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Preventing domestic violence with Men and Boys: Challenges and Opportunities

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Coping with Violent Behaviour and Perpetrators in Spain

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Abstract:

Men and boys in the Spanish regulation about gender-based violence are poorly present, limited to potential target individuals of educational interventions or perpetrators. However, there is a growing interest in promoting gender-based violence protective competences among young and adolescents through educational interventions addressed to both, women and men. *Lights4Violence*, a European project to promote healthy relationships among adolescents, is an example of this type of educational interventions. There are also emerging experiences of perpetrators' treatments with uncertain results. It is recommended the promotion of strategies with a multisectorial approach, which implies the coordinated responses of different relevant sectors (social services, education, health sector...) to improve both, educational interventions and treatments towards men, boys and/or perpetrators. Policies and strategies with a multidimensional approach are also needed due to the unequal distribution of the risk of gender-based violence among population's social groups. Developing networks between the different involved formal sectors and civil society (related to gender violence where men are part of or related with youth, migrants, minority ethnic, sexual diversity groups) can be key to achieve the active participation of men and boys into the design, implementation and evaluation of gender-based violence prevention programmes.

1. Violent Behaviour and Perpetrators in the Spanish Regulation

In the Spanish Context, the Organic Law 1/2004 on Integral Protection Against Gender Violence in Spain, which was enacted by the national parliament in 2004 (1), is the main legal instrument for the prevention and coping with Gender-based Violence against women. It has been reinforced by different action plans, the last one was the National Agreement of the Need of Urgent Measures to cope with Gender Violence against Women of 2018 (2). In both types of policies, gender-based violence is recognised as a manifestation of discrimination and the result of inequality of power relations between women and men who are (or have been) their intimate partners or who have been linked to them through affective relationships, even without cohabitation (1). Generally, the explicit mention to men is mainly focused to

educational interventions, legal sanctions and perpetrators' treatments in them. The following sectors are involved in these types of measures and interventions:

Educational sector. It is encouraged to promote gender equity values and attitudes against different forms of gender violence among women and men in different stages. The promotion of gender equity is integrated in the curricula of primary, secondary and university level. This strategy was introduced in the Gender Violence Law of 2004 and reinforced in the National Agreement Against Gender Violence of 2018.

Mass media. The Gender Violence Law of 2004 recognised the relevance of involving mass media to prevent discrimination against women and protect and promote gender equity among women and men. An observatory of gender equality in the media was, in fact, created to be in charge of these responsibilities and complaints made by citizens of sexism publicity and media contents.

Judicial system and the police. A great amount of coercive measures is included in the current gender violence regulations in Spain. Male perpetrators are mainly mentioned among these measures. Psychological treatments are also part of these measures, which are mostly addressed to those who have been condemned, with an explicit but not exclusive mention to those who have been sent to prison.

Health sector. Health professionals, women and men, are encouraged to be trained to detect cases of victims of gender violence and coordinate with the other involved sectors. A National Health Protocol to manage gender violence and intimate partner violence against women was approved in Spain in 2012 (3). In this protocol, it was included a short section related to the obligation of health professionals to offer perpetrator's treatments to those who have been condemned and/or were seeking this type of support to prevent violence behaviour. These measures have been poorly addressed since then.

2. Current Policy debate about Gender-based Violence Preventive measures

Nowadays, there are several "hot topics" related to our current Gender-based Violence Regulations, but neither of them are explicitly focusing on the need of involving men and boys in gender violence prevention strategies with the exception of an emerging debate about the need of early educational interventions to promote positive relationships and personal skills to solve problems without violence. In relation to this educational interventions, the need of promoting positive masculinities is still weakly addressed.

One of the most recent issue in these days is about the need to reinforce the legal sanctions against sexual depredators. In 2016, during "San Fermín" party in Pamplona (Navarra, Spain), four guys, including a policeman, raped a girl. This case

was extensively covered by different means of mass media not only because its severity, but also because during the judgment, the girl was accused of being exaggerating. For the perpetrators, what happened was just a “party” among adults. In the first judicial sentence, the judges seemed to agree with the rapists because they considered that there had been no violation since the victim did not explicitly deny the sexual relations with accused. The defence took the case to the Supreme Court supported by a wave of social protests throughout Spain. The ruling of the Supreme Court did recognise the violations to which the woman was subjected, as well as the need to review the training and sensibilisation of Spanish judges on cases of sexual abuse. After this event, Spanish mass media has released other cases of gang rapes that alert about the emergence of these types of predatory behaviours even among adolescents. The most recent one occurred in Valencia (Valencian Community, Spain) the first week of August 2019.

The National Agreement of Urgent Measures to cope with Gender Violence against Women of 2018 reinforced the importance of preventing such violence through educational interventions. They have been more focused on promoting gender equality and the rejection attitudes towards violence against women, but there is an increasing awareness about the need of transforming hegemonic masculinities and coping with biased perceptions about intimate relationships (including sexual behaviour). In these measures, girls and boys are considered both, potential victims and perpetrators, as well as good bystanders in cases of intimate partner violence among their peers.

Unfortunately, there is also an increasing debate about the need of including “men” as potential victims and then, recognised them as right subjects in the Spanish Gender Violence Law. This debate has been promoted by political forces that deny the existence of gender violence, gender inequalities and gender discrimination in our society. In these backlashed forces, there is an intention to reduce gender violence as an act of violence behaviour against anyone, women or men.

3. Promising experiences

Public health research and interventions have begun to focus on positive health - actions in health sector which focus on so called “health assets” or on what individuals, families and communities can do to increase their level of control over and improvement of their health (4). This model of positive health emphasises the origins of good health and has become a point of departure for the development of health promotion interventions (5-7).

Programmes have been carried out in both the educational and social contexts that focus both on primary prevention (directed at the whole population) and secondary prevention (directed at youth at risk, such as children of women affected by gender violence) focused on gender violence in young people and adolescents. These programmes focus on training on incidence and prevalence of violence, myths, power,

traditional gender roles, and resources available for victims and perpetrators (8,9). Evaluations of these interventions show significant changes in the risks of physical, psychological and sexual violence in both boys and girls (10-13).

The European Commission project, “Lights, Camera and Action Against Dating Violence [*Lights4Violence*] (14), a research action funded by the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers Rights, Equality and Citizen Violence Against Women Programme 2016, under the grant agreement number 776905, for the period 2017-2019. This initiative shares some of the above-mentioned elements, but its objectives relate to the promotion of protective factors (or assets) to prevent gender violence. These assets are related to the capacity for communication, empathy, pro-social abilities, anger management, perspective taking and non-violent conflict resolution (15). In this sense, it uses a model for positive youth development, centred on individual, family and community efforts to improve and gain control over health (16). The model emphasises youth strengths, stressing the development of capacities (personal, moral, cognitive, conceptual and social) that support young people in resisting risk factors, and reducing or confronting behavioural problems such as drug use, risky sexual relationships, antisocial behaviours and depression problems (17). These capacities are related to resources and assets that provide the necessary support and experiences to avoid and deal with risky situations, or to reduce their severity or consequences when they take place (18).

To our knowledge, there are no studies that evaluate dating violence prevention programmes aimed at promoting protective assets in young people with the focus on positive youth development. The results obtained in the programmes focused on youth violence and bullying are promising (19). Active participation and the use of tools that appeal to young people, such as video and short films, are also characteristics that help address health assets, given their role in motivating young people to adopt a more active role in carrying out the programme activities (20).

4. Opportunities and Challenges for transferability

As it was mentioned above, the role of men and boys in the prevention of gender violence against women is currently understood in Spain in a similar way as it is proposed in the Discussion Paper about “Preventing domestic violence with men and boys: challenges and opportunities”. There is a growing interest in promoting positive masculinities and intimate relationships among young and adolescents through educational interventions addressed to both, women and men; there are also experiences of perpetrators’ treatments with uncertain results (21). In this context, enabling the active participation of health professionals and the health sector may be key not only to provide these treatments, but also to detect violent thinking and behaviour among adolescents and adult population. They have a key position to detect, inform and coordinate with other sectors in relation with this theme (22).

As it was mentioned in the discussion paper, women and men involved in violent relationships are not a homogenous group. It was mentioned in relation to the need of distinguishing between men who want to change their attitudes and behaviour toward women than those who don't. This is a priority in understanding the risk of gender violence against women, too. As it has been evidenced worldwide, the likelihood of gender violence against women is social-patterned (23). The risk of femicide among migrants is, for example, five times higher than natives in Spain (24). Women with children, without employment, exposed to previous family violence or who belong to an ethnic minority group are also at higher risk of intimate partner violence in Europe (25, 26). Therefore, we need to include the social circumstances in the design of preventive measures at any level (primary, secondary and tertiary level).

Gender Violence against women programmes need the active participation of the whole society. Political, social and legal initiatives have been usually promoted and led by women's groups. This issue explains, for example, why in those countries where the gender parity is higher, the risk of femicide registered lower rates (27). However, men should also be part of the social forces to tackle gender violence against women. In order to do that, it is necessary to continue researching and implementing interventions in the educational sector as well as training male and female professionals from different sectors, including the educational, judicial, mass media, police and health sector –primary health care, hospitals and specialist care centres. In Spain, the awareness about this issue among boys and men is increasing due to the above-mentioned cases of gang rapes, femicide cases and the emerging experiences of positive relationships promotion programmes addressed to young girls and boys.

5. Recommendations: the need of a multidimensional and multisectorial participative approach.

The risk of gender violence against women and the access to available support services for battered women are social-pattered. Effective strategies to eradicate this problem need a multidimensional and multisectorial approach focused in dismissing the social inequalities in the distribution of gender-based violence risk and promoting the participation of different key sectors. The active participation of boys and men in the design of policies and interventions with both approaches can be also strategic to generate more effective responses, as it is explained below:

1. **The need of a multidimensional approach.** This approach is based on the principle of “equity and health in all policies” and includes the prevention of gender-based violence through addressing socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions. It also implies the integration of gender violence

prevention with men and boys at all levels of health policy: legislation, plans, and other structures that facilitate measures such as protocols for a healthcare responses, early detection of violent behaviours and/or intersectorial committees.

2. **The importance of promoting multisectoral responses.** Gender Violence primary (educational interventions), secondary (early detection of both, victims and violent behaviours among boys and men) and tertiary prevention (rehabilitation programmes for males who have been condemned) strategies and programmes need the coordinated response from different relevant sectors: social services, educational professionals and health services, among others. Health sector and professionals may have a key role in these different levels of gender violence prevention but they need to be coordinated with other key sectors. In order to strengthen cooperation between the health system and other sectors, mechanisms should be put in place that enable this coordination and make it binding, thus promoting ownership.
3. **Promoting men and boys social participation.** Social participation is defined as an active involvement of individuals, communities or community-based organisations in the design, implementation, management or evaluation of services, programmes and/or interventions. Educating or informing individuals or groups or consulting them to gain support for actions already decided could not be considered active participation (28). It includes, for example, promoting networks between the different involved formal sectors and civil society (related to gender violence where men are part of or related with youth, migrants, minority ethnic, sexual diversity groups) and developing channels to foster the involvement of men and boys into the design, implementation and evaluation of gender violence prevention programmes.

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