



European
Network

NATIONAL REPORT GUIDELINE

Appogg

Men's Services

Mission Statement

From abuse to respect through awareness and responsibility.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of Men's Services is to help abusive men:

- Learn to stop the abuse
- Learn to spot the danger signs
- Learn to break out of isolation
- Learn safer ways of expressing strong feelings
- Learn to build healthy relationships
- Take responsibility for their behaviour

One of the services available at the social welfare agency Appogg, is the perpetrators service, Men's Services. Men's Services forms part of the Domestic Violence Services which also encompasses the Domestic Violence Unit a service for victims of domestic abuse and Ghabex, a shelter for female victims of domestic abuse and their children.

Men's Services was set up in January 1999 following trends in other countries, when it became evident that many female victims of domestic violence stayed on in abusive relationships. The pattern was similar in our country and the response was to set up a service for perpetrators which could contribute to the safety of women and children. The service initially consisted only of a group programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse. Training in the facilitation of the group programme, Challenging Abusive Beliefs, was delivered by Mary Nomme Russell and Jobst Frohberg who had designed the programme which was then being used in Canada. Since then, the programme has been modified according to cultural influences and also to effectiveness. The original number of sessions has been extended from twelve to twenty-two and an open support group was set up to support the men who completed the programme in their change. Programmes are co-facilitated by a male and a female facilitator. Service users are also assigned a social worker for group admission assessment and risk assessment purposes as well as individual sessions held prior to the start of a programme, since the group is a closed one. Their individual life situations are also taken into consideration and addressed. Consequently, social workers are sometimes involved in a multidisciplinary team with the aim of helping the service user holistically. The team consists of social workers and the group facilitators team consists of social workers, family therapists, psychotherapists and psychologists. The programme is based on the Beliefs Systems Theory and the method implemented is mainly cognitive behavioural. Most service users are self referred and the majority are reluctant clients, many of whom terminate during the assessment phase prior to the start of the programme. Once they engage and actually start a programme, the attrition rate is usually low. To date the service has run twenty-one programmes.

Men's Services liaises closely with the Domestic Violence Unit. Social workers from the unit provide feedback from the partners of men who are service users ensuring that there is ongoing monitoring. Risk assessment and risk management are ongoing.

Men's Services is active in raising awareness of violence against women, including domestic violence. It is involved in media campaigns, provides training to members of the Police Force and other professional bodies and staff regularly attend Family Court hearings. They are also involved in Men Against Violence, the men's movement to end violence against women.

Men's Services is committed to:

Develop and contribute to services for the safety of women and children

Contribute to public education on domestic abuse

Work towards developing a society with zero tolerance to violence

Challenges

Men's Services faces a number of challenges as do most services for perpetrators. Evaluating our programme, indeed any perpetrators programme, is a challenge in itself. Appogg is currently an associate partner with the European Project, STREAM – Strategic Targeting Through Evaluation and Measurement, the final conference of which will be held in Malta in 2014 and which will hopefully facilitate an evaluation of our programme.

One of the biggest challenges encountered, is in relation to the Justice System. The Domestic Violence Act was enacted in Malta in February 2006. Subsequently Appogg was appointed as the designated agency responsible for the provision of preventive, therapeutic and, or treatment programmes for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. Despite the provision, a very small number are advised to refer to Appogg but treatment orders are rarely actually issued. Therefore the Service rarely receives referrals of court mandated clients. Social workers from the Domestic Violence Services regularly attend Family Court hearings related to charges of domestic violence. Potential service users are occasionally directly referred by the presiding Magistrate.

Another challenge is in the way of available human and financial resources for prevention and awareness. The staff complement is sufficient to cope with day to day requirements of the service but cannot undertake prevention and awareness campaigns. Funding for such campaigns is also limited. However, the Service is currently working on a feasible awareness raising strategy. Meanwhile, Men's Services staff are currently featuring as guests on television and radio shows, promoting the Service and raising awareness.

Explaining our philosophy to other professionals also proves to be problematic mainly in relation to responsibility for the abuse. Although service users' life situations and relationship difficulties are considered, responsibility for the abusive behavior is attributed to the perpetrator.

Malta: Perpetrator Services

Malta is a small island in the Mediterranean covering just over 316 km sq. with a population of 452,515. Malta signed the Istanbul Convention on 21.05.2012. However, there have been no amendments made, as yet, to the Domestic Violence Act of 2006.

Men's Services at Appogg is the only social work service in Malta that caters exclusively for male perpetrators of domestic violence. It also offers the only programme for male perpetrators on the island. Since almost all potential service users are self referred, it is rarely their first choice of treatment. It is mainly when the victim insists with her partner that she will only approve it as a form of treatment, that a perpetrator chooses to use the service. The other attraction is that the service is offered free of charge. Most perpetrators who have an option. usually opt for personal therapy or couples therapy, not always with the desired result. Unfortunately, many psychotherapists and couples therapists are not grounded in the dynamics of domestic violence and it is only where there is physical violence or obvious emotional abuse, that the problem is addressed. Even then, the safety of victims remains a concern. They are rarely referred to

domestic violence services where they would be provided with safety planning, information about shelters and general support by social workers specialized in the field.

Earlier this year, Rus Funk of the White Ribbon Kentuckiana was invited to deliver training on an initiative of the American Embassy and the Malta National Council of Women. A core task group was set up to engage men and boys in an effort to eliminate violence against women. The group has now been named Men Against Violence and will be officially launched during this year's White Ribbon Campaign in November. Appogg, with others from various N.G.O's including women's shelters and the National Council of Women, is represented in the task group.

Best Practices

Men's Services operates with professional staff trained in the dynamics of domestic violence. They receive regular in service training and attend seminars and conferences related to domestic violence. The team has regular meetings and supervision both by intra-agency supervisors as well as an external supervisor. Co-working facilitators are also supervised as a team.

Service users are provided with individual sessions as well as a group programme and a support group. They are also given personal support when required. The treatment they receive is holistic.

The service is in constant liaison with the victims' service within the agency which is, in turn, in close touch with women's shelters since women in shelters are all Domestic Violence Unit service users. The feedback loop through these services facilitates risk assessments and risk management whilst supporting Men's Services in its work with perpetrators. It also has easy access to Child Protection Services since this is also a service provided by the same agency.

Needs and Recommendations

Despite the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in 2006, the situation has changed very little with regards to perpetrators of domestic violence. Some members of the judiciary have shown a deep and growing concern for the victims of domestic violence and their children. However this has not translated into harsher penalties which could prove to be an effective means of deterrence. Often, out of concern for victims exposed to retaliation by perpetrators, the courts do not proceed unless the victim presses charges. Since sentences are rarely handed down, there is no opportunity to issue a treatment order. This is a cause for concern, since, despite the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act, perpetrators continue to manipulate the system.

Awareness needs to be a regular ongoing effort. So far, there have been various domestic violence awareness campaigns and results show that they prove to be effective in engaging victims, not perpetrators of domestic violence. Awareness campaigns need to be based on research on what appeals to perpetrators at a pre-contemplative stage of change.

So far, there has been little work done on prevention with regards to perpetrators of domestic violence. However, it is here that the issue needs to be tackled. Boys in education, sports, social and religious environments need to be educated in what constitutes respect and abuse. They need to learn at an early age and throughout their adolescence, as part of their education, that not only is violence against women not an option but that they also have a duty towards the safety of women and children.

To this end, the White Ribbon Campaign is a crucial turning point. Women have worked long and hard against the violence. It is now time for men to step in and support them in the ongoing struggle against the violence. Educating boys to be better persons who respect women as their equals is the first crucial step towards ending the violence. Engaging and educating boys so that, as men, they will stand alongside women, publicly taking their pledge against domestic violence, should be the next and most important part of prevention.

An evaluation of the Programme we deliver is also required. The overall service was evaluated a few years ago, however the programme outcome, as yet, has not been evaluated.