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Learning lessons whilst creating change

It is with great interest and pleasure that I read this long awaited German contribution to European evaluation research.

The Intervention Projects and removal laws evident now across Austria, Germany and Switzerland represent a distinct and European response to domestic violence. As some of you know I was initially resistant to this approach, seeing it as a backdoor way to 'de-criminalise' domestic violence, increasingly I see that it delivers what women have always said they want from the police – for them to stop the violence, and what women and children increasingly request, that they should not have leave their home, lose everything to be safe. The challenge remains to ensure a strong link between civil and criminal law, especially in relation to those men who do not respect either the police or the courts.

Before commenting on the report, and linking it to the wider international knowledge base, it is important to take a moment to reflect on the scale of change it records - not only in relationships between women's NGOs and state agencies, but also between the agencies themselves. This is a considerable achievement in itself. At the same time it should not lead to a presumption that it has had a similar impact on relationships between women and men – it is entirely possible to transform understandings of and relationships between professionals with respect to domestic violence, whilst having little if any impact on the phenomena itself.

One notable finding that resonates with work in the UK is the importance of proactive methods. We now have research from several countries, and with respect to rape and trafficking, that demonstrating that not only do women not resent automatic contact and/or follow up, the majority welcome it. One version of this are the outreach efforts that take services to where women are, rather than waiting for them to be so desperate that they find them themselves, and ensuring that there is more of what women say they most value in the initial process of dealing with abuse, which in the UK is a helpline. Feminist researchers and practitioners now face the challenge of revisiting and extending theoretical frameworks on self-determination and agency to take account of this changing praxis.

Those of us here from the UK, where we have had to evaluate over 40 projects (covering responses to domestic violence, rape and prostitution) in 1 or 2 years, envy that this evaluation spanned six years. Whilst outcome data is limited it appears that, as in other locations, stronger links and understandings, structural and procedural

changes have resulted in limited increased safety for victims and minimal changes in sanctions for perpetrators. Police discretion continues to mean that most cases are not pursued, justified through the 'unwillingness' of battered women to pursue cases. When we look deeper, however, we see that this perception permits officers to not investigate properly and fail to collect critical evidence. We know from the UK and Australia that support and advocacy enables women to continue with criminal cases, and when linked to systematic collection of evidence at the time of the incident, including using digital cameras, can result in increased, and early, guilty pleas¹. I also want to offer a note of caution about the idea of 'victim satisfaction' as an accurate measure of changed police practice. Whilst we find much higher satisfaction rates across a number of societies, but must ask whether this is because expectations are so low – that if police officers are respectful and empathetic, yet do nothing, women still rate them positively.

A number of the lessons from the German evaluations resonate with the English speaking literature:

- Change is incremental and has to be sustained over time
- There are no simple routes for either victims or agencies – all need what Purna Sen has termed a 'basket of resources', reflecting this many shelters in the UK have extended into outreach, advocacy and follow on support
- Inter-agency work is more effective with a paid coordinator, and resources to pay poorly resourced NGOs for their participation
- There is a need for multiple entry points and forms of support/intervention and for services that reflect the complexities of some women's needs – whether this relates to immigration status or drug use or other additional factors
- The importance of post separation violence – with over a third of calls to the police being from women who have already separated
- It is difficult to mainstream a consistent national response
- Changing the practices of agencies requires more than policy and cooperation
- A combination of specialisation and mandatory training for all staff is required
- Data collection and collation by agencies remains poor, despite calls at national and European levels for reform, making ongoing monitoring virtually impossible
- We have also found in the UK a reluctance amongst established networks to extend their remit to all forms of violence against women, and even to do the less difficult task of making connections between domestic violence and child abuse, forced marriage and crimes in the name of honour

¹ See Holder R & Mayo, N, 2003, 'What do women want? Prosecuting family violence in the ACT', *Journal of the Institute of Criminology*, 15:1.

As our recent research on responses to reported rape across Europe demonstrates, legal and procedural reforms still do not produce the anticipated results – throughout Europe during the 1990s prosecution and conviction rates for rape were static or fell². Gender orders appear to have extensive capacities to adapt and re-configure in response to challenge and change. Whilst we all know how difficult it is to measure ‘success’, the next phase of evaluation in Germany must focus more on outcomes – what difference, if any, has been made in women’s, men’s and children’s lives? And on digging deeper to reveal the mechanisms whereby the implementation process subverts the intentions of change makers.

² L. Regan and L. Kelly, 2002, *Rape: Still a Forgotten Issue*, London, CWASU. Available on www.rcne.com