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Preventing domestic violence with Men and Boys: Challenges and Opportunities


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Justice



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Preventing Domestic Violence

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Abstract:

Protection of domestic violence victims and assistance to victims has significantly improved over the last 5 years in Latvia – there are opportunities to obtain temporary protection from violence, and adult victims of violence (including perpetrators) have access to state-funded rehabilitation. Latvia does not currently have a unified national policy on preventing violence against women and domestic violence; Latvia has signed, but has not ratified the Istanbul Convention. Interinstitutional cooperation should be improved to reduce domestic violence and to enable victims to receive effective need-based assistance. The draft law “Law on Protection of Persons Subjected to Violence and Risk of Violence” has been drafted; work on a new policy-planning document on children and family policy is ongoing.

1. Relevant country context

Domestic violence against women is common in Latvia. According to the study carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2012 entitled “Violence against Women: EU-wide Survey”, 39% of female respondents in Latvia have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life after reaching the age of 15 years (Violence against Women: EU-wide Survey, 2014; Informative Report on Incidents of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, its Prevalence and Dynamics in 2016). This indicator exceeds the EU average of 33%. 32% of female responders report being victims of physical and/or sexual abuse by their partner (husband or boyfriend, i. e. domestic violence) at least once since the age of 15 years. The Latvian indicator is the highest in the EU (the indicator this high is only in Denmark).

Researchers at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2014) estimated that the expenses associated with partner violence against women in Latvia could reach € 442 million per year. The expenses include the victim's sick leave certificates, disability benefit, rehabilitation services, repeated visits by the police and emergency medical services teams, hospital bills. Long-term rehabilitation is required to mitigate the effects of violence, as violence causes both physical and mental health issues, such as depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, sleep disorders, etc. (Guidelines for Prevention and Risk Management of Gender-based Violence, 2014), which affect the victim's quality of life and ability to work.

Pursuant to the Regulation (EU) No 606/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 June 2013, the amendments to the Laws of the Republic of Latvia

(Cabinet Regulation No. 161 “Procedures for Preventing Violence Threats and Provision of Temporary Protection against Violence”), which stipulates that violence victims can obtain temporary protection against violence¹. (). Victims of domestic violence were much more vulnerable until 2014, frequently due to economic reasons (the place of residence was owned by the abuser), and lack of support from state and municipal bodies was an obstacle for women to seek help. The decision to isolate an abuser is taken by the State Police (for up to 8 days) or the court (for up to 30 days).

Decisions by the State Police to isolate the abuser since 2014, when 91 decisions were made, have increased on an annual basis (except for 2015, when 72 decisions were made) (Ziemele, 2018), reaching 184 decisions in 2016, 695 in 2017, and as many as 788 decisions in 2018. The court decisions on abuser’s isolation have also increased from year to year: 337 decisions in 2014, 554 in 2015, 631 in 2016, 817 in 2017, and 897 decisions in 2018. The data suggest that the opportunity to obtain temporary protection against violence has been seized more frequently.

In 2017, the State Police set the fight against domestic violence as one of their priorities (Public Report 2017 of the State Police, 2018) which indicates the topicality of the issue and its prevalence. The analysis of the decisions on abuser isolation made by the police in 2018 (Public Report 2018 of the State Police, 2019.) indicates that, similarly to the previous years, victims are mostly women, and the abuser is the husband (229), partner (308) or son (128). Healthcare professionals along with the specialists working in the law enforcement and social areas play key role in reducing the incidence of domestic violence (Allen, M., Perttu S., 2010). There are no uniform and legally approved guidelines for healthcare professionals in Latvia enabling them to address and assess the potential domestic violence risks when providing health care; there is no unified procedure for healthcare professionals to report domestic violence to law enforcement and/or social professionals, however, guidelines have been developed for healthcare professionals on work with women, possible victims of domestic violence (Domestic Violence, 2009), training for general practitioners and nurses have been organised (SAFEGE Baltija, 2018).

The legislation (Cabinet Regulations No. 338 “Requirements for Social Service Providers” issued pursuant to Section 17 (2) of the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance and Section 37 (7) of the Protection of the Rights of the Child Law) stipulates risk assessment criteria used by social workers in their daily work, also when assessing domestic violence between adults. Professionals who use risk assessment criteria in their daily work have repeatedly stated that the risk assessment criteria should be revised, as the criteria included do not reflect the real situation, their application is time-consuming, but the response to domestic violence situations should be prompt and effective.

¹ See: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=265314#>

State-funded rehabilitation programmes for victims have been provided in Latvia since 2014 (SAFECE Baltija, 2018). The number of adult victims of violence who have obtained rehabilitation has increased from 127 in 2014 to 294 in 2017. 353 adults obtained rehabilitation in 2018. The fact that the number of domestic violence victims who have been injured and sought healthcare facilities has decreased from year to year should be assessed positively (SAFECE Baltija, 2018), however, this decline should be treated with caution, as individuals may not apply to healthcare facilities. Significant work in the field of prevention of violence against women, support and rehabilitation for domestic violence victims has been carried out by the Centrs MARTA, which aims to promote gender equality and protect women's interests and rights (Articles of Association, 2017). In 2018, 388 women obtained assistance, including 264 women for the first time. In 2017, Centrs MARTA provided assistance to 392 persons, mostly women. Centrs MARTA provides assistance to domestic violence victims within the programme "State-funded social rehabilitation services for adult victims of violence".

A free hotline for victims of crime has been available in Latvia since 2016; its activities are coordinated by the Skalbes Crisis and Counselling Centre, which actively cooperates with state and municipal institutions in the field of domestic violence prevention.²

State-funded rehabilitation has been available to abusers since 2015. Perpetrators can attend both individual psychologist counselling sessions (10 sessions) and group sessions (15-16 sessions, and 3 additional individual sessions a year) run by a specially trained social worker and psychologist³. The number of perpetrators undergoing rehabilitation increased from 60 in 2014 to 304 in 2017 (SAFECE Baltija, 2018). The opportunities offered by the state to undergo rehabilitation for persons who have committed violence have been used more frequently every year, however, the ex-post assessment of the Family State Policy Guidelines 2011-2017 indicates that the rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators have been poorly applied, the impact of the intervention and improvement of these programmes had not been assessed until 2017 (SAFECE Baltija, 2018).

The State Probation Service applies programmes based on CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) principles in their work with abusers. The probation programmes provided by the State Probation Service involved 518 clients in 2018 and 655 in 2017, over 400 clients in the previous two years. Social correction programmes "Development of Respectful Relationships", "Emotion Management", etc. were provided in 2018; they are intended not only for abusers, but for a wider audience as well. Young people are offered the programme "Ready! Steady! Start!". Sex offenders

² <https://www.cietusajiem.lv/lv/>

³ See: http://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=81553;
<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/271251-socialas-rehabilitacijas-pakalpojumu-sniegšanas-kartiba-no-vardarbibas-cietusam-un-vardarbibu-veikusam-pilngadigam-personam->

are provided with Thames Valley Sex Offender Teamwork Programme (for community service) and Programme for monitoring and supervising sex offenders (for work in prison). The Violence Prevention Programme was introduced in prison in 2019. The State Probation Service plans to carry out an evaluation of the implemented programmes, which will be available in 2022. (State Probation Service. Public Report 2018, 2019).

2. Policy debate

Latvia does not currently have a unified national policy on preventing violence against women and domestic violence. The draft law “Law on Protection of Persons Subjected to Violence and Risk of Violence” has been drafted (Violence Prevention Policy in Latvia. Analytical overview, 2019; <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/tap/?pid=40426458>). The purpose of the draft law is to establish and improve cooperation between state and municipal bodies, healthcare practitioners and non-governmental organisations in order to ensure protection of persons from domestic violence, and to prevent risks of violence, recurrent violence and deaths caused by such violence.

The Ministry of Welfare⁴ has not set work in the field of violence prevention as a priority for 2017-2019.. However, one of the directions established in the Cabinet Order No. 298 “On the Roadmap for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2018–2020”⁵ provides reducing the prevalence of gender-based violence. The Ministry of Welfare is in charge of the roadmap implementation. There are a number of measures to reduce the prevalence of violence – promoting zero tolerance of violence against women in the society and strengthening the professional capacity of specialists involved in reducing and preventing violence. In order to implement the planned measures, social work methodology for violence victims and abusers will be developed by the end of 2020⁶. The social campaign (Campaign, 2017) “Domestic violence among relatives and neighbours hits you too” has been carried out to promote more active and responsive behaviour of the society and people in case of violence against women.

There are currently no guidelines for family policy in Latvia, but work on a new policy planning document in the field of children and family policy will continue this year and in the first half of 2020 (SAFEGE Baltija, 2018). The operation of a new policy-planning document in the field of children and family policy is planned for 2021.

3. Good practice examples

⁴ http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/pielikums/prioritates_2017_2019.pdf

⁵ http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/dzimumu_lidztiesiba/dokumenti_un_tiesibu_akti/lmpl_29052018.pdf

⁶ http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/dzimumu_lidztiesiba/dokumenti_un_tiesibu_akti/lmpl_29052018.pdf

On 1 February 2017, the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with their partners – the State Police and Association Centrs MARTA, and associate partners – the Ministry of Justice and Latvian Association of Rural General Practitioners – started a co-funded project “A Step Closer: Unified Community Response to Violence against Women”. The project aims to develop, test and implement a multisectoral, victim-centred institutional cooperation model in cases of violence against women – a unified response model of the Community. The tools (risk assessment questionnaire and operational guidelines) were developed within the project and were offered to specialists to enable them to respond effectively to victims' needs. A pilot project was launched in Tukums Municipality (2017): risk assessment questionnaires were developed and used in the police practice when receiving reports on domestic violence⁷, other measures were put in place: the victim is interviewed separately from the abuser during the involvement of the police; they learn to distinguish and identify different types of violence; they provide information to the victim in writing (one copy of the risk assessment questionnaire is given to the victim); the questionnaires are sent to the social service. Following the Tukums pilot project, the practice was tested in 5 other municipalities in 2018. One of the conclusions of the project was that next step is: state-funded rehabilitation must be mandatory for perpetrators. Standardised institutional cooperation model for cases of violence against women is ready to be implemented country wide, but if there is no decision from Latvian Government for it, the municipalities, who was involved in project testing, voluntary will continue to implement some elements of cooperation in their daily work.

In 2017-2018 Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with association «Streetbasket» (or Ghetto Games) and Skalbes Crisis and Counselling Centre was conducting project “Building comprehension of zero tolerance of violence against women “Violence like silence””.⁸ Project associated partners were Ministry of Education and Sciences and Legal aid administration. One of project activities was social campaign for violence prevention against woman in youth. To encourage young woman and girls speak about violence was made video clips and girls was involved in street sport activities. After project number of girls, who participate in street sport games, was tripled.

On 14 August 2019, a one-month pilot project was launched in Liepāja to help victims of domestic violence.⁹ Assistance will be provided to victims of domestic violence who have been placed under the control of the state or local police after the involvement of the police. The project will involve Liepāja branch of the Centrs MARTA, the State Police, Liepāja City Municipal Police, Social Service, and, in cases the family has minor children, the Orphan's Court.

⁷ http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/sociala_ieklausana/a/projekts_soli-tuvak_11.10.2017_1.pdf;
http://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/?option=com_content&view=article&layout=edit&id=91241

⁸ http://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82296

⁹ <https://www.liepaja.lv/mekles-labakus-risinajumus-lai-sniegtu-palidzibu-gimenes-vardarbiba-cietusajiem/>

Centrs MARTA provides group sessions for children and teenagers (12-18 years of age). The aim of the sessions is to challenge the stereotypes prevailing in the society about gender roles,; during these sessions, young people learn to recognise violence and learn to build equal, respectful relationships.¹⁰ Centrs MARTA has launched an initiative for men's engagement – the Forum “Rise” which aims to engage men in reflecting over and discussing gender issues.¹¹

In 2019, the Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism *Re:Baltica*¹² published a series of articles and stories on domestic violence, urging victims of violence not to remain silent and seek assistance, raising awareness of this issue in the wider community.

4. Transferability aspects

Primary prevention programmes should be applied in Latvia – educate children and young people at school, focusing on the issues of gender equality, challenge the perceptions of gender roles, masculinity. Potential difficulties are related to the possibility to engage a sufficient number of students throughout the country; primary prevention programmes should be evidence-based.

The practice in the violence prevention should be applied in Latvia, which would significantly improve assistance to the victim if the police officers carry out risk assessment. Risk assessment has been carried out under the pilot project in several municipalities, but it is not stipulated in legislation. Similarly to Sweden, in Latvia, when assessing risks, social workers and police officers (as part of a pilot project) currently evaluate different aspects, thus it would be necessary to introduce a common risk assessment system.

The practice that should be transferred from Sweden is related to engagement of violent men in prevention programmes that are specifically adapted to abusers, i. e., assuming that men who are abusive to their partner are not a homogeneous group and have different needs. It should also be taken into consideration that different approaches are required when working with a man who is abusive only towards his partner and a man who is generally abusive.

There is no helpline for men in Latvia, which is an initiative to be supported in Latvia.

5. Recommendations

At the national level:

¹⁰ <http://www.marta.lv/marta-darbiba/jauniesu-projekti/>

¹¹ <http://marta.lv/forums-celies-par-forumu>

¹² <https://rebaltica.lv/2019/04/ludzu-tikai-nesit-pa-acim/>

- Ratify the Istanbul Convention. In May 2016, Latvia signed but has not yet ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).
- Redesigning risk assessment criteria to adapt them to the real situations in order to improve awareness of violence and plan interventions to prevent violence as soon as possible.
- Improve interinstitutional cooperation in the field of domestic violence prevention by developing and adopting regulatory acts establishing a cooperation model for social, healthcare and law enforcement professionals.
- Crisis helplines and helplines for victims of crime are available in Latvia, but there is no helpline for abusers.

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