



## WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE

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### **Position Paper – October 2012**

#### **Safety & Support for Survivors as a Core Standard for Perpetrator Programs**

The support and protection of survivors of violence has to constitute the first priority for states in their policies to prevent and eliminate violence against women. All survivors have the right to protection and support, and a network of specialised services for women should be established in every country in order to guarantee these basic rights. Women have the right to stay in a relationship - this is a personal decision that has to be respected - and the right to live free of violence. They also have the right to leave the violent partner and not to experience further violence. Therefore, it is the state's obligation to prevent violent partners from committing further violence.

Perpetrator-related interventions are necessary to stop the violence and change violent behaviour. The term perpetrator-related interventions refers to any measures aimed at preventing somebody from committing further violence (e.g. reporting the violence, arresting or evicting the perpetrator from the home, barring and restraining orders under which the perpetrator has to stay away from the survivor, convictions, probation time and probation work, as well as programs for violent men). Thus, perpetrator programs are only one part of perpetrator related interventions and should never be the only measure. Comprehensive measures to prevent violence are necessary, but they have to prioritise the safety of survivors and have to be coordinated by women's support services in order to reach the goal of preventing violence against women.

The long-term research by Gondolf (2002) has shown that "the system matters" if perpetrator programs are to be effective: the better the program is integrated in a well-functioning intervention system, the quicker the system can react to situations such as participants dropping out of a program or reoffending, the better the overall success rate of programs. Accordingly, perpetrator programs should not be carried out in isolation, but should be part of a coordinated response of all agencies involved in the prevention of violence against women and their children.

The aforementioned research also showed that the women's opinion regarding their risk of re-victimisation is definitely related to the actual repetition of violence. It is

therefore very important to listen to the survivor, to include victim support in the work with perpetrators and to focus on the experiences and the safety of survivors. The safety of survivors is also a priority issue in international standards for perpetrator programs, such as standards of the program RESPECT operating in the United Kingdom.

Support programs for survivors run by specialist women's services should be an integral part of perpetrator programs and need to have extra-funding. Close co-operation between staff supporting survivors and staff running the perpetrator training, regular information exchange, repeat danger assessment and safety planning need to be standard procedures in running perpetrator programs.

Women's shelters and other women's services must have a leading position in the work with perpetrators because they work closely with survivors every day and can rely on many years of experience regarding the forms, the patterns, the impact of abuse and the strategies that abusive men use to exercise power and control over their female partners.

Perpetrator programmes should be based on a gender-specific approach, recognising that violence by men is not an individual problem but "a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement" (United Nations, 1993).

Standards for perpetrator programmes:

- The protection and support of survivors should always have priority, as long as there is no support for all survivors, a government or municipality should not fund perpetrator programs.
- Perpetrator programs should never be funded through budgets for women and children, but from other sources (the justice sector, crime prevention or defence budgets).
- Perpetrator programs should not work alone or be seen as the only solution. They have to be part of a comprehensive and coordinated intervention system aiming at the protection of survivors and the prevention of further violence.
- Perpetrator programs need to apply a gender-specific approach that recognizes the gendered nature of violence and the root causes of violence against women.
- Men's violence against partners and ex-partners needs to be seen as the abuse of power and control in the context of male dominance.
- Perpetrator programs need to provide support service to every woman whose partner or ex-partner attends a perpetrator programme.
- The support service for survivors has to be an integral part of the perpetrator program, with its own budget, carried out by an independent women's service (women's shelter, women's counselling/crises centre). Survivors are offered

support but they are never obliged to accept it and they can choose what kind of service they need.

- The safety of survivors needs to be the first priority of the program and confidentiality can never supersede safety standards.
- Danger assessment and safety planning with survivors have to be standards procedures.
- Danger assessment and safety measures with perpetrators also have to be standards.
- Joint program management and close cooperation between the survivors' support services and the perpetrator training have to be a standard as part of the safety measures for survivors.
- The perpetrator program needs to be a model of partnership and equal treatment of genders, individuals and agencies.
- The main target groups of perpetrator programs should be perpetrators mandated to attend the training by the justice system, but the obligation to attend a program should be an additional measure to a sentence and not a replacement for it.
- If participants drop out of the program or commit further violence, the intervention system has to respond with clear sanctions, to make sure that perpetrators take serious efforts to change their behaviour.
- Perpetrator programs need to aim at making perpetrators accountable and should start from the basis that violence against women is never justified and that the perpetrator is always the one responsible.
- Tried and tested programs, such as the DAIP or the CHANGE programme (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Dobash & Dobash et al., 2000), should preferably be used rather than "re-inventing the wheel" or using methods that are not adequate such as couples counselling, mediation or family therapy or others.
- Perpetrator programs are not therapy sessions, but a structured social training aiming at changing not only behaviour but also beliefs (such as the belief that it is legitimate for men to hurt women if they do not "behave").
- Perpetrator programs do not only address physical violence, but also other forms like sexual, psychological and economic violence, stalking and the general attempt of violent men to exercise power and control over the partner.
- Perpetrator programs should be carried out in group settings rather than in individual sessions. The groups should work in a module system and should always be open to new participants to avoid long waiting lists.
- Perpetrator programs should last at least 30 sessions. If participants miss sessions, they have to repeat them.
- Survivors need to be offered support throughout the duration of the training period and also for at least 6 months after the end of the training. Support also needs to continue if the perpetrator drops out of the program.
- The facilitators of trainings for perpetrators should include women, as well as men, for participants to learn to respect women.

- The program needs to apply international standards such as those of the RESPECT program.<sup>1</sup>
- All agencies and staff involved in the prevention of violence should follow clear protocols and guidelines to respond adequately and swiftly to violence and to intensify their efforts to protect survivors. Mandatory training of all staff is a standard in all agencies and professions involved.

#### References:

Gondolf, W. Edward. (2002). *Batterer Intervention Systems: Issues, Outcomes and Recommendations*: Thousand Oaks: London/New Delhi.

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United Nations. (1993). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*.

Pence, Ellen and Paymar, Michael. (1993). *Educational Groups for Men who Batter: The Duluth Modell*.

Dobash, Emerson R., Dobash, Russel P., Cavanagh, Kate, and Lewis, Ruth. (2000). *Changing Violent Men*. Thousand Oaks: London/New Delhi.

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<sup>1</sup> RESPECT in the UK is an organisation promoting best practice amongst statutory and independent sector projects, and individual practitioners, trainers and consultants that work with perpetrators of domestic violence and their partners/ex-partners.