



Training manual for perinatal and early childhood professionals:

how to engage fathers
and address gender-based violence



Fathers Rock – Training Manual

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Why this manual?

This manual is a practice-oriented guide for facilitators implementing training and education group programmes on gender-based violence prevention with fathers and fathers-to-be. It was developed within the framework of the European project FATHERS ROCK (2022-2024) and co-financed by the province of Styria.

The project team, which consists of partners from four European countries (Austria, Germany, Italy and two partners from Spain) and International Advisors Boards from “Gender, Violence & International policy”¹ (University of Gothenburg) and Cerchio degli uomini and Giardino dei Padri² developed an intervention for trainings and educational groups with the focus on engaging fathers in the childhood caring and the prevention of gender-based violence.

FATHERS ROCK training and education groups aims at improving the capacity of frontline professionals working in perinatal and early childhood services (pregnancy, birth, nursing, day-care, parenting, etc.) to:

- Involve and support (becoming) fathers in parenting in order to foster gender equality and shared caring and to minimize risk of violence perpetration.
- Improve the capacity of frontline professionals working in the context of pregnancy, birth, nursing, day-care, parenting, etc. to identify and address Gender based violence detecting risk indicators and early critical signs and using available resources and referral pathways for perpetrators and victims.
- Promote the commitment of key public institutions (public bodies, policy makers and stakeholders) regarding the prevention and fight against gender-based violence by involving fathers in involved parenting, supporting their caring role, and promoting gender equality type.

The manual intends to provide support, introduce fundamentals for multipliers (e.g., trainers, counsellors, frontline workers, operators’ perpetrator programs, psychologists, social workers, educators, etc.) and a guide to the slide presentation. The manual will also briefly present the results obtained from the need analysis conducted in the three countries that implemented the programmes, i.e. Austria, Italy and Spain. In the manual, the following topics will be analyzed and explored: importance of involving fathers in the children’s upbringing starting from pregnancy as a deterrent to violent behaviors; how the model of hegemonic masculinity can lead to perpetration of violence; gender-based violence prevention, i.e., how to detect violence in the men who utilize the services voluntarily, how to explore it and how to motivate them to participate in perpetrator programmes.

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2. Andrea Santoro, Chair of Cerchio degli uomini (Round of men) and Giardino dei Padri (Garden of fathers), will support the engagement with fatherhood with special focus on guidance to future dads and conscious fatherhood; Annina Lubbock, former Senior Gender Adviser for aid agencies.

Finally, we will share some suggestions and instructions on how to carry out the training and how Austria, Italy and Spain, the countries that already implemented the training, adapted it to their context and needs. The manual will also contain a list of links with further information on all topics.

We hope you find it useful!

The Fathers Rock team.

1. FATHERS ROCK – Fathers’ engagement in the Role Of Care Keeping mothers and children safe

The project is a two-year European project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Program (project n°. 101049488). It is run by partner organizations based in four European countries and it is coordinated by “Fundacion Blanquerna” in Spain (Catalonia).

The Fathers Rock project is based on the observation that pregnancy and childbirth are a moment of change and crisis, with a heightened risk for men to start using or to increase the use of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and, at the same time, an opportunity to engage fathers-to-be in gender equality through a transformation towards more caring masculinities.

Research has consistently shown that pregnant women and mothers of infants or young children, are at an increased risk of violence from male partners, up to fifty percent.³ Physical abuse was 13.8%, and sexual abuse 8.0%⁴. Although research indicates an increased risk of intimate partner violence and victimization during the perinatal period, yet IPV receives much less attention in the perinatal care setting.⁵

3. Hellmuth, J. C., Gordon, K. C., Stuart, G. L., & Moore, T. M. (2013). Risk factors for intimate partner violence during pregnancy and postpartum. *Archives of women’s mental health*, 16(1), 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-012-0309-8>

4. James, L., Brody, D., & Hamilton, Z. (2013). Risk factors for domestic violence during pregnancy: a meta-analytic review. *Violence and Victims*, 28(3), 359-380.

5. Parys, A.-S. V., Verhamme, A., Temmerman, M., & Verstraelen, H. (2014). Intimate Partner Violence and Pregnancy: A Systematic Review of Interventions. *PLOS ONE*, 9(1), e85084. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0085084>

Unfortunately, most services involved in pregnancy, childbirth and early education fail to engage fathers as they do not offer support specifically designed for them and fail at addressing GBV. On the other hand, fatherhood, wanting to be a good father and to reduce the adverse effects of GBV on their children has been identified as one of the most important motivators for men who perpetrate violence to seek help and attend a behaviour change programme, making perinatal support services a privileged setting to refer perpetrators to such programmes.

Research on involved fathering in more than 23 countries globally concluded that

“(...) greater involvement by men in daily care work brings benefits for everyone. Having involved fathers is good for gender equality. It is good for women’s health. It leads to better relationships within couples and can be linked with a reduction in rates of men’s violence against women. It is good for children, too. There is ample evidence from all over the world that engaged fatherhood has a positive impact on boys and girls – and the relationships they will have as adults. Girls are more empowered, and boys are more likely to believe in gender equality and to share the unpaid work if they saw their fathers do the same.”

The FATHERS ROCK project builds on three previous EU funded projects the partners participated in: **ENGAGE**, **PARENT**, **MiC- Men in Care** and European project **“Gender Education for teenage boys: developing a coherent kit”** .

- The ENGAGE Roadmap and training package were aimed at frontline operators and focused on the detection and exploration of domestic violence with the service users and their referral to the programmes for men who perpetrate violence in emotional relationships. The training was implemented in Italy, Spain, and France.
- The EU funded project PARENT aimed at tackling the challenges in preventing and eliminating violence against women and children by getting fathers involved in shared parenthood and children care, fostering equal distribution of non-paid care work. PARENT focused on the father role and the challenges related to fatherhood and was carried out in Portugal, Italy, Lithuania and Austria.
- Project MiC - Men in Care was carried out in Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Spain. It aimed at fostering the involvement of men in care roles and changing the behaviours and social attitudes around gender roles in care to ultimately establish a better balance between work and family life and caring masculinity.
- European project “Gender Education for teenage boys: developing a coherent kit” is an educational manual for gender education.

2. Results of transnational need analysis

The need analysis that was carried out in Austria, Italy and Spain involved the following stakeholders: fathers, mothers, perinatal and childhood professionals and operators of the gender violence prevention services. The analysis was carried out in a group of 21 fathers-to-be, 21 mothers-to-be and 52 professionals and operators. The need analysis carried out in the three countries aimed at understanding how involved fathers are in childcare starting from pregnancy according to the perception of each group and how their involvement (or lack thereof) influences the perpetration of violent behaviours.

Below you will find a brief overview of the results of the need analysis according to the different groups:

- Fathers report a positive evaluation of the experience with perinatal care services, early childhood, or education, although they recognise a lack of specialized care groups for men during pregnancy and postpartum. With regard to prenatal support, the fathers' assessment from a healthcare perspective is positive. However, they consider it would have been helpful to receive information and support regarding how to deal with new situations and changes in family dynamics at the time of the arrival of a new family member, as well as training on an active and useful role of the father after child birth.

Fathers acknowledge the situations of difficulty and tension generated by the arrival of the child (more stress-related conflicts emerge, often men feel set aside, women are constantly absorbed in the care, grumpy for the lack of sleep and any help always seems not enough, everything revolves around the child, apart from work, there is nothing else, etc.) and consider that, in couples with previous relationship difficulties, these situations may lead to conflicts that result in separations or violence, if the man is already prone to violence.

- Mothers report that fathers are excluded from most of the perinatal care by the public health care system, and they emphasize the feeling that there was a greater effort to involve the father at the time of delivery, but not during pregnancy and postpartum.
- The frontline professionals in the field of perinatal care and early childhood observed that fathers can be easily reached during the phase of preparation to childbirth, while their presence and attendance after childbirth dramatically decreases, with a very visible drop in participation in postpartum groups. Professionals in early childhood education report that even though they don't provide assistance to men and women separately, but rather to families, it is mainly the mothers who get involved. However, they also reported that a change has been visible over the last 10-20 years and fathers are getting more and more involved.

The topic of GBV makes some of the interviewees uncomfortable as it seems to be a taboo. Some choose the strategy of dismissing the topic as unimportant for their institution and delegating it to other institutions (social services, childcare teams, socio-educational intervention services, etc.). Although detection from these services is low, the interviewees occasionally describe violent situations in their work, which reveals a need for strategies to deal with violence in the services.

- The perpetrators programs do not seem to receive referrals from perinatal care services, early childhood care or early childhood education, which leads to think that these services are experiencing difficulties when it comes to detection and referral. There is little or no contact between the services that work with violence and perinatal services because they don't focus on early detection as the violence usually happens at a later stage.
- Professionals who work in victim support services refer that the use of systematic questionnaires or protocols for the detection of GBV in the perinatal care services would help to avoid situations of violence that are detected at a later stage.

In general, from the need analyses carried out in Austria, Italy and Spain with the four groups of participants, it emerges that, despite the fact that in the last 10-20 years fathers and fathers-to-be have become more involved during the pregnancy and birth preparation phases, the mothers still play the main role and they remain the only point of contact during postpartum and for the early childhood services. Furthermore, in all perinatal, postnatal and other childcare services, the detection of gender-related violence is not addressed but rather it seems that there is a certain embarrassment and lack of responsibility regarding the topic.

3. Involvement of fathers in perinatal, postnatal, and childcare phases to contrast and prevent gender-based violence.

3.1 Why is it important to engage fathers in fatherhood?

Globally, dominant restrictive gender norms not only discourage men from becoming more actively involved in caregiving and domestic responsibilities, but also justify men's violence and control over both women and children (Heise et al., 2019). Although evidence demonstrates the significant impact of fathers on children's early development, parenting and caregiving support programs primarily focus on mothers and women based on the traditional division of labor and care according to sex.

Getting men fully involved in their roles as caregivers and support partners alone is not enough. Family support policies and programmes must actively promote gender equality and challenge restrictive norms, so that relationships, roles, institutional practices, and services can gradually evolve to create peaceful, non-violent, fair societies (WHO, 2007).

In line with the principles of nurturing care, it has been demonstrated that it is necessary to ensure an early, active, practical, and emotional involvement of the fathers in parenthood in order to:

- Reduce risks during pregnancy and childbirth by providing important psychological and emotional support to the woman, which in turn can reduce pain, panic, and exhaustion during childbirth.

- Develop an early emotional and affective relationship with the child, as it helps to improve psychological and physical health thus ensuring a better cognitive, emotional, and social development, as well as having a profound impact on children's future relationships as parents and partners.
- Change unequal gender relations and power imbalances in decision-making within the family and promote women's participation in the labor market.
- Help prevent and reduce the risk of domestic violence.
- Promote co-parenting and role equality through flexibility and interchangeability, which will positively influence the behavioural model of the child as they become an independent person.
- Contribute to achieving gender equality through sharing family workloads between men and women.
- Initiate a cultural change in society by combating discrimination, exploitation, and violence against women.
- Improve the mother-child relationship.
- Furthermore, it emerged that when fathers are more involved women are less likely to experience burn-out, while men experience benefits in terms of health and well being, as well as improving sexual complicity and couple satisfaction (Barker et al. 2011).

Fathers who get more involved have a longer life expectancy, are less likely to get sick, consume less alcohol and drugs, are less stressed, have fewer accidents and are more active in the community (Allen and Daly, 2007; Ravanefra, 2008).

According to 16 longitudinal studies, children who had an involved and active father experienced fewer behavioral problems, fewer problems with the law, less economic vulnerability, better cognitive development and better school performance, higher self-esteem, greater stress tolerance in adulthood and were less likely to develop depression, hyperactivity, aggression during their growth years and adulthood (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid and Bremberg, 2008). On the other hand, **the absence of fathers has a direct, indirect, and social economic cost.**

Men's positive engagement as fathers goes well beyond their involvement in childcare and domestic tasks. We refer to **men's engagement as their active participation in the protection and promotion of health, well-being and the development of their partners and children. It includes having an emotional bond with their partner and children (even when they do not live together)**, through providing emotional, physical and financial support.

It means that men take joint responsibility with their partner for the family workload (including unpaid care work, education and paid work outside the home) and foster a respectful and caring relationship between partners or co-parents; they make informed decisions with their partner while supporting their independent decision-making; resolve conflicts constructively and peacefully and work to prevent violence by promoting caring and respectful relationships in the family (Plan International & Promundo-US, 2020).

3.2 How to involve fathers and fathers-to-be in groups and motivate them to participate?

Promoting greater participation of men in parenting and reproductive health requires a more comprehensive support from the social and work system. Numerous research has shown that more “generous” systems where parents enjoy a longer paid leave allows them to better balance work and family demands. This, in turn, has been shown to have positive effects on both gender equality and overall health. However, it should be noted that such support varies considerably among different European countries and is often limited overall. The same situation is also reflected in the workplace, where fathers are often not recognized as parental figures and therefore receive limited support to balance their family and work roles. The needs analysis conducted during the project confirms that fathers also want to have a space where they can share their emotions and opinions, both during and after the pregnancy.

One of the main challenges to promoting greater participation of fathers in active fatherhood concerns both their feeling identified and involved in the role of parents and their feeling motivated to continue to be involved with the perinatal services and during postpartum and early childhood.

Some effective strategies to meet these objectives can be: creating and disseminating information in the community, i.e. schools, community centres and sports centres.

The fathers can get involved not only through the mothers of their children, but also through word of mouth from other men who have attended similar initiatives.

Men-only discussion groups have been appreciated by participants and are becoming more and more popular amongst fathers.

Open-air activities, sports events and technical programmes are particularly recommended to encourage men’s participation. In order to get fathers more involved in the activities carried out by the service, it is essential that operators are trained in subjects such as gender perspective, GBV prevention and non-violent communication. It is also important to offer practical activities and experiences. Just as for mothers, it is fundamental to create a space where fathers can freely express their opinions without fear of social judgment or prejudice towards their parenting skills.

As far as the pre-birth training is concerned, fathers find it important to get knowledge and skills to be able to tackle the new family dynamics after the child is born. They think it is particularly useful to get information on how to tackle new situations and how to have an active and significant role as fathers. The most essential elements in the training include:

- Practical information about childcare right after birth.
- Better understanding the physical and emotional changes women go through during pregnancy and after the birth.
- Information about child development and how each phase can impact mothers and fathers.

- How to deal with lack of sleep and how it can influence the relationship with their partners.
- Effective communication between parents.
- How to adequately respond to the child's needs.
- How fatherhood has changed over time.
- How to achieve a more conscious paternity model to challenge the previous model.
- How sexuality in the couple changes during pregnancy and after birth.

Other factors to keep in mind are time and schedules (i.e., organizing the trainings in the evening so that they can attend after work), and availability of male facilitators (psychologists, pediatricians, obstetricians, etc.) to encourage a space for male sharing.

The interviewees acknowledge that the arrival of the newborn can create tensions and difficulties, mainly related to stress: men often feel neglected, and women are constantly absorbed in childcare, grumpy because of sleep deprivation, no help ever seems to be sufficient, everything revolves around the child, there is nothing else apart from the child and work, etc. It is important to consider that, in couples with previous relationship issues, the new, challenging situation can lead to conflicts, separation or even violence.

4. What role do frontline professionals working in perinatal services or early childhood education services play towards fathers?

Frontline professionals working in perinatal services or early childhood education services play a fundamental role in getting fathers involved in active fatherhood in all phases - starting from the idea of having a child, during the child's first six years, preventing domestic violence and referring fathers who perpetrate violence to specific treatment programmes.

4.1 Engaging fathers during prenatal, postnatal and early childhood phases

Fathers can be involved in the different phases of their children lives by:

- Keeping fathers informed and getting them involved during the pregnancy, providing them with information about the changes the mothers will go through and how fathers can contribute to the mothers', their families', and their own wellbeing.
- Preparing fathers for childbirth and fostering an open dialogue about feats and experiences of fathers and fathers-to-be.
- Providing fathers with information about post-partum and how they can contribute during this important phase.
- Informing them about possible uncomfortable phases that both mothers and fathers can go through after childbirth, including baby blues, postpartum depression (both in the mother and in the father), risk of violent behaviours in the couple.

- Organizing and promoting groups for childbirth and post-partum preparation exclusively for men, to offer them a space to share and learn.
- Getting fathers involved with early childcare and education services, to promote their active participation from the early years.
- Detecting gender violence perpetrators and referring them to perpetrator programmes and other specific services, to contribute to prevent and tackle violent situations in the family.

4.2 Detecting and referring male perpetrators to a perpetrator programme or other specialized services:

4.2.1 Detecting domestic violence and abuse in fathers and fathers-to-be – signs and indicators.

In this type of screening based on indicators, we won't analyse the problem of domestic violence with all users, but only those situations that show indicators or signs that lead us to suspect that the men might be carrying out abusive behaviours. These signs can only be detected if the operators are properly informed on violent relational dynamics and they are not biased about violence, i.e. they take into account that there are different types of violence and some of them leave no physical evidence. Example of verbal violent behaviours: misogynistic comments, belittling the operators or their partners, minimizing possible conflicts, etc. Examples of non-verbal violent behaviours: posture, stern look, ambivalent mood (i.e., from relaxed and easy-going to aggressive), the man interrupts while other people talk or talks on behalf of his partner, etc.

4.2.2 Exploring domestic violence and abuse with fathers and fathers-to-be.

When screening for violence and abuse with **fathers and fathers-to-be** it is necessary to guarantee a safe environment and privacy so that they can be revealed. Literature suggests to deepen the exploration through progressive questions to investigate the type and characteristics of the violence. It is very important in order not to collude with the violence and encourage the man's first step towards being more aware and taking responsibility for their violent behaviours.

4.2.3 Motivate and refer men to perpetrator programmes or specialized services

One of the main objectives during the phase of getting men involved and motivated, is to lead them to take responsibility of the violence they have perpetrated and start a process to stop using violence. Rather than pointing fingers, scolding men for their negative behaviour and trying to convince them to change, it is more effective to explore and reinforce the positive values and reasons for which they should change their behaviour. In this process, men will be more inclined to change if they start to recognize the contradiction between what they want (connection and meaningful relationships) and what they get through violence (isolation and fear). Recognizing these discrepancies can work as a motivator to change.

4.3 Focusing on the safety and well-being of women and children affected by violence.

To guarantee the safety of the victims, it is of paramount importance that all procedures are based on best practices. Any information shared by the women with professional or operator of the network must be kept confidential and should never be shared with the perpetrator. Sharing this information with the perpetrator could expose the woman to a higher risk or lead to an escalation of the violence, especially if the woman is considering a separation. Ensuring privacy is therefore an essential requirement to guarantee the safety of the women and children involved in the violence.

Victims often hope that, if the male perpetrator's behaviour changes, the violence will end. However, it is important to keep in mind that the positive outcome and the end of a violent situation depend on multiple variables that cannot be controlled by the victims.

4.4 Working in a network: collaboration with other relevant services with an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to help men take responsibility.

To develop interventions aimed at preventing abuse and ending violence, it is necessary to create a coordinated network that can adequately respond to all situations of domestic violence, from preventative phases to prompt and effective intervention. The victims' safety can only be guaranteed by mobilizing the entire social network since the risk assessment is carried out through sharing information from several sources and involves various entities. This cooperation of different stakeholders allows for a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of domestic violence situations and more focused and effective interventions.

5. Capacity Building Program

In the following chapter the Capacity Building Program is introduced. All modules and tools used in the programmed have been developed by the FATHERS ROCK team and are available on the FATHERS ROCK website (<https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/fathersrock>).

5.1 General Goals and Methodology

The Capacity Building Program developed by the FATHERS ROCK team aims at reaching and training front-line professionals, in particular those working in prenatal, birth and early childhood health services, in order for them to have the necessary skills and abilities to get fathers involved in the early stages of their children's lives, thus ultimately preventing and combating violence in emotional relationships. The training has a duration of approximately 8 hours, is divided into 4 training modules, and offers the possibility to be carried out both online and in person. It also includes a 2-4 hour follow up session to be carried out after six months to assess any issues that might have arisen, whether the training learnings have been used, whether they have met any perpetrators among the fathers and fathers-to-be, and whether they were successful in referring them to perpetrator programmes.

5.2 Modules

The following chapter features the four modules that were developed by the FATHERS ROCK team. They contain background information, methods and supporting literature. Each module focuses on a different aspect related to how frontline professionals can involve the men, fathers, and fathers-to-be they meet in their work at different services in violence prevention. Every module follows the same structure: 1) Module objectives; 2) Expected learning outcomes; 3) Module overview, with different sections and useful additional information; 4) References.

5.2.1 Module 1: Challenging stereotypes

Objectives of the module

The objectives of this module are:

- Detecting and highlighting common beliefs about why it is not important to get fathers involved.
- Deconstructing the participants' stereotypes
- Sharing information on the principles underlying public policies and initiatives aimed at men.
- Reflecting on the model of traditional masculinity, what values it is supported by and how it can lead to violent behaviours.

Expected learning outcomes

Upon completion of this module, participants should have the following knowledge and skills:

- Exploration of their own beliefs of involved fathers.
- Reflection of social constructions of masculinities and performance of toxic masculinity.
- Reflection on how the hegemonic model of masculinity leads to perpetrating violence.
- Awareness of benefits and advantages of gender and sexual diversity.

Risks

Frontline professionals are likely to hold stereotypical beliefs they are unaware of about the involvement of fathers.

Module overview

The 10 stereotypes highlighted in the slides are discussed. Based on the types of professionals attending, their field of intervention and age, we can focus on some rather than others. We can ask participants whether they also have these stereotypical beliefs and whether they can think of more which they deem more difficult to deconstruct.

The model of traditional masculinity and its characteristics are discussed. The activity "Real men" is carried out and "Kaufman's 7 Ps" discussed.

Activity 1: RealMen

“What does a man need to do to prove his “manhood” and to show others that he is a man (as opposed to being a woman)?

The main idea of this activity is to activate the participants’ imagination to raise their awareness on the qualities that society implicitly and explicitly requires in order to adhere to the model of traditional masculinity, and how these have a different impact on people based on their gender.

Ask the question: *“What qualities does society require from men so that they can represent the model of a “real man?”*. You can also ask which qualities are required in order to be “a real woman”. If the training is carried out in person, write the answers on post-its that will be displayed on a larger board for discussion. If the training is carried out online, participants can use the group chat to share the qualities that are then discussed collectively.

5.2.2 Module 2: Needs and motivations.

Objectives of the module

The objectives of this module are:

- Reflecting on the fathers' needs throughout the pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.
- Highlighting which elements can foster fathers' participation in pre-birth courses (content, time of the day, place, types of activities).
- Promoting the involvement of fathers during pregnancy, puerperium and in their children's activities during early childhood.
- Highlighting which strategies can be used by professionals to reach out to fathers.

Expected learning outcomes

Upon completion of this module, participants should have the following knowledge and skills:

- How the father figure is changing over time and what models of fatherhood currently exist.
- Organizational aspects (content, times, types of activities, contents) that facilitate the participation of fathers.
- Awareness of benefits and advantages of getting fathers involved.

Risks

Participants might be unable to put themselves in the father's shoes and find it difficult to understand their needs and motivations to participate in the proposed activities. The fathers reached by these initiatives might be the ones who are already well informed and aware, while fathers at risk of violent behaviours might be hard to reach.

Module overview

The module should allow participants to reflect and put forward proposals regarding how fathers should get involved also from an operational point of view, i.e. thinking of times and spaces that could accommodate meetings even just for fathers.

Communication and dissemination of information around activities, what time and where they take place, are important elements that can influence the fathers' participation (or lack thereof) to the initiatives promoted by the professionals.

Brainstorming can also be used as an instrument to spark a discussion among participants and encourage them to propose concrete actions to get fathers involved in paternity during pregnancy or even before, when couples are planning to have a child.

Activity 2: GoodDad

What are the characteristics of “being a good father”?

What does a man need to do to prove his “manhood” and to show others that *he is a man* (as opposed to *being a woman*)?

Similarly to the previous activity, participants are asked to imagine which characteristics a “good father” should have and write them on post-its that will then be collected on a larger board - if the training is held in person, if online, participants are asked to write them on the group chat.

Participants are invited to reflect and comment on the characteristics that have been collected and to observe which contradictions emerge when comparing the “good father” to the “good man” characteristics discussed in the previous activity.

The activity should stimulate reflection on the fathers’ needs and motivations to get involved in active fatherhood and what strategies professionals can implement to achieve their involvement.

5.2.3 Module 3: Detecting violence

Objectives of the module

The objectives of this module are:

- Providing guidance to identify potential male perpetrators of violence among the service users and providing operators with the skills to have a more significant role in combating violence, detecting male perpetrators and referring them to specialized services.
- Starting a reflection on the perception of violence to make it more easily detectable.
- Sharing the basic principles from the Istanbul Convention and national legislations.
- Prioritizing the victims' safety, providing guidance on foundational elements of ensuring safety.
- Highlighting and recognizing common beliefs and stereotypes about male perpetrators of violence, providing correct information to help identify abusers.

Expected learning outcomes

Upon completion of this module, participants should have the following knowledge and skills:

- They should be aware of the importance of their role in detecting and intervening in situations of abuse.
- They should have a basic knowledge of the forms and types of violence and the main international and national regulations on the topic of violence.
- They should have a realistic comprehension of the multiple profiles of male perpetrators, and they should have gained awareness and started a reflection on their own experience with male violence perpetrators.

Risks

Operators might feel disconnected from their role and institutional duty of dealing with perpetrators and intimidated by the task of discussing violence with men. Limited time to explore and detect physical and psychological violence, different knowledge, and preparation levels. Operators might have very structured and rigid beliefs on how violent men are supposed to look like and they might not be able to detect violence in individuals that look "normal", reasonable, or even pleasant.

Module overview

The first slides introduce the objectives of the roadmap and describe the most common ways in which operators get in contact with men who may have perpetrated violence. It is recommended to use examples and to stress the importance of the role of operators.

The topic of violence is discussed using the two images and participants reflect on the different forms of violence, especially those that don't leave marks. We share the definition of violence according to the Istanbul Convention. To make this seemingly factual concept more interactive and interesting to the participants, we recommend that the trainer focuses on specific elements of the convention, for example on the topic of violence threats, that extend the idea of violence to all forms of intimidation. This is connected to the previously mentioned concept of investigating and being able to detect psychological abuse.

We continue with the explanation of article 16, which focuses on the necessity for the signatory states to start programmes for perpetrators of violence based on specific characteristics, such as the victims' safety, prevention of recidivism and the close collaboration with anti-violence centres. After that, we explain the rest of regulations on combating violence.

The last part of the module is dedicated to reflecting on the profiles of male perpetrators of violence and what characteristics they might or might not have in common, while stressing that there is no single male perpetrator profile and how important it is to reflect on one's own stereotypical beliefs about perpetrators.

Activity 3: Who is a perpetrator?

We ask participants to brainstorm around the following question and collect their ideas: *“Who is the male perpetrator?”*

We encourage participants to think about characteristics, qualities, experiences with male perpetrators of violence and we write them on the board to analyse and reflect upon them together. The ultimate objective of this activity is to dismantle stereotypes regarding the characteristics of an abusive man. I.e., it is necessary to convey that there is no single profile.

To spark a discussion, it could be useful to show an interview with a male perpetrator who has started a programme for change. The interview can be recorded beforehand or found online. Attendees are encouraged to reflect on their impressions after watching the video. Watching a “normal” man talk about his experience is an interactive way of encouraging discussion and challenge one’s own stereotypes.

If we find the chance throughout the discussion, we can introduce and explain the stereotypes around how violent men cannot change, that alcohol and substances cause violence, and/or that violence is intergenerationally passed on. Each one of them can be a risk factor on its own, while it is also true that there are multiple and complex paths to violence. An element on which it is worth focusing is the polarized stereotype on the parenting skills of an abusive man. Some believe that a man who is violent to his partner and mother of his child is not necessarily a bad father, while others maintain that the violence causes damage on all areas related to parenting. It is important to emphasize the damage that an abusive parent can cause and specify that recognising the damage is an important step towards a change.

5.2.4 Module 4: 4 Steps to detect violence and refer men to perpetrator programs (from project Engage)

Objectives of the module

The objectives of this module are:

- Providing participants with instructions on how to detect violence in the male perpetrators they enter in contact with and refer them to male perpetrator programmes.
- Providing participants with skills and information to identify signs and indicators of violent behaviours in men.
- Providing participants with skills and information to explore violent behaviours together with the men.
- Providing participants with skills and information to motivate men to change and to attend programmes for male perpetrators.
- Providing participants with skills and information on how to effectively refer male perpetrators to specific programmes.

Expected learning outcomes

- Participants should be aware of the signs and indicators of violent behaviours in men.
- Participants should be able to name violent behaviours and explore them with men.
- Participants should be able to apply motivational techniques and be aware of the programmes for perpetrators available in their area and how they work.

Risks

Operators might not recognise the importance of their role in detecting violence and make referrals.

Module overview

Four steps:

- 1. Step one: ability to identify a male perpetrator through detecting common signs and indicators.** We discuss the various ways a perpetrator can access the services, stressing that they might be contacting the services for reasons that have nothing to do with violence or they can be involved in programmes that are primarily focussed on their partners and children. After this general reflection, we explain that the indicators of a possible male perpetrator generally fall into two categories: 1) Indicators connected to the way they talk and express themselves during the sessions; 2) Indicators connected to their behaviour and attitude towards their partners and the operators. After introducing the indicators and discussing them through examples proposed by both the trainer and the attendees, we start with the analysis of a specific case, an exercise aimed at identifying indicators of abuse. (See Activity 4: case study).

- 2. Step two: Exploration of violence.** This activity is recommended in literature as a fundamental step to attract men and motivate them to change, if it is carried out in a context that can guarantee the men's privacy and the victims' protection and safety. We talk about a specific technique to run sessions that is useful to encourage men to acknowledge the violence and take responsibility, i.e., the funnel.

It starts with generic questions about the man's relationship with their partner and gradually moves to into specific forms of perpetrated violence. We can recommend a few checklists and questionnaires to support operators in identifying violence by investigating different forms of violence, i.e., physical, psychological, economical, sexual. While discussing the topic of violence detection, it is important to specify that high risk cases should be reported to the police, while if abuse is paired with mental health problems, the case should be referred to the relevant health service.

The final theoretical element to keep in mind is that, when conducting sessions with a potential male perpetrator, it is important to investigate and ask questions about the violence, however without passing judgment on the person, but just on the violence. Trainers should pass on the message that investigating violence does not mean mechanically applying a list of questions and sessions should be carried out with a respectful and curious attitude.

- 3.** The third step is the **ability of encouraging men to take responsibility for their violent actions and motivating them to change.** Even if motivation is considered a separate step in the process of getting men involved, the message should be passed on to the participants that their intervention aimed at motivating them is transversal and is carried out in every moment of their work with the perpetrator, especially in light of the fact that during their contact with the services most men will deploy mechanisms of denial, minimization and try to free themselves from any responsibility.

Especially at the beginning of the process, most men will have an ambivalent attitude towards acknowledging the violence and starting a programme to contrast it. Therefore, being able to offer motivational support and identifying "the good reasons" to change together with them will be decisive for them to start the process and be referred to specialised services that can directly address the problem.

- 4.** The fourth step concerns the **referral procedures to carry out to encourage those men who are sufficiently motivated to participate in specific programmes and treatment.** The trainer should provide basic information on how perpetrators centres work. The first step is to assess each case through a few individual sessions, while the actual treatment is carried out through a group programme.

Activity 4: Case study

RICK

Rick is 35 and is the father of Bob and Lizzie, who are 6 and 3 years old. He contacts the social services to ask for help with his challenging family situation: he feels he is the victim of a plot. He is friendly with the operator and he tells her he is quite worried. During the session, he complains about having an unstable job as a call centre operator and about "being the only one who works", since his wife Veronica is only taking care of the children since they were born. (*"As any good father, I've always slaved away to support my family"*).

He criticizes his wife and is angry at her because he thinks she is inadequate with the children, she is too permissive, she neglects herself and the house, she does not set any rules and she doesn't seem to be in a hurry to find a job as she's always been lazy and passive. Rick would like Veronica to leave her children with his mother more often, as she is way more capable than her mother, and he would like Veronica to distance herself from her mother (*"As she was an only child, she was always the little princess of the house. Since you are an expert and you have seen these kind of situations before, you will agree that daughters are likely to repeat their mothers' behaviours"*).

Rick really loves his wife but they often get into arguments because of this. A few months ago, during one of these arguments, Rick pushed her and she ended up in the emergency room. She ended up reporting him to the police (*"She exaggerates and makes a drama out of everything"*). Rick would be willing to get a separation, as Veronica has also asked him through her lawyer, but he's hesitant because he thinks his family wouldn't be able to move on and support themselves given Veronica's behaviour.

After all, he is the man of the house and has certain responsibilities. What would Bob and Lizzie do if he's not around to bring order and support them? What if it's all an excuse because she has someone else? This would explain a lot of her attitude. To resolve the situation, Rick is also willing to do couples therapy, as long as Veronica takes her responsibilities, just like he has always done without anyone.

6. Conclusion and recommendations for the implementation of the training

6.1 Trainers and facilitators

It is advisable that the training is conducted by experts in the prevention of gender related violence, who have undertaken a personal process of growth and awareness regarding their own behaviours and gender models. It is also important that they have some experience in treating male perpetrators of violence in affective relations.

Facilitators should also have a thorough understanding of gender dynamics and the transition from a traditional model of masculinity to a nurturing model. They should also have a solid understanding of how fatherhood has evolved over time how they can contribute to getting fathers more involved in the upbringing and education of children.

6.2 Framework and delivery

The training can be conducted both online and in person, as the main training methodologies include face-to-face sessions, watching videos and group activities. The recommended number of participants is 8-20, to encourage interaction and provide more points of view.

This training is aimed at front-line professionals, in particular those working in perinatal and childhood services (pregnancy, childbirth, nurses, pre-school, parenting services, etc.).

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the training and get a wide variety of professionals involved, it is recommended to get public entities involved both as partners and participants in the training. This way they will be able to organize their own programmes with fathers and fathers-to-be.

6.3 The role of the network

All initiatives aimed at preventing gender-related violence should ensure the safety of the victims (both women and children) and place responsibility on the perpetrators. It is therefore important to create a network that involves professionals from a variety of services, i.e.: perinatal services, experts in victim protection and experts who work with perpetrators of violence. Please refer to the document "Multimodal collaboration", created by the Fathers Rock project team, for more information about active paternity initiatives promoted by public services and violence prevention initiatives promoted by private entities.

6.4 How the training programme was implemented and adapted in different countries: Austria, Italy, Spain

The following paragraphs contain the actions carried out by the countries who already implemented the programme (Austria, Italy and Spain) and information about how they adapted it to their territory and the needs of the professionals involved.

6.4.1 Implementation of Fathers Rock CBP in Austria

In Austria, the material for the capacity building program was adapted to focus on professionals in parent education. Need analysis had already made clear that the professionals found it difficult to deal with the topic of violence. The basic attitude was “this doesn’t happen at all with our clients”. After further investigation, some of the participants described violent situations experienced in the workplace and the overwhelming demands that went along with it became visible.

The removal of taboos around violence became a strong focus in the adapted version of the training. Low-threshold approaches to the topic of violence and related topics were used to promote the participation of the target group in the CBP. Austria also specifically addressed the topic of gender stereotypes in babies. This was a strong incentive to participate in the capacity building program and many professionals asked for a training about it. The trainers also included their own slides with the statistics on violence in Austria and Europe and the theory of masculinity (Connell, Messner, etc.).

Another element that was adapted were the disclosure processes, i.e., how operators should behave during the process of finding out about the violence and disclosing it to other services. The adapted version also included an overview of the services for victim protection and work with perpetrators in Styria and Austria. Participants were reassured on the fact that, due to the diversity of offers, it is normal to be in doubt about whom to contact. However, especially in Styria, the individual institutions are so closely in contact with each other that no matter whom you contact first, you will always be redirected to the appropriate institution. The keyword here is: victim protection-oriented work with perpetrators.

6.4.2 Implementation of Fathers Rock CBP in Italy

In Italy, several training sessions were conducted both face-to-face and online, each lasting 8 hours. The first training sessions included professionals from the public health sector, with particular attention to professionals from counselling services, maternity and children hospital wards, and social services.

The first two modules focused on: in-depth analysis of the father role; current expectations towards fathers; operators’ stereotypes about the involvement of fathers; analysis of how the traditional male model can contribute to violence and how violence affects children; strategies to prevent the intergenerational transmission of such behaviours. In the last two modules the Engage Roadmap was explored and adapted to the context of the professionals attending the training for them to be able to refer their users and clients to specialized services for perpetrators.

Specific training was carried out for operators of children care and education services. In fact, there had been a high demand for participation from these professionals, which confirms that fathers are scarcely involved with the education of their children and professionals need tools to effectively involve them and overcome social and cultural resistance. In the first session several videos were used to discuss different modalities of “being a father” and how the father role should not only be about educating and setting rules but also about care.

This was aimed at starting a reflection with the participants about their current reality in the workplace, how involved fathers get with early childhood education services and what they can do to get them more involved. Further activities and reflection were carried out on the topics of traditional masculinity and how it can lead to violent behaviour. Special focus was placed in the Engage Roadmap and the topics of violence detection and exploration, and how to motivate male perpetrators of violence to attend specific programmes and refer them to the appropriate services.

In all training sessions, professionals from public and private services for motherhood and childcare and early education manifested great interest in getting updated information on how to embrace the new role of caring fatherhood that is slowly emerging in Italy.

6.5.3 Implementation of Fathers Rock CBP in Spain

In Spain, suggestions have been collected from various groups of professionals to improve the implementation of the training. In particular, the manual has been adapted to offer both a two-session and a three-session format, especially for services for parents in situations of crisis and child protection. Therefore, the manual focuses more on the principles and strategies of intervention with fathers and possible aggressors, rather than on a general explanation of violence, since most professionals have basic or advanced knowledge in this matter and have even received previous training about these topics.

Furthermore, the feminist and gender perspective we base our work on can sometimes make it difficult to adapt to a male perspective, and there may be resistance and fear of working with men in a comprehensive and supporting way, even if it is to help them overcome their problems with violence. Thus, during the training, it might help to emphasize that those who benefit the most from interventions against violence are women and children.

7. REFERENCES

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