrator programmes receive the recognition of local authorities, because this will help place the service within the context of other existing public and private services. It might be strategic at the beginning to ask only for public endorsement, without requesting direct funding. This should facilitate the recognition of the issue of perpetrator work on the public agenda. It will also enable programmes to start functioning with existing services and begin to interact with the judicial system. Public and judicial systems tend to be quite traditional in their acquisition of partners and new services, so it is important to show how the particular perpetrator service fits into a complex web of other services and how it will sustain other's work in the field.

Province and Regional authorities: In many countries this is the level to turn to for start-up funding. There is hopefully some line of funding for innovative services for the public health system. The social, the judicial and the health care system can be tapped to fund perpetrator programmes. It is important to approach this level of politicians with as clear an understanding as possible of the functioning of these institutions and with a close attention to the hierarchical levels of decisions. Ideally it would be good to have a deputy that supports your cause and who helps drive you through the system. Ideally it would be good for perpetrator programmes to try and stay focused on their mission and social change project without endorsing any particular political party. You want the programme to weather political change with as much stability as possible and this is possible only if you stay well focused on the specific agenda of VAW.

National authorities: Developing relations with national deputies and ministries is fundamental if you want to lobby for legislative change. It is also important in shaping national guidelines on perpetrator programmes and the funding policies that follow. Usually developing working relations with deputies passes through the contacts you have developed at a local, provincial and regional level. It is also possible to contact your locally elected national deputies. Again ideally you would be selecting the most motivated person that has successfully lobbied for issues related to VAW or DV laws before. Beware of politicians that have always held a sceptic vision on gender issues or DV, they might try and play the perpetrator issues against the victim issues in nasty ways. A clear understanding and common view of the origin and cultural and social nature of DV is necessary to be able to trust and support a political ally.

Lobbying with funders & donors: One of the most effective ways of finding supporting donors and funders is to involve the private sector in actions related to social change. If you are approaching supporting parties looking for alliances for taking action together, it is more probable that they may feel encouraged to support your work. Enthusiasm, passion, serious work and documentation are part of what makes a good fundraiser. It is also important to work in collaboration with women's shelters and services to create a collaborative effort and not subtract fund to victim services.

Funding: Where and how we search for funds will be informed by the idea we have of DV and VAW and who is responsible for social change. If we assume that DV is a public health problem, a judicial, a social or a public issue we might turn to different funding sources or to a mix of all. Since the economic crisis has hit so many European countries in such a harsh way, this has caused a cut in the public services funding. It might seem like the worst possible

moment to start a new service, since most institutions and public services will strongly discourage you from starting something new. So starting up is going against the current, always a good economic strategy. It does require a creative and innovative way of setting up programmes. You should give attentive thought to:

- 1) Cost-effectiveness of the programme.
- 2) Highly motivated staff.
- 3) Creative ways of privately supporting your work (e.g. training, having the men pay a fee, asking for partnerships that don't have costs for your partners but that cut your costs, like lending rooms and space from public institutions, partnerships with private enterprises).

It is also important to carefully assess all forms of grants available at the national and regional level, as well as asking local and regional institutions for financial support. European projects might be evaluated especially as partners of other bigger European organizations, since the projects require more structure than a start-up organization usually has.

Community collaboration and networking

Perpetrator programmes cannot work as a stand-alone service. Perpetrator programs can serve as facilitators of community collaboration. Perpetrators programmes often have been the “missing stone” in the four pillars of stopping and preventing domestic violence. These pillars include: 1) continuous public awareness rising about consequences of domestic violence, 2) identification and efficient prosecution of perpetrators, 3) ensuring timely help and support to victims tailored to their needs and 4) perpetrator programs that effectively help stop violent and abusive behaviours.

Practical community collaboration in dealing with domestic and gender based violence has several dimensions that should become a part of the plan to start a perpetrator programme.

First, close collaboration of a perpetrator programme with other services serving to increase safety of the victims is essential. Moreover, the Istanbul Convention (Art. 7, §§ 1, 2) clearly requires development of co-ordinated policies that ensure holistic response to domestic violence. This should include victim support services, law enforcement agencies, criminal justice system, child protection agencies, social services, etc. Perpetrator programs belong within this category. Alcohol and drug treatment programs as well as health services are also important players. Public statements on such co-ordinated policies are helpful mechanisms of demonstrating a joint commitment.

Second, clear agreement is needed on how such collaboration should work in practice. In some member countries key stakeholders have agreed on written protocols. In such a document roles, responsibilities and procedures of each stakeholder organization are described. A protocol also explains how the stakeholders communicate among themselves to increase efficiency of response to cases of domestic violence (e.g. telephone or e-mail contact instead of sending paper notices). It can help ensure that co-operation does not rely on individuals who are willing to share information, but on the institutional commitment of each agency. Important aspect is the issue of confidentiality and information sharing among different services. In some countries information sharing about a specific case among

agencies involved in domestic violence is rather restricted by law. However, if there is a legal problem in sharing direct information on a case, a protocol of collaboration may still be very helpful in facilitating exchange of experiences about each agency's work, how they achieve respective missions and goals, as well as addressing the challenges of getting to know each other.

Other practical tools to facilitate effective and operational co-operation are joint trainings of staff from different sectors, joint publications and regular inter-sectoral meetings at the community level where examples of responding to domestic violence cases are discussed.

Third, community stakeholders need to build common understanding how each of them contribute to combating domestic violence within their respective statutory responsibilities and limitations. In practice there may be frictions due to lack of understanding of the legal boundaries that, for example police or judiciary have regarding requirements for documenting a domestic violence case, or a perpetrator program having to maintain intake criteria, privacy protection issues, etc.

Fourth, as a fairly recent stakeholder in combating violence, perpetrator program staff have a responsibility to help other community services fully understand what the program format, contents and methods are, what are the intake criteria; what are the requirements from perpetrators; how they the staff handle safety issues, monitoring and reporting. There is no one better equipped than the perpetrator program staff to share knowledge with other stakeholders. They need to reach out to these community partners and design a format to meet the partners' needs and acknowledge their perspectives.

Research shows that the co-ordinated community response on accountability of perpetrators is as important as the content of the perpetrator programme. The added value of community networking for a perpetrator programme is that it gains more visibility in the overall community and among decision makers, including funders. Building community alliance against domestic violence in which perpetrator program demonstrates its effective contribution to the common goal can in return strengthen its credibility.

Developing a perpetrator treatment programme

Developing a perpetrator programme needs to be clearly founded in both state-of-the art knowledge of topics that directly relate to program goals and in the methodology of how to achieve the change in perpetrators. The best practice indicates that programmes based on the cognitive-behavioural approach yield best results. They should also be based on a clear value orientation that abuse and violence is absolutely unacceptable and illegal behaviour. The gender equity is a value that should be built in both contents and methods of treatment delivery. It has to be clearly addressed because it perpetuates the male dominance in a partner relationship and feeds the patriarchal type of abuse in some partner relations. In both the contents and methods partner and children safety should be kept as a priority, which should be reflected in reliable risk assessment and ensuring that victims have a safety plan as well as access to support.

When developing a perpetrator programme it is helpful to keep in mind the overall structure that typically includes three phases: intake, treatment, and program completion with evaluation.

The intake phase usually includes several individual sessions with a client (perpetrator). These sessions have several objectives: individual assessment; evaluation if the perpetrators meets the intake criteria; detailed explanation of the format, contents and methods of the programme; requirements and obligations of the client during the programme; safety issues regarding the victim; privacy policy and limitations of confidentiality; motivating the client for participating in the programme and trying to benefit from it. Some programs may want to include psychological assessment, but then it has to be clear to how such data will be used in the program (e.g. individualizing the treatment or monitoring the treatment outcomes).

The main part of the perpetrator treatment programme includes a number of sessions (usually in a group format). The contents of the sessions will depend on the theoretical background of the providers. However, the topics typically include recognizing own violent behaviours and its consequences, identifying high risk situations, tools for enhancing emotional self-regulation and behavioural self-control and work on empathy; increasing parenting skills; reducing victim blaming patterns; understanding the role of masculinity and gender roles; understanding conflict and how to resolve it in non-abusive way; improving interpersonal communication skills, etc. Programme developers should carefully select the topics that they want to address in a programme given the available time frame and working methods.

The completion phase of a programme usually provides final feedback to the perpetrator about own progress. If reporting to the referring authority is part of the structure, the contents of the report should be clarified with the perpetrator, as well as the feedback that will be provided to the partner-victim.

Structured programmes have a clear sequence of steps that are followed during each session. Such structure helps the clients develop a routine and may reduce anxiety of participating in a group format. This also facilitates setting in place a clear monitoring and data keeping procedures about the client's progress. A structure can help the treatment providers to manage the group dynamics which can be a very complex and demanding task, especially at the beginning of a treatment when confronting victim blaming and minimization of client's abuse is typical.

Treatment programmes require active participation of a client in a variety of activities. Among these the most challenging is disclosure of own past (violent and abusive) behaviours. Clients typically tend to avoid this topic, may diminish severity of their controlling and abusive behaviours and resist the request to disclose. Therefore the treatment providers should have the competencies on how to deal with such resistances. Some programmes also require participants to practice new skills and develop insights between the sessions, in their respective real-world settings (so called home-work). This may cause some resistance, especially during the first few group sessions for which the providers should be trained to deal with.

The programme designers should decide what is the feasible time line of the whole programme implementation (length in months, number of intake sessions, number of

treatment sessions). If the clients are court mandated, then the legal framework and practice needs to be considered.

Finally, procedures for evaluation of treatment effectiveness should become a part of the programme development. This is quite a challenging issue because it requires specific knowledge and skills, as well as resources. Nevertheless, determining the effectiveness of a treatment program cannot be overestimated because this is the tool to demonstrate accountability in using the resources and promote work with perpetrators.

Organizational issues

People providers who are determined to start a perpetrator treatment programme are typically very highly motivated and hope to contribute to a systemic change that will interrupt the pattern of domestic violence and women abuse. They most often have an activist and/or professional care-providing background. As such, they may neglect pitfalls of organizational development. Here are some of the organizational issues that need to be addressed when starting a perpetrator programme.

Managerial capacity includes a number of aspects such as: decision making structures (who decides about what), lines of responsibility (who is responsible for what), financial responsibility (including fundraising and oversight of expenditures).

Organizational logistics and support includes contacting clients, corresponding with other agencies and community partners, maintaining data base and record keeping (in a safe place that ensures the confidentiality of the documents), preparing reports to the referral points (e.g. courts, police, social services, child protection services, victim support services), financial accounting and bookkeeping (sometimes independent financial auditing is required), maintaining public relations and dealing with the media, preparation of materials used in the treatment, etc.

Appropriate office space will partially depend on the profile and ambitions of the perpetrator programme. Obviously, if the programme includes both individual and group formats, larger office space should be provided. In many cases an office of about 20 square meters for group work and an office of about 8 square meters for individual work should suffice. In some countries there are minimal standards that stipulate that a treatment programme must ensure waiting room, toilet facilities, individual counselling and group work room, filing cabinets that can be securely locked to ensure confidentiality of documentation. In some countries with court referred perpetrators system, the space must be accessible to disabled clients.

Financial issues are closely related to the status of a perpetrator programme within the legal context. It is important to clarify who is going to pay for this service to the community. Where perpetrators are referred by authorities and their participation in the programme is mandatory, the funding usually comes from these authorities' budget. Therefore it is important to reach agreement how much, for which period and how the funding will be delivered. In some cases the authorities will support a programme for self-referred perpetrators, but the same type of agreement is necessary. Such arrangements have direct consequences on the fundraising strategy, including possible financial contribution by the

clients. However, the Council of Europe recommended that individual payment should not be required, but rather that funding is a responsibility of the member states since this is a human rights issue. In any case, before starting a perpetrator programme a realistic financial plan should be developed.

Competencies of treatment providers should be defined and described as a key aspect of staffing of the programme and staff development. The staff competencies are closely related to the programme profile, contents and methods of work. For example, if the programme includes intake evaluation, the staff should have knowledge and skills to do this, if group format is part of the treatment, the staff must have competencies of working with a group of clients likely to show considerable resistance to change. These competencies should be described in precise and preferably measurable terms. New programmes usually start by recruiting most appropriate staff candidates and then invest resources in their training and development. It is advisable to start the staff development plan with the assessment of the achieved level of competencies and then design tailor-made trainings that meet the specific needs of each of the programme staff. The competencies should be seen in a time perspective, meaning that they develop to the proficiency level over time, but supervision and consultation should be accessible and sometimes made mandatory.

Supervision / consultation / support of treatment providers is one of the main methods of service quality assurance, staff development and care for the well-being of the providers. Daily work with cases of domestic violence, meeting victims and perpetrators, children who suffer from parents' relational violence is very challenging. Therefore support mechanisms should be put in place to offset the negative effects of such work as much as possible. Supervision is a specific activity that includes components of professional development, consultation, emotional support and sharing of responsibility for decisions and actions. As such, it helps ensure appropriate quality of services which in turn is important to the clients, organization's management, funders, authorities and of course the treatment providers.

Documentation development procedures and data base management is sometimes considered a self-understanding and not an important component of a setting up a programme, and hence pushed aside or left to be put in place at a later date. But this should not be seen as a bureaucratic hassle. On the contrary, it is a tool to manage information be seen how the programme is functioning, including monitoring of services, profile of clients, evaluation of achievements, reporting to the funders, authorities, referring partners, preparing public relation releases etc. The system of filing complex documentation and the related confidentiality issues can be rather demanding and often requires very specific expertise.

Reporting procedures and requirements depend on the legal framework, services that refer perpetrators to the treatment programme and other pathways into the treatment. Confidentiality legal constraints are, again, important in setting up the reporting procedures, and must be followed. Reporting on progress in a particular case of a perpetrator is a particularly sensitive issue, especially if it requires assessment of achieved change or future risk behaviours. It should be made very clear what the expectations of different stakeholder are in relation to reporting and such agreements should be made transparent to all the involved (e.g. client-perpetrator, victim, referring service, other involved services). Another

aspect of reporting relates to providing summary (sometimes annual) reports to authorities, funders, partner organizations and the general public. Such reports usually have a standard format which helps to write them.

Training

Training of the treatment providers is directly related to meeting the work with perpetrators objectives. Training is a tool to attain sufficient level of the providers' competencies that increase likelihood of changing perpetrator's abusive behaviours and underlying beliefs. Competencies comprise three aspects: knowledge about topics relevant for achieving this change, skills to facilitate the change, and values on which work with perpetrators is based.

Training should take into account the trainees' experiences with clients, particularly with the clients who are expected to undergo a substantive change, as is the case with treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence. Such experiential learning model is highly recommended because it acknowledges the already existing competencies. Training serves to increase proficiency of such competencies and to add new specific skills and knowledge. Examples from the trainees' work are often used and related to the context of work with perpetrators.

Several broad competencies should be attained through the training:

1. Recognizing abusive behaviours and underlying beliefs (e.g. understanding the core issues and dynamics in abusive partner relations; understanding the role of power and control in a relationship; understanding effects of violence on victims; understanding the role of gendered socialization, culture and masculinities in the society and in individual clients; recognizing and responding to abusive behaviours and manipulation; recognizing manipulation and misuse of children in partner abuse; recognizing risks and danger for victims; ability to develop victim safety plan; etc.).
2. Managing relationship with a perpetrator-client (e.g. ability to do motivational interview; recognizing substance abuse; maintaining intake criteria; placing victim safety in the centre of a treatment; developing and maintaining relationship with a client; recognizing and responding to verbal and nonverbal aspects of client's behaviours and messages; recognizing client's emotional state and responding to it; ability to work with a group of clients with low motivation; ability to convincingly present the benefits of participating in the treatment; managing group dynamics; managing clients' resistances; ability to address issues of perpetrators who are parents; leading a client in setting the treatment objectives; evaluating treatment achievements; etc.).
3. Organizational and administrative competencies (e.g. preparing for individual and group sessions; maintaining coherence and consistency of the treatment programme; developing and maintaining collaborative relations in a team; managing records and data; ability to write and timely submit reports; etc.).
4. Competencies for community collaboration (e.g. ability to work together with other stakeholders responsible for victim safety; ability to promote and disseminate work with perpetrators in public; engaging in public advocacy; etc.).

5. Ethical work and work within the legal framework (e.g. maintaining confidentiality and respecting its limitations; understanding legal provisions for protection of victims and children; understanding legal responsibilities of treatment providers; acknowledging responsibilities of respective community services; ability to receive and integrate feedback about own work; understanding the effects of working with violence on care providers; recognizing own needs for professional development; etc.).

About the authors:

Dean Ajdukovic (Society for Psychological Assistance - SPA, Zagreb, Croatia)

Alessandra Pauncz, (Centro di Ascolto Uomini Maltrattanti - CAM, Florence, Italy)