



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Measures to fight
violence against women
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Comments Paper - Norway



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Comments to Discussion papers from Spain and Ireland

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1. Introduction

Norway is a relatively small country with a low level of violence. According to Statistics Norway about five per cent of the population is subject to violence each year, and this has proved to be relatively constant over the last 30 years. The Norwegian national study on Gender Based Violence - GBV (Haaland, Clausen, and Schei 2005) shows, however, that the occurrence of violence is higher among people who rely on state support and have low education. Men are more exposed to violence in public spaces from wholly or partially unknown men, while women are mostly victims of violence at home or near to home.

There may be several reasons for the low rate of violence, one of them will for sure be the long tradition for comparative social and economic equality and a social welfare state dedicated to generating welfare for the whole population. There has been an increasing attention to GBV in Norway in the last decades, and today there are several institutions (national and local), NGOs and other working to prevent GBV. The main activities are listed below:

- 46 crises centres all over the country (from 2010 by law)
- 22 centres against incest and sexual assault
- Several centres and treatment programmes for perpetrators, where Alternative to Violence (ATV) was the first specialised treatment centre in Europe, and is the largest and most successful with ten centres nationwide and international educational programmes
- 5 Regional Resource Centres for Violence, Traumatic Stress and Suicide Prevention (RVTS) in five different regions of Norway
- The first National Action plan against GBV was launched in 1983, and since then several others, the last one launched in 2012: Action plan against violence in intimate relationships
- Several local action plans on municipal level
- Different research programmes sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council
- Activities to strengthen the competence of the police and the judicial system when it comes to GBV
- A white paper on GBV (Meld. St. 15, 2012-13) presented March 8th 2013 (see next chapter)

The Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) published in 2011 two different reports on violence in Norway. The report *Violence prevention in Norway* provides an overview of interventions intended to prevent violence in Norway, with an emphasis on organisations, working methods and target groups (Saur, Hustad & Heir 2011). The report *Research and education on prevention of violence* presents 24 different research and development projects in Norway related to the prevention of violence in close relationship (Saur, Hjemdal & Heir 2011). Both reports are available on net.

2. Policy debates and measures

March 8th this year the Norwegian Government presented its first white paper on GBV, *Forebygging og bekjempelse av vold i nære relasjoner: Det handler om å leve. (Preventing and combating violence in intimate relationship)*¹

The white paper underpins the presence of GBV in Norway and the necessity to take it seriously even in “the most gender equal country of the world”. The main goal of the paper is to broaden the competence and improve the coordination of the different activities to better prevent GBV. Some of the important premises for the paper are the acceptance that there are huge varieties in the forms of violence, that there are several explanations for the occurrence of violence, and that the perpetrators differ a lot.

Both the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and a focus on perpetrators and intervention programmes are important parts of the white paper. The paper will be followed up by a new action plan for the period 2014-2017.

Recently as a part of the police debate there has been an intensive discussion in media about sexual assault and rape. The reason for this is a combination of several incidences of rape the last years, too few sentenced and a proposal to strengthen the law paragraph on rape, including the necessity to have a clear consent to have sex. The Norwegian Government presented its first action plan against rape June 2012.²

3. Transferability issues

3.1. Comments to Spain

The paper “The use of ICT in the fight against gender-based violence in Spain” by Gerardo Meil describes new possibilities of preventing violence through the use of new technology. There are clearly transferability possibilities and relevance for other EU countries. There is a number of activities in the area in Norway that are relevant for the Spanish paper.

¹ Meld. St. 15 (2012-13): <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/jd/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2012-2013/meld-st-15-20122013.html?id=716442>

² http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/jd/dok/rapporter_planer/planer/2012/handlingsplan-mot-voldtekt-2012-2014.html?id=691821

- Helpline and Website

The first crises telephone lines were launched in the 70s, and helplines have been an important measure in the fight against GBV since then. After the new national law on crises centres in Norway from 2010 all the local communities have to provide a helpline open 24 hours all year around.

It was a clear conclusion in a report from NKVTS from 2012 that more systematic information on net is needed. Today it is outspread and one has to search different places to find it. The government have therefore recently decided to open a new website with all necessary information. When and how is still open for debate.

- Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide (SARA)

Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide (SARA) is a tool that the police can use to evaluate risk factors for future serious spousal violence. The SARA checklist is designed to ensure that all information resources have been consulted, and the instrument has a score form to screen for risk factors of spousal assault so that preventive measures can be taken.

SARA has been tested in 2011/2012 in two police districts and will be gradually implemented in all police districts in Norway as from 2013.

- Mobile violence alarm

On 1 January 2004 the police initiated a nation-wide system of mobile violence alarms. Used in combination with other measures, like ban of visit (restraining order) mobile violence alarms are intended to give persons under threat of violence greater freedom of movement and help to prevent violence and threats.

The alarm system is based on two geographical positioning systems (GPS and GSM) to ensure that the police can locate the person under threat as accurately as possible. When the alarm is triggered, the person concerned can communicate directly with the police operations centre. To ensure that the alarms are used effectively in every police district, the Directorate of Police has drawn up special guidelines for the provision of mobile violence alarms.

Special information brochure and instruction manuals have also been prepared for the threat victim. As of February 2013, a total of approximately 1,800 alarms were in operation.

- Electronic monitoring of violent offenders

In May 2009, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice proposed a legal amendment that authorises the use of electronic monitoring of a ban on contact or visit. At this point it is only allowed for the use of electronic monitoring of offenders as part of a sentence. The measure is in line with the perspective that insists that the abuser must take responsibility for his acts and that it is the abuser – and not the victim – who must bear those consequences, in that his freedom of movement is restricted.

There have been some difficulties in finding a technical solution that satisfies the requirements set by the police. The project was completed in December 2012 and the law entered into force 1 February 2013.

The perpetrator will be fitted with an electronic tagging device, which in the event of breach of a restraining order will trigger an alarm at the police station. The system uses 3-way cellular, landline and RF communication as well as GPS tracking in order to monitor the aggressor and alert the victim and monitoring centre. The system creates user-defined restricted zones, where upon an aggressor's entry a breach of terms alert is distributed. There are also warning zones for the victims, for the purpose of notifying them of the aggressor's presence in the area. All alerts are communicated in real time to the police.

3.2. Comments to Ireland

In the paper "Domestic Violence Perpetrator Intervention Programmes" John Devaney discusses both theoretical and ideological approaches to the work with perpetrators as well as concrete elements of good practice. Ireland has a long tradition for working with perpetrators and good experiences with different forms of intervention that surely are transferable and relevant for most countries in Europe.

I will first make some critical reflections on the premises of the paper, before I go into the concrete methods for working with perpetrators.

Too much time for too long a period has been used to discuss the relevance of working with perpetrators of GBV. An on-going ideological battle has in many instances hindered an effective establishing of treatment programmes, and a more vigorous European effort to prevent GBV. It is hard to understand why violence to such a large degree has this ideological superstructure, which is very different from other health or social issues, and why ideology have been able to suppress empirical findings and real experiences from the field. I beg for less ideology and more empirical studies to be learnt from.

Two of the preconceptions in the Ireland paper are problematic: that domestic violence is based in gender inequality and oppression of women; and that it is crosscutting all social standings. Here we have to be more nuanced. Gender inequality and oppression of women is one of several possible reasons for GBV, and violence against women may affect women from all social stratus, but not equally. Let me put forward some arguments from Norwegian studies.

The quantitative most widespread form of domestic violence, the episodically violence, is almost equally distributed between the two genders (Pape & Stefansen 2004, Haaland et.al 2005, Meld. St. 15 (2012-2013)). This type of violence is often conflict related and episodic and not a form of a systematic abuse. This does not mean that it cannot be dangerous or serious. But if we want to work with this form of violence we have to work with both men and women, as most of the programmes in Norway now do.

Studies show that even if GBV may happen among all classes of society, the occurrence of violence is higher among people with other social problems, for example among people who rely on state support and have low education (Pape & Stefansen 2004, Haaland et.al 2005, Saur et.al 2011). Violence is not only a gendered problem it is also a social problem.

A new study about men in treatment from Alternative to violence (ATV) shows that men with a problem with aggression and violent behaviour have experienced violence in their own life. I quote from the report: "Half of the men had experienced emotional neglect, seven out of ten had experienced emotional abuse and almost eight out of ten had experienced physical abuse from parents, other relatives and/or others. Two out of ten had been sexually abused" (Askeland et.al 2012). If we shall be able to establish successful treatment centres we have to take these psychological dimensions into account, and be able to recognise the life stories of these men. So far ATV has not done any studies on the female offenders in their programmes.

These are three out of several points indicating that perpetrators of domestic violence are a heterogeneous group, as John Devaney underlines in his paper (p.11), and we need approaches to work with them all if we want to reduce GBV. I agree with Devaney on several of the concrete arguments and measures in the work with perpetrators:

- Ideological based group work is less successful
- There need to be a range of disparate programmes
- Programmes should be offered to both men and women
- Individual as well as group therapy for a longer period is necessary
- Perpetrators programme should be available nationwide
- Most programmes should be self-referral
- There need to be equal amount of resources put into treatment to stop men/women using violence as to rescue women/men from abusive behaviour

A short comment to chapter 6 of the Irish discussion paper which suggests issues for further debate: almost all the programmes in Norway are voluntary and based on self-referral. This is a difference from most Irish and other programmes, and I think this is one important reason why there is less drop-out and a better outcome in the Norwegian programmes. ATV and NKVTS are now conducting a broad study on men in treatment for violent behaviour, a study that will be finalised in 2014. Reports will be published regularly, and I will recommend everybody to look out for these important reports on treatment programmes.

4. References

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