

National strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, 2010 -2014

Final Review and Proposals for New Strategy

Feedback from the MEND Programme and the Men's Development Network

Re: Action 16: Strengthen measures to deal with domestic violence perpetrators.

What was good about the Strategy?

- On-going support for Intervention Programmes with integrated Partner Support Services.
- Establishment of the Domestic Violence Intervention Programme Committee that meets 3 times a year
- Strengthening the links between the individual Interventions Programmes and between Intervention Programmes and the Victim Support Services.
- Facilitating agreement on having a representative from the Intervention Programmes on the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women.
- Supporting the development of data collection systems that help with programme development, effectiveness and evaluation.
- That Cosc actively profiled the work of Intervention Programmes (e.g., in Spain), engaged with external researchers regarding Programme development (e.g., Prof John Devaney, Queens University, Belfast and meet with expert trainers in the work of the intervention programmes (e.g., Mark Farrall and Paul Wolf Light)
- Awareness Raising annual Grants have supported related issues. E.g., White Ribbon Campaign and 16 Days of Action events where intervention programmes participated (e.g., in Waterford and Wexford)

What was not good?

- In Chapter Two of the Strategy: Understanding domestic,sexual and gender-based violence, the opening paragraph (2.1) reads:

“In order to tackle the subject of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the problem. What is domestic violence? What is sexual violence? What is gender-based violence? When does this violence occur? What types of behaviours are generally covered by these terms? How extensive is the problem and what are the barriers to its resolution?”

All good and appropriate questions but a question that remains unasked and often unanswered is: what are the core factors influencing a person's need/choice to use violence or abuse within intimate relationships? This is important because a strategy cannot be based simply on the prevalence of the violence/abuse or the ways in which it manifests but must also look at factors that might lead a person to use violence/abuse within their intimate relationships. It is difficult to see how a strategy can really effect change without a comprehensive exploration of the key factors involved in the use of violent or abusive behaviour within intimate relationships. The Strategy, again appropriately, listens to the voices of the victims (Section 1.2) but like many documents on Domestic Violence the voices of perpetrators are absent. Our experience of working with men who have been violent within relationships is that they have insights into their violent behaviour, its role in their lives, what has led to this behaviour etc. If we don't engage with those who perpetrate the violence and restrict ourselves to an ideological understanding of this behaviour, then the impact of strategies will be limited. Listening to perpetrators does not imply condoning their behaviour, colluding with their behaviour or suggesting that they are not responsible for their behaviour. The prevalence of violence/abuse within intimate relationships clearly indicates that it would be of value to explore key factors influencing some men's violent/abusive behaviour within their relationships. This might lead to a recognition of the complexity of the issue but also to a recognition of appropriate and timely interventions that will get to the heart of the matter. To quote from Beyond Violence:

“Furthermore, too often primary and secondary domestic abuse prevention strategies focus narrowly on challenging inappropriate attitudes. Attitudes play an important part in reinforcing violence, particularly at certain points in culture and history. However, evidence suggests the most potent contributors to domestic abuse in our society today are found in the relationships people have and are exposed to when they are young. A comprehensive prevention strategy should therefore include helping people to have positive relational experiences right from the start and supporting them in finding the skills for these.”

A more comprehensive understanding of the factors involved in a person's use of violence/abuse within intimate relationships will facilitate a more flexible, gender inclusive response. Below are some relevant quotes from the Beyond Violence – Breaking Cycles of domestic abuse. A report from the Centre for Social Justice (June 2013) Authors Dr Elly Farmer and Dr Samantha Cullen:

“Consider healing and restoration, where possible, as well as punishment and safety – Current policy and practice is dominated by the important but insufficient goals of punishing perpetrators and ensuring safety for victims. This strategy, consistent with the dominant paradigm of power, control and patriarchy, typically ignores the possibility that people and relationships can change at the deep psychological level. Policy and practice should aim not only for the restoration of people who have been abused, but also for the rehabilitation of people who have abused and, if appropriate, transformation of the abusive relationships themselves”

“Acknowledging the complex influences and dynamics involved in domestic abuse in no way excuses perpetrators or moves the debate away from responsibility and choice. It is crucial for the sake of victims and their families, that we break from this

common misconception. Juxtaposing the issues in this way is unnecessary and counter-productive. Well-intentioned efforts to avoid absolving the person who abuses from responsibility for that abuse, can result in key drivers to domestic abuse going un-recognised in prevention efforts. Recognition of both wider influences and individual responsibility is critical to addressing the problem successfully. Working at the heart of this ‘both, and’ position might feel complicated, messy, and lacking the sense of there being a clear enemy camp, but it is where green shoots of new solutions can appear.”

From the Men’s Development Network it is suggested that the inclusion of prostitution as an identified form of violence against women and girls and some men and boys in any definition of violence against women and men. It could be said that this is a conspicuous omission from the last National Strategy that it is timely to rectify given the large body of research, the agreement of the Joint Oireachtas Committee, and the resolution of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe recognising the gendered and harmful nature of Prostitution.

What evidence

To quote from a recent paper by John Devaney, Queens University, Belfast “One of the weaknesses of group-based programmes is that they were originally developed by and have evolved through an ideological perspective on the root causes of domestic violence, rather than an empirical model of intervention development.” Our experience in the area is that ideological perspectives continue to overshadow evidence-based treatment responses which could support a variety of responses to perpetrators and victims, including under certain conditions, couples work. There are many models of treatment emerging, including Gender-Inclusive approaches and the evidence is that these have not been fully explored (see “*Family Interventions in Domestic Violence – A Handbook of Gender-Inclusive Theory and Treatment*, Eds John Hamel and Tonia L. Nicholls Springer Publishing Co 2007)

The New Strategy – what we would like to contribute

- Continue to see our Intervention Programmes funded and developed.
- Set up new local programmes where necessary and with the guidance of Cosc.
- Explore evidence-based or evidence informed approaches that will help to develop the work with perpetrators and victims into the future, including more gender inclusive responses.
- Continue to participate on appropriate Domestic Violence forums to inform others of our work and to listen to the work being done by others in the area.

- Continue to be involved in Awareness Raising Campaigns at local (eg 16 Days) and at national levels (e.g., White Ribbon Campaign and Turn Off the Red Light Campaign)

What others can do

- For the Intervention Programmes building on our relationships with Women's organisations both locally, regionally and nationally is important so that we can optimize the outcomes for women, children and men where domestic violence has been an issue.
- Sign up to an inclusive dialogue to facilitate engagement with the 'both and' dimensions of working with male perpetrators in recognition of both the "wider influences and individual responsibility .. critical to addressing the problem successfully."