

NATIONAL REPORT MALTA 2016

WORK ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND WORK WITH PERPETRATORS IN SWEDEN

DETAILS REPORT WRITING ORGANISATION

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1. ORGANISATIONS/PROGRAMMES

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITIES RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION HAS YOUR ORGANISATION CARRIED OUT DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS?

The first perpetrators' programme was set up in 1999, and was based on a programme imported from Canada. Throughout the subsequent years, the programme has been refined according to the needs of service users. The next closed group will follow a new programme based not only on the existing programme, but also on evaluations and feedback from service users and their partners.

Prevention is an essential element in combatting domestic violence and it has been an important focus of the agency since its inception. Managing Abusive Behaviour (MAB) works in collaboration with its partner service, the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU), and together they make up the Domestic Violence Services of Agenzija Appogg. The organisations participate regularly in networking forums with counsellors, therapists and teachers from schools across the country, in order to develop systems for educating children about domestic violence, and systems for identifying and supporting children who

witness violence in the home. The organisation delivers regular in-service training to police, including new recruits, and networking with probation officers is also ongoing. Further, outreach is made to various agencies, including those working with substance abuse, to encourage referrals and to deal with any queries that arise. The organisation also participates in various media, with a view to encouraging education and debate.

Despite consistent prevention work, progress in certain areas has been very slow. Our biggest challenges, so far, have been related to the justice system and law enforcement. Since the enactment of the domestic violence act in 2006, the number of treatment orders issued by the courts has been negligible. Further, most of these treatment orders were independent from probation orders or any other kind of sentencing. However, a breakthrough has been achieved within the criminal section of the Family Court. The presiding magistrate has invited social workers from Domestic Violence Services, including the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programme (formerly the Perpetrators' Service) to be present throughout court sittings for the purpose of referrals.

A further challenge is the increase in dual reporting, which makes it appear that women are equally violent to men, and does not take into account the complexities of domestic violence. Police officers are required to make reports, and in court the victim is often re-victimised, while the perpetrator presents himself as the victim.

A common belief held among the general public, medical professionals, and some psychological professionals, is that perpetrators suffer from some form of mental illness. Despite research findings, many still adhere to a medical or psychological model of treatment for perpetrators. Some family doctors prescribe medication and/or refer patients for psychiatric assessment and treatment. Some psychologists and psychotherapists explore various 'causes' of violence, while other family therapists work with couples. Fortunately, a number of these professionals do refer their patients/clients to specialised services.

## 2. COUNTRY

PLEASE GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF GENERAL SITUATION IN YOUR COUNTRY REGARDING WORK WITH PERPETRATORS.

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Programme (DAIP), provided by Agenzija Appogg, is the only perpetrator service in Malta. The DAIP is based on a feminist perspective and its primary focus is the safety of women and children.

The service is open to referrals from various professionals, the Appogg helpline, other agencies, courts, as well as self-referrals. Referred persons are assessed for the group programme, given individual sessions and provided with a more generic social work service, if necessary. Perpetrators eligible for the programme will then join a support group composed of both perpetrators who have completed the programme and others who are about to start the next one. The partners of service users are contacted by the organisation and offered access to victim services from the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU). A feedback loop is established between the DAIP and DVU for the purposes of monitoring the perpetrator, and for risk assessment. Service-user evaluations are carried out half way through the programme and at the end. After the programme is completed, the perpetrator and his partner, if she so wishes, meet together with their respective social workers to discuss the perpetrator's progress. This process is only undertaken if the victim desires it and feels safe, and if the situation is assessed as being very low risk. During these meetings, the social workers make recommendations for the way forward.

The Domestic Violence Act was enacted in Malta in February 2006 and Malta was one of the first countries to ratify the Istanbul Convention in 2014. Despite the inclusion of the Istanbul Convention in the statute books, Maltese legislation still needed to be updated in order to bring it in line with the requirements of the Convention, including those regarding domestic violence and rape. Last year, an inter-ministerial committee was set up between the Ministry for Civil Liberties and the Ministry for the Family in order to develop a set of proposals based on the Istanbul Convention. The committee aimed to amend laws,

introduce policies and strengthen structures. The legal amendments will bring Malta in line with the Istanbul Convention. The bill was presented for public dialogue in September 2016 and a national strategy for domestic violence is likely to be published before the end of the year. The strategy will complement legal amendments aimed at curbing gender-based violence.

### 3. BEST PRACTICES

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TELL US ABOUT BEST PRACTICES IN WORK WITH PERPETRATORS IN YOUR COUNTRY.

DVIP has always networked and liaised with various victim services, including women's shelters. Although the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) acknowledges male victims and provides them with services, it is recognised and acknowledged that domestic violence disproportionately affects women.

DVIP is involved in prevention campaigns and, with DVU, offers training related to domestic violence. A social worker from the service, along with a social worker from victim services, is present during criminal section hearings of the Family Court.

Risk assessments are ongoing and perpetrators' partners are introduced to victim services for support and feedback purposes.

### 4. NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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WHAT HAS TO BE DONE TO PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN YOUR COUNTRY (REGARDING WORK WITH PERPETRATORS)?

DVIP can work with many more referrals than it receives currently. Professionals need further education about the dynamics of domestic violence, and effective measures for working with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Unless professionals are aware of the importance of addressing gender equality issues in dealing with domestic abuse, they will

continue to make referrals to medical doctors, mental health professionals, or family therapists.

Judges and magistrates need to proceed with prosecution even when the victim drops the charges in court, and perpetrators need to be arraigned within a brief period following the charges. As things stand, most cases are dropped when victims drop the charges. There is also a considerable period of time before a perpetrator is arraigned.

Treatment orders need to be issued by presiding judges and magistrates and they need to be a part of sentencing. At present, a treatment order is often issued in place of an actual sentence or probation order.

In sum, domestic violence needs to be understood as the crime that it is, and the perpetrator must be held accountable and given opportunity to change.

Written by Lauren Agius, Agenzija Appogg

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