



European
Network

NATIONAL REPORT

COUNTRY: SLOVENIA

Društvo za nenasilno komunikacijo

Association for Nonviolent Communication:

Miklošičeva cesta 38, Ljubljana 1000

TEL: +386 (0)1 4344 822,

FAX: +386 (0)59 09 57 66

e-mail: info@drustvo-dnk.si

Organisation/programme

The Association for Nonviolent Communication is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation. Our purpose is solving the problem of violence with an integrated approach, putting emphasis on prevention of domestic violence (violence towards women and children). With this vision in mind, the Association started its programmes for helping victims of violence (including: a telephone and electronic helpline for information and counselling; individual help for victims of violence; social advocacy for victims; a Safe House for women and children) with programmes for perpetrators (Social Skills Training for male perpetrators; Individual counselling for perpetrators; "I have a choice" – a guided help group for young males who behave violently), becoming the first organisation in Slovenia to do so. We also strive to make our active contribution by informing the professional and general public about the problem of violence with preventive and educational activities. We contribute with our suggestions, as well as active work in different governmental committees, by promoting change in public policy responses to domestic violence in Slovenia.

Our programmes for perpetrators are either groups with an emphasis on social skills training, or individual counselling that is based on cognitive behavioural therapy.

The **Social Skills Training programme for men who commit violence against women (SST)** is designed and implemented for men who most likely would not have chosen to

engage in the process of changing their beliefs and violent behaviour on their own. The programme is largely based on the actions of state institutions (state court, social work centres) which have referred perpetrators to our programme. State institutions enforce their message when they face a perpetrator with the consequences of his violent behaviour and demand that he stop committing violence. Group work consists of lectures and practical exercises (social skills training). The main emphasis of the training is on passing knowledge through exercises and personal experiences of the users.

In addition to Social Skills Training for men, our association offers another programme for adolescents who behave violently. The programme is called **I have a choice – a guided help group for young males who behave violently**. Adolescents who had behaved violently used to join our individual counselling programme for young people. It turned out, however, that many adolescents found the individual approach too direct, which is why we decided to offer young people an additional programme – a guided group. The group offers them a place to express their ideas, opinions, beliefs, doubts and questions. We encourage them to express their opinions and disagreements in a way that no one is humiliated, degraded or insulted.

Our greatest achievement in the last 4 years is definitely the fact that we have succeeded in spreading the SST programme throughout the regions of Slovenia. Alongside Ljubljana (2004), it is now offered in six other Slovenian cities – Koper (2009), Celje (2010), Novo mesto (2010), Slovenj Gradec (2010), Nova Gorica (2011) and Murska Sobota (2011). In 2012, the programme included 291 perpetrators from all over Slovenia, which established it as the most prominent national programme in the field of working with perpetrators of domestic violence.

In the last few years, we have established cooperative relationships with all state institutions (centres for social work, the police, schools, the public prosecutor's office, courts), which have since been referring an ever increasing number of perpetrators to our programmes. SST thus became an integrated part of an intervention system and its practitioners actively participate in inter-agency alliances and networks against domestic violence in order to achieve a coordinated approach to domestic violence.

The greatest obstacle/challenge in our work has been precisely the fact that too many new perpetrators have been joining our programmes. Consequently, with our current staff shortage (3 employees per 291 users), we are unable to meet the growing demand of new users, which is most evident in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. In the times of economic crisis, neither the state nor the local authorities are willing to provide additional financial support (employing new professional workers) for such programmes. Although cooperation with other institutions has improved in recent years, promoting a coordinated approach still requires a considerable amount of effort. Some institutions/individual professional workers occasionally still decline cooperation with our association – either as a result of failing to see our programmes for perpetrators as important for dealing with violence, or, occasionally, due to disagreements regarding our association's main principles (namely: the perpetrator is the only one responsible for violence; violence is to be prevented by means of zero tolerance; violence is a learnt behaviour).

Country

The biggest obstacle in the way of running programmes for perpetrators in Slovenia in the past years was an inappropriate public policy in the field of domestic violence prevention – there was no specific law regulating this area, and the public was very tolerant towards domestic violence. The social climate only changed after the year 2000 (after years of intensive public campaigns run by various NGOs), which is when prevention of domestic violence (with a focus on perpetrators) became an important political issue.

In recent years, Slovenia has seen two important changes of legislation that concerns working with perpetrators of violence. The first occurred when the Domestic Violence Prevention Act was passed in 2008. It introduced the Coordinated Approach in the field of domestic violence prevention (described in detail later on). The second important legislative change happened with the 2009 amendment to Article 191 of the Penal Code, which has since criminalised domestic violence as an independent offense. Amendments to articles that specify sanctions, especially the suspended sentence under protective supervision, have also been important for referring individuals to programmes for perpetrators. They have enabled the court to specify the appropriate instructions (obligatory treatment/therapy, attending psychological counselling or social skills trainings, etc.). We have noticed that issuing such instructions in combination with suspended sentences has become increasingly frequent since 2010, and have consequently documented a great increase in users referred to us by the court. External motivation drives most of these perpetrators to cooperate in the programme, as they fear that their suspended sentences might otherwise be revoked.

Our SST programme is currently the only organised programme offered in Slovenia in the field of working with perpetrators of violence. The only other organisations to offer programmes for perpetrators are the Franciscan Family Institute in Ljubljana, and the Institute for Social Psychiatry and Psychotraumatology in Ptuj. Under these unfortunate circumstances, many perpetrators usually only face legal penalties and sentences, as there are still only a few suitable programmes intended for self-improvement and, consequently, eliminating violent behaviour.

Best practices

The greatest achievement in the field of domestic violence prevention has been the implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, which defined the legal framework for the Coordinated Approach. It has also made participation of involved institutions (centres for social work, the police, schools, NGO's, etc.) obligatory when dealing with situations of domestic violence. All involved institutions have consequently begun to approach the issues of domestic violence in a more coordinated manner. The burden and responsibility for intervening in the event of a violent situation has been taken over by the community as opposed to the victim. The community is thus tasked with ensuring the woman's safety and confronting the perpetrator with the responsibility for his actions.

With our SST programme, the benefits of following the Coordinated Approach are evident on multiple levels. Since its implementation, the various institutions have not only been referring new users to our association, they have also begun to provide us with more detailed and comprehensive information, which is crucial to planning our individual work with the perpetrators. Having comprehensive data, it is much easier to make risk assessments. These are, whenever possible, made available to the victim and/or the

organisation where the victim has sought support. We have noticed that most problems arise whenever the victims have not joined any help programmes. A similar issue is the fact that they do not contact us in order to obtain or provide information when their partner has joined one of our programmes. The practitioners are consequently often left without the information which would be most relevant for assessing changes in the perpetrator's behaviour, nor can they relay their own data to the victim or the institution that is offering them support. In such cases, all information is relayed to the centre for social work or any other institution that has referred the user to our association. Professional workers in the programme thus regularly provide the relevant authorities (the court, prosecutor's offices and centres for social work) with data regarding the user's attendance of our programmes, especially in cases where the perpetrator has prematurely stopped attending.

Needs and recommendations

Our main problem is currently the fact that programmes for working with perpetrators of violence are regionally unequally distributed, resulting in unequal accessibility for users from different parts of Slovenia. The state is obliged to provide the financial means for the implementation of these programmes in all Slovenian regions. It has come to our attention that, in spite of clearly voicing a need for their implementation, most local communities are unable to finance programmes for working with perpetrators of violence in their respective regions. Individual penalties are, in spite of a uniform legal basis, also subjected to the limitations imposed by the region's offer of programmes. Courts, prosecutor's offices and centres for social work are referring the perpetrators to programmes in the regions where they are available. By doing so, the state allows discrimination of its citizens based on regional privileges.

All further planning of programmes for working with perpetrators of violence must take the diversity of their users into account. Many users, ultimately representing a very heterogeneous group of people, are referred to our programmes. Our association cannot possibly meet all of their needs with our current selection of programmes. When a user has been referred to us, we frequently lack the appropriate programme for specific forms of violence/specific personal circumstances of the user. We currently offer the SST programme, which is primarily intended for men who are violent towards their partners. However, there is an increasing demand for organising programmes for parents who are violent towards their children, as well as programmes for children (adolescents) who are violent towards their parents, and programmes for preventing violence towards the elderly. Courts and prosecutor's offices have also voiced a great demand for designing a programme for perpetrators of criminal offenses outside the domestic environment.

The fact that the state is currently not willing to finance new programmes (in the field of working with perpetrators of violence) is another big issue, which renders us unable to improve our existing programmes. The current SST programme is designed to support 12 weeks' worth of sessions, which is insufficient for effecting more complete behavioural changes in the perpetrators.