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Guidelines to Develop Standards for Programmes Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence - Working Document Version 3, 2018



European Network for Work with Perpetrators (WWP EN)

Working Document

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Guidelines for Standards

Guidelines for standards are necessary to assure the quality of effective and safe work with perpetrators of domestic violence. The safety for victims is a priority and interventions should ensure that the work does not endanger women or children.

Programmes in the European countries are different in 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 work that is responsible and accountable.

Updates are continually required to integrate new research findings and best practice. As such, this is designed to be a living, dynamic document subject to an ongoing process of consultation and review.

Terminology

- “Perpetrators”

The terms “man” and “perpetrator” are used to reflect that the vast majority of perpetrators are men.

- “Victims”

The term “women”, “(ex)partner and “victim” are used interchangeably throughout the document to reflect that the vast majority of victims are women. Children are also considered to be victims, and, where not explicitly stated, included in this term.

The Istanbul Convention

As well as individual country legislation, the main legal instrument in Europe to eliminate violence against women in Europe is the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). On ratification, it obliges parties to take the necessary measures to promote and protect the rights of women to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere.

WWP EN promotes the Convention in all its work. In line with this, the overall mission is to prevent violence in close relationships as a gender-based phenomenon and to foster gender equality. More specifically, to improve the safety of women and their children and others at risk from violence in close relationships, through the promotion of effective work with those who perpetrate this violence, mainly men.

Article 16, on “Preventive intervention and treatment programmes”, paragraphs 1 and 2 set out that parties should set up domestic violence and sex offender programmes to prevent re-offending and change violent behaviour patterns to non-violent ones. Paragraph 3 states that “Parties shall ensure that the safety of, support for and the human rights of victims are of primary concern and that, where appropriate, these programmes are set up and implemented in close co-ordination with specialist support services for victims.”

The following definitions from the Convention are also of note:

“Violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life;

“Gender” shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men;

“Gender-based violence against women” shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately;

Extending definitions of violence

Male violence against women is a serious and widespread problem. Domestic violence against women is a pattern of coercion or coercively controlling behaviour by the intimate partner or

ex-partner, which includes, but is not limited to, physical and sexual violence, emotional/psychological abuse, isolation, economic abuse, threats, intimidation, harassment and stalking.

If perpetrator programmes are to be truly effective in addressing abusive men's behaviour and successfully accountable to women and children and their experiences of domestic violence, they need to recognise and address these in their programme design, implementation and outcome measurements. This means paying attention to the following:

- Abuse restricts victims' everyday lives in a situation where they are continually "micro-managed" (Kelly and Westmarland 2016).
- The cumulative effects of coercive control over time, serve to "entrap" women and that are gendered in terms of tactics and consequences (Stark 2007).
- Abused women have long talked about how psychological abuse impacts on their physical and mental health, some stating that this is worse than the effects of physical violence.
- Existing inequalities influence how abuse works and impacts on people, as Hester (2017) points out, it sustains and strengthens gender inequalities, in that the uses and threats of abuse control women's lives and reinforce men as more powerful, and are experienced differently in different contexts and social relations.

Programmes need to work to an extended definition of domestic violence that encompasses this complex assessment of behaviour, context and impact. Any understandings that focus only on incidents, physical violence or criminal behaviour is not going to address the nature of the problem, and the success of a programme is going to be, at best, limited, at worst, dangerous. Further, if we recognise that women and children's responses to abuse are forms of resistance, this has implications for how victim services operate, and how we work with perpetrators on their behalf (Vlais 2014).

A. Principles for perpetrator work

A.1. Aims and objectives of the work

The main goal of the work with perpetrators is to increase the safety of the victims of violence.

Perpetrator programmes should be based on the understanding that violence against women and children is unacceptable and that violent men are responsible for their use of violence.

Further, perpetrator programmes must give priority to the human rights and dignity of women and their children at every level of the programme. This should be explicit both for the facilitators and for the men they work with, and may lead to the necessity to manage tensions, such as not affording men complete confidentiality.

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

It is particularly important to cooperate closely with services for women victims and their children to ensure their safety. These principles of co-operation can be implemented in many ways, for example, by including representatives from women's support services as experts in steering committees or advisory boards of perpetrator programmes.

Further, it is of vital importance that all the agencies involved in a family's life collaborate, so that they can contribute to the safety of women and children and hold violent men accountable. As such, perpetrator programmes should be an integrated part of a holistic intervention system and actively participate in inter-agency alliances tackling domestic violence. Cooperation and participation in alliances and networks should be acknowledged and funded.

WWP EN supports non-competition for funds, however, given that the problem of gender-based violence is at epidemic proportions, the stakeholders working against this violence are many and that the funding awarded is not nearly adequate, this will set up dynamics that contribute to services being forced into competition for funding. WWP EN believes that there should be the provision of more funding with a focus on integrated approaches to certain standards, so that this community response can include perpetrator work.

It is the responsibility of perpetrator programmes to reach out to the specialised women's support services to establish communication in an attempt to set up collaboration. However, it is also recognised that this may not always lead to an effective partnership. Nevertheless, perpetrator programmes should make constant and ongoing efforts to converse and cooperate with women's services.

A.3. Theoretical understanding

Programmes should use an ecological model to understand the complex factors and pathways that enable and influence perpetrators' use of abuse. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to:

- society (macro) – e.g. impunity, devaluing women, masculinity, children's status, media violence;
- institutions (meso) – entitlement, failed sanctions, discrimination, "honour" codes, poverty;
- family/peers/community (micro) - peer approval, stereotypes, myths, rewards, opportunity, family stress, obedience code;
- individuals (ontological) – masculine sale, emotional and cognitive deficits, growing up in families unable to provide basic care, depersonalised sex, stimulus abuse, early trauma.

One such model is an interactive one developed by Hagemann-White et al in 2010. As suggested by Hester and Lilley (2014), although a programme cannot necessarily effect change at every level, it should strive to understand the factors at all levels that influence how a perpetrator can take responsibility for his violence and unlearn this behaviour on an individual level. As such, programmes can interrupt his chosen abusive behaviours and encourage him to create relationships based on respect and notions of equality. Programmes should incorporate a gendered perspective, i.e. an understanding of the relationships of violence with structural inequalities and power relations between men and women and with the underlying historical and social constructions of masculinity and femininity. Further, they need a critical awareness of the intersections of gender with other social locations such as nationality, race, class, age, physical or mental ability, or others.

Perpetrator work explicitly integrates both the cultural and clinical approach in achieving attitudinal and behavioural change in their target group. Providers should use methods in group or individual settings to encourage, lead and model change in the targeted beneficiaries. However, belief systems and structures of micro and macro levels of society may support resistance and undermine change, which should be addressed in the programme content.

Finally, perpetrator programmes' theoretical background should be embedded within a wider process of cultural and political change towards abolishing gender-based violence, gender hierarchies, as well as other forms of personal and structural violence and discrimination.

B Important issues for perpetrator work

B.1. Victim contact and services

Generally, there are specific issues that are critical for women whose (ex)partners have enrolled in a perpetrator programme. In “Domestic and Sexual Violence Perpetrator Programmes: Article 16 of The Istanbul Convention” (Hester and Lilley, 2014), elaborate on Article 16.3 to point out that attendance of her partner on a programme may have a bearing on a victim’s decision process around staying or leaving, or give her false hopes about his behaviour change. As such, victim contact and services should cover the following:

- a) Make every effort to minimize any risk related to contacting her.
- b) Make sure that contact is voluntary for her.
- c) Ensure that she is informed about the goals, the content of the programme and about its limitations (e.g. no guarantee for non-violence).
- d) Information about how her (ex)partner can use the programme attendance to manipulate or further control her.
- e) Information on how to access support and safety planning.
- f) Be warned if her (ex)partner drops out of the programme or if facilitators perceive a risk to the her or the children.
- g) Never give messages that she has any responsibility for the men’s participation or progress in the programme.
- h) Ensure that her needs are respected.

All of these aspects require that there is exchange of information and shared procedures for evaluation of risk and progress, programmes should use information provided by the victim. Victim and perpetrator services should try as much as possible to work on a basis of direct consent from their respective “clients”, bearing in mind that countries might have different requirements in law as to the possibility of information sharing.

B.2. Children

Children are always directly or indirectly affected by domestic violence and involved in the dynamics related to this. There is not a large body of research on risk for children in Europe, however, it is suggested that the more severe the violence is against the woman, the same it is for the children (Hester et al. 2006). Programmes should also bear in mind that there is often the co-existence of child sexual and intimate partner abuse.

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.

Including 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. 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

Agencies running perpetrator programmes carry a great responsibility for all those involved. Perpetrator programmes should be based on a belief in the ability of abusive men to change but 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. An overarching consideration is how to create environment that favours change. One safe enough to encourage the participants to feel comfortable in disclosing information, and enable them to take the risk of identifying and changing their attitudes related to gender relations, entitlement etc., whilst balancing the attention to women and children's safety.

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

A detailed focus on the violent or abusive 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.

Evidence suggests that more structured programmes can have moderately successful outcomes such as reducing physical violence towards women (Gondolf 2002). Moreover, programme completion is important for achieving its objectives, so that measures to enhance regular attendance and active engagement during sessions should be considered.

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 misuse, personality disorders) it may be more appropriate to refer the man to a service

that better suits these needs, or to address them before working with him on addressing his abusive behaviour, or to collaboratively work with another service to address issues concurrently.

These considerations should lead programmes to formulate them into a written rationale of their approach and work with perpetrators, such as a “model of work” or a “programme logic model”.

Programmes may also wish to consider the following in their programme design:

- Domestic violence in same sex relationships;
- That domestic violence can be a precursor to partner homicide, as such, perpetrator programmes may consider how to highlight their role as a preventative measure;
- Domestic violence perpetrators causing harm to others: birth outcome, children and other family members;
- The differences between aggression, violent resistance and coercive control;
- Assessment for suitability and ongoing procedures for monitoring this;
- The importance of attention to motivation (internal and external);
- An understanding of change processes, how to enable participants to change their abusive behaviours and the attitudes that support this, including an understanding of resistance to change.

B.4. Risk assessment

Programmes should have systematic assessment of risk factors, risk management and safety planning.

Risk assessment and management should be undertaken and documented at intake, then at set times during the programme and whenever the perpetrator’s behaviour or situation indicates a possible change in risk. These risks may relate to his past or current behaviour, complicating issues such as mental health states or substance misuse, high-risk situations or victim vulnerabilities. For a full discussion of risk factors, programmes should refer to the WAVE Handbook on “Prevention and Support Standards for Women Survivors of Violence: A Handbook for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention” (Section 8, pp 42-48).

This information should be used to manage the perpetrators’ risk and inform safety planning with victims (including children). Further, it provides important information on special treatment needs, or guidance as to whether the programme itself is even suitable. Programmes

need to consider if they will take on men who show a high level of risk, and in which circumstances they will not work with abusive men.

The victim's assessment of the situation is usually the most accurate (Weisz et al. 2000), although this may be limited in attempted and actual femicide (Roehl et al. 2005). Since the risk of homicide greatly increases after women separate from their abusers, or whilst they are planning this, particular attention should be paid to risk and safety planning at these times and up to at least 6 months after separation. Attention should also be paid to any suicidal ideation from the perpetrator, which may present slightly differently, but may also influence the risk of both his harm to himself and potentially to others (such as in cases of "family annihilators").

It is generally recommended that the use of a recognised risk assessment tool, together with the victim's views, is the most accurate (Connor-Smith et al. 2011). If possible, as many sources of information as possible should be included, such as police records and information from any other agencies involved.

Programmes should also contribute to a multi-agency assessment of risk factors, or encourage this if systems are not already present. Risk assessment can be instrumental in helping other agency staff, such as health, social or children's services, to understand the dynamics of a relationship, including within a specific cultural context, and respond appropriately.

However, limitations to risk assessment procedures or tools used should be taken into account at all times. Most important is the acknowledgement that risk is not a static phenomenon but one that constantly changes over time (Gondolf 2012), partly because risk is subject to so many changeable variables.

B.5. Staff competence

For a high standard of work with perpetrators, the process of learning should be considered continual. The following competencies for facilitators may be considered:

Knowledge: (e.g. from written material, workshops, lectures, presentations, webinars)

- Understand abusive behaviour patterns and underlying beliefs, the impacts of these on victims and the misuse of children in these dynamics.
- Understand the theoretical approach of the programme.
- Understand processes of change, and the factors which might support or inhibit this.
- Basic understanding of substance use and mental health issues.
- Understand legal responsibilities, confidentiality and all issues relating to risk.

Skills: (e.g. from practice, skill-specific training)

- Ability to work in a way that is “gender informed”, for example, to use gender transformative approaches in the work.
- Developing and maintaining relationship with clients, including ability to motivate and work with resistance.
- Ability to work respectfully, whilst not colluding with abuse or manipulation.
- Ability to use cultural and linguistic skills in work with diverse population of perpetrators.
- Responding to verbal and nonverbal presentation, including emotional states.
- Manage group dynamics.
- Capacity to assess and monitor suitability.
- Responding to all aspects of risk and safety issues, including recognising suicidal ideation and risks to partner and children.

Values: (e.g. from supervision, discussion, reflection, codes of professional values and ethics)

- A commitment to violence-free relationships and to gender equality.
- Recognise the importance of self-reflection, and show capacity to receive and integrate feedback about own work.
- Consideration of one’s own experiences with and understanding of violence.
- Accountability at different levels of the programme.

B.6. Quality assurance and evaluation

Perpetrator programmes should document and evaluate the programmes’ outcomes and relate it to national and, where possible, international findings of best practice and research.

Measures of success should go beyond the stopping of violence alone, and, as Hester and Lilley (2014) advise, reports from victims should be collected wherever possible, in order to ascertain whether their perceptions of safety and quality of life has improved. These should be triangulated with other sources.

WWP EN promotes the use of the WWP EN Impact Toolkit, as developed and piloted by several European partners, for the purpose of evaluation and comparison of outcomes of different programmes. It comprises of questionnaires aimed at men on the programmes and their (ex)partners, up to five stages during and after the programme and covers the areas listed in the Mirabal Project (Westmarland et al. 2010). These are as follows:

1. Improved relationships underpinned by respect and effective communication.
2. An expanded space for action.
3. Safety & freedom from violence.
4. Safe, positive & shared parenting.
5. An enhanced awareness of the impact of the man's violence on himself and others.
6. Safer, healthier childhoods.

Further, programmes should create and implement measures to continuously monitor the quality assurance, internal processes and outcomes of their work.

Working with violence (perpetrators and victims) can be emotionally taxing for staff. Organizations delivering programmes should ensure regular support in order to maintain quality and effectiveness of the programme, and to manage the risks for the staff mental health and functioning. Regular team sessions and supervision are important measures to ensure this.

B.7. Interventions that are not men's individual or group programmes

Programmes should be able to evidence that their intervention does not put the partner and any children in physical or emotional danger or re-traumatise them at all times (not just during the sessions). It should be noted that joint sessions can be contraindicated and can result in enabling the perpetrator to escalate his levels of control, abuse and/or violence.

Further, programmes should also ensure that their interventions are not set up so that the victim is implicated in the abuse or somehow even partly responsible for the perpetrator's behaviour, as this would collude with society's victim blaming tendencies.

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