

«My hopes for the future: Just a normal life»

How victimised women experience intervention in partner violence

Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations

A research study in the context
of the National Research Programme NRP 60 «Gender Equality»
of the Swiss National Science Foundation

Schinznach-Dorf, June 2014

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Information about this study

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Funding of the research

The study was conducted in the context of the National Research Programme NRP 60 «Gender equality». It was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Research report and reference

Gloor Daniela, Meier Hanna (2014): «Der Polizist ist mein Engel gewesen.» Sicht gewaltbetroffener Frauen auf institutionelle Interventionen bei Gewalt in Ehe und Partnerschaft. [„The police officer was my angel“. How victimised women experience intervention in partner violence] Project NRP 60, final report, pp. 366.

The report can be obtained at www.socialinsight.ch

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1 Starting point

1.1 Problem to be addressed / about this study

The „victims‘ views“ study concerns the experiences of women who approach agencies and institutions for help and support with intimate partner violence. How do women experience these contacts? To what extent do women find intervention and support from different agencies helpful and useful given their respective circumstances and problems?

This question is significant in so far as the past years have seen far-reaching changes in societal perceptions of violence against women: violence in marriage and intimate relationships is no longer acceptable. As a consequence, the state and its institutions have considerably changed their approach to the problem. Nowadays it is no longer primarily independent women’s projects that intervene in domestic abuse but rather a range of different agencies and institutions that offer support and intervention in ongoing violence.

New legislation at national and cantonal level underlines these changes: since 2004 violence in marriage and intimate relationships is a public offence prosecuted by the state. In 2007 a civil legal measure for protection against violence came into effect (Art. 28b ZGB), and go-orders for domestic violence, which are implemented by cantonal police, have been introduced successively since 2003. Agencies and institutions have new intervention tools at their disposal and the actions of different actors have been improved and coordinated.

However, what has been missing is a closer look at the impact of these changes, whether they have had the intended consequences and whether they have helped to improve the lives of women affected by violence. Little attention has been paid to how women themselves view the new measures and the workings of the intervention and support system. It is at this point that the present study is situated.

In 2011 and 2012 the research team conducted in-depth narrative interviews with 40 women who had experienced violence from their partner and subsequently sought support. The interviews took place in four German speaking Swiss cantons – Basel-Stadt, Luzern, St. Gallen and Zurich – and were arranged with support and logistical help from police, women/victim's aid agencies and women's shelters. These agencies set up contacts between researchers and interviewees. Interviews lasted from one to three hours and were transcribed verbatim; they constitute the primary empirical evidence of this study. The qualitative analysis focused on women's views of their contacts with different agencies and institutions. The analyses foreground women's subjective perspectives and viewpoints; the goal is to understand how victimised women experience their situation, which measures, services, and approaches they find supportive and helpful, and which they find stressful and difficult. To complement women's views the research team also conducted interviews with experts at different institutions. Lastly, the team conducted a document analysis of legal texts and institutional policies that set out an entity's responsibilities within the intervention network.

1.2 Intervention goals and the intervention framework

Numerous different institutions, agencies and professionals participate in the practical work of intervening in partner violence. Across these entities a consensus has been established, not least due to the work of the intervention and coordination offices against domestic violence, as to the goals and overall direction of institutional intervention. At present three fundamental goals guide institutional action towards partner violence (domestic violence), with the intention to respond appropriately and improve the situation of victims:

- Ending violence
- Protecting and supporting victims
- Holding perpetrators accountable and offering support for behaviour change

In principle, all actors who are confronted with issues of partner violence are required to work towards these goals. The same goals also underlie legislation on domestic violence. However, different agencies and institutions act under different institutional and legal constraints and their engagement with partner violence has developed along different trajectories. Therefore, within the intervention framework individual agencies and offices take on different roles. Usually, *one* of the three fundamental goals is at the forefront of their practical work.

Table 1 Primary institutional goals for intervention in partner violence

End violence	Protect and support victims	Hold perpetrators accountable and offer support for behaviour change
Police	Police →	Prosecution / Criminal courts
	Specialised victim support agencies	Specialised violence counselling
	Women's shelters	
	← Civil law courts →	
	← Child protection agency (KESB) →	
	Migration office	
	Health care system	
	Lawyers	
	Various other agencies	

Table 1 illustrates the relative emphasis, within the present intervention framework, that different agencies put on the three fundamental goals.¹ Several agencies and institutions take on important tasks in victim protection and safety, and in specialised support and help for victims of domestic violence. In contrast, noticeably fewer agencies have tasks and competencies related to the goal of ending violence and the goal of holding perpetrators accountable and encouraging behaviour change. It should be noted that each individual institution, regardless of its primary remit, should always pay attention to all three goals. This is part of the inter-institutional consensus, which has emerged over the past years from the work of the cantonal intervention and coordination offices against domestic violence.

2 Key findings and conclusions

2.1 Sensible intervention goals in the perspective of victimised women

When women talk about their histories and experiences with partner violence they themselves raise the three fundamental goals without being asked about them. The interviews show that with regard to partner violence the goals of institutions fully align with the wishes and needs of women. First and foremost for women is the need to end the partner's violence and control. Violence needs to end and women ought no longer to suffer from threats, assaults and humiliations.

Ending violence

In the perspective of affected women the goal of ending violence means, for instance, „to live in peace and quiet“. It also means not being afraid anymore and not living with constant uncertainty and insecurity. For these women the need to end violence clearly goes beyond the immediate crisis. Ending violence means not only the end to an immediate threat, humiliation or dangerous situation but a *sustainable* life without violence. Women's choice of words illustrates this: “living in peace”, «being able to live my life», «be left in peace», to have «just a normal life». These are recurring phrases when women articulate their wish for violence to end.

... he should just leave me in peace. This is my great wish. [...] I don't want to live anymore being afraid all the time. I want to be free with my children [...] just be comfortable, I don't want to always have to look back over my shoulder: Is somebody[he] coming? (Int 2, SI-Abs 108, 118)

For several women ending violence also meant that the violence should not be passed on to their children. They want to prevent their children from becoming perpetrators or victims because of these experiences. Therefore, ending violence also means disrupting the cycle of violence for the future of the children.

¹ The arrows in the table indicate that an agency or institution also has measures at its disposal that contribute to the neighbouring goal. The full report, available in German, sets out in more detail the specific tasks of different entities and their position within the intervention framework, as well as developments and changes in institutional practice.

Eventually, they'll grow up, get married, have a family, and I just didn't want, that these things would leave their traces on them. (Int 17, SI-Abs 41)

That THEY [children] find a way, later in life, nonetheless, DESPITE EVERYTHING ... to enter into a relationship and one WITHOUT beatings. Because it's two BOYS and that is ALWAYS at the back of my head. (Int 8, Abs 117)

Holding perpetrators accountable, offering support for behaviour change

Holding the perpetrator accountable for his behaviour is a topic that comes up repeatedly in the conversations with the women. It becomes clear that in women's perspectives there is a wide range of ways in which a perpetrator might take responsibility for his behaviour. For some women it means criminal prosecution of the perpetrator and an explicit sanctioning by the justice system of his behaviour and transgressions. For these women official punishment of the perpetrator through the legal system is the called-for societal response. Furthermore, for these women criminal proceedings and sanctioning often mean that there ought to be a substantive discussion of the violent behaviour. This means that the man's behaviour will be named and rejected as unjust, but also that something is set into motion that will change his behaviour. Criminal proceedings and sanctions should get the man to confront his actions and solve the problems he creates.

Other women do not mention criminal proceedings and punishment in their reflections and descriptions. Nonetheless, they, too, articulate the need for the man to take responsibility and confront his own behaviour. They speak about the need for help for the man, that he should seek and receive help. What matters in the perspective of these women is that the (ex-) partner—in whatever way possible—gets to the point where he admits his behaviour is problematic, takes it seriously and starts to change. Quite often the women then state that the man might need a little “encouragement” on this path and be forced along for his own good, as he probably wouldn't be able to change on his own. In the perspective of these women targeted help and support for the man is a meaningful way of holding him accountable.

Protecting and supporting victims

The women made it clear that when they contact various institutions they unreservedly expect that these will support them through their ordeal. In the perspective of the women this means first and foremost that agencies and experts will fully realise, acknowledge and take seriously the circumstances and victimisation experiences women share with them. For the women this is particularly important if they, despite having been victimised, have no noticeable physical injuries “to show for it”.

This may seem self-evident but in the perspective of the women it is decisive. When agencies or professionals do not fully take in what women tell them, interaction with them turns into the opposite of support and becomes “depowering”. If this fundamental aspect of interaction is short-changed, serious consequences ensue: the response of the agencies and their concrete intervention measures will not be properly tailored to a woman's actual circumstances; they will not contribute to safety but may inadvertently pose additional

dangers. Not least, in such situations women are not referred to specialised services or are referred too late.

For women who have been victimised the institutional goal of victim protection and support means that they are accorded the proper space to share their experiences and are taken seriously. In women's perspective this is the essential and necessary foundation on which further, appropriate measures can be built so that institutional interventions actually are supportive and effective.

Conclusion: The three basic aims, which at present various agencies and institutions pursue when intervening in partner violence, align with the central needs of victimised women. In terms of implementation this is a useful and encouraging finding: women will experience institutional action as suited to their needs and expectations when intervention actors focus on ending violence, protecting victims' safety, offering appropriate and empowering support, and setting limits to perpetrators, holding them accountable and offering support for change.

2.2 Experiences with institutional intervention: Much has changed – much remains to be done

The experiences which the interviewees shared give further insight into the current state of the intervention framework for partner violence. Because of the (ex-)partner's violent actions the women come, sooner or later, into contact with many different agencies, institutions and professionals. In the following analysis, however, the focus is not on individual entities but on the intervention framework as a whole. The question is to what extent, in women's perspective and experience, are the three fundamental goals of institutional intervention actually reached?²

Ending violence

Women's testimony draws attention to fundamental problems with measures and actions that are supposed to end violence. Some women find that after an institutional intervention the partner's violence ended. Often, however, women say that whatever measure was taken had no effect: measures are insufficient for effectively ending violence.

A sobering realisation emerging from the conversations is that the success of measures to a large extent depends on the violent man's willingness to cooperate. This means the interventions and orders of responsible agencies are effective so long as the man "plays along". If the man decides that the findings and orders against him are none of his business and that he will ignore them, the measures remain ineffective – neither does the violence end nor does the perpetrator suffer any further consequences for his defiance.

² Findings about women's interactions with the individual agencies listed in Table 1 are detailed in the full report in the respective chapters on institutions.

The experiences of victimised women demonstrate vividly that a man's refusal to cooperate rarely has any consequences. Certainly, go-orders and injunctions are imposed; however, when the man does not "voluntarily" adhere to them but rather continues to contact, harass, endanger or control his (ex-)partner, such actions usually have no further consequences for him. There is no additional institutional action that would reinforce the measures and end the violence.

From the perspective of the woman, in such situations her problems intensify considerably: she is exposed to more violence by her (ex-)partner and it is her responsibility to do something about it. She needs to report the breach of go-orders or injunctions to the authorities and get in touch with relevant agencies and institutions – when the man *continues* to be violent, the woman needs to *continuously* report. At this point, any positive contact between woman and police turns into the opposite; her repeated reports do not endear her to police. In addition, she experiences their intervention as ineffective because little further action follows aside from scolding the perpetrator, "you must not do this!" From the perspective of the woman this is more of a validation for the violent man than a sanction: The man gets the message that he can do whatever he wants with impunity – apparently his actions are acceptable after all.

Protecting and supporting victims

The analysis of the conversations shows that the changes of the past years with regard to the goal of victim protection and support – appropriate interaction and advice – have been effective. Many women report good interactions with various agencies and institutions, which they found helpful and supportive. For many of these contacts the interviewees described interactions in which they felt acknowledged and taken seriously and in which their circumstances were considered in detail.

Police certainly rank among the institutions which have engaged intensely with domestic violence over the past years and where much has changed. The analysis shows that this is mirrored in women's experiences. Nowadays victimised women frequently report very good and helpful initial contacts with police, in which their situation is taken seriously and help, further information and support are promised and offered.

Furthermore, of great significance is tailored, professional support from specialised victim support agencies and women's shelters. For a large number of women it is these agencies that offer decisive help and support. Women experience as a particular turning point having access to information that helps them sort through their options, and access to the wider support system, including potential or actual legal intervention. It is significant for women to have practical support and help with decision-making as they contact further agencies, institutions and professionals. Last but not least, for many women it is important to have the space to talk about their experiences and circumstances, to reflect on these in the presence of an experienced and empathetic listener, and to sound out their own wishes and capabilities. Victimised women experience all of these elements as profoundly validating; they contribute to a woman's ability to (again or newly) recognise and expand her space for action.

The goal to protect and support victims also is relevant in interactions with other institutions and agencies. Here, however, it becomes clear that interventions are somewhat haphazard: they depend on individual staff members' knowledge and awareness and are not integrated into institutional policy. Surprisingly common are gaps in terms of referrals to specialised support (victim's aid, women's shelter) and connecting victims to the full range of available services. Instead, women frequently hear rash advice such as to press charges, which can embroil them in a drawn-out, dire process.

Holding perpetrators accountable, offering support for behaviour change

The findings show that the third intervention goal at present hardly comes to fruition. The conversations with the women rarely suggested that intervention in domestic violence includes holding the perpetrator accountable.

Aside from go-orders and injunctions there is hardly any institutional engagement with the perpetrator in which he is held to account. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that neither victim nor perpetrator are made aware of the fact that violence in marriage and intimate relationships now is an offence prosecuted by the state. Nor do women's experiences with prosecution and legal proceedings suggest that this new legal status affects the way in which cases of domestic violence are processed.

Similarly, specialised counselling for violent men is largely underutilised. The opportunity and benefit of referring violent men to agencies or programs that offer education against violence and specialised individual counselling are rarely considered. Instead, the perpetrators remain largely outside the vision of institutions; neither do they have to fear sanctions nor are they offered problem-oriented support and help with change.

Conclusion: Institutional intervention in partner violence has borne mixed results. Whereas numerous efforts and successes can be noted with regard to protection and support for victims, with regard to the other two goals systematic implementation has not yet taken place. All too often violence against the female partner continues and is not ended, and efforts to hold the perpetrator accountable, whether through criminal legal measures or counselling, are the exception rather than the rule.

2.3 Victims face a mountain of work in coping with violence and engaging with institutions

Nowadays it is undisputed that victimised women need support. It is also undisputed that various entities encounter and professionally address the issue of partner violence. In this context the perspective of victimised women draws attention to an issue that is still underappreciated. For a woman experiencing partner violence and subsequently engaging with the institutional intervention and support system means opportunities for help and change. At the same time, for most women this also means – in addition to coping with the violence – a mountain of work involved in engaging with these institutions. It is telling to merely list how many institutions women contact (with one or more contacts per institution):

- One quarter of women contact 2-5 institutions,
- half of the women contact 6-9 institutions,
- and another quarter contact 10-16 institutions.

The interviews show that one-time contacts with different agencies are an exception. Most of the time there are multiple contacts, sometimes within a short period of time, in other cases over months or years. The partner's violence generates considerable „institution work“ for victims which they need to manage without delay.

Among this institution work are:

- contacts with police,
- contacts with the civil legal and criminal justice system;
- appointments at women/victim's aid centres or stay(s) at a shelter;
- contacts with lawyers;
- contacts, discussions, and appointments related to the children (child protection agencies, youth agencies, school, therapy, etc.),
- contacts with the migration office to clarify residence permits,
- appointments with health professionals (GP, medical specialists, physiotherapy and other therapies, psychological/psychiatric counselling, etc.),
- contacts regarding financial issues (child support, welfare, unemployment, etc.),
- contacts regarding changes in employment (less/more work, job centre, absence from the job due to the impact of the violence, dealing with employers, etc.)
- various other contacts with advice and support agencies etc.

In part these are interactions women choose themselves; in part women find that their changed circumstances force them to get in touch with certain institutions, and often institutions get in touch with them. As a consequence, victimised women need to engage with a multitude of institutions and professionals. This contrasts markedly with the finding mentioned above that institutional engagement with the violent man, be it through sanctions or counselling, is largely missing. While victims (have to) engage with multiple agencies, the perpetrator is mostly left alone. Moreover, institutions appear to prefer to be in touch with the woman (for instance, in her role as mother), while the man disappears from view. Hence, in the conversations the women express the additional stress caused by institution work. This is expressed in metaphors and figures of speech such as having to “bend over backwards”, “endless maelstrom”, and “I can't do this anymore”. Only for contacts with women/victim's aid agencies do women occasionally mention time and energy savings.

Additional institution work and stress is created when the man bad-mouths the woman to an institution or uses an agency to get in touch with her again; we call this instrumentalising institutions. Examples include the man reporting the woman to police or prosecutor, filing charges against her in civil court or with child protection agencies (e.g., about divorce, visitation rights/child contact, child support payments or requests for money; accusations that the woman abuse the child, etc.), accusations with the migration office, for instance, because of fake marriage. In such cases the women have to appear before institutions and agencies to defend themselves and may even need to engage a lawyer.

These findings also indicate indirectly how much work domestic violence creates for institutions. This, in turn, raises the costs of domestic violence for society at large.³

2.3.1 Widening the understanding of intervention

Based on the experiences of the women we interviewed we developed a model for the cycle of violence and intervention (see Table 2). This model expands the common three-part view of “violence”, “intervention”, and “return to normalcy”.

A widespread view of violent relationships has them move through phases: after an initial honeymoon or “normalcy” phase the relationship deteriorates into a second, difficult phase, in which sooner or later different forms of violence occur that remain unacknowledged in public. If in a third phase the violence becomes public knowledge – often due to an acute crisis in which police are called or the woman contacts a support agency – the intervention network takes action (intervention phase). Relevant institutions and agencies intervene to end the violence, protect and support the victim and hold the perpetrator accountable. Subsequently, the woman can resume her “normal” life (normalcy).

According to the experiences of the interviewees the reality is more complex. For instance, for victims the intervention phase often takes much longer than expected, and turns out to be much more complicated. The women do not experience a linear pathway from intervention to normalcy.

As noted above the initial interventions lead to many more subsequent agency contacts and a mountain of institution work piles up. If the violence, as happens frequently, does not end despite institutional intervention, institution work becomes even more intense and time-consuming. From the women’s perspective the intervention phase needs to be understood in a much more comprehensive and multifaceted way as it extends far beyond intervention in acute crisis situations. Therefore, in table 2 the intervention phase is split into two phases: a phase of acute crisis intervention (phase III) and a phase of managing institution work and violence-related follow-up problems (phase IV). In many cases women experience multiple cycles of phase III and IV.

Only rarely can women step directly from crisis intervention (phase III) into normalcy (phase V). Instead, this journey is very involving – as is typical of phase IV – and accompanied by repeated institutional contacts over time, multiple interventions and support services, and various follow-up problems.

³ See Eidgenössisches Büro für die Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann, EBG [federal office for gender equality] (Hrsg.) (2013): Kosten von Gewalt in Paarbeziehungen [The costs of intimate partner violence]. Research report. Bern.

Table 2 *Partner violence and intervention: an expanded model*

Phase	Name	Description
I	'Honeymoon', 'Normalcy'	Relationship begins without violence Normalcy and honeymoon
II	Deterioration, ,unacknowledged' violence	Relationship problems develop Patterns of violence and control
III	Intervention, 'acknowledged' violence	Violence becomes public knowledge, often through an acute crisis that requires external intervention Intervention goals: – Ending violence – Protecting and supporting victim – Holding perpetrator accountable, help
IV	Coping, intervention and follow-up problems	Managing institution work and interventions, coping with follow-up problems, including: – Violence does not end, – Legal consequences/actions, – Health consequences/Coping with victimisation, – Situation of children, – Social/financial consequences, – Status of accommodation and employment – Residence status
V	Return to 'normalcy'	Return to a „normal“ life without violence; conclusion of violence-related institution work

The circumstances of our sample illuminate further why such a more differentiated understanding of the intervention phase is called for. Police, victim support and women's shelters gave us addresses of interviewees only when a woman's case was considered closed. We had wanted closed cases in order to interview only women who – after institutional contacts had ceased – lived in a new normalcy. However, the interviews made increasingly clear that this was the case for only a few of the 40 interviewees.

New normalcy is exemplified in responses to the last question of the interview in which women were asked what they wished for their future. One would assume that violence *and* follow-up problems are a thing of the past when women say that for the future they wish:

Vacation, vacations! (Int 34)

That everything stays as it is. (Int 30)

That my little house will eventually be ready. (Int 26)

However, such comments are in the minority. Very few women made comments that are so carefree and forward-looking, and that imply a newly gained ordinary everyday life – arrival in phase V.

In contrast, the answers of most interviewees indicated that they are desperately hoping to arrive at a new normalcy in the future and reconquer a normal life. And what does “normal” mean for them? They wish for a life without violence, uncertainty and fear, and they want to be able to trust the feeling of having finally overcome the consequences of victimisation. For the women this would mean not least that contacts with intervention agencies (finally) have come to an end. Yet, women’s responses show that at the time of the interview they are still in phase IV. They long for normalcy and an “ordinary” life. In the responses to the last question about the future this longing is expressed like this:

I don’t have many wishes, wishes I do not have many – my wish still is: I just want to live in peace and contentment [laughs]. I don’t want a million and nothing. [...] So many ... so many people find it crazy that we [woman and child] have to move again after only five months ... It had to come to this ... I see this clearly, and ... Yes, I look forward to, I am so looking forward to my ... normal life [laughs] – only an ordinary life. (Int 5, SI-Abs 130)

Well... I want to... to buy a house here in Switzerland. Because I think, I'm not going anywhere anymore. Mostly because my son... of my son's situation. And... I just want to live a normal life. [...] We are here now and I have to make the best of it. I have to... one day... feel at home. I hope, this day will come. I don't know, when. But I really hope for it. [Sniffles] Just a normal life. Go to work, and then come back and make dinner... [hoarse voice] And that I don't have to be scared of this man anymore. [...] These are my hopes for the future. Just... a normal life. (Int 18: SI-Abs 241)

Conclusion: Coping with partner violence requires considerable work and effort from victimised women and the agencies and institutions in the intervention network. Intervention typically begins in response to an acute crisis (phase III) after which a long and stressful phase ensues in which women are constantly confronted with a multitude of institutional contacts and follow-up problems (phase IV). In general, phase IV lasts much longer than is usually assumed, an issue which in public/institutional perspectives has not received proper attention. The primary focus of many intervention agencies, as well as policy-makers, is on crisis intervention measures (phase III) on the assumption that these will lead to normalcy (phase V). Our research shows that for victimised women reality is more complex because crises may last longer than expected and intervention extends beyond crisis. This finding needs to be integrated into institutional and policy understandings of how to intervene in partner violence.

2.4 Threats and harassment continue at the time of the interviews

As noted above the effectiveness of measures to end violence largely depends on the perpetrator’s willingness to go along with them. This observation acquires additional significance with the finding that even at the time of the interviews several women were still threatened by their partner or ex-partner.

These women had worked with multiple agencies, which in turn had intervened and were now considering the cases “closed”. Nonetheless, the men continued their violent behaviour towards the women. Therefore, the women were still living under dangerous and constraining circumstances. A consistent and effective implementation of measures to actually end violence had not taken place.

One in four interviewees (11 out of 40 women) described how in her daily life she still experiences various forms of abuse – controlling behaviour, terrorising text messages, threats, verbal abuse, targeted harassment, bad-mouthing, stalking – or needs to be prepared for physical violence. Child contact also often provides a context in which the man seizes the opportunity to further threaten and abuse the woman. After the interviews were completed we learned of one life-threatening attack against one of the 40 women.

Eight of the 40 women were living in relative peace at the time of the interviews, yet were suffering from constant anxiety and the fear that „it will start up again“. They could not at all rule out that the man would become “active” again; this remained a possibility. For instance, if he returns from abroad where he went under cover; when a court or divorce hearing is scheduled; if she enters into a new intimate relationship; or simply if she accidentally crosses paths with him. These women, too, do not feel safe and adequately protected.

In sum, at the time of the interviews almost half of the women still felt endangered, either because violent actions were continuing or because further violence had to be expected.

Conclusion: The findings show that the end of institutional contact is not a reliable indicator that the man’s violence against the woman has ended. Instead, the current system of regulations, measures, and implementation effectively ends neither threats against the woman nor violence against the woman.

2.5 Additional victims in earlier and later relationships of the perpetrator

The study also shows that the women who participated in the interviews were not the only partners who experienced violence from the respective man. In about a third of the cases (12 out of 40 interviews) additional female partners had been identified who also had experienced violence from the same man or were experiencing violence from him. This includes relationships the man had before and after his marriage or relationship to the woman in the interview. The women learn about additional relationships in different ways: through information from police, local authorities or social services, from the man’s family or acquaintances, from the children and also through direct contact with earlier or later female partners.

In two cases the same man was violent against four different women (including the interviewee). The analysis also shows that multiple children from the different relationships are affected.

For the problems of a victimised woman the appearance of a new female partner can be an efficient solution. The interviewed women experienced repeatedly that the existence of a new female partner significantly and effectively improved their own situation. This is reflected in the wish, expressed several times, that the ex-partner may soon find a new woman – on the assumption that he then will (at last) leave the interviewee in peace.

From the outside, however, this “solution” appears decidedly undesirable. It is alarming to realise that, in many cases, violence does not end even though one particular woman is no longer victimised – instead a different woman now suffers violence from the same man.

Conclusion: The finding of sequential violence against different female partners emphasises the significance of and need for effective intervention in terms of “ending violence” and “holding the perpetrator accountable, offering help”. The existence of repeat violence across multiple female partners indicates that violent men do not receive helpful institutional support. As a consequence they carry their attitudes and behaviour from one relationship to the next. What is new is the new female partner, while the man’s behaviour patterns remain unchanged: sooner or later he is violent again.

This finding points to the urgent need of an institutional engagement with perpetrators of domestic violence. Violent men should be offered institutional help and support, and the state as well as relevant institutions and agencies need to ensure that such services are utilised.

3 Recommendations

The findings of this study confirm the usefulness of the goals that state, society and policy-makers have formulated for intervention in partner violence. The study shows that the intervention network can indeed help and support victimised women, and that appropriate forms of help and support are empowering. This means institutional intervention aimed at victim protection and support and offering tailored advice can expand victimised women’s space for action – and support pathways out of violence. Therefore, institutional intervention in domestic violence is an effective instrument to promote gender equality.

However, the study also points to significant gaps and problems in the intervention system. On one hand, the findings call for further refinements in victim protection and support. On the other, they reveal considerable challenges the current intervention system faces in ending violence and holding perpetrators accountable. In these two areas further efforts and developments are needed to effectively and efficiently implement appropriate measures.

There needs to be broad support for the further development of intervention in partner violence and the consistent implementation of new and existing measures. Called upon are government agencies as well as decision-makers at various agencies and institutions (policy level) and professionals in practice fields. Without question the core network of actors who develop and implement intervention in partner violence also includes the specialised offices at cantonal and federal level – the cantonal coordination and intervention offices against domestic violence, and the federal office on domestic violence. Recommendations based on this research for these different actors follow below.

3.1 Recommendations at policy level: federal and cantonal entities

On 11 September 2013 Switzerland signed the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). The Istanbul Convention offers helpful guidance for politics and administration on how to further develop intervention in violence against women. From the perspective of research on violence in marriage and relationships it would be welcome if the convention was ratified soon and its principles implemented.

Facilitate access to specialised support services

In terms of *access to specialised, professional support services for victims* the present study notes significant gaps. Further efforts and measures are needed to ensure early, low-barrier access to the system of help and support. We recommend:

- To establish a *country-wide Swiss helpline* for domestic violence with a focus on partner violence that can ensure proper information and swift referral to specialised services; the helpline needs to be publicised on an ongoing basis. A negative cantonal decision in 2013 in this regard reflects particular departmental priorities and financial considerations; from the perspective of victims it makes no sense.
- To create a binding framework and procedures that enable a *proactive* engagement of support agencies (so that these can actively approach victims) and that improve access to services for additional, often difficult to reach populations. In this context the possibility of a *national law to protect against violence* should be considered; current legal and procedural differences between the cantons should be reduced.

Specialised support services: Improving provision

Based on the present findings there is a clear need for *appropriate, specialised support*. Such services do not exist in sufficient number nor are they distributed evenly across the country. We recommend improving provision through specialised agencies, in particular:

- Expand *ambulatory, specialised services for victims of partner violence*: Expansion of the volume of services offered through women's advice centres under the victim support law (OHG); introduction of specialised victim support services in cantons that only have generic victim support centres; development of specialised women's support services for women in areas outside of large cities (such as regional centres in the larger cantons and ways to make it easier for women in rural areas to access services); provision of sufficient full-time equivalencies to ensure quality (in-depth support and advice for crisis cases and – with a view on prevention – for 'minor' cases; provision of advice over a sufficient *length* of time; ensuring that victims can be accompanied when they go to authorities or institutions)
- Expand *stationary services for victims of partner violence*: the number of women's shelters and the number of beds in women's shelters should be increased to recommended levels; financial support for the services women's shelters provide should be coordinated and secured nation-wide by government, and the nation-wide services of the women's shelters' umbrella organisation should be secured and strengthened.

Targeted efforts to hold violent men accountable and provide support for change

The study revealed *systemic weaknesses* of the intervention system *in terms of work and engagement with violent men*. The findings show deficits in the implementation and effectiveness of measures to end violence. Similarly, there are gaps and shortcomings in terms of how and how often men are held accountable. Therefore, in this area it is necessary to undertake targeted efforts and developments. We recommend the following:

- Make the *consistent engagement with and involvement of the violent perpetrator* a primary focus at all levels of intervention (legislation, institutional measures and cooperation of all involved agencies). Not least this will reduce the amount of “institution work” for women; as institutional attention and decisions are increasingly directed at the perpetrator victimised women need to spend less time and effort to engage with agencies and institutions.
- *Widen and expand, respectively, specialised help and advice for men who are violent in intimate relationships*. This should include the development of a network of professional, gender-sensitive violence counselling and group-based educational programmes against domestic violence along with proper referral structures. As services for violent men are developed their quality and goals need to be monitored. The development of binding standards, practice codes, and quality controls is an important precondition for the expansion and professional implementation of work with perpetrators (following international models).
- Clarify and expand, within legal institutions and other institutions authorised to make referrals, the basis and opportunities for binding orders and binding referrals to educational programmes against domestic violence and to specialised advice centres.
- Create binding foundations, frameworks and procedures that will enable a *proactive* engagement of violence counselling centres (so that these can actively approach perpetrators)
- Examine, furthermore, how public policy and government can underscore the societal interest in *holding perpetrators criminally accountable* – which lawmakers have already expressed in making violence in marriage and relationships an offence to be prosecuted by the state. This means partner violence will lead to sanctions and when these are ignored, they will be enforced with additional measures. In other words, the perpetrator will truly be held accountable.

Strengthening problem awareness and basic knowledge

The research findings repeatedly reveal insufficient problem awareness and gaps in basic knowledge among experts and institutions in contact with victimised women or violent men. This state of affairs often has detrimental consequences for choice of measures and interaction with victims and perpetrators. Therefore, it is advised to fill these gaps for which we recommend the following:

- Create the basis for appropriate training and continuing education for agencies, institutions and professionals confronted with the issue; expand courses and require integration of the topic into relevant education and training programmes.

- *Take the issue of partner violence into consideration in quality control and funding* through public entities. Written policies about partner violence should be required (including problem-centred qualifications of staff members; institutional goals and interaction with victims and perpetrators).
- Make particular efforts to establish an *understanding of partner violence that is appropriate and does the problem justice*. It is important to overcome a narrow understanding of “domestic violence equals physical violence”; instead, partner violence (domestic violence) needs to be recognised as a multifaceted behaviour pattern that includes a variety of violent actions. Practitioners and institutions need an accurate conceptualisation of the issue in order to respond appropriately to the experiences and circumstances of victims. Such an understanding also will help professionals recognise *those* situations in which the violent man tries to manipulate them for his purposes.
- Complement the introduction of changes (new institutional policies, new legislation) with appropriate training. Formative *evaluation* should be used to test and further develop new measures and changes.

3.2 Recommendations at practice level: agencies, institutions and professionals in the intervention network

Based on the findings from the present study the following recommendations are listed in overview. Detailed comments on each suggestion are in the full report.

From a research perspective, institutional intervention is more successful when implemented by qualified professionals at different agencies and institutions – *and* when policy makers and institutional decision-makers are committed to the intervention.

Development and implementation of novel approaches and institutional changes require the engagement of institutional policy-makers. Their guidelines and decisions impact on effective and timely implementation, which provides the foundation on which professionals can base their work.

Specialised advice at victim’s aid

- Openly present service options at the initial contact with victimised women and on the Internet (Goal: Women feel that the services are useful for them regardless of how diverse their circumstances and needs are)
- Rename the centres, not only using the term victim (which many women feel does not adequately describe them)
- Maintain an open and open-minded counselling style for women from unfamiliar sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., marginalised ethnic Swiss women from lower class backgrounds, women who are mentally ill, women considered “strong”, old women, young women, etc.)
- Guarantee and evaluate referrals to qualified lawyers who understand the issues
- Increase awareness of the services (among victimised women and professionals; see helpline above)
- Improve the ability of professionals at different agencies and institutions to make proper referrals

Women's shelter

- Openly present the services women's shelters offer (Goal: lower barriers for ethnic Swiss women, for middle and upper class women and presumably „strong“ women)
- Monitor the situation of women who have more resources and appear to need less support
- Increase awareness of the services (among victimised women and professionals; see helpline above)
- Improve the ability of professionals at different agencies and institutions to make proper referrals

Police

- Adopt a more differentiated implementation of go-orders: the assumption that „go-orders end violence“ needs to be re-thought; assess whether the perpetrator is complying with orders and injunctions, which could include asking the woman about his compliance and stopping by the residence or patrolling the street periodically
- Take non-compliance with police intervention seriously; instruments and measures are needed in cases where perpetrators violate police orders
- Improve integration of rural police departments into the intervention network
- Introduce automatic referral to victim's aid and violence counselling
- Clarify that violence in marriage and relationships is now an offence prosecuted by the state; tell women this means that police will press charges and bring the case to the prosecutor; investigate and press charges against the perpetrator and thus implement current law; end the current practice that police still ask women whether they want to press charges

Health care system

- Acknowledge and address victimisation experiences as part of the reality of health issues; choose appropriate conversational forms; become aware of and use existing information about domestic violence
- Properly document violence (consider the potential use of evidence and specialised documentation); educate victimised women about why it is meaningful and important to document health impacts of partner violence
- In all cases educate victimised women about specialised advice and counselling agencies or make referrals to these: women/victim's aid and women's shelter

Prosecution and criminal court

- Accelerate case processing, ensure that cases are processed within a reasonable period of time and do not drag on; process cases (do not let them pile up); initiate and conduct criminal investigations without delay (this also sends a „message“ to the perpetrator that his violence is taken seriously; consider endangerment/protection of the victim related to institutional actions)
- Consider alternative sources of evidence (not just through the woman); in the case of offences prosecuted by the state: related information and communications should go to victim and perpetrator

- Use all possible options of holding the perpetrator accountable along all phases of the proceedings (orders and injunctions against the perpetrator; education programmes against domestic violence; specialised violence counselling)
- Apply sentences that include measures tailored to the problem instead of punishment (specialised violence counselling and educational programmes)

Civil court

- Lower the high barriers to accessing civil legal protection measures (Art. 28b ZGB)
- Introduce instruments and measures if perpetrators do not comply with civil legal measures
- Explicitly acknowledge issues of partner violence as factors in separation/divorce and related findings
- Take note of the man's violent strategies and develop ways to deal with them

Child and adult protection services (KESB)

- Acknowledge and take seriously the safety of woman and child when child protection issues arise in the context of partner violence; this is particularly important for child contact decisions and visitation rights
- Include and actively engage the violent man (holding him accountable)
- Use all possible options of holding the perpetrator accountable (education programmes and specialised violence counselling)
- Consider the situation of children even when they are not joint children of victim and perpetrator

Migration office

- Guarantee independent resident permits for victims of partner violence; utilise relevant knowledge from research and practice about forms and dynamics of partner violence when processing cases
- Establish contact and exchange with professionals at specialised women/victim's aid centres and women's shelters; if necessary obtain documented evidence of violence from these agencies
- Consider the possibility that the man may manipulate the migration office as part of his violent strategy

Lawyers

- Examine possibilities and ways of introducing specialisations and specialised qualifications for lawyers who represent victims of partner violence
- Ensure broad legal knowledge (representing victims of partner violence often touches on multiple areas of law at once) as well as knowledge about forms and dynamics of partner violence when choosing strategy and preparing the case

Specialised violence counselling

- Engage the perpetrator: binding referrals to educational programmes and specialised violence counselling
- Establish cooperation with the other institutions in the intervention network and promote binding referrals to specialised violence counselling
- Improve quality of services and expand provision; violence counselling should be available everywhere in the country

Various other entities

This includes agencies and professionals in communities, institutions, social services, family services, faith-related counselling services and counselling related to migrant issues, educators, alcohol and substance abuse counselling, regional job centres, etc.:

- Recognise the significance of proper referral: Victims need to be referred to *specialised* agencies (counselling or women's shelter for women/victims, specialised violence counselling for perpetrators)