

*Summarizing Conclusion*

*Prevention of  
intergenerational  
violence in the  
Netherlands and Europe*

Exploring what works

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## **Prevention of intergenerational violence in the Netherlands and Europe.**

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## 4 *Summarizing conclusion*

### 4.1 *Introduction*

To grow up in a family where violence occurs, influences the way in which children will engage in intimate relationships of their own at a later age, and the risk they run of becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence in those relationships.

In Dutch emancipation policy and the nationwide approach to violence in dependency relationships, one objective mentioned is breaking through intergenerational violence. To prevent a repetition in any form, it is essential for all those involved, the children included, to actively deal with violent experiences. In addition, from an emancipatory point of view, protective factors such as the personal strength of women, their labour participation and the caring attitude of men may also be of great importance. The goal of prevention can be served by connecting the attention paid to these protective factors at different levels (the integrated approach).

This study primarily focuses on deepening existing insights into the approach in interventions that have proven to work when it comes to breaking through the intergenerational transference of violence. Furthermore and partly based on the outcomes, we have examined whether and how interventions in different fields offer new leads for the development of preventive *policy*.

The main research question is:

*What insights do promising preventive practices in the Netherlands and Europe offer for the prevention of the intergenerational transference of violence in families, that focus on (parenting) support provided to mothers, fathers and children and with special attention paid to the emancipation of the family members?*

We will discuss the following subquestions:

1. *Promising practices*: Which preventive practices seem to be effective in breaking through intergenerational violence via (parenting) support for mothers, fathers and children?
2. *Operative elements*: Is something known about ‘what works’ in these promising practices and about the question to what extent and in what way they fit in with the need for parenting support of mothers, fathers and children?
3. *Gender sensitivity*: How do these promising practices pay attention to the connection between measures aimed at the emancipation of mothers, fathers, daughters and sons on the one hand, and the prevention of violence within families on the other?

In this study, we have examined six promising projects in the Netherlands, supplemented with interventions from four EU countries. Starting from the central research question, we have looked among this selection for promising interventions in the various domains that are of significance for an integrated approach (in policy): community, family/individual and peers. While selecting these projects, we have looked particularly closely at their innovative character, especially with regard to their attempts to integrate a gender-sensitive approach. This study is intended as an exploration of operative elements in selected interventions (what works). These interventions are thus not representative of all preventive interventions in the Netherlands.

In addition to the study of the selected Dutch interventions, we have made a comparison with practices and interventions in other EU countries that offer inspiration and starting points for the development of practices in the Netherlands (Sweden, Great Britain and Greece, and Spain specifically or its regulation/policy).

Based on the empirical findings presented in our study, the most important conclusions will follow below, with the emphasis on the question to what extent practices are innovative, in particular with regard to the extent of the attention paid to the emancipation of mothers, fathers, daughters and sons. In section 4.2, we will indicate for each of this study's subquestions the conclusions that can be drawn from the study's findings on the three research questions. Next, we will take a closer look at what this means for government policy in section 4.3.

## 4.2 *Concluding insights into promising practices, the operative elements and gender sensitivity*

### 4.2.1 *When is a practice a promising practise?*

In the analysis of the selected projects, we have focused on three core elements of the subquestions. The first core element concerns the question whether they are promising, that is, whether there are indications for an *effective* impact of the palette of protective factors and risk factors addressed in the intervention on the effort to break through intergenerational patterns of transference. The second core element concerns the question whether it contains *innovative elements*, and the third core element concerns the question whether the intervention is *gender-sensitive* as well. The question what determines the effectiveness will be discussed in detail in section 4.2.2. We will examine gender sensitivity more closely in section 4.2.3.

With regard to the protective factors and risk factors, we have made a classification into factors at the individual, micro and meso levels, based on earlier research presented in our study. We will arrange the conclusions about the interventions according to the domain at which the interventions are directed: the social environment (*community*), contemporaries (*peers*), and the individual and family levels.

#### **Community**

The main conclusion is that, as yet, there are few interventions in the Netherlands focused on the activation of the responsibility and capabilities of the social environment and society to intervene at an early stage in order to prevent violence. The projects developed abroad show that it actually is possible to tackle the community about their responsibility as onlookers.

In this study, we have taken a closer look at two Dutch, community-based projects: '*Men, come on!*' (in Dutch: '*Mannen Kom Op!*') and '*Domestic Violence Confidential Advisors Malburgen*' (in Dutch: '*Vertrouwenspersonen Huiselijk Geweld Malburgen*'). The projects are mainly put into action to start up a process to raise awareness within the neighbourhood, making it possible to talk about violence within the family, raising the sense of standards regarding the application of violence, and directing people towards further assistance, if necessary. The '*Men, come on!*' project concentrates on men, as perpetrators but also as victims of violence in relationships. In these projects, the meso and micro levels are central, but whenever individual violent experiences play a part, the individual level is central as well.

What makes '*Men, come on!*' and '*Domestic Violence Confidential Advisors Malburgen*' *innovative* is that volunteers, - most of them with personal expertise' - from the community around family members are involved in making violence a debatable topic. The specific focus of '*Men, come on!*' on the men in the families and the attention paid to their attitude towards care are innovative as well, and important because, in practice, it has turned out to be extremely difficult to reach the fathers. More in general, we know from clinical research that it is hard to reach perpetrators (of both partner violence and child abuse) and to motivate them to accept help in changing their behaviour. Usually, only the mothers are involved in the assistance process, and they feel that the fathers remain out of range. The involvement of hands-on experts of the same sex (at '*Domestic Violence Confidential Advisors Malburgen*', there is a choice between female or male volunteers) can lower the threshold to start taking part.

In both projects, a *gender-neutral* analysis of the violence problem is used. The question who has been the perpetrator and who has been the victim remains at the background, and views on an unequal distribution of power in the relationship are not made the starting point of the approach, nor is this inequality specifically identified. The projects chiefly focus on just breaking through the taboo on violence in relationships, on changing the sense of standards with regard to violence, without taking

into account the social or cultural context of inequalities. The expectation is that a gender-neutral and thus non-accusatory point of departure will lower the threshold to talk about violence and ask for help, which will make it possible to prevent future violence. The question is, however, whether it is possible to realize an emancipatory effect with an approach in which the starting point of changing gender inequality is emphatically absent. After all, this would mean endorsing the viewpoint that change is a desired goal. For that matter, 'Men, come on!' actually does concentrate explicitly on the attitude towards care of fathers, assuming that a focus on the children provides the best entry to make fathers accept change.

In a number of respects, the structural conditions for effectiveness are under pressure as well. The fact that the execution of both projects largely depends on volunteers makes their continuity vulnerable (see below for further discussion). During the Round Tables, both Dutch projects gave rise to critical questions from foreign experts about the possible consequences of limitations in the level of (the volunteers') quality. The foreign experts' greatest question mark related to the expertise of volunteers because of the seriousness of the problem. They also pointed out that other neighbourhood inhabitants are often acquaintances, which makes it impossible to call upon them anonymously. The developers and experts in the Netherlands, on the other hand, see the deployment of volunteers as an operative element of the approach. According to them, calling upon another neighbourhood inhabitant, in the case of Malburgen someone of the same ethnic origin to boot, will, on the contrary, lower the threshold. Structural professional support and links with the regular assistance channels are seen as crucial operative factors, especially in the context of working with volunteers, as both Dutch and foreign experts emphasize.

As yet, it is impossible to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the approach in these Dutch community projects or about the question whether a raised awareness really does result in a decrease of violence. For the moment, there is no theoretical and empirical foundation for such conclusions.

The studied practices in Sweden concentrate on the possibilities of prevention grounded in the community, in particular prevention among adolescent and adult men ('*Freedom From Violence*' and '*Equal Parenthood*'). They focus on the macro, meso, micro and individual levels. They pay attention to views on and norms about masculinity at macro level and the status of men at the relational level (both meso and micro), and also to the question how to break through an individual's stereotypical views and patterns through education and consciousness-raising.

These practices are innovative because they focus on primary (universal) prevention, which addresses everybody about their role and responsibility as 'bystander' to prevent violence. The target groups are students in secondary education and men who are about to become fathers. The projects (training courses given by professionals at school and/or in discussion groups consisting of soon to be fathers who have signed themselves up) aim for a raised awareness among adolescent and adult men about gender-stereotypical patterns between men and women, related to the use of control and violence by men in '*Freedom From Violence*', but also related to child care in '*Equal Parenthood*', respectively.

Both projects emphatically use a *gender perspective*. The underlying view is that unequal distributions of power that affect gender patterns should be explicitly identified. An additional point of departure, based on research, is that men more often are the perpetrators of violence while women more often fall victim to it (although the opposite also occurs). Violence is understood as an act of power and control that is the full responsibility of the perpetrator.

With respect to the *effectiveness*, the Swedish projects seem very promising. Solid research data are not yet available. The projects build on indications from earlier research that a gender-sensitive approach that directly targets men and boys is more effective than a gender-neutral approach is.

### **Peer**

Prevention projects aimed at young people turn out to be relatively scarce, especially those for children below the age of 12. The projects that have been developed for adolescents are usually not structurally embedded, but are funded on an occasional basis and are often short-lived. We have selected three Dutch projects, aimed at teenagers and young adults, with which some experience has been built up. All three projects aim to break through taboos related to violence by making them debatable, and to realize changes in attitude regarding violence. In all cases, the goal is to encourage healthy relationships between young people and to transmit a positive message: that there is no justification for violence, control and coercion in relationships; that it is possible to overcome negative experien-

ces; and that victims can become self-asserting people. The projects are strongly focused on primary prevention, targeting all adolescents. The meso level is central, yet attention is also paid to individual factors such as coming to terms with violent experiences and making people more self-asserting.

'*Stay in love*' is an educational programme that teaches adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 what a healthy courting relationship implies. It is the only intervention in this group with a scientific foundation. Its objective is to improve an adolescent's knowledge and skills to make positive contact with a partner. The makers are continuing to develop the method in practice, among other things with regard to the question how to incorporate the growing role of social media into the programme. In this respect, it can be called innovative, too.

In 'Stay in Love', the differences between boys and girls do not take centre stage. At this moment, there is no explanation for the finding that the positive effects on attitudinal change are stronger among girls than they are among boys. In the intervention, gender differences in views and behaviour do not constitute special points of interest.

Research results during the developmental stage of 'Stay in love' show clear indications of effectiveness: after the training, the tolerance for unacceptable behaviour decreases, especially among girls. As yet, it is unclear whether this effect on views will persist in the long term and how it will translate into behaviour.

The 'PIECE' (in Dutch: 'STUK') project has been developed from practice as a theatrical performance for and by adolescents. The adolescents involved have incorporated their own experiences with violence in their family in a play they perform at secondary schools. Based on the performance, the adolescents engage in a discussion with pupils. In the meantime, the activities have been extended with short video's, a 'piece' book, and thinking along about curricula for future professionals. The project is innovative because of its chosen creative form and because it has been developed from the experiences and questions of teenagers. In 'PIECE', gender sensitivity is not a central point of interest. During the discussion with pupils particular topics may come up, such as stereotypical images of men and women, or their division of roles. Sometimes attention is paid to the inequality between men and women 'in particular cultures', but gender inequality in general is not an intended topic of discussion.

Whether the project in its entirety is effective (and helps adolescents in discussing violence, with the aim of bringing about a change in attitude) cannot yet be proven, but the indications are positive.

'*WE CAN Young*' is a campaign for and by adolescents, focused on raising awareness and making individual teenagers more self-asserting in the face of all forms of gender-related violence, be it psychological, physical or sexual. Changing traditional views on relations between men and women, especially on patterns of dominance and power differences and on violence in families, is central. The campaign discusses both the micro and meso level and links them together. It is an intervention that aims to widen its support base by means of connection and cooperation with organizations and institutions that subscribe to the goals of 'WE CAN Young'.

Within this group, 'WE CAN Young' is the only preventive intervention aimed at adolescents that explicitly makes a connection between violence that disproportionately often targets girls and women and gender-related inequalities.

The first indications about the effectiveness in terms of raised awareness are favourable. It is still too early to draw any conclusion about the question whether a permanent change in attitude or a decrease in violence will occur.

In Greece, the educational '*GEAR*' (*Gender Equality Awareness Raising against intimate partner violence*) project has been developed for pupils, the specific goal of which is to prevent partner violence through consciousness raising and changing the views on gender inequalities and role patterns between boys and girls (in secondary education). In the underlying view and the elaboration of teaching material, the individual, micro and meso levels are emphatically connected. The intended changes will have to take place at the individual and meso levels. In Greece, views on gender roles seem to be interrelated with still very present patriarchal traditions. A difference with the Netherlands is that Greek teachers receive an intensive training in the harmful consequences of gender stereotypes and unequal power relations. The teachers fulfil a central task in the programme's execution.

The effectiveness of 'GEAR' in changing adolescents' attitude toward and knowledge of partner violence and gender stereotypes had been proven. At the moment, the programme is successfully implemented in other countries with relatively less dominant patriarchal culture than the Greek one.



The project is extracurricular. Although teachers carry it out, as yet the programme has not been anchored in the regular curriculum. The same applies, for that matter, to 'Stay in love'.

### ***Individual/family***

For the domain of family and the individual, we have studied the Dutch projects 'New Future' (in Dutch: 'Nieuwe Toekomst') and 'PreCaution' (in Dutch: 'VoorZorg', a play on words because it may also mean 'In Favour of Care'). One of the projects' goals is to increase the defence of women against violence by strengthening their (economic) independence and social skills. In 'PreCaution', attention is also paid to the relationship between mother and child and, to a limited extent, to the involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing as well. With regard to informal support, both projects focus on the individual level and micro level; the micro level is more central to 'PreCaution' since it pays attention to education. The men or fathers are not or only collaterally involved in the projects (for the most part because they are divorced from the mothers or are unknown).

Innovative in both projects is that they direct their support concretely at the actual realization of the social and economic independence of women and at coaching them on their trajectory toward the labour market. Both projects bring forward that the combination of child care and having a paid job presents a majority of the women with a dilemma.

The underlying vision of 'New Future' is *gender-sensitive*. The starting point is that, from a financial and economic point of view, women are often vulnerable (and dependent on their partner) as a result of the predominant patterns in the Netherlands, according to which caring for the children is a woman's responsibility while the facilities to take on this responsibility in combination with a paid job are insufficient. Crucial protective factors that enable women in the project to be more self-asserting in the face of a violent partner, are paid employment that offers sufficient income and social participation. The aim of the project is to improve women's self-confidence and break through their social isolation by working in a goal-oriented way on a 'new future'.

'PreCaution' represents a *gender-neutral* approach. Breaking through gender inequality and an unequal power distribution in the relationship are not explicit points of departure. The focus is on strengthening the social, economic and pedagogic self-assertion of the woman as a mother and breadwinner, detached from social patterns. This project is innovative in its orientation on primary prevention: pregnant women with an increased risk of parenting problems and partner violence are coached extensively. The goal is to support the young and often low-educated (future) mothers in parenting and other domains as well (their finances, housing). Attention is also paid to learning social skills in parenting and in communication with the partner. In the margin, attention is paid to the involvement of fathers, too, when they are in the picture, but only in their traditional capacity as 'playing dad'.

Both projects answer the criteria of good indications for effectiveness (in this case because in the short term, the influx on the labour market increases - 'The New Future' -, and abuse and/or neglect of new-born children rarely occurs in this group at risk - 'PreCaution'). The embeddedness of the projects, that is, their connection with other relevant disciplines or institutions (for instance the police, shelters, children's schools), is limited.

In England, the programme 'Safer Together' has been set up to strengthen the self-assertion of families where violence has taken place. The programme uses an integral approach, focused on the mother as the central player, who learns (parental) skills that will enable her again to make her own choices, deal with problems and build a social network. The women learn how to recognize power and control in the behaviour of the violent partner, and how it affects both themselves and the children. Children are directly involved in the project, too (contrary to the Dutch projects studied here). Mothers learn how to talk about the violence with their children. The approach is innovative in that it consists of an abundance of interventions and methods that are offered to the women in tailored coherence. The programme has a clear theoretical foundation and in various parts makes use of validated measuring instruments (for risk assessment and the assessment of the family's defences).

From the point of view of (secondary) prevention, part of this intervention is another interesting intervention called the *Early Intervention Service*. This service consists of specifically trained staff, who offer tailored support to high-risk families (identified based on a standardized risk assessment and a safety plan).

The effectiveness of 'Safer Together' in terms of making the violence stop has not yet been corroborated with hard research data. Especially promising in this regard is the high level of professionalism:

the coherence of its theoretical foundation and execution, and the use of validated assessment and evaluation instruments. The professionalism of the specifically trained people carrying out the programme is important as well, as is the assignment to each family of a 'key worker', who is responsible for the coordination of the assistance provided.

#### 4.2.2 *Operative elements*

In our study, we have identified a number of operative elements that determine the success of interventions (what works), based on the prevention literature.

- *Foundation, systematic approach and programme integrity.*  
Many of the studied projects lack a systematic methodological foundation and evaluation and effect research. As a result, usually little information is available on these points. This makes a good argument for an investment in knowledge support.
- *Quality of execution and the connection with assistance channels.*  
The so-called structure characteristics of interventions deserve specific attention, especially in view of the fact that Dutch projects run on a lot of volunteers. Working with volunteers has both benefits and disadvantages. Important benefits are a low threshold and increased accessibility, in part stimulated by more informal working methods and the fact that the executors operate outside of the, quite often mistrusted, formal system of assistance and care. A disadvantage is the possible lack of professional competences, for example to point out problems and refer to the available assistance on offer. For this reason, professional training, supervision and monitoring of the execution are all the more important, as the studied interventions actually show. Furthermore, much attention needs to be paid to the demarcation of the tasks of volunteers and professionals, as well as to the structural exchange and cooperation between the formal and informal work. This assignment is high on the agendas.
- *Relevance for those involved, interactive learning model and partnership.*  
In general, the rule applies that an intervention is successful only when the people involved perceive it as personally relevant to them, and when they agree with the goals and approach. Perceived relevance is probably all the more important in the case of a taboo topic such as violence in intimate relationships, moreover a taboo topic placed in the context of gender inequality, which is also a sensitive topic, in some communities especially so. There it sometimes happens, for example, that women do not perceive themselves as being the victims of violent behaviour because in their surroundings, such behaviour is seen as normal. Earlier, we have already pointed out the importance of a context-dependent approach and tailored work, which takes into account the background, social world and needs of those on which the intervention is focused. This also means a need for sensitivity about diversity with respect to ethnic background, socioeconomic position, religion and age, in addition to gender. Several of the interventions discussed here provide examples of how this can be accomplished, such as the examples in the *peers* domain, which respond strongly to the living conditions and needs of adolescents. In this context, the operative factors of the method's interactivity and of the partnership with those involved are relevant as well. To determine the goals and/or means in consultation with those involved, and to work as partners on the development and execution, works better than a top-down approach does.
- *Variation in methods.*  
In the separate interventions, variation in method is important to be able, if necessary, to deliver tailored work that will have the intended impact, especially in case of interventions in the lives of clients who have asked for help. Many of the interventions discussed here make use of different methods, such as individual contact combined with group activities and/or activities aimed at raising awareness in the community, or the transference of knowledge combined with learning skills by means of interactive activities, or theatre with discussion and workshops afterwards. Of course, the chosen methods need to be adequately related to the goals and target group of the interventions.

- **Positive angle.**  
To convey positive messages instead of a problem orientation is of importance to the prevention of violence in families, as many of the studied interventions show. To stimulate the personal power of family members, that of women in particular, is a frequent goal. A number of projects also intends to encourage nonviolent forms of behaviour, and some of them focus on the positive role of men as educator as well. A positive approach may also mean the avoidance of a pointed finger or accusatory approach. For this reason, it is important to aim for a positive wrapping of the message that all parties involved will benefit from breaking through traditional gender patterns and striving for more gender equality, making it possible for men, too, to feel positively addressed.
- **Social support.**  
Strengthening the (in)formal networks around individuals or families is a frequently sought after goal in the interventions. This is correct, of course, since social support is undisputed as an operative factor. Various forms of social support are involved in the interventions circumscribed here, such as individual supportive contact by a volunteer or professional, contact with partners in adversity, individual (for instance peer-to-peer) or in groups, the organization of neighbourhood meetings, and contact with other forms of support and assistance. With the present problem, one must take care that the approach does not backfire. In some cases, people from the immediate surroundings may be involved in the continuation of the problem (for example, in case of forms of honour-related violence). It remains necessary to assess carefully what the contribution of untrained volunteers from the immediate surroundings might mean. Usually, the violence problematic is so complex, that professional expertise is essential to the approach. Social support can never be a replacement for professional assistance, yet it is an indispensable element on the road to recovery of the resilience and self-assertion of those involved.
- **Professionals: matching and sensitivity/impartiality.**  
With suitable and *evidence-based* interventions alone, we are not there yet. The effectiveness also depends on the qualities of the professionals and their relation with clients. In this context, ‘matching’ between professionals and clients on characteristics such as sex or ethnic background may be important. In a number of projects, this is a conscious goal. We know from the literature, however, that ethnic matching is not always necessary, possible, or even wanted. It may occur, for instance, that migrant parents express a specific preference for autochthonous caseworkers, or no preference at all. Here, too, the most important thing is to start from the background and needs of people, and from their values and norms. The qualities of professionals, such as empathy, respect, open-mindedness, and the ability to create a safe environment are just as important in this context, qualities that have been mentioned multiple times by those involved in the studied interventions.
- **Commitment and sustainability.**  
As far as the available information goes, the involvement of the people carrying out the studied interventions is often strong. The involvement of policy parties and financiers is a different story sometimes. Common practice is that interventions take place on a project basis and depend on temporary funding. Structural funding and getting embedded in regular policy is of great importance for continuity. From the side of the projects, this calls for an investment in the creation of a support base among the local authorities.

#### 4.2.3 *Gender sensitivity*

In general, we can conclude that there are few Dutch interventions that pay attention to gender-related inequalities and the importance of the emancipation of women, men and their children (daughters and sons), in a balanced and well-integrated way. In this respect, some of the studied projects from other EU countries are more advanced and the emancipatory approach is more firmly embedded in these interventions as well. The Dutch interventions often lack a clear and systematic vision on the concrete carry-over of gender-determined cultural patterns and social inequalities between women and men on relationships and familial relations. The concept of gender sometimes seems to be a *black box*, of which everybody knows the overall content in general terms, while knowledge about the precise content and its functioning remains vague. In the interventions, attention is paid more fre-

quently to a partial aspect such as, for instance, the importance of paid employment for the woman involved, without paying specific attention to the social influence of inequality or the persistency in role patterns that can make it hard to persevere with changes. Sometimes, the involvement of fathers in the children's upbringing does get attention, but at the same time, the developers turn out to spread the message that care given by fathers is exceptional (for example by means of just one 'daddy day' per week) and underscore the traditional role of fathers as the children's playmate. In a few cases, it is argued that the project is not founded on a view on gender inequality because of anticipated resistance and assumed negative effects: to make an emancipatory agenda explicit is assumed to scare off target groups. This applies in particular to boys and men from migrant families. The consequences of not addressing resistance seem to slide to the background. This indicates that the insight into the relation between gender-determined inequality and violence against women and girls is sometimes insufficient.

In the context of this study, we have seen that there are few relevant interventions with an encompassing scientific foundation, that looks at the impact of assumed differences from a gender-sensitive perspective as a consequence. One conclusion is obvious: that gender inequality is an important breeding ground for violence to come about and continue, deserves to get more attention in the advancement of professionals' expertise. The emancipation of family members is, after all, an important element in the prevention of violence, also and in particular where the intergenerational patterns of transference are concerned. The challenge is to recognize actual, gender-related inequalities in the approach, even when a tendency of defence or denial may occur in the practice at hand. It requires specialized expertise to translate this into an approach that is in keeping with the demand for help and motivation of those involved.

It may help, as foreign experts have indicated, to make a distinction at the theoretical level between the development and the execution: to pay attention to gender (in)equality does not mean an argument for a specific approach. The elaboration into the approach can be done in different ways, depending on the target group (when victimized men constitute the target group, gender-determined patterns and inequality play a role, too) and the best way to fit in with the target group and the needs living within it.

Commitment to the implementation of interventions in the institutions and communities/target groups at whom the intervention is aimed, is crucial to their chance of success. Furthermore, it is a challenge to improve the women's defences in a way that will not alienate their partners. Emancipation may be the main objective, but the actual approach is context dependent and always requires tailored work.

In our study, we have described the protective and risk factors that need attention with respect to the prevention of (the intergenerational transference of) violence within families. For this purpose, we have built on an earlier developed *pathway* model, designed to prevent violence against women. The model has been complemented with potential protective factors, which specifically help to break through the intergenerational transference of partner violence and child abuse by means of interventions at the different levels (that of the individual, the family and the social context).

In the Dutch interventions studied here, it is striking that most of the attention is paid to the emancipation of women and girls. Activities focused on the emancipation of men and boys are still in their infancy, especially with regard to views and behaviour in relation to gender equality, breaking through role patterns and the encouragement of men to take on care tasks in the family. In this context, the Swedish projects in particular may serve as an additional source of inspiration. At the family level, (support during) the gender-sensitive upbringing of boys and girls has been neglected. In this respect, we did not find any relevant practices abroad, either. For an approach regarding the factors focused on *community* and *peers*, we have found relevant practices in the Netherlands in which a gender-sensitive approach is at work, to a limited extent. This applies explicitly to 'WE CAN Young', also with respect to its foundation and goal. In Sweden and Greece we have found relevant projects, focused on adolescents, that are promising; the developers have successfully chosen to take gender equality as their starting point and goal, in order to prevent violence.

### 4.3 *Government policy*

In this study's set-up, the relation between the emancipation of women and men (and their children) and the prevention of (the intergenerational transference of) violence has been an important point of departure. Considering that Dutch emancipation policy emphatically pays attention to the prevention of violence, and that the intergenerational transference of violence is the subject of nationwide policy developments (violence in dependency relationships), we have not just looked at the main research question. Based on the outcomes, we have also examined whether we could draw conclusions relevant for policy development. A number of points catch the eye.

#### *The necessity of programmatic policy*

In view of the complexity of the problem of the intergenerational transference of violence and the variety of factors that exert their influence at different levels (see the model presented in our study), more coherence in the approach is urgently needed. We need an all-encompassing, programmatic preventive policy, focused on multiple levels.

All kinds of factors influence the coming about and continuation of violence, at the individual level, the family level and the meso level. Prevention should also focus on the nature of the violence taking place in a family, as well as on the extent to which it is taking place, from incidental to structural and sustained violence. In doing so, an encompassing programme should address the risk and protective factors of which we know from research that they do have an impact.

Such a programme needs to pay explicit attention to the role played by gender inequality and an unequal distribution of power. It is important to look at the context in which violence takes place, where other factors than individual ones interact with it. This applies, for instance, to the (economic) dependence between partners and to inequality in their financial position or their status regarding their right of residence, or an unequal division of paid labour and care between women and men. This study shows that there are promising practices in the Netherlands, which support (young) mothers who are victims of partner violence during their return to the labour process.

Beside tertiary prevention, attention must be paid to primary and secondary prevention as well. From a prevention viewpoint, gains can be realized especially by paying attention to groups at risk or target groups such as pupils. Violence can be prevented by strengthening teenagers and (young) adults in their capabilities to engage in healthy relationships. In addition, also important is that it is possible in this way to reach adolescents and adults who have experienced domestic violence, but are afraid to expose this.

Furthermore, programmatic prevention focuses on all those involved in domestic violence. The main point is the ability to offer a range of different, tailored interventions. The usual practice is to deal with the factors at play among adults/partners, adolescents and in the social environment relatively separately by means of different interventions. From a policy viewpoint, more tuning and coordination would be desirable, which would enable the executors of interventions to actually make that connection. Looking at the practice of the assistance field, with its current funding flows, this fragmentation is understandable; after all, at least in part, each 'level' requires its own approach. Yet, looked at with effectiveness in mind, this is also a risk. The progress made in one part of the field may be undone in adjacent fields because the appropriate (follow-up) measures are lacking. For this reason, a more programmatic and integrated policy is necessary, both at the municipal and the national levels. A more integral prevention policy should encompass the entire playing field of those involved (children, father and mother) and all aspects at work in it. More structural support in the policy context is desirable, too. Interventions from the UK show that an integral and gender-sensitive familial approach has added value and requires adequate coordination, enabling a connection between the different domains in which assistance is required.

Both at the national and decentralized levels, national policy is essential to provide a framework in which that range of required interventions all have their place. From a prevention viewpoint, it is crucial to strengthen protective factors in the social sphere. The nationwide approach to violence in dependency relationships, but also the current decentralized developments in the fields of youth policy, participation policy, the policies concerning the Social Support Act and Safe at Home (in Dutch: *Veilig Thuis*), and the Regional Views on domestic violence, all provide the opportunity to do this. This study shows that one such important protective factor, for example, is breaking through gender-related inequality linked to the distribution of unpaid care tasks at home and paid work outside the home.

Akin to the Spanish example, trade and industry can be stimulated to provide parenting training courses for men, organized by the company. In the current study, Spain provides a promising example of a country that has made a start with the creation of a national legal framework to realize policy regarding gender-related violence. At the national level, legislation provides a clear framework for offering protection and support to victims of violence. The prevention of violence is also part of this framework, for instance in the development of affirmative action to reintegrate victims of partner violence on the labour market. In Spain, too, however, there still is fragmentation, caused by very limited budgets, among other things, and differences in prioritization in the different regions.

This risk also arises in the Netherlands, as a consequence of the decentralization to the municipal level. For this reason, policy development at this level, focused on a stronger connection between gender sensitivity and ways to prevent violence, deserves close attention. In the Dutch situation, it is important to place this policy development in the context of the transformation of the policies aimed at young people and families. Moreover, it is important to be directive with regard to foundation (choosing interventions based on operative elements that have been proven by research to be effective) and to build up the evidence of interventions by making a focused investment in knowledge support and monitoring.

#### ***The necessity of gender sensitivity in programmatic policy***

In the Netherlands, at execution level, the basic attitude in combating gender inequality is to pursue a gender-neutral policy, although this is the subject of dispute as well. This also resurfaces here and there in the debate on domestic violence. While other countries such as Sweden, England or Spain take the view, based on research, that women in particular fall victim to violence, in the Netherlands this is disputed quite regularly. The assumption is that violence against men is underreported due to the shame of the men involved to admit they are victims. In a few interventions, we observed that to identify differences between men and women as the perpetrators of violence gave rise to the fear that this would create a new gender stereotype: the idea that women cannot possibly be the perpetrators of sexual violence. The assumption is that when one does not differentiate between the sexes/genders, this will lead to equal outcomes, since the opportunities are then equal for both sexes. The underlying thought is that women and men can make their choices individually and in freedom. This neo-Liberal view ignores differences in social or politico-cultural conditions that influence whether and how women and men make choices and grab opportunities (for instance regarding women's participation in the labour process).

The gender-neutral attitude in policy, but also among professionals, constitutes a risk, since it can be at odds with the needed gender-sensitivity. The lack of this sensitivity may result in missed opportunities to adequately address the problem. The foreign experts emphasize that violence in intimate relationships is always based on power and control - among both men and women - and not just when intimate terrorism occurs. Research has shown that, socially speaking, more men than women are in a position to control and intimidate their partner, and that they actually do so in practice more often. Although the recognition of women as possible perpetrators is of importance, this does not alter the facts of the lopsided distribution between the sexes and social gender patterns.

Given that international research has shown consistently that women and girls run a disproportionately greater risk of falling victim to violence, the Dutch government has entered into binding international agreements on an integrated and gender-sensitive approach, at both the national and local levels. Through the international treaties (human rights treaties, the UN Women's Treaty and the Istanbul Convention), the Dutch government has the obligation to preventively protect its citizens in general, and in this case women in particular, 'with appropriate care' against partner violence, by means of the development of an active and gender-sensitive prevention policy, the protection of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators.

In the international agreements, it is determined that the government must develop a focused policy that contributes to both driving back violence and strengthening the position of women. Most recently, with the passing of the Execution Act of 18 November 2015, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence has also come into effect in the Netherlands. This convention has laid down that a gender-sensitive (prevention) policy means that the approach should not relate just to violence (against women, men or children). Article 6 emphatically states that policy aimed at the prevention of and the protection against violence must be coupled to measures to stimulate the equality between women and men and to strengthen the position

of women. More in particular, the text points out that government measures must aim at improving the economic position of women, among other things by entering into agreements with stakeholders (companies, municipalities). The goal of these agreements must be to actually increase women's opportunities. The underlying idea is that increasing the economic independence of women contributes to their self-assertion, well-being and safety, in this sense making it a crucial part of prevention policy. Improving the expertise of caseworkers and other professionals who work with victims is another important obligation laid down in the Convention. Especially from the viewpoint of prevention and breaking through intergenerational patterns, that expertise is a crucial condition for professional effectiveness.

***To conclude: continuing down the same path***

This exploratory study shows that there are several promising practices to prevent violence in relationships and the transference of violence issues to the next generations. Yet, at the same time, we are dealing with a practical field where interventions and policy specifically geared towards (early, primary or universal) prevention are still in their infancy. During the last four decades, in which the attention paid to domestic violence and child abuse has grown, that attention has been mainly concentrated on measures to provide shelter, protection and support. Thus, more attention needs to be paid to primary prevention.

A comparison with a number of foreign interventions within the EU has shown that, frequently, a coherent theoretical foundation is still lacking. Projects are sometimes started up, based on practical knowledge, but without a scientific foundation. While building a more solid basis for these projects, it is also important to do this from a gender-sensitive perspective, that is, with an eye for the different levels at which social and cultural inequalities between women and men occur, and how these may influence operative elements in the approach. According to the experts, it is important to make a distinction between different levels while reflecting on the projects. Firstly, the question is whether there is a view on gender equality. Secondly, the question is which means are used to reach a wide audience with this view. A third question is: do the people involved in the approach's execution endorse this view? A precondition for a sound execution is that teachers, professionals (or volunteers) are trained to execute the intervention professionally and effectively.

Regarding the question of 'what works', the bottleneck is that empirical research that may provide insight into this is still in its infancy. However, the interventions that have been the subject of empirical research offer inspiring examples of how it can be done. For instance, the effect studies on the projects concentrated on a change in awareness and attitude among adolescents (Greece, Sweden) with respect to the representation of boys/masculinity and girls/femininity and, more specifically, the unacceptability of violence, show positive effects.

Despite the limitations, it is hopeful that the study has shown a number of very promising examples, and that examples from other EU countries may serve as an inspiration. It would be regrettable if it would no longer be possible to structurally continue promising projects because they have been anchored insufficiently in (municipal) policy and the necessary funding. The national government and municipalities have an important task in the development of a sustainable prevention policy, focused on breaking through the intergenerational transference of violence by means of a programmatic approach, making it possible to offer different interventions at different levels in one, coherent package. The problem is serious in both dimension and nature, and effective action is therefore urgently needed. The aim of this report is to provide some insights that are relevant for the developmental process towards more effectiveness. It is to be hoped that, with a clear framework established by the national government, the municipalities will continue to take up the challenge of being in charge, for the benefit of the quality, continuity and effectiveness of prevention policy.

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