

Violent men can change

Dr Ralf Puchert, Executive Director of the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP-EN), explains why shifting the responsibility onto those who are abusive or violent will help keep woman and children safe

The European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP-EN) was formally founded in 2014. Why wasn't the WWP-EN established prior to this?

In the 1980s, the first European programmes working with perpetrators started up, primarily in English- and German-speaking countries and in northern Europe. For a long time, these programmes focused on the start-up and development of this work purely on a national level.

Then in the 2000s, several European research projects on perpetrator work took place. Through meetings and conferences related to these, the need for a European network became apparent. In response to this, and as an indirect result of the research, an informal European network was established.

The network was formalised in 2014, triggered by two factors. Firstly, The Council of Europe's Treaty No. 210 'Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence' came into force on 1 August 2014, following its 10th ratification by Andorra in April of that year. Also called the Istanbul Convention, this stressed the importance of work with perpetrators as a vital part of prevention work. Secondly, the European Commission changed their funding regulations to allow social and political non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and networks to apply for funding when, previously, they had not.

WWP-EN is dedicated to preventing violence and improving the safety of women and children. How would you describe the Network's unique approach?

WWP-EN works to tackle the perpetration of violence in intimate relationships. Most of this work is on men's violence towards women, as gender inequality contributes to the scale of this specific aspect of domestic violence. Domestic violence in other contexts also gets attention within the network but not to same extent, so when I refer to male perpetrators, it is in acknowledgement of this.

The Network's approach is unique as we seek to harmonise and support efforts to prevent further violence and improve safety without advocating a 'one size fits all' approach. Programmes in the European countries are different in tasks, target group, funding, legal basis and in many other aspects and conditions of our work. We believe that, as different countries and organisations, we have much that we can share and learn from each other to improve our work and support each other in doing it.

Members of the WWP-EN Network understand that to improve the safety of women and children in families we have to look at who and what is causing them to be in

danger. It is vitally important to work with perpetrators because domestic abuse or violence will not stop unless those who are carrying it out stop doing it. All too often, those victimised by partners are asked to be responsible for the violence that is targeted against them; for example, people often ask: "Why doesn't she leave?", but not: "Why doesn't he stop abusing?" We do this work because men can reduce the harm they cause to current (or future) partners and children if they get the right intervention. Further, one of the most common requests from victims is for someone to work with the perpetrator in order to stop him from being abusive and keep them safe.

The ultimate aim of working with male perpetrators is to ensure the victims' safety. Are there any specific methods that deliver successful results?

We believe that abusive and/or violent men have the ability to change. As stated in the guidelines, some of the aims of working with male perpetrators should be to help them recognise that they choose to use violence and to help them identify their own discourses of denial and justification. A reconstruction of concrete actions, thoughts and feelings, as well as an exploration of the many different impacts and consequences of their violence towards their partners and children, helps to foster men's empathy, accountability and motivation to change.

The relationship between the facilitator(s) and client is important for creating and enabling change, and, as such, facilitators offer respectful behaviour and attitudes towards their clients. This enables a relationship where a level of thoughtful challenge can happen with a view to creating and maintaining positive behaviour change. This also models positive behaviour that the men can then use in their own relationships.

Assessment and management of risk as a parallel process, and with information from as many sources as possible, is also vital to identify any dangers to female partners and children and act on them whenever necessary.

As part of its mission, WWP-EN collaborates with support services, mainly for women and their children. Could you explain how these partnerships work?

Domestic violence is something that affects us all and every agency has a part to play in tackling it. Therefore, we suggest that member programmes should be an integrated part of an intervention system and actively participate in inter-agency alliances and networks against domestic violence. This approach also ensures that a family is treated consistently by the agencies involved in their lives, for example, that services aren't acting in contradictory ways or not taking the actions they need to in order to ensure safety.



We believe that abusive and/or violent men have the ability to change

These collaborations work in different ways depending on the country and the organisations in question. For example, on the WWP-EN board, victim support organisations play

a key role in our partnership at this strategic level and we also have a strong relationship with women's European organisations such as Women against Violence in Europe (WAVE) network.

In some countries, perpetrator programmes have their own victim services, which will support and safely plan with partners, and give them

information about the programme and a realistic idea of the change that is possible. In other areas, this may be a partnership with a victims' support organisation. Other countries are still establishing those links or working as best they can within their country's legislation. Mapping and supporting best practice in these partnerships will be a focus for us in 2016 and 2017.

In terms of impact, how do you ensure your programmes are effective and make a real difference to people's lives?

We advocate the use of our guidelines to develop standards for programmes, which remains the most visited part of our website. We believe that to find out 'what works for which men under what circumstances' is not a static but an ongoing process, and should take into account the latest research and best practice. As such, these guidelines are due to be updated through 2016 and 2017.

As part of the European Commission's Daphne III programme, funding was acquired for a project on the 'Evaluation of European Perpetrator Programmes'. It started in January 2013 and finished at the end of 2014. The project involved the close co-operation of seven organisations across

various European countries. It produced the Impact toolkit, which is available for programmes to use in six different European languages. The questionnaires help programmes to self-evaluate.

This is done by tracking any changes in police call-outs, behaviour, attitudes and impacts on partners and children, through asking clients and their partners for information at various stages during the intervention. The programme is currently being used online in the UK with a view to further roll it out in other European countries this year. This will eventually give us comparable data across Europe and will help to make programmes more effective as we learn more about what works.

Why is it important to promote research and innovation that focuses on male perpetrators of domestic violence?

Network members know that domestic abuse and violence is not only about men targeting their female partners. Some heterosexual women and those in same sex relationships can be abusive, too. However, members are clear that in the vast majority of cases this is a gender-based phenomenon. Existing European data and research on this issue shows significant effects on women and children in terms of both numbers and impacts. They understand that gender inequality lies at the heart of this issue and that domestic violence is a violation of human rights, which is also in line with the Istanbul Convention. Further, they see that the social constructions of gender contribute to a power imbalance and that these intersect with other social positions such as race, class, nationality and ability. In the work we do, it is vital to address and take into account all of these issues, if we are to be successful in ending domestic violence.

More knowledge will obviously improve the quality and impact of the work we do. Even in the countries where this kind of work has been going for about 30 years, this means that the work is still fairly new in its nature. In some countries, the work is only a few years old. We find that there



are certain similarities about the work we do but there are also many differences between countries, meaning that the work needs to be adapted to each situation, hence our focus on innovation.

On a personal note, which milestone or achievement has been the most rewarding during your term at WWP-EN?

The formalisation of WWP-EN as a network has been my most rewarding achievement to date. The support my work received was excellent and I was grateful for the confidence people had in my vision and actions. This was not only from perpetrator organisations, but also from victim-focused organisations like WAVE, and donors and funders such as the European Commission and the Oak Foundation.

Can you briefly explain how your previous career has led to your current role as Executive Director of WWP-EN?

In the 1980s, I studied social sciences in an institute with a feministic focus. This was an interesting challenge for a male student. A group of us started a men's group to clarify our position and perspective on the development of equality for women. After completing our degrees, we founded an NGO called Dissent with Hegemonic Masculinities (Dissens), which aimed to support gender equality from a male perspective. Our focus was on violence prevention and workplace equality – two major issues. We offered services around social work, qualifications and research. I personally worked mainly as a researcher in this organisation.

In the last 15 years, I have researched the issue of masculinity and violence in very different ways. For instance, I have researched men as perpetrators of violence – but I have also carried out a pilot study about violence against men in Germany. My work focused on the questions: "Does work with perpetrators help to decrease male violence and foster gender equality?" and "How could we disconnect masculinity and violence?" One idea was that the questions were related and that work with perpetrators could help this

THE EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR THE WORK WITH PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

- Founded as a formal organisation on 9 April 2014 in Copenhagen
- Operated as an informal association for eight years prior to 2014
- Has 18 founding members from 13 different countries

'disconnection', and, later on, one offshoot of the research projects on perpetrator work was the founding of WWP-EN. I am very pleased to be able to continue contributing to the promotion of gender equality and prevention of violence through my role at WWP-EN.

With an eye on the future, what plans do you have for the WWP-EN?

I think that better and closer cooperation with victim support organisations is necessary to decrease both the amount and the impact of domestic violence; as such, this will be a key part of our work in 2016 and 2017. WWP-EN would like to expand and strengthen its membership base by attracting more members from more countries. We also aim to help organisations improve the quality of the work by updating the guidelines/standards, and offering training on many issues related to domestic violence perpetrator work. Specifically, we plan to offer more training and support on the use of the Impact toolkit to evaluate programmes and build on the existing European research base.

WWW.WORK-WITH-PERPETRATORS.EU

