



New pathways in the evaluation of programmes for men who perpetrate violence against their female partners



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ABSTRACT

Today, evaluation research in the field of intervention programmes for men who perpetrate violence against their female partners still makes a fragmentary impression. Across Europe various evaluation studies have been performed. However, the methodologies applied are too heterogeneous to allow the combination of the results in a meta-analytical way. In this paper we propose a future pathway for organising outcome evaluation studies of domestic violence perpetrator programmes in community settings, so that today's problems in this field can be overcome. In a pragmatic framework that acknowledges the limited pre-conditions for evaluation studies in the area of domestic violence perpetrator programmes as it is today, feasible approaches for outcome evaluation are outlined, with recent developments in the field taken as starting points. The framework for organising future evaluation studies of work with perpetrators of domestic violence is presented together with a strategy to promote this framework. International networks of practitioners and researchers play a central role in this strategy through upskilling the area of practical work, preparing the ground for evaluation research and improving cooperation between practitioners and researchers. This paper is based on the results of the European funded project IMPACT (under the Daphne-III-funding programme of the European Commission).

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1. Introduction

Between 2013 and 2014 a group of researchers and practitioners from Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom conducted the project "Impact: Evaluation of European Perpetrator Programmes" within the Daphne-III-Funding Program of the European Commission. The first aim of this project was to fill the knowledge gap regarding evaluations of domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DVPPs) in Europe. Another goal was to make a step towards harmonisation of evaluation methodology in the realm of psychosocial work with perpetrators of domestic violence, that is treatment programmes for men who use violence against their female partners and children. These treatment programmes are ideally part of a community setting, which means they are part of a coordinated set of interventions together with the police, courts, victim protection organisations, child and

youth welfare authorities and so forth. This particular approach is called "coordinated community response" (CCR). Accordingly, the term "psychosocial work" points to interventions that are implemented on a psychological level with the individual perpetrator (e.g. behavioural training groups) in interaction with elements of the social environment (e.g. providing information about the perpetrator's compliance to victims or authorities).

The motivation for this project was the fragmentary outcome evaluation research situation in this field. Experts consider it highly important to have convincing studies at hand so that practitioners, programme staff and managers can monitor and improve the quality of their work and policy makers can make reasonable strategic decisions (Geldschläger, Ginés, Nax, & Ponce, 2014; Hester, Lilley, O'Prey, & Budde, 2014). Unlike in the field of treatment of delinquent and criminal behaviour within the criminal justice system with a longer tradition of evaluation (Brazão, da Motta, & Rijo, 2013; Redondo, Sanchez-Meca, & Garrido, 2001), only a few European evaluation studies have been published to date (Akoensi, Koehler, Lösel, & Humphreys, 2013), although a variety of domestic violence perpetrator programmes exist throughout the EU member states (Ginés, Geldschläger, Nax &

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Ponce, 2015; Hamilton, Koehler, & Lösel, 2013). On the other hand, in their systematic review of studies (including unpublished reports and those studies that have been published as grey literature) Hester et al. (2014) found 65 evaluations of perpetrator programmes up to the year 2014 in total—but these studies vary in quality. In general, the authors mainly found national studies with big differences regarding approaches, theories of change, methods and instruments; in other words, the evaluation models that were applied differed a lot. The methodological differences of the studies are so big that reasonable meta-analytical conclusions about the work with perpetrators are hard to make. Furthermore, a lot of studies struggled with basic methodological problems, such as the establishment of a control group to allow for internally valid conclusions to be drawn from the results. As a result of this scattered evaluation landscape, the European specificity concerning work with perpetrators is missing in the international discussion on evaluation of domestic violence perpetrator programmes (Hester et al., 2014).

In order to improve this situation, the Impact project aimed to produce recommendations on how to go forward with the evaluation of domestic violence perpetrator programmes. A specific part of the project was dedicated to developing ways to overcome the fragmented situation of evaluation research on domestic violence perpetrator programmes, and to make use of the heterogeneity of the European landscape in terms of national legislation and working approaches. The basic idea was to consider this heterogeneity not as a problem for evaluation in the first place, but to regard it as a resource, following concepts of *managing diversity* where differences in general are seen as something valuable and profitable in a wide sense.

Consequently, the project team focussed on ways of evaluating perpetrator programmes with a multi-site and multi-country approach. Although the evaluation of single sites was still considered a basic and meaningful activity, the interest was on how to integrate such studies within a research framework that would allow for comparisons of various domestic violence perpetrator programmes in different countries. In other words, the aim of this paper is to present both a framework for evaluation studies that can involve different sites, countries, and contexts, and a strategy for promoting this framework.

2. Method

Our goal was to identify evaluation models with possible applicability in different European countries and contexts concerning *outcome* evaluation of domestic violence perpetrator

programmes. *Process* evaluation was not the focus, although aspects of both approaches (outcome, process) could be included. To reach this goal we applied the following methods:

- Analysis of literature on evaluation of perpetrator programmes in European and non-European contexts and relevant related topics (Dobash & Dobash, 1998, 2000; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2000; Dutton, 2006, 2007; Dutton & Sonkin, 2002; Erikson, Hester, Keskinen, & Pringle, 2005; Gondolf, 2002, 2012; Phillips, Kelly, & Westmarland, 2013; Price & Rosenbaum, 2009), together with relevant literature on evaluation research (Bamberger, Rugh, & Mabry, 2006; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Shaddish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).
- Re-analysis of other activities within the Impact project, especially an online survey of perpetrator programmes (Geldschläger et al., 2014) and the compilation of European evaluation studies (Hester et al., 2014). The survey was conducted in 2013 and, after sending internet based questionnaires to 308 European perpetrator programmes, the research team received 134 valid completed questionnaires from 22 European countries, which corresponds to a response rate of 44%. Among them were both programmes founded before 2000 and very new programmes, but the majority were young programmes (in existence since 2006). Moreover, the majority of the programmes researched were rather small (0–50 participating men), though big (more than 200 men) and medium (51–200 men) programmes also took part in the survey. Last but not least, the research team analysed voluntary/referred, court-referred and mixed programmes. A more detailed description of the programmes that took part in the survey can be found in other papers resulting from the project (Geldschläger et al., 2014; Ginés et al., 2015) (Fig. 1).

Simultaneously a review of European evaluation studies was conducted and the research team identified a final number of 74 papers from each 64 unique evaluation studies from Nordic (Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Sweden), Southern (Portugal, Spain), Western (Ireland, UK), Central (Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland) and Eastern (Croatia) European regions. Among them, either published papers (as scientific articles or research reports) “grey literature” (unpublished or limitedly distributed research reports, government reports, programme/funder reports and PhD reports) papers have been identified and further analysed (Hester et al., 2014) (Fig. 2).

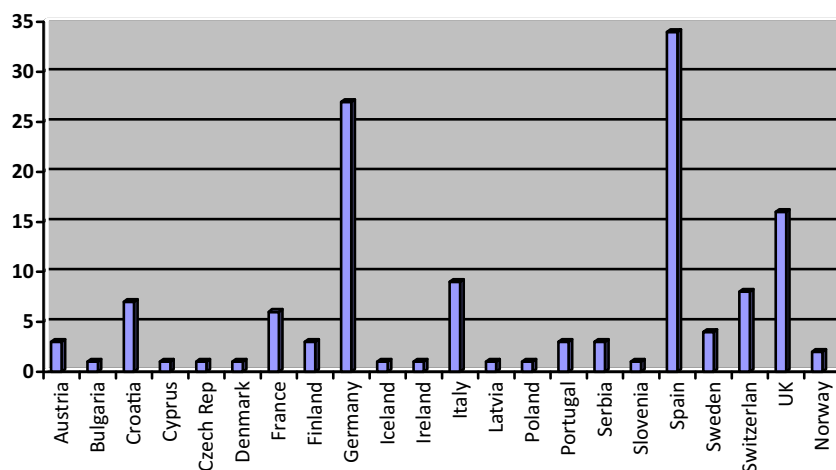


Fig. 1. Number of researched programmes per country.

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