



E-MARIA - EUROPEAN MANUAL FOR RISK ASSESSMENT

NEWSLETTER

July 2012

E-MARIA is funded by the European Commission, DG Criminal Justice, to develop innovative approaches to and instruments for risk assessment in the field of domestic violence in order to increase the prediction of re-assault and to promote the safety and security of victims of violence.

In the intervention in domestic violence safety of women and children is paramount at all times. Thus risk assessment – applying formal instruments to assess the likelihood that intimate partner violence will be repeated and escalated – plays a central role and must be given utmost priority. It is the basis for establishing a safety plan to guarantee the safety and security, preventing further acts of violence or murder and allowing survivors of violence to live a life without violence.

E-MARIA seeks to improve the intervention in domestic violence by creating instruments and tools that allow a high level of efficacy and efficiency in the protection and safety of the survivors and by promoting their recovery, and consequently their empowerment and autonomy, and to prevent further victimisation.

E-MARIA addresses professionals who intervene in the field of domestic violence, and women survivors for whom training sessions will be offered aiming at accompanying their recovery process and promoting their autonomy.

E-MARIA RECENT PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The first year of the European cooperation could result in some important outcomes that are the basis for the activities in the second project year. During the first year the partner institutions (from Portugal, Austria, Germany and Lithuania) conducted comprehensive stocktaking and need analysis activities and initiated the development of the European Manual on Risk Assessment as well as the development of training modules directed to professionals, on the one hand, and to survivors, on the other hand. The intensive collaboration among the European partners has been supported by means of monthly online meetings and three partner meetings, according to the project design.

3rd Partner meeting in Vienna, Austria



The E-MARIA team met for the third time in June 2012 in Vienna, Austria, complementing the regular virtual meetings. The main aim of the meeting was to discuss together and take decisions about the Manual on Risk Assessment and Management and the subsequent training for professionals and survivors. The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss further project planning and its activities (which are outlined hereafter).

The team agreed on the schedule for the main activities in the 2nd project year, namely:

-  Launch of the Manual – 25th November 2012;
-  Delivery of pilot training for survivors – between 25th November 2012 and 22nd February 2013;
-  Delivery of pilot training for Professionals – between January and 22nd February 2013;
-  Final Conference – 07th May 2013, Lisbon, Portugal.

Need Analysis Report

In autumn 2011 the project team launched an online survey and conducted desk research activities substantiated by personal interviews with local stakeholders from the field in order to gather information on existing approaches to risk assessment and management and on related specific needs. The online survey and interviews addressed all professionals who provide front-line services for women who are experiencing domestic violence, with special focus on legal practitioners and law enforcement professionals, as well as all professionals who intervene in the field of domestic violence, taking into account that the implementation of risk assessment has an impact on all levels of intervention. AMCV also conducted focus groups with women survivors of violence. The main aim was to create a sound common basis for the development of a European Manual on Risk Assessment.

The main results of the Need Analysis were:

Professionals' Needs

- ⚠ Most of the professionals are aware of the existing international legal instruments, which guide their professional practice.
- ⚠ Most of them are familiar with risk assessment tools; nevertheless lack procedures to support their practice and/or inter-organisational intervention. The same applies to the development of safety plans, although no procedures are established.
- ⚠ The majority of the participants expressed the desire to take part in special training courses on risk assessment and management and its procedures, as well as on professional/organisational roles.

Women's Needs

The majority of women expressed also the desire to participate in training courses that support them to:

- ⚠ Recognise the situation of domestic violence that they live in;
- ⚠ Identify the signs of violence and be aware of the violence and its various types, available resources and existing support;
- ⚠ Have knowledge about their rights;
- ⚠ Recognise and assess the real and actual risk when experiencing the violence, especially the violence which they have already previously experienced;
- ⚠ Develop and apply individual protection strategies aimed at increasing their safety while living with the perpetrator as well as after leaving him;
- ⚠ Strengthen their process of autonomy.

European Manual on Risk Assessment

At this moment, the project team is preparing the E-MARIA Manual on Risk Assessment directed towards professionals working in the field of domestic violence. The Manual intends to improve the understanding of risk levels and subsequent intervention in domestic violence situations. The E-MARIA team expects the Manual to be useful for intervention in this area in any country of Europe, proposing a set of recommendations and good practices.

The Manual will be composed by several sections, such as the context of women human rights; risk language and definitions; risk assessment; risk management and monitoring; community networks. The E-MARIA partners foresee its **launch at European level at 25th November 2012** – International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Training for Professionals

In addition to the Manual, training modules related to risk assessment and management addressed to professionals are being developed. Besides the content directly related to the risk assessment and management, it will include specific content, namely: human rights; general introduction to domestic violence; professional roles; community network; and coping strategies.

This training will be delivered with a blended learning approach, i.e. containing different methodological elements, such as e-learning modules and face-to-face workshops. The initial phase will be delivered on an e-learning platform and complemented by face-to-face workshops. Workshops will include a variety of methods like role-plays and case studies in order to develop skills of the envisaged target groups. Special attention will be given to the sharing of experiences. The training will be implemented in the first two months of 2013.

Training for Survivors

Based on the need analysis as well as on previous projects, the E-MARIA partners are developing a training course for women survivors of violence. The training will include the following contents: domestic violence awareness, risk assessment, life projects, and recovery. The main aim of the training is to contribute to the recovery of survivors.

The training will be implemented at local level, between 25th November 2012 and 22nd February 2013. The setting of the timeframes for the training still needs to be defined by taking into consideration the specific needs of the women.

Workshop on Risk Assessment and Management



Screenshot of the website with information on the workshop¹

On April 4th 2012, AMCV organised a workshop in Lisbon dedicated to risk assessment and risk management, with the contribution of two experts - Davina James-Hanman¹ and Laura Richards², both from United Kingdom. The workshop was attended by approx. 100 professionals, who considered the workshop as an important moment of reflection about the issue.

The workshop was opened with an introductory presentation of the E-MARIA project by AMCV. Then Laura and Davina made a presentation on risk assessment and management in

¹ Director of AVA – Against Violence and Abuse; Davina was responsibility between 2000-2008 for the development and implementation of the London Domestic Violence Strategy for the Mayor of London. In 2009 she assisted the Home Office in the writing of the national violence against women strategy.

² Laura Richards developed the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour based Violence Risk Checklist - **DASH** 2009, on behalf of ACPO and in partnership with Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA). Laura has also been involved in assessing the Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) on behalf of CAADA. Laura has also been involved in assessing the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) on behalf of CAADA

* website: <http://alentejodediversidades.wordpress.com/2012/04/06/opus-gay-alentejo-de-diversidades-no-workshop-avaliacao-e-gestao-do-risco/#respond>

accordance with their professional background. Both experts started from the point that violence could be preventable but is not inevitable. One of the questions raised by Davina was: What risk is being assessed?

Laura Richards reinforced that risk assessment instruments are not infallible but frequently treated as such. Besides, they should not be a substitute for understanding the dynamics of stalking and domestic violence, which makes training for professionals all the more important for a better understanding of the domestic violence dynamics.

Davina underlined the importance of considering to what extent risk factors interact with each other. In addition, professionals need to look at the victim's perception of risk and her violence history, since the risk is more than a simple tick.

Both experts believe that the implementation of risk instruments and subsequent steps should take into account several elements, such as:

- ⚠ The risk dynamics in domestic violence situations.
- ⚠ When gathering the information, the setting for the victim should be as much comfortable as possible.
- ⚠ The victim's perception of the risk should be valued carefully.
- ⚠ Special sensitivity should be given to the issue of sexual violence.
- ⚠ Much attention should be paid to factors that could increase the risk substantially.
- ⚠ Both victims and perpetrators are at high risk for suicidal ideation.
- ⚠ In case of risk it is important to implement a multi-agency intervention in order to manage the risk.

News from Germany

Case management for de-escalation in cases of domestic violence

The current situation in Germany with special focus on the latest developments in Lower Saxony (one of the 16 German federal states)

Germany recognises that violence against women is part of everyday life in Germany and that it takes a wide variety of forms. Violence against women is not limited to assaults on the physical and emotional integrity of women alone, it includes subtle forms of behaviour which prevents a woman from developing and expressing her own will, and ignores her needs and well-being. In 2002 the law against violence has been implemented. It allows the endangered individual to remain in her/his familiar surroundings following the underlying principle: "Whoever hits must leave". Two years later, in 2004, the Protection Law was implemented and finally in 2007 an anti-stalking law came into force. In order to combat violence against women more effectively, the Federal Government has issued a comprehensive Action Plan (Aktionsplan I and Aktionsplan II der Bundesregierung zur Bekämpfung von Gewalt gegen Frauen) to combat violence against women³. In doing so, the Federal Government makes it clear that structural changes are necessary, rather than the occasional, isolated measures that disregard the complexity of the manifestation of violence. The main objective of the German Action Plan is to improve the efficiency of the fight against violence and to improve the protection of affected women.

³ Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth:
<http://www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/Service/Publikationen/publikationen,did=100962.html>

There have been, however, reports on fatal conflicts in intimate relationships in the media. When analysing these cases, one can come to the conclusion that pieces of information on the escalation were available at very different places. If these pieces of information had been aggregated, the risk for escalation could have been assessed and the escalation could have been prevented in some cases. This has resulted in the effort to create an instrument that would bring together existing information and knowledge that are available in the different intervening institutions as basis to assess the risk and take preventive actions. Thus, it seems necessary to develop a common frame for the intervening professional groups and to set up a binding form of cooperation, while observing the legal data protection requirements of the various professions, on the one hand, and the need to safeguard the entitlement to information self-determination and to protect the private sphere of the victims, on the other hand.

Against this background the Landespräventionsrat, Crime Prevention Council of Lower Saxony, in cooperation with the Interministerielle Arbeitskreis "Häusliche Gewalt", Interministerial Working Group "Domestic Violence" developed a model "Interdisciplinary Case Management for De-escalation in Cases of Domestic Violence and Stalking – Orientation points for Interdisciplinary Cooperation", which is described in a brochure. The model description is complemented by reports on good practice and experiences from different professional groups. It also shows the specific professional perspectives of police, justice, counselling and social services, on how they handle the dangers of escalation, risk assessment and interdisciplinary cooperation.

The underlying principle of the model is that for preventing the dangers of escalation effectively, all information available in the various intervening institutions shall be aggregated in order to create a possibly complete picture of the potential perpetrator, the victim and the context of the situation. For this purpose agreements shall be made and procedures shall be developed that ensure consideration of all relevant pieces of information that become known to the professionals in the intervention process. The cooperation of involved professional groups, institutions and authorities is hereby an important frame. Although cooperation among professional groups in the field of domestic violence is explicitly promoted by the German Action Plan there is still the need to improve the interdisciplinary cooperation. In order to recognise and assess cases of escalating violence a structured and regionally embedded interdisciplinary case management is necessary, where police, justice and counselling services play an essential role and where information of each case of escalating domestic violence is gathered centrally and analysed individually.

The brochure was published in 2011 and recently presented in a conference. It offers orientation on how this type of interdisciplinary case management can be integrated in the framework of the above mentioned Action Plan II.

ProBeweis (ProEvidence) – Project in Lower Saxony, Germany:

Survivors of domestic violence or of sexual assault are often traumatised in a way that they only press charges after months or years of the incident. All the more time passes, the more it is difficult to collect evidences of the incident.

In 2011, shelters, counselling and intervention institutions against domestic violence in the capital of Lower Saxony, Hannover and its surroundings reported 5150 cases and the smaller town of Oldenburg reported 1049 cases. Experts state that the estimated number of unreported cases is much higher. Explicitly in cases of DV or sexual violence in the nearer

social community victims are much more inhibited to exercise their rights and to press charges immediately. If they decide to exercise their rights, there is the need to document the incident on time and under certain exploitable procedures to ensure a promising criminal prosecution.

In the 3-year project⁴ coordinated by the forensic department of the Medizinische Hochschule Hannover (MHH), medical university and hospital of Hannover, specialised ambulances shall be established and practitioners shall be trained to enable them to explore the situation of the woman and to collect the evidences by means of a specific tool kit.

The head of the department of the MHH states that, in most of the cases, it is easier for the women to look for help at a gynaecological hospital than at a police station.

Aim

With this project girls and women shall get the chance to preserve evidences without being obliged to press charges. For the judiciary the situation of evidence-protection could be improved considerably – this is of much importance in cases where survivor's word stands against perpetrator's. A collision with the principle of legality which orders criminal proceedings of all criminal acts will not take place. This project addresses all victims who might want to press charges later. It is the first time that victims have the chance to secure evidences which are relevant for a juridical procedure – without pressing charge at the same time.

In addition, the project seeks to weave a network of focal clinics, so that potential victims will be able to reach a focal point in a clinic in Lower Saxony which is not further away than 100 km.

Method applied

Experts from the gynaecological department of the MHH will train other physicians on how to collect evidences in an adequate way by using a special tool kit along the lines of a standardised procedure.

Summary

The project is initiated by the university hospital. The intention is to improve the cooperation with counselling services, helplines, shelters, and other NGOs.

E-MARIA WEBSITE

The project website was implemented in autumn 2011 and offers information on the project. It is updated regularly to allow an interested public to get a closer insight in the project work. The website gives interested visitors the opportunity to exchange experience and information on project related topics.

For further information, please contact either the coordinator or one of the partner organisations.

www.e-maria.eu

⁴ Ministry of Lower Saxony, Netzwerk ProBeweis:
http://www.ms.niedersachsen.de/portal/live.php?navigation_id=4972&article_id=106126&psmand=17



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