Together against violence

Assessment of the project by RIKK – Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference, University of Iceland

Summary in English (summary is translated from the Icelandic report, publ. 24th of October 2016 https://reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/lokauttekt_saman_gegn_ofbeldi_isbn.pdf)

In January 2015 The City of Reykjavik started a project titled ***Together Against Violence*** in cooperation with the Metropolitan Police Department, the Women's Shelter in Iceland and the Health Centres in the Capital Area to fight domestic violence. At first, the project was introduced as an experimental project. *In 2016 the project was extended for one year and is now a permanent project within the City of Reykjavík.* The project has now been assessed and evaluated. The aim of the assessment was to provide insight into the ***Together Against Violence*** projects current strength and weaknesses. Based on the assessment, concerned parties can identify current problems and consider different measures to address them.

The report is based on extensive data collection, including in-depth interviews with victims and interviews with key employees working within the project. Furthermore, data was collected through focus groups consisting of the projects key employees (from the Metropolitan Police Department, Reykjavík's Social Service Centres and Child Protection Agency. Additionally, online attitude surveys were sent out to key employees. The authors have analysed statistical data sets from the City of Reykjavík and the Greater Reykjavík Area. Moreover, the authors have had a discussion with specialists within the field (from the Women's Shelter in Iceland and the Organization Heimilisfriður) regarding the ***Together Against Violence*** project. Here, a summary of the main findings will be provided. It's important to note, that the data was collected during different times after the project was launched. Therefore, some of the comments presented in this report have been addressed and handled at this point.

The main results:

- There was a sharp increase in the number of domestic violence cases handled by the police in 2015. In total, the police handled 391 cases in 2015, compared to 200 in 2014. Keep in mind that these numbers are only based on the domestic violence cases handled in Reykjavík. The total number of cases handled in the capital-area in 2015 were 627. In 2014, there were 290 reported cases.
- Victims are mostly women (around 80%) and most perpetrators are men (81%) according to data accumulated by the Metropolitan Police Department. The most frequent cases handled by the police regarded victims of intimate partner violence. Domestic violence takes a number of different forms, including physical and emotional abuse.
- 2015, employees of Reykjavík's Social Service Centres handled 164 different cases where they were required to enter a site along with the police. The Social Service employees only entered a site if there were children present on the site or there were any children living at the site. If the victim agreed to have a Social Service employee entering the site along with the police, they did.
- 212 cases were identified as domestic violence by the Child Protection Services in Reykjavík. The majority of the cases were reported by the police (155 cases) and involved 144 children. Other cases were reported to welfare services (17 cases).
- Victims reported different forms of abuse: physical, emotional, sexual, economic abuse and destruction of property. In some cases, the abuse was a regular occurrence. Two victims experienced emotional abuse in the form of stalking.
- Survivors of domestic violence experience physical injuries and shame related to the abuse. The abuse can lead to mental illness, depression and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, it can lead to self-harm and even attempts at suicide. Few of the survivors who were interviewed had sought help to deal with the effects of the violence.
- In the interviews, victims mentioned that they had experienced economic abuse. It diminishes the victim's capacity to support themselves and increases dependence on the perpetrator, which can prevent the victim from leaving the situation. In this way, the victim's economic situation can be used to control and suppress the victim.
- Society's response to domestic violence has an impact on survivors. Support and positive reactions can make a difference, improve the well-being of the victim and

might prevent the victim from remaining locked in a cycle of abuse. On the other hand, negative reactions and isolation can affect the victim in a harmful way.

- Victims may experience significant barriers that prevent them from leaving the violent relationship, e.g. financial difficulties and difficulties in getting alternative housing. Half of the victims interviewed, said that they had ended the abusive relationship. Afterwards, they felt relieved but experienced complex emotions. Even though the relationship had ended, it did not ensure the victims security in some cases.
- Overall, the personnel was satisfied with the ***Together Against Violence*** project. Although, the implementation of the project has been criticised, which is normal concerning the major changes in the procedures being used.
- A questionnaire conducted among the Metropolitan Police Department showed that the majority of respondents said that they knew the procedures (67.3%) and that the procedures had been followed successfully (73.6%), additionally, 63.7% of the employees thought that the procedures met the needs of the victims. On the other hand, when employees were asked whether they thought that the procedures would result in a long-term decline in domestic violence incidents only 44,4% of the employees believed it would. Although, only one third of the employees asked responded to that question.
- It was noted through focus groups consisting of detectives and duty officers working at the Metropolitan Police Department that both groups were positive towards the ***Together Against Violence*** project. Both groups found it a necessary change to the handling of domestic violence matters and a part of change in attitudes towards domestic violence within the police. They found it helpful to have Social Services and Child Protection Services present at the scene, where there is often a great need for social assistance. Senior managers within the Metropolitan Police Department mainly criticised the procedures for being too rigid, some cases were upheld against the will of the victims and sometimes the employees felt that they didn't have enough resources to help or support people. It should be noted that project procedures have been changed following the senior managers criticism.
- It was noted through a focus group consisting of prosecutors working at the Metropolitan Police Department that prosecutors thought that the gathering of evidence at the scene had improved (e.g. photos of injuries). The employees had a

critical view of the project and mentioned that it's not possible to handle every case in the same way, that restraining orders could be burdensome and should only be imposed in special cases. Lastly, employees mentioned that they would have preferred more consultation when the project was in its forming stage and during the implementation phase.

- Police specialists had a positive view of the project and thought that it would inspire change in this specific policy area and how cases are processed within the Metropolitan Police Department. The police specialists had a very positive attitude towards cooperation with the City of Reykjavík.
- When asked about their view of the police, most victims had a positive view and mentioned that the officers had treated them with respect. Some of the victims mentioned that they noticed a clear difference in the police officers responses before and after the implementation of the project. Furthermore, the victims were pleased with how their cases were handled by the police; that the police speak to the victim and the perpetrator separately, photos are taken at the scene and evidence is collected. However, in a few cases, the victims experience with the police at the scene was negative. In those cases, some of the victims were displeased with the police officers behaviour and others felt like the police were taking the perpetrators side. Luckily, these cases were exceptions to the general experience victims described, which was positive.
- A questionnaire regarding the ***Together Against Violence*** project was sent out to the City of Reykjavík's staff (Social Services, Child Protection Services and senior managers). The results showed that there was a great deal of satisfaction among the staff. The majority of the staff felt that the procedures had been followed successfully at their workplace and that the procedures met the needs of the victims of domestic violence. When asked, the majority of the staff, 80,9%, believed that the procedures were likely to reduce the number of domestic violence cases in the long run. In addition, the majority of the staff were happy with the management of the project (81,8%) and believed that reforms implemented after the project was started had been implemented successfully. Finally, 68,1% of the respondents were happy with the training provided because of the ***Together Against Violence*** project.

- It was noted through focus groups consisting of Reykjavík's Social Services staff, that the staff was pleased with the project. Moreover, it was noted that the Social Service staff now handles more cases, different cases than they have handled previously. The Social Service staff also mentioned that they had a good cooperation with the police but criticized how little emphasis was placed on the perpetrators and underlined the importance of changing that. It was also noted through the focus group that the Social Service staff experienced much workload and thought that there was a need for certain factors to be improved when cases are documented.
- It was noted through focus groups consisting of the Child Protection Service staff was generally pleased with the ***Together Against Violence*** project. It was also noted that the staff considered the project to be very beneficial for the victims of domestic violence. However, the staff mentioned that their workload had increased, mainly because of more time devoted to work on the scene in relation to emergency calls reporting domestic violence. In cases where there was a child present at the scene, time consuming investigations at the scene can be hard on the child. Also mentioned by the staff was the need for specialized information and access to other professional networks familiar with the topic, e.g. Nordic networks.
- Specialists working at the City of Reykjavík were happy with the improved registration and statistical knowledge related to domestic violence cases. To ensure that cases are properly addressed and followed, there is a great need for communication between the parties involved. To that end, it's important that the employees follow the procedures outlined by the project.
- When asked about their experience of Reykjavík's Social Service most victims had a positive experience. In particular, it was noted that it was important to have social workers present at the scene to support the victims. The Social Service was mainly criticized for failing to follow-up on, and provide continued assistance to the victim. However, these issues have been addressed and dealt with by changing the projects procedures.
- Other partners of the project, like the Women's Shelter (Kvennaathvarfið) and the Heimilisfriður organization had a positive view of the project, which is a sign of positive development within the field.

- All employees involved in the project are experiencing an increased workload. An assessment team has pointed out that many of the employees are at risk of experiencing burnout if the workload remains at this level or continues to increase. To prevent this, increased funding is needed. It should be noted that the City of Reykjavík provided funding for employees working on call duty.
- Special actions that are included in the project's processes: Follow-up visit, restraining orders and expulsion from the home (these processes were in place before the project was implemented but are now given special emphasis), a checklist and training. At the beginning of the project, only two out of fifteen victims of domestic violence received a follow-up visit shortly after the violence was reported to the police or Social Services which is in accordance with the projects processes. Those who received a follow-up visit were very pleased with it. The follow-up visit proved to be more complex during the implementation phase of the project. Due to the complications, the procedures have been changed and the initiative of the follow-up visits are now in the hands of Social Services.
- There was an increase in restraining orders issued and numbers of home expulsions in the first half of 2015, compared to 2014. Victims seem to be pleased with having a restraining order as an available option. However, two domestic violence victims' request for restraining orders were denied, which disappointed them. There are mixed views on the effects of restraining orders among the employees of the project. For example, employees at the Prosecution service felt that the remedy was burdensome for perpetrators and that it should be used carefully. On the other hand, police officers didn't agree with that. It has also been discussed whether it would be appropriate to go against the victims will when a restriction order is decided.
- A checklist should be filled out at the scene but some police officers complained about the list and said that they were unsure of what difference it made in their process of collecting evidence. This has been addressed and work is underway to develop and implement a risk assessment within the police.
- Police officers generally criticized the lack of training regarding the ***Together Against Violence*** project. Various programs and lectures have been offered to police officers but attendance has been low, which can be partly explained by the heavy workload police officers often experience. Furthermore, meetings have been held with police

officers to clarify procedures and increase consultation between different parties. Other courses regarding the project have been held and the Department of Welfare has offered a special program in relation to the project to its staff. Social workers were pleased with the training but wished for more specific training and more consultation meetings for the future of the project. This has been addressed at this point. To this end, psychologists working at Reykjavík's Child Protection Agency have also asked for more specific training and for access to other professional networks.

- Certain groups are at a greater risk of experiencing domestic violence: children, disabled people, people of foreign origin and those facing addiction or mental health problems. Additionally, there is a lack of resources for female perpetrators and male victims**.**
- According to data collected by the Metropolitan Police Department, children were living on the site in 63% of domestic violence cases handled by the police. Children were living in nearly all homes of the victims who the authors of this report spoke to. Children can be victims themselves or witness domestic violence which can have very negative effects on them. There was a consensus on the importance of paying close attention to cases where children are involved among all the victim's authors spoke to during the data collection. Police officers were positive about putting more focus on children. Reykjavík's Child Protection Agency employees were also generally happy with the project and especially with the fact, that children who witness domestic violence now have the right to psychological treatment as soon as possible. However, there was some dissatisfaction among child protection employees with the police having to possibly step into what was previously their role. It is necessary to think of children who are exposed to or experience domestic violence and ensure that they get enough support. To this end, there is a need to strengthen psychological services offered by the Child Protection Agency.
- In about one-fifth of the cases handled by the police the victim or the perpetrator were of foreign origin. This means that people of foreign origin are at a greater risk of experiencing domestic violence. During the data collection, authors spoke to two victims whom were of foreign origin. Generally, both were pleased with the service offered but one of the victims mentioned that they perceived the police as disrespectful. Police officers tend to consider these cases as complex, due to cultural

differences and different values that make a difference in cases (such as physical punishment used as a method for upbringing). Police officers make an effort to respect different views and cultural groups. However, they must respond to violations according to the Icelandic. It has also been noted that it can be difficult to provide interpreter services. Employees of the Women's Shelter pointed out that women of foreign origin tend to stay longer at the shelter due to lack of a support network in Iceland. Furthermore, the women lack information about their rights and other options that are offered in Iceland.

- Victim's disabilities are not documented in data collected by the police. According to police officers, disabled people are not involved in many of the domestic violence cases handled by them. Still it should be noted, that disabilities vary and are not always recognisable. For future references, there is a need to look into how disabled people can be reached and how their needs can be met. Moreover, it's important to include the number of cases where disabled people are involved in the data collected by public institutions.
- The police are not allowed to collect information about addiction problems and mental health issues. It was noted through interviews with the victims that perpetrators often suffer from mental illnesses or addiction and had not sought help to deal with it. Three victims said that they had an addiction problem themselves. Project employees pointed out that casas where both addiction problems and mental health issues are present and those who are involved haven't sought help can be really complicated.
- In domestic violence cases, it is often assumed that perpetrators are male and the victims are female which is generally the case. However there are few cases where the victim is male. In those cases, male victims often lack options or a way out. For example, the Women's Shelter only welcomes women but offers assistance to men by phone. When it first began Heimilisfriður was only for men but has recently opened up for everyone. It is important that this be taken into account when formulating and planning resources in the future.

Overall, the results presented in this report show that there has been a positive change within the field and much progress has been made since the project was launched.

Employees have a strong belief in this new approach and believe that it will reduce domestic violence cases in the long run. There has been a good cooperation between Metropolitan Police Department, Reykjavík's Social Service Centres and the Child Protection Agency. Procedures have been improved along the way and employees have had time to get used to new procedures and methods.