Improving the response and follow-up of victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence by police authorities in France

101096908 – TACTICS - CERV-2022-DAPHNE
"Updated Regional Roadmaps to Improve DV Response System"

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“Updated Regional Roadmaps to Improve DV Response System”

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1. Overview of the structural barriers in achieving multi-agency collaboration on the management of domestic violence cases in the region

In France, the protection of victims of domestic violence relies on two separate police forces:

The national police, which has jurisdiction nationwide and is attached to the Ministry of the Interior;

The municipal police, which is managed by local authorities and has a strong presence in the community.

Each plays an important and complementary role in enhancing the safety of victims, but their missions, training and resources differ considerably.

In addition to the national and municipal police, there are social workers in police stations (ISC), who collaborate with police when a victim presents to the police station for a case of domestic violence. These social workers liason with victim protection services, and sometimes with perpetrator services, but there are so few of these in France.

The structural barriers in achieving multi-agency collaboration on the management of domestic violence in the Ile-de-France region in which TACTICS took place are as follows:

Firstly, the most important structural barrier is the risk assessment, or tools for assessing danger for the vctim and if present her children. The national law enforcement agencies (police and gendarmerie) have a risk assessment grid, which is often used during interviews. This tool provides a factual reading of the situation, but has several major limitations:

- It does not address children or psychotraumatic impacts.
- It is sometimes too long, misused, or given without prior training, which considerably limits its scope.
- Questions are often asked in an emergency, during or immediately after the incident, making them difficult to use in a crisis context.

Social workers in police stations (ISC) do **not** have access to this grid. They therefore carry out their assessments on the basis of their own professional judgement, which can lead to discrepancies in analysis with the police, due to the lack of a common reference framework.

No risk assessment tool is available to the municipal police, even though they are often the first on the scene. A simplified grid, taking into account criteria of dangerousness and vulnerability, would improve the quality of reports sent to the national police.

The **second** structural barrier in collaboration is that there is also no formalised protocol for managing or monitoring cases. The handling of situations relies heavily on the individual will of officers, in a context of overload and lack of resources. Thus, even when the danger is real, the response may be inadequate due to a lack of clear assessment or structured coordination.

Thirdly, police training is very heterogeneous. While initial and continuing training is compulsory within the national police force, it is not systematic for the municipal police, where it depends on local political will. Psychotrauma, in particular, is rarely or never addressed. Some officers educate themselves, but no structured content is provided on a widespread basis.

Fourthly, is the lack of data and data sharing needed for improved multi-collaboration. These data include:

i. Number of referrals from the police to victim support services: not published at national or local level.

ii. Number of referrals from the police to perpetrator services: not published at national or local level.

iii. Police number of referrals to other services, e.g. social workers

iv. Ability of the police to share data on victims and perpetrators with other professionals: the police officers interviewed stated that data is shared informally and without standard procedures, but rather when colleagues know and trust each other.

In summary, the lack of harmonised tools, systematic training and shared follow-up protocols significantly weakens the ability of law enforcement agencies to effectively assess danger and protect victims in a consistent manner. A thorough reform, based on training, shared tools and inter-agency cooperation, is necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of police action in these contexts.

2. Overview of the key areas for improvement in facilitating multi-agency collaboration on the management of domestic violence cases in the region

The following are the key areas for for improvement in facilitating multi-agency collaboration on the management of domestic violence cases in the Ile-de-France region:

- Absence or weakness of collaboration protocols; many professionals lament the lack of formalised protocols with law enforcement agencies, particularly regarding information sharing and the articulation of roles. Some organisations use internal assessment tools but do not share them with law enforcement agencies. Information provided by professionals is not always taken into account.

- No assessment of danger or different assessments based on the professional involved in the case due to inadequate or non-existent tools; the risk assessment scales used focus on victims. No operational tools focusing on the dangerousness of perpetrators are made available to officers, even though they are on the front line when it comes to handling complaints and police reports. Assessments often remain subjective, carried out in a hurry, without the possibility of taking a step back or coordinating with experts.

- Lack of shared standards and inter-institutional protocols; there is no uniform procedure to ensure consistent treatment of perpetrators. Each organisation acts according to its resources, culture, or the involvement of its officers. Judicial decisions are sometimes disconnected from the actual level of danger posed by the accused, due to a lack of link with psychosocial or clinical assessments.

- Shortage of specialised structures for perpetrators; many regions have no dedicated services for perpetrators. In the absence of associations, professionals are forced to improvise measures (video conferencing, home interviews, etc.) with no guarantee of continuity. Few professionals are willing to intervene, as the subject remains socially stigmatised, undervalued by public policy and insufficiently funded. When no action is taken against the perpetrator, the mental burden falls on the victim, who tries to deal with the aftermath of the violence alone: protecting children, finding new accommodation, justifying the situation to loved ones, anticipating the perpetrator's reactions. This can exacerbate the abuse, leading to the continuation of the violent relationship or a return to danger.

- Refusal or dissuasion to file a complaint by the police, despite the presence of social workers in police stations

- Minimisation and invisibility of violence by the police, despite the presence of social workers in police stations; incidents are described as marital conflicts or disputes. The violence is trivialised, reduced to marital disagreements. Psychological, economic and cyber violence (even with evidence such as text messages and emails) is regularly ignored.

- No shared language between professionals due to lack of understanding of psychological trauma by police; police officers demand dated, precise facts, even covering several years, without understanding the impact of traumatic amnesia and police do not have the training that social workers, victim protection professionals have

- Weak connection between police and existing support services for victims. In the majority of cases:

  - No information about procedures or their rights
  - No contact with specialist organisations
  - The 3919 helpline is rarely provided
  - They are left alone, without guidance or support
  - No follow-up after filing a complaint

- Language-related inequalities faced by non-French speaking victimswhen speaking with professionals: For those who do not speak French well, the lack of translation or explanation has led to years of silence and wandering

- Unequal support between perpetrator and victim; due to lack of perpetrator services, there is the feeling by victims that their attackers enjoy impunity: little judicial response; very long delays in processing the perpetrators; rapid intervention in favour of fathers, whenmothers are trying to protect their children

- Heterogeneity of police practices; professionals providing victim services note significant disparities in how victims are treated by different departments: complaints are refused, violence is minimised, psychological or economic violence is ignored. Some police officers send victims away without explanation or redirect them to other units without providing immediate assistance. The lack of standardised practices weakens partnerships.

3. Recommendations for improvement by Victim Support and Perpetrator Work Services in the region

- **Strengthening inter-professional cooperation:** Establishing regular coordination meetings (such as the VIF network) involving law enforcement, social services, associations and magistrates. Share inter-partner monitoring tables with simple indicators (e.g. red/green colour coding) to assess needs and actions already taken. Re-establish or create reporting protocols that respect victims' consent and ensure that all victims are received, listened to and referred, even if they do not file a complaint. In addition, the protocol must ensure that victims are systematically offer a referral to a specialised structure.

- **Integrate professionals into police systems:** Integrate trained social workers into every police station or gendarmerie brigade. Identify these professionals as points of contact for associations. Promote feedback mechanisms enabling professionals and police officers to hare their successes and difficulties in order to find common solutions.

- **Develop a structured interview grid for professionals in the field** (law enforcement, social workers, associations), inspired by the Engage programme.

- **Create self-assessment tools** for use by perpetrators themselves as part of a support programme.

- **Structure and stabilise social worker positions** in police stations

- **Make it standard practice to have social workers trained in supporting perpetrators,** with a clear and recognised role in the police station's organisational chart.

- **Draw up a national job description**, in conjunction with the relevant ministries, to ensure continuity of intervention.

- **Include these professionals in inter-institutional meetings** to enable genuine shared monitoring.

4. Recommendations for improvement by Victims of DV/IPV in the region

- **Train and specialise officers in**

  - Recognising different forms of violence (economic, psychological, cyberviolence, etc.),
  - Psychological trauma and its effects,
  - Reception and active listening,
  - The dynamics of control and domination, coercive control,
  - Non-judgmental care (deconstructing representations of victims)
  - The use of digital evidence.

- **Strengthen training for all stakeholders**

- **Create a compulsory inter-professional module** (police, justice, social work) covering:

  - Perpetrator profiles and indicators of recidivism,
  - Interviewing techniques and ethical framework,
  - Gender dynamics, control and denial,
  - The link between domestic violence and parenting,
  - Tools for referral and risk assessment.

- **Integrate these training courses into police academies and social work training centres.**

5. Recommendations for improvement by Police Authorities in the region

i. Create specialised police units accessible throughout the country.

ii. Create and distribute standardised tools focused on the perpetrator:

- Develop a national assessment grid for evaluating the dangerousness of perpetrators, incorporating clinical, contextual and behavioural criteria.
- Develop regional or inter-municipal mobile units to intervene with perpetrators in areas without services.
- Create a secure application to locate available resources (facilities, lawyers, psychologists, support groups) based on the perpetrator's location.

6. Conclusion

This report highlights the significant but still too fragmented progress made in the collaboration between law enforcement agencies and service providers in dealing with cases of domestic violence. It is clear that certain specialised mechanisms and a few local partnerships are working effectively and enabling a more humane, rapid and better coordinated response to victims. The presence of domestic violence advisors, the existence of specialised units, ad hoc cooperation with professionals in the field, and the growing role of municipal police in certain municipalities demonstrate that positive dynamics can exist, provided they are based on clear commitments, appropriate training and a willingness to collaborate across institutions.

However, these successes coexist with major structural dysfunctions, which have been widely denounced by professionals and victims alike. The heterogeneity of practices, the lack of shared national protocols, the weak culture of psychotrauma and 'invisible' violence, as well as the persistent tolerance of sexist remarks and rape culture considerably weaken the police response. These shortcomings are not only technical or organisational: they also reflect a cultural resistance to change, particularly with regard to the recognition of the gendered nature of domestic violence.

It is imperative that the protection of victims no longer depends on the goodwill of individual officers or the particular sensitivity of local authorities. There is an urgent need to establish mandatory national standards based on an approach that integrates the psychotraumatic dimension, a detailed understanding of the mechanisms of domination and the impact on children. Finally, zero tolerance for sexist, discriminatory or victim-blaming comments must become a reality, with effective reporting mechanisms and sanctions. The State, local authorities and police institutions have a duty to restore victims' confidence and guarantee their safety through consistent, respectful and professional action at every stage of the process.

Only then will the police be able to truly fulfil their role as the first line of protection, and will the fight against violence against women become a concrete and lasting reality.

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