

REACT TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR VICTIMS OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**CYPRUS MAPPING STUDY:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND THE EXISTING VICTIM
SUPPORT SYSTEM**

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REACT to Domestic Violence: Building a Support System for victims of Domestic Violence

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1

INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a research project conducted by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) within the framework of the project *REACT to Domestic Violence: Building a Support System for Victims of Domestic Violence*, funded by the European Commission Daphne III Programme, and coordinated by the Legal Informational Centre for NGOs Slovenia (PIC). The project's main aim was to raise awareness, knowledge and sensitivity among legal practitioners, judges and prosecutors involved in domestic violence as well as to increase the capacity of the NGO support system to effectively respond to victim's needs.

This mapping study aims to gain and share knowledge and understanding on domestic violence in Cyprus, as well as to assess all aspects of implementation of the relevant legislation and policies on domestic violence, with a particular focus on the victim support system. The research was conducted from a gender perspective.

The qualitative analysis is based on eight semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with policy makers and government officials from all relevant ministries and government departments, as well as with front line services providers including the police, the social welfare services and non-governmental organisations. The themes addressed in this report include the examination of existing and planned policies to combat domestic violence; challenges relating to the implementation of relevant legislation and policy measures; views and attitudes regarding the situation of domestic violence in Cyprus; as well as recommendations for the improvement of the existing victim support system.

Information was also gathered through the existing National Action Plan on Prevention and Combating Violence in the Family (2010-2015) that was recently adopted by the Council of Ministers. Additionally, police criminal statistics, statistics from the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence, and other studies, such as those conducted by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) and other research centres, were also used for the purposes of this report.

2 THE CASE OF CYPRUS

2.1 Defining Domestic Violence

According to the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action, the term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations 1996:73f.).

Domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women and involves a pattern of abusive and threatening behaviours that may include physical, emotional, economic and sexual violence as well as intimidation, isolation and coercion. The purpose of domestic violence is to establish and exert power and control over another; and men most often use it against their intimate partners, such as current or former spouses, girlfriends, or dating partners.¹ Intimate partner violence is an epidemic of global proportions that has devastating physical, emotional, financial and social effects on women, children, families and communities around the world.

Violence against women is a structural violation of women’s human rights and is recognised as such by international human rights instruments. General Recommendation No. 19 of the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that “Gender-based violence against women is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.” According to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), which has been endorsed by all EU Member States, violence against women “is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement”.

Violence against women is rooted in a system of practices and laws which sanction men’s rights and active attempts to maintain dominance and control over women.² Domestic violence, as a form of violence against women, involves a male perpetrator and a female victim in the majority of reported violence, and constitutes a reflection of unequal power relationships between men and women.³

In Cyprus, according to the Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Laws, violence in the family “means any act, omission or behaviour which causes physical, sexual or mental injury to any member

1 Stop Violence against Women: A project by the Advocates for Human Rights. [www.stopvaw.org]

2 Maynard, M. (1989) ‘Privilege and Patriarchy: Feminist thought in the nineteenth century’, in S. Mendus and J. Rendall (eds.), *Sexuality and Subordination*. London, Routledge, pp. 221-247.

3 Maynard, M. and Winn, J. (1997) ‘Women, Violence and Male Power’ in Robinson, Victoria and Richardson, Diane (eds.), *Introducing Women’s Studies*. Macmillan Press; 2nd Revised edition, p. 180.

of the family by another member of the family and includes violence used for the purpose of having sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim as well as of restricting its freedom."⁴ Member of the family, according to the Law, can mean a husband and wife who have been legally married whether the marriage still exists or not, or cohabiting partners; the parents of the cohabiting spouses; the children and/or grandchildren of cohabiting partners and their parents; or any person residing with the aforementioned persons. The defilement or attempted defilement of girls under the age of 16, are considered particularly serious and carry increased sentences. The Law also specifically recognizes children witness of violence as direct victims of said violence. Furthermore, marital rape is recognized in the law as a gender-specific offence by a husband toward his wife.

The Cyprus law on domestic violence has been widely assessed to be adequate and its broad scope has been cited as an example of best practice. However, the 'family violence' framework has been widely criticized by experts on violence against women as this results in public policies that aim to combat domestic violence from a gender blind perspective, without consideration of the gendered power relations at stake in violence against women. Furthermore, it has been argued that not only is gender-neutral legislation subject to manipulation by violent offenders, but it has also served to prioritize the stability of the family over the rights of the (predominantly female) complainant/ survivor, because it does not specifically reflect or address women's experiences of violence perpetrated against them.⁵ Thus, gender-neutral legislation fails to recognise the differences and specific needs of women and men, does not acknowledge that women's and men's experiences of violence differ, nor does it identify such violence as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.⁶

As a consequence of this gender-blind approach, as this report will reveal, all policies and measures to combat domestic violence adopted in Cyprus have failed to address the root causes of such violence on the one hand, and have failed to meet the specific needs of women victims of violence and their children on the other.

2.2 Main Features and Recent Trends in Domestic Violence

National data on the prevalence of domestic violence is scarce and the only data available are those collected by the Cyprus Police and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, an NGO that runs a domestic violence hotline and a women's shelter. Population based surveys on the prevalence as well as the effects of all forms of violence against women are non-existent and questions on violence against women are not included in other national surveys such as those on health, well-being and quality of life. Police statistics make it possible to describe the trend in *reported* cases of domestic violence but do not give a true picture of the prevalence of domestic violence in Cyprus. For this reason, the records of the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family are particularly useful, as will be seen below.

The Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family, a coordinating body for the monitoring of violence in the family has for some years now been coordinating efforts to create a unified database under the Law Services of the Republic to which all front-line services such as the Social Welfare Services, the Health Services, and the Police will contribute under the principle of "mandatory reporting". However, developments have been slow and it is not clear when the database will be fully functional. The establishment of the database has been included in the recently published National Action Plan on the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family (2010-2015), although no timeline for this has been

⁴ The Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law 119(I) of 2000 and 212(I) of 2004.

⁵ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2008) *Good Practices in Legislation on Violence against Women*, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, 26-28 May 2008, p. 16.

⁶ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2008) *Good Practices in Legislation on Violence against Women*, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, 26-28 May 2008, p. 15.

indicated. The Advisory Committee also has the authority to commission studies on violence in the family, but, to date, the only prevalence study that has taken place involved the impact of violence in the family on children of 12-18 years.

The prevalence of reported domestic violence has risen dramatically in the last decade. Criminal statistics collected by the Police show a general trend of increased reporting of violence in the family with reported cases almost doubling from 2002 to 2008 (538 and 959 cases respectively). Over this period the large majority of cases have involved physical violence (79%), followed by psychological violence (18.5%) and sexual violence (2.4%). All forms of violence have shown an increase over this time period. In terms of sexual violence, the fact that marital rape was recognized and penalized under the amended law on family violence in 2004, may have indirectly contributed to the increase in reported cases.

In terms of gender, the majority of victims during the period 2002-2008 were women at 71.18%. If we include children (girls and boys under 18 years) the figure rises to 82%. The vast majority of perpetrators during the same period are men at 81.6%.

According to the statistics of the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, cases of domestic violence have tripled over the years 2004-2009 (from 397 cases in 2004 to 1148 cases in 2009). The vast majority of victims over this period have been women with 83% in 2009 as compared to 8.6% men. Of these cases, 82% were classified as involving psychological violence, 44% physical violence, 0.7% sexual violence.⁷ The figures show an overlap in forms of violence, demonstrating that in many cases reports involve both physical and psychological violence. This trend in forms of violence has remained more or less consistent over the period 2004-2009.

Interestingly, while psychological violence was the main form of violence reported to the NGO, physical violence greatly outnumbered other forms of violence reported to the Police. The fact that women are more likely to report physical/sexual violence to the police poses the question as to whether women experiencing psychological abuse recognize such abuse as a form of violence on the one hand, or feel that they will be taken seriously by the authorities on the other.

Although the increase in reporting can be seen as a positive trend, the scarcity of national prevalence studies conceals the fact that domestic violence is, as all forms of violence against women, one of the least reported crimes in Cyprus. This is due to ingrained socio-cultural attitudes that render violent behaviour acceptable, persistent economic inequalities between women and men, a lack of confidence in the relevant authorities, a total lack of resources for women victims of violence, fear of social stigmatization, and a general culture of "victim blaming" in relation to all forms of violence against women.⁸

Another important trend in reported domestic violence cases in Cyprus is the high level of 'attrition' in the course of investigations and prosecutions of domestic violence.⁹ A very high number of cases of reported domestic violence cases do not develop into criminal investigations and are either suspended or interrupted. According to the Police, this is mainly a result of victims changing their testimonies and/or returning to the violent relationship and the fact that the victim is often the only witness exacerbates the problem. According to a report by Veis (2010) analysing the criminal investigations of domestic violence cases during 2005, only 40% of cases reported to the police took the form of a formal criminal investigation. 90% of cases that were formally

7 Cyprus Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family. [www.domviolence.org.cy]

8 European Commission, Expert Group on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, Health and Long-Term Care Issues (2010) *Violence against Women and the Role of Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Strategies*, Synthesis Report, Brussels.

9 Attrition refers to the process by which reported cases are lost from the legal process, and thus do not result in a criminal conviction. See Kelly, L. & Lovett, J. (2009) 'Different Systems, similar outcomes? Tracking attrition in reported rape cases in eleven countries', European Briefing, April 2009, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit.

investigated proceeded to court but only half of these were completed. The remaining half were suspended, interrupted, withdrawn or rejected by the courts.¹⁰ Of the number of cases recorded in court only 38% resulted in a conviction (66% of those cases completed in the courts) and 34% of cases resulted in acquittals.

Also discouraging are the nature of penalties imposed on the perpetrators of domestic violence. The majority of penalties imposed were fines (74%), 21% were imprisonment and/ or suspended sentence, and 5% were probation. Thus there is clear and overwhelming preference for imposing monetary fines and financial guarantees.¹¹ According to Veis, the minimum monetary fine imposed was approx. 50 Euros and the maximum approx. 3,850 Euros. In terms of prison sentences, the maximum penalty was 12 years and the minimum just 10 days. The median prison sentence during the period under study was 6 months and the median monetary fine was approximately 500 Euros.

There have not been any qualitative studies on attrition in domestic violence cases in Cyprus. In the absence of such, in order to shed some light on the continuing “justice gap” in domestic violence cases, we can only draw on research that has been carried out in other European countries as well as on the opinions of the service providers interviewed during this study. Firstly, participants felt that the high level of attrition is directly related to deficits in the victim support system that does not do enough to encourage victims to proceed with criminal investigations. The criminal justice process can be an ordeal and there is a valid concern for the continuing safety of the victim. Furthermore, women with children may be more reluctant to pursue criminal investigations for fear that this may adversely affect their safety and well-being. The high levels of attrition are also strongly linked to the economic dependency of women on their partners and to the lack of adequate re-integration and social inclusion mechanisms that would allow women to exit violent relationships and pursue independent lives.

Research has also shown that women do not have sufficient confidence in the system in order to proceed with criminal charges.¹² This is also related to sentencing, as women may feel that the end result may not be worth the possible cost to them. As seen above, it is obvious that the sentences imposed on perpetrators do not provide any real deterrent to perpetrators and are not preventative on a wider social level. Furthermore, if one considers the protection of the victim which is at the heart of the Cyprus law on domestic violence, the sentences imposed cannot be considered adequate to ensure the protection of the victim from immediate danger from the perpetrator. The preference for monetary fines can also directly or indirectly affect the victim, particularly when victim and perpetrator are still legally married. A shocking example of this was given by a representative of an NGO, who cited a case of a victim who was forced to pay the monetary fine of her violent husband.

Ensuring that victims are provided with continuing specialized support and protection is vital in order to increase the number of women willing to support criminal prosecutions through the courts. Furthermore, there is a need for the police, the judiciary, and service providers to understand the dynamics of domestic violence against women in order to appreciate the particular difficulties that victims face in reporting incidents, let alone supporting investigations and prosecutions. Finally, if victims do not see the criminal justice system as providing an adequate and long-term resolution to her ordeal, then there is not sufficient motivation for victims to go through this process.¹³

¹⁰ Veis, C. (2010) 'The Criminal Investigation of Domestic Violence Cases: Challenges and Issues', *Analysis Report, Inspection of Cyprus and European Law*, Vol. 11, μ – Law Publishing, p. 6-11.

¹¹ Ibid, p.9.

¹² Hester, Marianne (2006) 'Making it through the Criminal Justice System: Attrition and Domestic Violence', *Social Policy & Society*, 5:1. 79-90.

¹³ HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 'Violence at Home: A Joint Inspection of the Investigation and Prosecution of Cases Involving Domestic Violence', February 2004. [<http://www.hmcpso.gov.uk/documents/services/reports/EAW/DomVio0104Rep.pdf>]

2.3 The Legislative Framework and Policies Addressing Domestic Violence in Cyprus

Domestic violence is the form of violence against women that has received the greatest level of support by the Cyprus Government. This can be explained in part by the fact that in Cyprus, as in Europe and worldwide, intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence against women. However, it must be said here that the fact that other forms of violence against women are given little, if any, attention reveals a general lack of awareness and understanding of the scope and nature of violence against women, as well as a lack of real political will to combat the phenomenon.

Cyprus has a comprehensive legal framework to address violence in the family which has been the basis of all action on domestic violence to date. However, this poses a critical problem: The term violence in the family as defined by law is gender-neutral and covers violent behaviour perpetrated by any member of the family toward any member of the family ignoring the gender specificities of the violence. Furthermore, the term “family violence” fails to highlight that violence against women largely stems from women’s subordinate status in society.¹⁴ Thus, it is evident that domestic violence is not, in fact, recognized or defined as a form of violence against women. As almost all the organisations working on issues of violence in Cyprus employ the Cypriot legal definition as given by the Cyprus law on family violence, this has resulted in a lack of gender sensitivity particularly in support and protection measures as will be seen further below. It has also resulted in a lack of awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence, and its links to gender [in]equality and social norms and stereotypes.

The Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law 47 (I)/1994, replaced by Law 119(I)/2000, was later amended in 2004 by Law 212(I)/2004. The Law inter alia condemns any act of violence within the family, raises substantially the penalties for violence, provides protection to victims mainly by empowering the Court to issue restraining orders, clarifies that rape can be committed within marriage, facilitates the reporting of violent incidents, provides for the appointment of Family Counsellors, the setting up of the Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of the Law, taking testimonies of victims of violence by electronic means, establishment of a shelter for victims, the protection of victims and witnesses, and makes the spouse a compellable witness if the victim is another member of the family. Despite the law’s gender neutrality, it does recognize that rape can be committed within marriage and makes extensive provision for the protection of victims.¹⁵

Another recent development was the adoption by the Council of Ministers of a National Action Plan on Prevention and Combating Violence in the Family (2010-2015). The aim of the NAP is to monitor the extent of violence in the family in Cyprus; to raise awareness and sensitize the public as well as relevant professionals using various mediums, including special conferences and seminars and information campaigns and programmes; to promote scientific research on violence in the family; to promote services dealing with all aspects of the problem and specifically for support and protection of victims; and monitor the effectiveness of services and the enforcement of the relevant legislation. Although the NAP is ambitious both in terms of its stated objectives as well as actions foreseen, a number of limitations put the possibility of its effective implementation into serious question.¹⁶

In terms of content, the NAP in its introduction recognizes that domestic violence disproportionately affects women (and children) and is a consequence of unequal power relations between women and men.

14 World Health Organisation (2005) ‘Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women: Initial Results on Prevalence’, *Health Outcomes and Women’s Responses*, Geneva.

15 The Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims), Laws 2000 And 2004 [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/legislation/laws_2000_and_2004_en.pdf], and Violence in the Family Prevention and Protection of Victims, Law 1994, [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/legislation/law_1994_en.pdf]

16 Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family, *Cyprus National Action Plan on Combating Violence in the Family 2010-2015*, Nicosia. [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/downloads/actionplan_2010-2013.pdf]

Despite this recognition, gender equality does not feature in the 'basic principles' upon which the NAP is based. Women are referred to as a 'vulnerable group' along with children, persons with disabilities, and migrants. Having said that, there have been efforts to take into account the gender dimension of family violence particularly in the section on prevention, and the section on sensitization and training of professionals and the public. Reference is made to actions to empower women, to the eradication of gender stereotypes and the promotion of gender equality, with a special focus on the educational system.

More seriously, however, in terms of protection and support of victims of domestic violence the gender perspective is lacking completely. There is special reference to timely identification of victims of violence, with a special focus on vulnerable groups including children and children with disabilities, as well as the elderly and adults with disabilities. Nowhere under this heading is the gender dimension of protection and support to victims recognized, demonstrating a lack of awareness of both the causes and consequences of domestic violence against women that are inextricably linked to gender inequalities in all areas of life. Furthermore, there are no provisions for addressing the needs of migrant women who may face economic disadvantages, language barriers, and institutional racism. On the other hand, the NAP does foresee the establishment of regulations for the operation of shelters, financial support to NGOs and community centres for the provision of services to victims, as well as the establishment of programmes for the social inclusion and social protection of victims of family violence.

In addition to the limitations described in terms of content, there are other practical limitations that put into question the feasibility of the full implementation of the NAP. The most serious of these limitations is, firstly, in the lack of specific timelines for the implementation of the actions foreseen, and, secondly, the failure to allocate a specific budget for its implementation. As one government representative stated:

"Funding and timetables to implement the NAP on Domestic Violence have not been set. Each ministry is responsible for including costs in their respective annual budget in order to be able to implement activities next year. Of course, this year budgets have been cut significantly due to the economic crisis, so I do not know to what extent the relevant stakeholders took into consideration the implementation costs of the NAP".

Another limitation identified in the NAP is that the responsibility for evaluation of the implementation of the NAP lies with the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Family Violence, which is also the institution responsible for coordinating the implementation of the NAP. Although internal evaluation is important, it is also crucial for evaluation by a third party for more objective and critical feedback on the implementation and impact of the proposed actions.

A serious shortcoming of the NAP on family violence, and one that has received considerable criticism, is the complete absence of NGOs and women's organizations in the proposed actions. Given the enormous contribution of women's organisations and NGOs such as the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family not only in providing services that are not offered by the State, but also in raising awareness and conducting research, their absence is a serious deficiency. At the time of writing this report, the House Committee for Equal Opportunities is seeking an explanation from the relevant authorities for this omission.

Another NAP that is worth mentioning is the National Action Plan on Equality between Men and Women (2007-2013) which includes violence against women among its main priorities.¹⁷ Taking a gender equality approach, it makes reference to all forms of violence against women including domestic violence. Proposed actions include awareness raising campaigns, training of relevant professionals on issues of gender equality and violence against women, the establishment of an electronic observatory for the collection of data on all forms of violence against

¹⁷ National Action Plan on Equality between Men and Women (2007-2013), Cyprus Ministry of Justice and Public Order, Nicosia.

women, and the conducting of research on all forms of violence against women. Despite this, as with the NAP on family violence, the proposed actions are vague and not specific in terms of their aim, target group, timeline and budget. Furthermore, there are no proposed actions to address the needs of different groups of women, such as migrant women (except in reference to trafficking), women with disabilities, elderly women and so on.

3 PREVENTION

In public health terminology, there are three levels of prevention in relation to violence against women that relate to the time sequence within which the various courses of action are adopted: Primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention refers to action to address the root causes of violence and to intervene before such violence occurs.¹⁸ This approach contrasts with other prevention efforts that seek to reduce the harmful consequences of an act of violence after it has occurred, or to prevent further acts of violence from occurring once violence has been identified. Primary prevention involves understanding and intervening against those factors that place people at risk for becoming victims and perpetrators of such violence.

Despite the importance of addressing the root causes of violence in action to combat domestic violence, in practice it tends to be neglected in favour of secondary and tertiary prevention. Although primary prevention holds the promise of keeping future generations of women and children safe from violence, it has been largely absent from policies and programmes that address domestic violence. As will be discussed further below, it requires more research, greater attention and more resources than it receives today.

3.1 Gender Equality and Domestic Violence

The prevention of violence against women rests on addressing women's inequality and subordination.¹⁹ In Cyprus, despite an impressive legal framework on gender equality, women are still lagging behind men in all spheres: Women are critically underrepresented in public and political decision making; there is a very wide gender-pay gap with women dominating lower paid and part-time positions; women still disproportionately bear the responsibility of taking care of children and other dependents; they report lower rates of health and wellbeing; and are at greater risk of poverty regardless of age or social group.

Women's inequality is both a cause and a consequence of violence against women. While women's inequality creates the conditions for violence against women, it also has a direct impact on women's health, their ability to work and generate an independent income, their access to education and life-long learning, to adequate housing, and to physical safety and autonomy. As will be discussed further in the section on Social Inclusion, these are significant risk factors for violence that hinder women's ability to escape violence and live independent lives.

¹⁸ WAVE Office and Austrian Women's Shelter Network (2000) 'Prevention of Domestic Violence against women', European Survey, Good Practice Models WAVE Training Programme, Vienna.

¹⁹ European Women's Lobby (2010) 'Towards a Europe Free from All Forms of Male Violence against Women', December 2010.

Thus, promoting gender equality is a critical part of violence prevention. Domestic violence is a crosscutting issue that is relevant to a range of policy fields and must be addressed systematically in measures to promote economic growth, labour market inclusion and education, health and wellbeing, active citizenship, among others.

Despite the above, gender equality has not featured prominently in efforts to prevent domestic violence as will be seen further below. In all aspects of prevention, gender inequality and patriarchy are never directly challenged. There seems to be little awareness and understanding of the interdependency between violence and inequality, coupled with a lack of political will to address the issue comprehensively.

3.2 Public Awareness Initiatives

In the last years there has been an increased effort by government authorities and NGOs alike to raise awareness on domestic violence and its consequences. Cyprus took part in the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (2006-2008). The President of the House of Representatives, Ministers and other high level officials participated in these events, in order to reaffirm their commitment to the issue, as well as raise the profile of the event and increase media coverage.

The Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence has published a number of booklets and other information material, including a booklet about the Cypriot legislation concerning domestic violence analyzing the most important legal aspects of the law. Posters, leaflets, and other material have also been published, which are disseminated widely among relevant authorities and the public. The Committee has also been involved in the organisation of training seminars and workshops for professionals, aimed at providing information and training relevant professionals on handling cases of domestic violence.²⁰

The Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office of the Cyprus Police, apart from the investigation of criminal cases sent to the headquarters, offers training to the police academy, delivers presentations to university students, the mental health services, and gives informative lectures to other professionals. The police implements awareness raising campaigns for the public that include the dissemination of printed informative material in various languages. They have also produce TV and radio spots to sensitize and inform the public on domestic violence.

The National Machinery for Women's Rights of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has played an important role in funding a number of projects implemented by women's organisations and NGOs aimed at raising awareness and sensitizing the public on the issue of violence against women (mainly domestic violence) including research, training workshops, information seminars, conferences, exhibitions etc. However, the women's movement in Cyprus is relatively weak and there are few independent NGOs working systematically on violence against women. There is a general lack of expertise coupled with a lack of adequate funding for women's organisations to have any real impact on the policy making agenda or on the wider society.

The media is a powerful tool for awareness raising and for contributing toward the prevention of domestic violence. The media can play a critical role in challenging those gender norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and violence against women. Despite this, the media has largely been ignored by government and NGOs alike in initiatives to combat domestic violence. The media in Cyprus largely portrays women in ways that support gender inequality and that reinforce negative gender stereotypes.²¹ This is particularly true when reporting issued related to violence against women. Most journalists and media professionals are

²⁰ Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family. [www.familyviolence.gov.cy]

²¹ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2005) *The Gender and Media Handbook: Promoting Equality, Diversity and Empowerment*, Nicosia

not gender aware and often promote and perpetuate gross gender stereotyping and common myths associated with violence.²² Despite this, it must be acknowledged that in recent years journalists have taken an increased interest in human rights issues, including issues related to women's rights and violence against women. Research findings by research centres and NGOs are published with more frequency than previously in the print media and are taken up by TV and radio programmes which have promoted increased awareness and public debate. Despite this, a lot more needs to be done to sensitize the media on gender equality issues, as well as to make full use of this medium in reaching a wider audience.

The National Action Plan on the Prevention and Combating Violence in the Family foresees prevention activities that include the creation of local structures for urgent intervention, the introduction of reconciliation measures between work and family life, implementation of programmes that provide accessible childcare services, the creation of counselling centres for young parents, the implementation of awareness raising campaigns, and educational seminars and lectures. As is the case with other National Action Plans, there is no timeline specified for the implementation of the actions or specific budget allocated.

There are several concerns in relation to the impact of awareness campaigns implemented by government authorities and women's organisations/NGOs in Cyprus. Firstly, public awareness initiatives are not implemented systematically and there is no evidence that initiatives to date have had any impact on the wider society. Furthermore, existing initiatives have focused on informing people of their rights and on encouraging potential victims and high risk groups to report cases of violence. Although this is important, it does not constitute primary prevention as defined above. Another issue in relation to the awareness raising campaigns that have been implemented thus far is that, again, only very generic terminology is used consistent with the gender-neutral family violence framework, and the links between women's rights, gender equality and domestic violence are not addressed. Thus, the question remains as to what measures are being taken to combat those gender norms, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to an environment where violence is tolerated and acceptable.

3.3 School Based Initiatives

The education system including schools, teachers' unions, and Ministries of Education can play a critical role in addressing domestic violence. The education system is one of the primary sources of cultural norms, including those that support gender-based violence such as gender stereotyping and the reinforcement of rigid gender roles of what is supposedly "appropriate" male and female behavior. Because adolescence is a formative period, such cultural norms can be internalized by young girls and boys, increasing their vulnerability to experiencing violence either as victims or as perpetrators. Emerging evidence suggests that patterns of violence and victimization may develop in early adolescence, and soon become difficult to reverse.²³ Hence, primary prevention measures have an essential role in combating domestic violence since schools and other education centres are a critical component of adolescents' lives and one of the main contexts where gender socialization takes place, as well as where attitudes toward oneself and others are formed and reinforced.

Despite the importance of strategies to reach adolescents and young adults in preventing domestic violence, this dimension has largely been ignored by those involved in the domestic violence policy agenda. Primary prevention has largely been absent from policy and programmes, which focus primarily on adult victims and their children, crisis response and criminalizing domestic violence. Thus, existing legislation and policy measures in place fail to target the foundations of this problem in the early stages of its appearance.

22 Who Makes The News (2010) Global Media Monitoring Project 2010, World Association for Christian Communication WACC. Canada. [http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2010/global/gmmp_global_report_en.pdf]

23 Rosewater, A. (2003) 'Promoting Prevention Targeting Teens: An emerging Agenda to Reduce Domestic Violence', *Family Violence Prevention Fund*, p. 6.

There has been some increased and much needed progress on measures to combat violence against children and youth, including the increasing recognition that child witnesses of violence are direct victims of violence. This is recognized in the Cyprus legislation and studies have been carried out regarding the effects of domestic violence on children.²⁴ However, domestic violence has not been treated as a social issue that is strongly linked to gender-based violence among adolescents, dating violence, violence in intimate relationships, bullying, and sexual harassment, which are areas that have received less attention in both prevention programmes as well as in policy development and research. Indeed, the Ministry of Education does not implement any prevention programmes, training activities, or awareness raising actions on a systematic basis. Most of the emphasis by the Ministry has been in identifying incidents of family violence among students in both primary and secondary schools, but even these efforts have been ineffective according to an evaluation conducted by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Family Violence. According to the report, there is a general lack of awareness among teachers and educators on the legal right of children to be protected from violence, and a lack of systematic training of teachers and educators on family violence issues.²⁵

The recently adopted National Action Plans on Combating Violence in the Family and National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men, recognize the need for school based interventions to combat and prevent gender based violence and promote gender equality in all levels of education. However, as discussed above, no specified budgets or time-frames have been set in order to effectively and systematically implement the actions foreseen in the NAPs. It is also questionable whether the Ministry of Education has taken its role in implementing these NAPs seriously.

Moreover, one area that is still seriously lagging behind is sexuality education that would include modules on gender relations, sexual and reproductive rights, relationships, and intimate partner violence among others. Sexuality education is neither legally mandated, nor implemented on a regular basis. Special modules on sex education, gender relations, and health education, have been implemented sporadically on a pilot basis over the last decade but are not formally part of the curriculum at any level. Some aspects of sex education have been covered within a more broad biology class, health class, and home economics class. A missed opportunity for integrating comprehensive sexuality education at all levels in primary and secondary education was the recent education reform that took place in Cyprus, where all primary and secondary school curricula were extensively revised and restructured. Although NGOs lobbied hard to include sex education as a distinct educational module within the health education curricula in all education levels, this unfortunately did not become a reality.

Indeed, in Cyprus, little research exists on adolescents' and youth's knowledge and attitudes regarding gender relations and sexuality, and perceptions of messages they receive regarding sexuality education, but existing evidence so far documents low levels and serious gaps in knowledge around sexuality and sexual and reproductive health.^{26 27}

Thus, there is an imminent need to actively and systematically address the issue on a primary prevention level through raising young people's awareness on the issues mentioned above using research-informed methods

24 Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Family Violence (2009) 'Evaluation of Services that are provided in Schools for the Prevention and Confrontation of Incidents of Family Violence', Nicosia. [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/research/erevna_2009_aksiologisi.pdf]

25 Ibid, p. 12-13.

26 Kapsou, M. (2006) 'Country Report: Cyprus', in Chruściel, E. *Youth's Voice: Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Balkan countries*, Astra Network, Warsaw, Poland.

27 Kouta, C., Tolma, E.L. (2008) 'Sexuality, sexual and reproductive health: an exploration of the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the Greek-Cypriot adolescents', *Promotion & Education*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 24-31.

which will be sensitive to the specificities of the challenges faced by adolescents and young people regarding domestic violence as a form of GBV.

In the absence of any real government action in the area, a number of NGOs systematically work with young people within the education system to raise awareness and provide information on issues related to domestic violence. For example, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence provides informational and educational services, such as presentations, seminars, and speeches, for students, parents and teachers. Recently, the Association in cooperation with the Cyprus Family Planning Association implemented an awareness raising programme in primary schools (for students and teachers) in Cyprus, in relation to all forms of domestic violence.

The Cyprus Family Planning Association, a nongovernmental, voluntary organisation that defends, protects and advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), also contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence by working with teachers, parents, and children/adolescents on a systematic basis through formal cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute. Its educational programmes on SRRH also include modules on gender equality and violence against women.

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) has been working with young people and adolescents for the prevention of gender-based violence since 2006, mainly through the implementation of European projects. In 2010, MIGS completed a project within the framework of the Daphne III Programme and coordinated by the City of Modena (Italy) entitled "Perspective: Peer Education Roots for School Pupils to Enhance Consciousness of Tackling and Impeding Women Violence in Europe". Within this framework, MIGS is implementing training workshops in three secondary schools in Nicosia on the issue of gender-based violence involving more than 50 teenagers in active discussion and experiential activities on this issue. Teenagers are also trained in peer education skills so that, following their training, they will be able to train their peers on issues such as bullying, violence within adolescent romantic relationships, and gender stereotypes.²⁸ In 2011, MIGS will continue its work on preventing GBV among adolescents with a new Daphne III project entitled "Youth4Youth: Empowering Young People in Preventing Gender-based Violence through Peer Education".

28 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2010) 'Perspective: Peer Education Roots for School Pupils to Enhance Consciousness of Tackling and Impeding Women Violence in Europe', Daphne III Programme. [<http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/news/perspective-peer-education-roots-for-school-pupils-to-enhance-consciousness-of-tackling-and-impeding-women-violence-in-europe/>]

4

VICTIM SUPPORT AND TREATMENT

4.1 Multi-agency Initiatives

In order for women to overcome the consequences of violence and address those conditions that render them vulnerable to violence, a wide range of specialized support and assistance services are needed. Such services should include women's shelters and crisis centres, women's help-lines, psychological counselling and support, health treatment, legal services, as well as re-integration and social inclusion programmes. It is also important that such services are offered involving different actors and stakeholders, including women's organisations and NGOs, given the multidimensional nature of violence against women and its multiple consequences.

Thus, inter-agency co-operation is considered essential in combating domestic violence. One important achievement of the Advisory Committee was the drafting of a Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures, with the aim to clarify the functions and role of professionals in the process handling cases of family violence and involved the Social Welfare Services, the Police, the Health Services, the Education Services, the Law Office of the Republic, as well as relevant NGOs. However, according to an internal evaluation of the Manual, it is clear that not all recommendations and guidelines are followed and, as such, the Manual is currently being revised based on the recommendations made in the evaluation.²⁹ However, according to one government representative, even with revised and improved interdepartmental procedures, no amount of co-operation will be of significant benefit unless the requisite resources and support facilities are available. What is lacking within the victim support system are interdepartmental *structures* and *services*:

"Theoretically it is ideal to have a very good document covering interdepartmental procedures which is a very good practice for better cooperation between governmental departments. On a practical level though, you cannot rely only on interdepartmental procedures BUT on interdepartmental structures and services. For me the modern approach for Cyprus is to be able to implement all these procedures together in one place and a common structure that will manage each case interdepartmental integrated service provision"

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Another issue that was revealed during this study was a deep gap in experienced, professional, and stable staff in governmental services dealing with domestic violence cases. This was considered by the majority of the interviewees as one of the basic problems hampering the proper cooperation of stakeholders within the victim support system. This is a result of a lack of systematic training of professional staff in all services dealing with domestic violence including the Police, the Welfare Services, and the Health Services, among others.

²⁹ Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family (2004) 'Report on the Evaluation of Interdepartmental Procedures for the Handling of Family Violence Cases', Nicosia. [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/downloads/aksiologisi_diatmimatikon_diadikasion_200501.pdf]

Training workshops and programmes for professionals are occasionally held by trainers from women's organisations working in the anti-violence field but, unfortunately, this cannot replace the need for regular and systematic intra and inter-agency training.

Another problem that was raised that impedes effective interdepartmental cooperation is the lack of progress in the establishment of a unified data collection system for the documentation of domestic violence cases amongst all relevant stakeholders. According to the participants of this study, this results in serious gaps in methodological expertise that would be vital in victim identification and the following-up of domestic violence cases.

In terms of government cooperation with NGOs in the provision of services, this takes place through formal collaboration with the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family that provides the only domestic violence helpline and shelter for women victims of violence in Cyprus. The Government does consult with NGOs and women's organisations on policies relating to violence against women, although such consultation is often superficial and does not always result in real policy impact. NGOs are involved in the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family and the National Machinery for Women's Rights and, in this way, women's organisations and NGOs have an advisory role and are directly consulted in, for example, the drafting of National Action Plans. Unfortunately, however, although NGOs and women's organisations featured strongly in the first draft of the NAP for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family that was submitted to the Social Welfare Services for revision, they were subsequently removed and are now completely absent from the actions foreseen in the NAP.

Thus, there is a strong need in general for a more multidisciplinary approach on the issue on behalf of the governmental services as well as more systematic cooperation between NGOs and government agencies.

4.2 Victim Identification and Intervention

CYPRUS SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES

The role of the Cyprus Welfare Services (SWS) in combating domestic violence is based on the laws of 2000 and 2004 on domestic violence and the law of 2001, which refers to family counsellors and their competencies. The law is specific about procedures involving domestic violence cases (i.e. reporting, victim support etc), and the welfare services competencies are drawn from the above-mentioned laws. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the 'family counsellor' of the SWS to provide psychological support to victims, practical assistance (financial and other), information on the services of the SWS, information regarding the services of other government agencies and NGOs, and information regarding the rights of victims. According to the SWS, there are currently 67 family counsellors posted at local SWS offices dealing with family violence cases. It is important to note that assistance is offered only to the extent that the victim requests this.

According to the NAP on Combating Violence in the Family, the Social Welfare Services will also be responsible for training and education activities, particularly of their own staff, but also support programmes for families, particularly among vulnerable population groups. Furthermore, the NAP foresees the development of regulations for the operation of shelters for victims of violence, and the financial support of NGOs and local authorities for the provision of services to victims of violence.³⁰

The Social Welfare Services came under intense criticism by the participants in this study. Most of this criticism focused on lack of coordination and organisation in relation to the state of preparedness to immediately

30 Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family, *Cyprus National Action Plan on Combating Violence in the Family 2010-2015*, Nicosia.

respond to cases, as well as on the staffing and training / qualifications of Family Counsellors. One of the major issues identified was that not all family counsellors are qualified and able to assist victims properly.

“Domestic Violence cases require special treatment and it is a setback when social welfare officers are proclaimed family counsellors in order to have more family counsellors. The quality of service is put into question when there is a lack of expertise.”

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE

The terms of reference for family violence counsellors are not defined either by the Violence in the Family Law or by the Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures, so many of them (particularly on-call officers who are called on by the police to handle cases outside regular working hours) are actually ordinary welfare officers and not trained family counsellors with expertise on domestic violence. Another problem is that there is a high mobility rate among family counsellors and they often transfer to other posts within the SWS, which results in a general lack of expertise, awareness, and capacity to deal with domestic violence cases.

‘There are officers (in the SWS) with whom we cooperate that seem to have the necessary knowledge, however there are others (that may be new) who do not know the relevant procedures, and often ask us what it is they need to do’.

NGO REPRESENTATIVE

‘Basically it seems that there are a lot of changes taking place at the Welfare Services...and cooperation between us has deteriorated. It is more difficult to find someone to talk to about a specific issue. If you find a person then cooperation is good but it is difficult....there are days where we talk to one person and then others where we talk to someone else because the staff is changing continuously.’

NGO REPRESENTATIVE

Several participants to the study stressed that domestic violence is no longer seen as a priority for the Social Welfare Service, which is preventing it from adequately carrying out its responsibilities effectively as mandated by law. NGO representatives as well as government officers also stated that victims are mistrustful of the SWS and have expressed dissatisfaction with how their cases were handled. Indeed, in a report by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) exploring the links between domestic violence and poverty and social exclusion, women victims of violence expressed deep dissatisfaction with the treatment received by the SWS and felt that their basic needs were not being adequately addressed.³¹

Indeed, the SWS are facing a significant staffing problem, resulting in the inability to respond to domestic violence cases in a timely and effective manner. This is particularly true during non-government working hours where they are often requested to take immediate action (there is only one on-call officer per district during these hours). Furthermore the lack of staff and frequent transfer of family counsellors to new posts means that SWS cannot provide the necessary systematic and long-term support to victims as there can be no adequate and continuous monitoring and follow-up of cases.

To conclude, it would seem that despite being primarily responsible for all aspects of victims support and assistance as mandated by law, the Welfare Services are not addressing the issue of domestic violence as a matter of priority and, ultimately, are failing in its task to keep women and their children safe from violence.

THE POLICE

The Police remain the first point of contact for victims requesting support and assistance. According to the Police, this is due to the fact that the reporting of domestic violence usually takes place late in the afternoon,

31 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2010) Poverty and Social Exclusion of Women Victims of Domestic Violence, December 2010, Nicosia. [<http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Women-Violence-and-Social-Exclusion-Final.pdf>]

evening, or on weekends where police stations are the only available and accessible service for victims, as that other government services, such as the Social Welfare Services, are closed.³² Given that domestic violence is one of the most underreported crimes, the lack of available services on a 24 hour basis for victims that may not want to report to the Police at first instance, can be seen as a serious flaw in the system.

Despite the Police being the first point of contact for victims, it cannot provide the kind of support and protection (psychological, financial support, legal support, information, empowerment etc.) required by victims beyond that of a basic level.³³ According to the Police representative, the psychological support of victims cannot be the responsibility of the Police when there are specific and specialized government agencies and NGOs who can provide such assistance. In his view, the role of the Police must focus on the effective criminal prosecution of perpetrators in order to secure convictions, and victim support cannot extend beyond that of 'primary support' that will facilitate the taking of depositions and the gathering of evidence in order to substantiate cases in court. In practice, however, this depends on the availability and accessibility of family counsellors of the Social Welfare Services to respond immediately to requests for assistance, which seems to be currently lacking.

According to the Police, the fact that 90% of domestic violence that are criminally investigated reach the court sends "a clear message as to the seriousness and rigour with which (the Police) approach the issue".³⁴ However, it seems that this approach in itself is not sufficient to reach an expedient hearing of cases and ultimately to the conviction of the perpetrator as is clear from the poor conviction rates. Furthermore, as discussed above, attrition rates are extremely high, an issue which has yet to be addressed. Again, according to the Police, the problem lies with the weak victim support system:

"Many domestic violence cases are suspended because of one vital factor, the deep deficit in the support framework for domestic violence victims. Once a case leaves the police, there is a question mark as to whether there is substantial support for the victim. It takes 1-2 years or more for a case to be completed. What happens to the victim during this time? Typically support and treatment exists but it is not structured in a specific context, with supportive structures to help the victim cope with the difficulties that arise after a complaint."

REPRESENTATIVE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILD ABUSE OFFICE, CYPRUS POLICE

Another issue affecting the effectiveness of the Police in dealing with domestic violence cases is the lack of systematic training of all its personnel. In 2002 the Police established the Police Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office as the competent department for the investigation of domestic violence cases, and the collection of statistical data. The Office includes a staff lawyer and a staff psychologist that provide assistance to Police Stations all over the country. However, despite this positive development, this cannot close the gap in expertise among the Police. According to the evaluation of inter-departmental procedures, the Police do not have trained personnel in every police station, there is not always a woman police officer on site to take statements from the victim, and not all police officers are trained in taking statements by electronic means. The Association for the Preventing and Handling of Domestic Violence also confirms that Police officers do not always have sufficient expertise for dealing with victims. There also seems to be a lack of awareness and sensitivity among police officers which affects their handling of cases, with victims claiming that they have been ridiculed or not taken seriously when reporting incidents of violence. This directly affects victim confidence in the police which in turn affects the ability of the Police to initiate a criminal investigation, particularly when the victim is the only witness to the violence, which is often the case. Finally, this lack of awareness and sensitivity ultimately puts at risk the safety of the victim and her children.

³² According to the Police, only 18% of domestic violence cases are reported during government working hours (07:30 – 14:30).

³³ Veis, C. (2010) 'The Criminal Investigation of Domestic Violence Cases: Challenges and Issues', *Analysis Report, Inspection of Cyprus and European Law*, Vol. 11, μ – Law Publishing, p. 6-11.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 6-11.

Thus, although there are trained police officers with expertise in dealing with domestic violence cases, a good number are not which results in a lack of consistency in the effective handling of domestic violence cases by the Police. Without systematic training, it remains up to the individual police officer's personal knowledge and sensitivity toward domestic violence which cannot be considered sufficient under any circumstances.

HEALTH SERVICES

Although in many countries, violence against women and particularly domestic violence, is framed as a public health issue, this is not the case in Cyprus and, as a result, the public health services play almost no role in data collection, prevention (in terms of early detection, awareness raising etc), and treatment of domestic violence victims. It is widely recognized that the Health Services can play a vital role in helping to identify abuse early, in providing victims with the necessary treatment, and referring women to appropriate care in order to prevent the escalation of violence and its short and long term health consequences. According to an evaluation of the role of the health services in handling domestic violence cases, health professionals have neither the time nor the training to take full responsibility for the care of victims. Indeed, health professionals reveal a general lack of awareness on the causes and consequences of domestic violence and tend to justify the actions of perpetrators and transfer responsibility on the victims.³⁵ There is no systematic programme for the specialized training of health professionals in the area of domestic violence, and health professionals themselves feel that they are not adequately trained to identify victims of violence or to intervene effectively. Furthermore, there is a general lack of awareness among health professionals with regard to existing support services for victims, and thus they are not in a position to refer victims to the appropriate services.³⁶ There are also cultural barriers in identifying possible victims of violence including language barriers and other cultural factors that inhibit an open discussion of the issue.

According to the new NAP on domestic violence, the Health Services will play a more prominent role in both prevention and treatment of domestic violence through the implementation of parenting seminars for young couples and the incorporation of domestic violence in the in-service curriculum of all health professionals including gynaecologists, paediatricians, general practitioners, mid-wives, etc. as well as the emergency staff.³⁷

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AND NGOS

As discussed above, 82% of domestic violence incidents that are reported to the police are reported at times when the only governmental service available is the Police. In many cases the victims cannot access other relevant services because they are closed or because they are not accessible via telephone, especially during non-working hours. This hampers the effective identification of domestic violence victims, the accessibility of state support services.

NGOs can and do play a critical role in the identification, referral, and provision of support to victims of domestic violence. The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence runs the only crisis helpline and shelter for victims of domestic violence in Cyprus. The helpline is staffed by trained psychologists and social workers that provide immediate psychological support, guidance, and information with regard to their rights, as well as to arrange personal appointments with the Association's psychologists and social workers. However, due to funding constraints the hotline is not accessible on a 24 hour basis but from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

35 Apostolidou, M., Apostolidou, Z., Biran, M., Kouta, C., Payiatsou, M., Mavrikiou, P. (2008) *Attitudes of Health Professionals on Violence in the Family*, United Nations Development Programme, Nicosia.

36 Apostolidou, M., Apostolidou, Z., Payiatsou, M., Mavrikiou, P. (2007) 'Evaluation of Services Offered to Victims of Domestic Violence by the National Health Service', Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family, Nicosia. [<http://www.familyviolence.com.cy>]

37 Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family, *Cyprus National Action Plan on Combating Violence in the Family 2010-2015*, Nicosia. [http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/downloads/actionplan_2010-2013.pdf]

The Cyprus Family Planning Association, within the framework of its service provision on sexual and reproductive health and rights, often identifies and refers victims of domestic violence or other forms of violence against women to the relevant services such as the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence, the Police, and/or the Social Welfare Services as appropriate.

The organisation Action for Support, Equality, and Anti-Racism (KISA) are also an important actor given that they are the only NGO that provide free legal and social services, support, guidance and advice to migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Cyprus. Within this framework, KISA play a critical role in identifying victims of violence, as well as in providing support to migrant women victims of violence. NGOs report that migrant women face economic, geographical, and cultural barriers in accessing adequate psychological, legal, medical, and financial support. Migrant women are not encouraged to seek help from government services and are generally mistrustful towards them due to racist, xenophobic and sexist attitudes among officers. This makes the role of NGOs such as KISA in identifying victims, providing legal and other support, and in referring victims to other relevant services all the more important.

4.3 Women's Crisis Centres and Shelters

There are currently no state operated shelters for victims of domestic violence in Cyprus, despite these being foreseen by the relevant law as well as the aforementioned National Action Plan on the Prevention and Combating of Family Violence. According to the Council of Europe Recommendation Rec (2002)5, the existence of shelters, the number of places, and their accessibility are clear indicators of a state's will to protect women from violence on an immediate practical level. Despite commitments made on a political level to protect victims of domestic violence, the failure of the Cyprus Government to ensure that victims have immediate access to safe housing bellies a lack of real political will in this respect. Furthermore, there is no special provision for migrant women and there is no evidence to suggest that services provided are culturally sensitive.

In 1990 the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family began operating the only shelter for victims of domestic violence in Cyprus, and now offers 12 places for women victims of violence and their children. According to the recommendation by the European Parliament with regard to minimum shelter capacity available for victims of domestic violence, 65 family places are still needed. The shelter is located in Nicosia and thus is not easily accessible to women from other cities or from rural areas. The shelter is financed by state funding and there is a maximum stay period in of 6-8 weeks. In extreme cases additional time may be given. When the shelter is full the social welfare services shelter victims in private and public hospitals and even in nursing homes for the elderly. According to the Association, the shelter does not just provide housing to women in need, but also provides them with counselling and empowerment sessions so that women can freely identify their needs and make their own decision to break the cycle of violence.³⁸ There are also plans for the opening of a new shelter that will be operational by the end of 2012. The new shelter is expected to have more capacity to host victims, have permanent staff, and will also be accessible to women with disabilities.

The main problems faced by the Association are limited shelter space and lack of adequate funding. Of course, another issue that arises is their dependence on the state for funding, which puts into question their independence as well as the possibility of expanding their activities and services. Furthermore, the fact that the only shelter in Cyprus is located in the capital constitutes a vital barrier in providing shelter to women victims of domestic violence due to geographical, economic and other reasons. The Association's staff felt the state must play a more active role in achieving full provision to victims of violence in Cyprus.

38 Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family. [www.domviolence.org.cy]

Another issue affecting the Association is the lack of a gender perspective in its work. Although the Association fully recognizes that domestic violence disproportionately affects women and girls, the Association works within the national definition of domestic violence and does not formally recognize that domestic violence as gender-based and rooted in inequality between women and men. This puts into question their understanding of the true dynamics of domestic violence and, ultimately, their capacity to meet the needs of victims.

Despite these severe limitations in the scope of its work, the Association does cover a large gap in terms of meeting the needs of victims of violence and providing those services that the state does not adequately provide, or has failed to provide altogether. The Association often carries out evaluations of their services which have shown that victims are satisfied with the support services they have received, and other stakeholders such as the Police and the SWS have evaluated their cooperation with the Association as highly professional.

4.4 Measures to Promote Social Inclusion

Violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of women's poverty and social exclusion.³⁹ All interviewees agreed that poverty and economic or other dependency are the most frequent risk factors for violence. Women and children living in violent environments often face 'poverty traps' that hinder their ability to escape such violence and rebuild their lives. According to a report by WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe) the 'poverty traps' leading victims of violence and their children to social exclusion include: the impact of violence on women's health; exclusion from education and life-long learning; limited access to the labour market leading to reduced economic resources; dependency on public assistance; homelessness; single-parenthood; and, for migrant women, risk of being deported and/or otherwise excluded from public support and assistance due to their migrant status.

Contributing to the above are the structural inequalities faced by women at all levels, including their marginalized position in the labour market, the persistent wage gap between women and men, lack of high quality low cost child care, among others. These translate into lower pensions for women and greater dependency on public assistance and other welfare provisions. Women experiencing domestic violence, especially after a separation, are vulnerable to poverty for numerous reasons. In the majority of cases they are without financial means, without a place to live, and access to the labour market is especially difficult for them. The situation is even more precarious for migrant women whose legal status is often linked to the perpetrator and thus may be prevented from accessing public benefits and/or risk deportation.

The majority of interviewees in this study agreed that poverty and social exclusion are the most frequent risk factors for violence, and constitute the main barriers for women living in violent relationships from escaping such violence.

According to the Police, one of the issues related to the economic dependency of women is the fact that women sign proxies/mandates and bank guarantees giving their spouse the right to manage all their financial, property and business matters. There have also been a number of cases of forgery of a women's signature by their spouse in order to secure loans and bank guarantees. Another barrier to the economic independency of women is the fact that the state does not have effective enforcement mechanisms to collect child support allowances owed by men, and for greater protection of divorced women in general.

In Cyprus, programmes for the social inclusion and reintegration of victims of violence are rare and are not part and parcel of support and assistance provided by relevant government services and/or NGOs. Focus is on providing immediate assistance such as accommodation and board, as well as legal advice and support.

³⁹ Women Against Violence Europe (2009) *'Policy Paper on the Interdependency of Poverty and Women experiencing Domestic Violence, and Migrant women'*, WAVE Network. Vienna.

The Social Welfare Services (SWS) are responsible for granting public assistance to victims under the Public Assistance Law. Under the Public Assistance and Services Laws 1991-2003, a person legally residing in Cyprus whose resources are not sufficient to meet his/her basic and special needs, may be entitled to financial assistance and/or social services. In 2006, the Law on Public Assistance was amended to financially reinforce public assistance recipients and encourage their integration in the labour market. Victims of violence can and do benefit from the public assistance scheme but most do so as 'single parents' given they meet income and other criteria. Single parents are also entitled to additional benefits within this framework. For example, for single-parent families 50% of the net income from employment is not taken into account when determining the right to and the amount of public assistance. Child benefit is also not taken into account. Single parents are also eligible for an additional monthly allowance, including additional amounts for each dependent child.

However, according to the participants to this study, there are often long delays in granting public assistance to victims, which puts them in an extremely vulnerable position as they are usually in need of immediate economic support. This particularly affects those women who are in the shelter run by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence and whose futures are extremely uncertain. This may be exacerbated further in the case of migrant women whose residency status is uncertain and may not be eligible for any public support. According to the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence, even when women leave the shelter and manage to find new accommodation and employment, public assistance is often not enough to cover their basic needs and those of their children.

The Cyprus National Strategy for Social Inclusion (2008-2010) describes a number of policy measures on social integration of vulnerable groups including vocational training, and measures to promote their integration in the labour market. However, women victims of violence are not recognized as a distinct vulnerable group within this framework. This is one of the most serious problems faced by the victims that need urgent economic support, childcare, access to the labour market, and/or vocational and other training.

"We have a big gap in mechanisms that support women victims of domestic violence especially after they leave the shelter, in terms of public assistance, housing and also programmes for re-integration."

NATIONAL MACHINERY FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

When designing integration/social inclusion programmes, it is essential that these address those factors that contribute to the marginalization of women in all areas and render them socially vulnerable. Although economic assistance is important, it must be emphasised that this cannot be considered a cure-all in addressing the needs of victims of violence. Such programmes must include measures for adequate housing, employment, vocational training, and childcare services, and be linked to the gender equality and women's rights framework. So although social benefits are vital for the immediate support of victims of violence, these must be accompanied by active inclusion policies that take into account the specific needs of women from a gender perspective.

4.5 Perpetrator Programmes

The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence in the Family runs two related intervention programmes called "Compassion" which are designed for perpetrators of domestic violence on the one hand, and victims of violence on the other. The first is directed toward men with violent behaviour and is designed to help them take responsibility for their anger and behaviour, change their attitudes and perceptions towards such violence, and thus prevent violent behaviour from reoccurring. The other is for women victims of violence aiming at empowering them through self-compassion techniques in order to find their inner strength and be able to take the best decisions for themselves, as well as for their relationships. Thus, the programme claims to have both a preventative as well as a treatment element in that it aims to prevent

negative thoughts and feelings that may lead to violent behaviours, as well as to help women recuperate from emotional pain and abuse through the practice of specific self-healing techniques. The programme has been running since 2007 and has reached a total number of 98 persons, 43 men and 55 women. According to Association sta , the programme has been evaluated internally through the use of questionnaires, and has achieved positive results in terms of behaviour change and building self-esteem. To date, there has not been any external evaluation of the programme.

The programme 'Compassion' was lauded by the Government as a necessary and innovative programme to fill the gap in the provision of support to perpetrators. However, participants to this study expressed concern that such programmes may in future be used to avoid legal sanctions.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it was felt that there is little evidence that such programmes are effective in addressing men's violent practices and that promoting such social interventions as a blanket policy regardless of their quality can be dangerous.⁴¹ There is also an immediate danger to partners and ex-partners when offering a service that appears to give the hope that the perpetrator may change his abusive behaviour. Indeed, when a perpetrator attends such programmes his partner may decide to stay in or return to the relationship - given personal, financial, and societal pressures - which may result in her immediate danger. Furthermore, if we recognize violence against women as a structural issue linked to unequal power relations between women and men, then perpetrator programmes cannot address anger management issues alone, but those gender-based assumptions supporting abusive behaviour. Another worrying issue is the extent to which perpetrator programmes may divert funding from desperately underfunded women's projects and services into relatively untested programmes for men.

Nevertheless, the aim here is not to dismiss perpetrator programmes altogether but to raise some important questions for further study and consideration in order to ensure that the safety of victims are the uppermost priority. Firstly, perpetrator programmes should not be used in order to avoid the legal consequences of criminal behaviour as defined by law. Secondly, perpetrator programmes must be run in close cooperation/coordination with programmes dealing with the protection of women and incorporate a gender equality perspective. It is also necessary to implement systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes and whether this effectiveness justifies their costs. Finally, perpetrator programmes must not divert much needed funding from victim services.

4.6 The Law Services and Legal Assistance

The Law Office of the Republic is the body responsible for prosecuting cases of domestic violence that are considered particularly serious, or that will be brought to Criminal Court. Such cases are dealt with by public prosecutors, acting in accordance with legal guidance of the Office of the Attorney General.⁴² All other cases of domestic violence are brought before Family Court, and victims can apply for legal aid if they are unable to afford a private lawyer.

According to the Manual on Interdepartmental Procedures, the Law Office of the Republic was to appoint a 15 member team that would specialize in domestic violence. This team would be responsible for the examination of reported cases and refer them to the relevant authorities such as the Police and the Social Welfare Services. This team would also be responsible for handling cases of domestic violence in Criminal Court. Additionally, a specialized legal officer would be available for legal advice regarding domestic violence on a 24 hour basis.

40 Veis, C. (2010) The Criminal Investigation of Domestic Violence Cases: Challenges and Issues, *Analysis Report, Inspection of Cyprus and European Law*, Vol. 11, μ – Law Publishing, p. 12.

41 Anti Gaber, M. (2009) *Violence in the EU Examined: Policies on Violence against Women, Children and Youth in 2004 EU accession countries*, 1st edition. University of Ljubljana: Faculty of Arts. [<http://www.ff.unilj.si/fakulteta/Dejavnosti/ZIFF/DAPHNEeng/Publications/BOOK%20Violence%20in%20the%20EU%20Examined.pdf>]

42 Office of the Attorney General. [http://www.law.gov.cy/law/lawoffice.nsf/dmlindex_gr/dmlindex_gr?OpenDocument]

Despite the above, in reality this 15 member team does not in fact function, nor do public prosecutors have any specialization in domestic violence. This was confirmed by the representative of the Law Services who stated that domestic violence cases are brought to court by public prosecutors that specialize in general criminal law and not domestic violence specifically. In fact, the Law Service does not support or see the need for specialization on family violence in order to effectively prosecute criminal cases. The representative of the Law Office that participated in this study stated that all criminal cases receive the same priority and are handled with equal seriousness regardless of the issue, and regardless of the prosecutor's specific expertise. She continued to argue that if a public prosecutor is specialized in criminal law then it should not matter if the victim is a woman, an elderly person, or a child. Another serious issue is that, according to the participants of this study, although in theory a public prosecutor should be available 24 hours a day to provide urgent legal advice, this is rarely the case and often the officer on duty cannot be reached or is unavailable.

Thus, the Law Services play very little role in effective victim support which directly affects the rates of attrition and conviction in domestic violence cases. There is a general lack of expertise among public prosecutors on domestic violence, as well as a lack of awareness and sensitivity.

With regard to legal support provided by private legal counsellors and lawyers, a study by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies shows that victims of violence are deeply dissatisfied with the support provided.⁴³ They indicate that they are not provided with adequate and sufficient information with regard to the legal process, do not receive comprehensive information in relation to their rights, and even complain that their cases are dealt with negligently. This was particularly true in the case of migrant women who felt that they were the victims of prejudice and discrimination on the part of their lawyers.

4.7 Lack of Awareness among Service Providers

It is well documented that there is widespread prejudice in relation to domestic violence as with other forms of violence against women. Women victims of domestic violence experience fear of stigmatisation on the one hand, and face societal norms that accept and normalize violence on the other. Women themselves also lack awareness in relation to their rights and information on available support services. Furthermore, research has shown that there is a general mistrust towards the government departments and their competency in providing adequate protection and support.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, as we have seen above, these attitudes also permeate all government and NGO services working in the domestic violence field. Again, despite the fact that the majority of service providers recognize that women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, most participants to this study strongly supported the gender neutrality of domestic violence legislation and policies to combat the phenomenon. The absence of the gender perspective and the discursive confusion of the gender dimension of violence can be partly explained by the misconception of the term "gender perspective" as discrimination towards men. Gender-sensitivity is not perceived as recognition of the differences and specific needs of women and men, or as an acknowledgment that women's and men experiences of violence differ. Rather, it is misconstrued as a mechanism for giving women preferential treatment. When discussing violence against women in Cyprus, there are always those that will object to the term, claiming that men can also experience violence at the hands of women.

⁴³ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2010) 'Poverty and Social Exclusion of Women Victims of Domestic Violence', December 2010, Nicosia. [<http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Women-Violence-and-Social-Exclusion-Final.pdf>]

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 32-49.

"I am completely satisfied by the definition of domestic violence in that it covers both men and women. If I have a case of a man victim of domestic violence I should be able to prosecute the perpetrator on the same terms. Otherwise women will be benefit and men will lose."

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE

A number of participants to this study also revealed stereotypical attitudes towards domestic violence and particularly towards the victims. They revealed a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and there was no gendered analysis of the phenomenon. It is also evident that a general culture of 'victim blaming' prevails among those that work with domestic violence victims and who have responsibility for protecting them.

"Why do women stay with violent husbands? Why don't they leave them? I don't think that women nowadays are forced to stay with a violent husband".

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE

The lack of a real gender perspective in service provision means that not only victims are denied the support that they need but also sends the message that perpetrators can exercise violence with impunity. Systematic training programmes on violence against women and gender equality is critical for all those professionals that operate as gateways for the identification of victims and that provide access to victim support services. This should include officers of the Law Services as well as the Judiciary. These programmes must aim to change the attitudes of professionals towards domestic violence and towards domestic violence victims.

5 CONCLUSIONS

National data on the prevalence of domestic violence is not existent, and the only data available are those collected by the Police and the Association for the Prevention of Violence in the Family. The scarcity of data on violence against women means that we are dependent on police statistics for identifying trends in reported violence against women, but lack a true picture of the prevalence of domestic violence in Cyprus. This obviously impedes informed policy making on the issue, and results in inadequate support and protection services for women.

It is evident that there is a general trend of increased reporting of domestic violence with reported cases almost doubling in the past decade. The available data also shows that the majority of victims are women who suffer violence from male family members. Domestic violence has received an increased level of support by the Cyprus Government over the last decade, which has led to increased visibility of the issue and may have contributed to the increase in reporting rates. However, domestic violence continues to be one of the least reported crimes in Cyprus and conviction rates are among the lowest in Europe.

Cyprus has a comprehensive legislative framework to combat domestic violence, and more recently adopted a National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family (2010-2015). Despite this, the legislative framework is gender-neutral and does not take into account the gendered power relations at stake in violence against women. This has resulted in a complete lack of a gender perspective in policies and measures to combat domestic violence in Cyprus, which have thus far failed to address the root causes of violence against women, or the specific needs of women victims of violence and their children. Similarly, although the recently adopted NAP on Family Violence recognizes that violence disproportionately affects women and is perpetrated by men, it does not fully incorporate a gender perspective. Furthermore, no specific budget has been allocated for the implementation of the NAP, nor have timelines been set for the actions foreseen.

In terms of prevention, action has mostly focused on secondary and tertiary prevention and has failed to address the root causes of violence. The links between violence against women and gender inequality in all spheres of life have not been analysed or addressed in any meaningful way in prevention programmes and activities. Prevention activities have largely taken the form of public awareness raising actions with no real evidence of their impact on the wider society. Less attention has been placed on school based interventions with the exception of a number of NGOs that work with young people and adolescents on a systematic basis to challenge those gender based attitudes and perceptions that support and perpetuate violence against women. Despite the promise that comprehensive sex education was to be incorporated in the school curricula during the recent educational reform, this did not take place presenting a missed opportunity to sensitize young people and challenge prevailing knowledge and attitudes on gender relations and sexuality issues.

State services such as shelters and other specially designed premises for housing and handling victims of domestic violence are inadequate and do not meet minimum standards in terms of number of places offered per population. Only one shelter operates in the capital Nicosia, with only 12 places for women and their children.

Interagency cooperation on domestic violence is weak, despite the adoption of the Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures drafted by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family. Exacerbating the problem is the deep gap in experienced, professional, and specialized staff in all governmental services working on domestic violence. This is mainly due to the lack of systematic training, as well as the high mobility rate among front line service providers. This is particularly true of the Social Welfare Services, which are primarily responsible for all aspects of victim support and assistance. Officers are often unavailable and do not respond to domestic violence cases in a timely and effective manner.

The Police play a key role in combating domestic violence and remain the first point of contact for victims requesting support and assistance, mainly due to other government services being unavailable outside working hours. However, the Police also suffer from a lack of sufficient specialized personnel which directly affects the ability of the police to intervene expediently to keep the victim safe, as well as its ability to initiate criminal investigations.

The Health Services do not play any real role in data collection, early detection, or treatment of domestic violence. Health professionals have neither the time nor the expertise to identify victims of violence or to intervene effectively.

Despite the recognition that poverty and economic dependency are risk factors for violence, social inclusion/reintegration programmes are not part and parcel of support and assistance provided to domestic violence victims by relevant government services and/or NGOs. Victims eligible for public assistance often experience delays in the evaluation of their applications, and often the assistance is not sufficient to cover their basic needs and those of their children. The lack of social inclusion programmes raises the risks of poverty and social exclusion for women victims of domestic violence, and thus those factors that render them vulnerable in the first place are not adequately addressed.

Finally, there is a lack of a real gender perspective in service provision in Cyprus with service providers often holding stereotypical attitudes towards domestic violence and particularly towards victims. The real dynamics of domestic violence are rarely understood and domestic violence myths are widespread resulting in a culture of 'victim blaming' that permeates most of Cypriot society.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Systematic research on the extent of these crimes needs to be conducted to better understand the real dimensions of the problem and to better inform policy and support and prevention campaigns.
- Domestic violence needs to be recognized as a form of male violence against women and interpreted within the context of gender inequality and traditional power relations between women and men. This needs to be reflected in the legislative framework and in all actions to prevent and combat domestic violence.
- The gendered dimensions of those factors that render women vulnerable to violence need to be mainstreamed into anti-violence policy including marginalization in the labour market, the lack of affordable, quality child care services, and the gender pay gap, among others.

- Timetables, deadlines, and specific budgets for the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence must be set.
- Thoroughly monitor and evaluate the measures and strategies of the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence, and ensure that such monitoring is undertaken by an independent organisation that is not a party to the NAP.
- A systematic plan of action for the prevention of violence against women is needed, that will include awareness campaigns through the media and other sources, which will be monitored as to its implementation, regularity, target group and evaluation.
- Cooperation among governmental departments as well as cooperation between governmental departments and NGOs must be clearly re-examined and a new revised Manual of Interdepartmental Procedures drafted and adopted.
- NGOs and women's organisations must be systematically consulted in the formulation and implementation of policies and measures to combat domestic violence.
- The establishment of a domestic violence crisis centre that will provide a range of high quality, comprehensive and coordinated specialized services for women including legal assistance, counselling services, psychosocial support, health services, among others.
- The state must meet its obligation to provide safe shelter to women victims of violence and their children according to recommendations by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.
- A 24-hour hotline for victims of domestic violence must become operational without delay with specialised staff for immediate urgent intervention.
- Organise systematic and specialised training using a gender-sensitive approach for all actors involved in domestic violence, including the police, the health services, the social welfare services, the judiciary and legal professionals.
- Women who are victims of domestic violence must be able to receive autonomous and independent residence status regardless of migration status.
- Accessible and free legal assistance should be provided to all women victims of domestic violence prior and during the legal proceedings.
- Greater support from the state to NGOs that provide services to victims of violence. The funding and NGO participation in policy and services must be transparent and be regulated by law.
- Women victims of domestic violence must be recognized as a group particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. They should have access to a tailored package of services that will promote access to quality housing, income support, education and vocational training, child care services, among others.

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