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Preventing domestic violence with Men and Boys: Challenges and Opportunities

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Risk management of Domestic Violence: a Finnish approach

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Abstract:

After a revision of the debate on domestic violence, the legal platform as well as the services already offered to the perpetrators in Finland, it seems that the perpetrators in the development of social policies must be seriously and openly taken into consideration, to better organise preventive work as well as to find the legislative means to strengthen the role of the legal authorities during the legal process. The model presented in the Swedish discussion paper is a very interesting approach that is surely adaptable to the Finnish reality.

1. Relevant country context

According to the latest data from the European Institute for Gender Equality, the situation in Finland seems critical. Finland's score for the domain of violence is 32.4, which is higher than the EU average. In Finland, 47 % of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. This is 14 p.p. higher than the EU-28 average. 46 % of women (compared to 33 % in the EU-28) have experienced health consequences as a result (EIGE, Gender Equality index, 2017).

According to the Finnish statistical agency, there were 8,300 victims of intimate partner and domestic violence crimes in 2017. Conferring to the same source, 68% of victims of domestic and intimate partner violence were women. On the other hand, 78% of the suspects were men (Tilastokeskus, 2018). On the other hand, it must be emphasised that, in Finland as in Sweden, equality between the sexes is at a very high level compared with other countries in the European Community. This could maybe explain the high level of severity of IPV. Therefore, if we are looking for an explanation for this fact, it could be because the threshold for reporting domestic violence to authorities is lower in the Nordic countries than in other European countries.

Another indicator that might tell us about the severity of domestic violence in terms of the differences between the European countries of Europe is the financial cost of violence. That is, the part of GDP spent on domestic violence (EIGE, Gender Equality Index, 2017). For example, in Finland domestic violence absorbs 0.95% of GDP, while in Greece, where only 25% of women have experienced violence, the part of GDP spent is 1.67%.

Another aspect of the Finnish specificity is the representation of domestic violence in terms of differentiation between the perpetrator and the victim in the public discourse. It means that the role of the perpetrator is absent when the issue of IPV is discussed. Focus is primarily on the victim. Rarely the man is present, as a perpetrator, even though all the agents in the professional field know that the elimination or the diminution of domestic violence must seriously be considered also from the point of view of the perpetrator and his masculinity.

At the same time, it is essential to outline the current context of working with perpetrators in Finland, which is mainly based on the resources of the tertiary sector, i.e. the NGOs. NGOs almost completely deal with domestic violence in Finland, whether it is intervention or prevention work. This is a consequence of the tertiary sector's financing model according to which the Finnish state redistributes money perceived by the gambling monopoly to the different organisations. It might be that the participation of state or communal authorities can be perceived as indirect in intervention and prevention work.

Today, at the national level, professionals working in intervention and / or preventive work with perpetrators of violence are the Unbeatable Line in Espoo (Lyömätön Linja Espoossa), some of the member associations of the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters and Groups of Men (Miessakit). Furthermore, the development of models of cooperation with authorities (police, prosecutor's office, crime prevention agencies, child protection and family counselling) depends on the initiative of these organisations.

2. Policy debate

To be able to address the current state of the domestic violence discourse, one would have to look at the changes in the platform of laws. The advent of the equality law in 1986, the consideration of rape in marriage in 1994, the use of violence in public places, which has become the subject of public prosecution in 1995, and the restraining order in 1999, which has also become a restraining order into the family in 2005 have been set IPV to another level. From 2011, minor assaults are subject to formal prosecution when they are directed against a minor or against a person close to the perpetrator. Stalking was added to the Criminal Code in 2014 and is since then punishable.

A significant change came in 2015, when Finland ratified the Istanbul Convention. It was indeed the first piece of legislation that took into consideration the importance of the fact that work with perpetrators must be seriously considered.

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or support programmes aimed at teaching perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour in interpersonal relationships with a view to preventing further violence and changing violent behavioural patterns (Istanbul convention, article 16, section 1, 2011).

This has had immediate repercussions, at least for the founding of new shelters for victims of domestic violence and Nollalinja (“the Zero Line”) - helpline for victims of domestic violence. It was a radical change in the role of the state, whose intervention is not only visible at the legislative level but also much more concrete. The Act on reimbursement out of State funds for providers of shelters for victims of domestic violence (1354/2014) took effect on 1 January 2015. The responsibility for financing the services provided of shelters rests with the State. The law is a historical improvement to secure the victims of domestic violence acute help and protection all over the country. The purpose is to guarantee qualitative and comprehensive shelter services. Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland (THL) is responsible for the national coordination and development of the shelter services. THL is responsible to follow up the quality of the work, to coordinate the education and training and collect national data. There is a government decree of the competence of the staff. The leader of the work has to be a social worker, master degree. Staff members are professionals in social services or health care, university degree of applied science and special training in domestic violence issues.¹

Since 2015, the number of places for shelters has increased significantly. In 2016, a helpline for victims of domestic violence was set up. It is fully funded by the state. The helpline is open 24/7 and is free of charge and the calls are anonymous. Most of the callers are women victims of domestic violence but also some men who are using violence are calling the helpline. This direct involvement of the Finnish State in financing special services for victims of domestic violence has given a clear message that tackling the domestic violence is already a priority.

The focus has been primarily on the victims of domestic violence. The current government's agenda is going a step ahead. The current Governmental Programme includes variety of measures to combat domestic violence and violence against women and to prevent crime and recidivism. The police, prosecutors, courts or enforcement authorities will refer persons whom they have encountered to other necessary services such as programmes to end violence. Work to prevent violence will be targeted especially at people of all genders who recognise violent tendencies in themselves. Funding will be allocated to the Ministry of Justice for a three-year project to enhance crime prevention.

¹ <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2014/20141354>

A programme to combat violence against women will be drawn up, which will include, inter alia, increasing victim support services, shelters and resourcing to the level required by the Council of Europe. An independent National Rapporteur on Violence against Women will be established.²

Various inter-ministerial working groups are active in this field, and soon, the need to include work with perpetrators clearly in the legal framework should be openly declared. Traditionally, working with perpetrators of violence is based on customer's motivation and activity. Receiving the guidance on the necessary services is still voluntary, parallel to the legal process without obligation of participation in adequate programmes.

3. Good practice examples

Since 1994, Lyömätön Linja Espoossa has been working locally (in Espoo) with perpetrators of violence. Over the years, a workable Unbeatable path - An Alternative to Violence Programme (Lyömätön tie – Väkivallan katkaisuhjelma®) has been developed specifically for men who have used or are afraid of using violence in the family or in close relationships. This is a sufficiently long programme and its effectiveness is currently being evaluated in cooperation with the University of Turku. The programme consists of face-to-face meetings, a professionally led peer support group, and follow-up meetings. The duration of the programme depends on the customer's characteristics and motivation. On average, the programme lasts about 1.5 years. Participation in the programme is voluntary and clients can get involved either by contacting themselves or through a cooperation partner. The main principle of the programme is that violent behavior can be stopped by recognising one's own actions, taking responsibility for one's own actions by developing one's own non-violence skills during the working process. The work process is not purely therapy, only therapeutic discussions. The working methods are a solution-oriented, dialog-based and narrative approach. The funding comes from the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health organisations (STEA). As already mentioned earlier that is a redistribution of gambling monopoly money perceived by the state. Other contributors are the cities of Espoo and Kirkkonummi.

It is essential to mention here the development of a cooperation model with the police, which began in 2000. The working name was the Criminal Procedure Cooperation with the Police and the Prosecutor's Office. The purpose of the cooperation model is to address intimate partner violence by directing the perpetrator to the necessary services. The collaboration model currently called Stop Violence - Referring a Domestic Violence and Domestic Violence Suspect from Pretrial

²https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161664/Inclusive%20and%20competen%20Finland_2019_WEB.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y

Investigation to an Alternative to Violence Programme³. The service guidance from the police or the prosecutor's office does not mean that the participation in adequate programmes is obligatory.

In addition, the perpetrator's participation in the programme does not affect the legal process. During a year, a maximum of 20 men reaches the Unbeatable Line in Espoo services via this cooperation model.

In 2010 a multiagency victim-focused risk assessment meeting, MARAC was piloted in three local districts in Finland. After the first year the project continued and more MARACs were set up. The evaluation of victim's safety in the project was done 2016. The data was collected from police records and interviews. 382 cases have been referred to MARAC in Finland during 1.10.2010-30.3.2015 and 95 % of victims were women. Police files were pulled six months after the MARAC was held (N= 365 and 70 victims were interviewed). The results showed that crime reported to the police before MARAC was 64 percent of all 365 cases and crime reported to police six months post MARAC was only 18 percent of the cases. The re-victimisation was reduced in more than 70 per cent of the cases, and no new reports of recurring violence were filed with the police during the six-month follow-up period. Victims themselves reported similar results, and they no longer felt threatened by violence and stalking. Results showed that the MARAC method has successfully reduced the number of recurrent domestic violence reported to the police. The results also shows that it's more common to report domestic violence to police six months after MARAC when the restraining order has issued to protect the victim. Currently MARAC are operated in Finland in over 100 municipalities by over 30 local MARACs.

4. Transferability aspects

The practice as well as the policy of the Swedish neighbours seem to be complete and considered from different points of view. The transferability of such a policy is quite adequate to the structures already set up in Finland. Indeed, Susanne Strand and Joakim Petersson say loudly what everyone thinks so low in Finland. Primary prevention is in a certain way presented in Finland, although there are no uniform and general structures. Taking into consideration that the legal system needs to be more proactive, in terms of prevention and finding judicial tools to deal more directly and productively with recidivism in cases of domestic violence, is a reality, which decision-making centers take into consideration in Finland. I agree that the link between risk assessment and risk management is essential. In this process, we must take into consideration agents other than those who are traditionally involved. The risk management in MARACs in Finland are in the focus and the safety plans are followed up in MARAC. The idea of developing heterogeneous programmes based on the different needs of perpetrators is a subject that has been concern for some time. The

³ <http://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/110163>

Predov programme with its adaptive character is very interesting as well as the possibility to continue in this one after the incarceration.

Finally, the practice presented seems to be adaptable to the Finnish reality and especially in the sense that little by little a national strategy for domestic violence is conceived as a necessity also in Finland.

4. Recommendations

- The development of primary prevention programmes, which act at a level of changes in attitudes and their implementation, should be a priority in the development of a national strategy against domestic violence.
- To extend use of MARACs all over the country and in addition to MARAC develop perpetrator programmes to where police can refer.
- The role of the police but also that of the Prosecutor's office must take more importance in a strategy that aims at tackling IPV. As Strand and Petersson state: if society more clearly identifies IPV within the criminal justice system then more targeted treatments can be used, as well as sentencing perpetrators to specific IPV treatments as part of the legal sanctions.
- Decision-making centers at national as well as European level should take into consideration that working with perpetrators is essential for reducing IPV. The application of Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention is a necessity.