



Improving Frontline Responses  
to High Impact Domestic Violence

## **Requesting support to step out of domestic abuse: What does it take?**

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# IMPRODOVA project

= Improving frontline responses to high-impact domestic violence

## Goals:

- Improve **interagency cooperation** among HIDV frontline responders
- Integrate **human factors** in FLR's perception of and intervention in HIDV cases



# IMPRODOVA project



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## IMPRODOVA DEVELOPMENT & TEST

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Policy Development Module  
Data Improvement Recommendations  
Risk Assessment & Case Doc. Module  
Training Platform  
Communication Platform Pilot

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# Domestic abuse is harmful.



(EIGE, 2021; Lancaster et al., 2010; Nemeth et al., 2019; Outlaw, 2009; Varma et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2012)

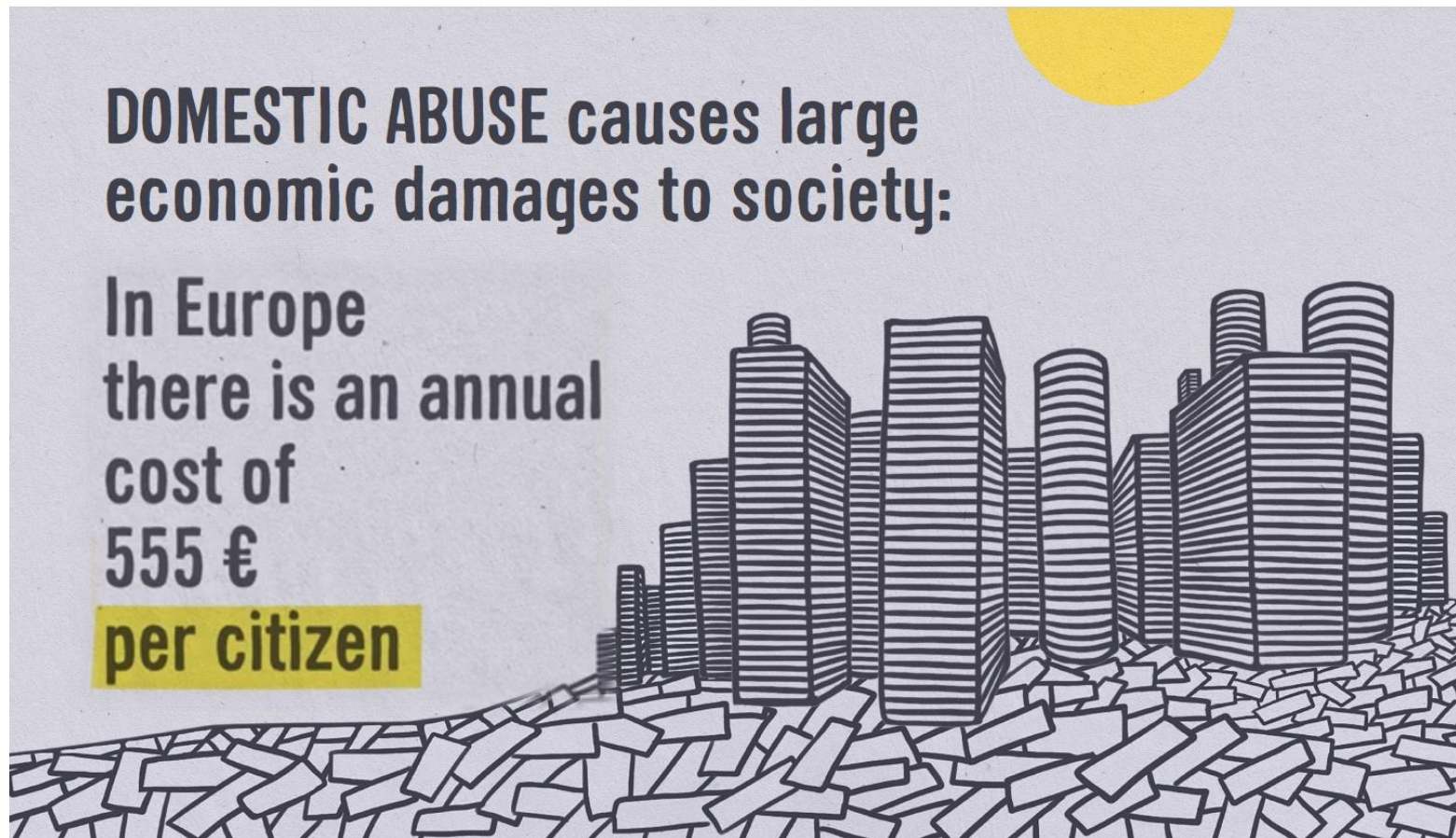
# Domestic abuse is toxic.



(UNODC, 2019)

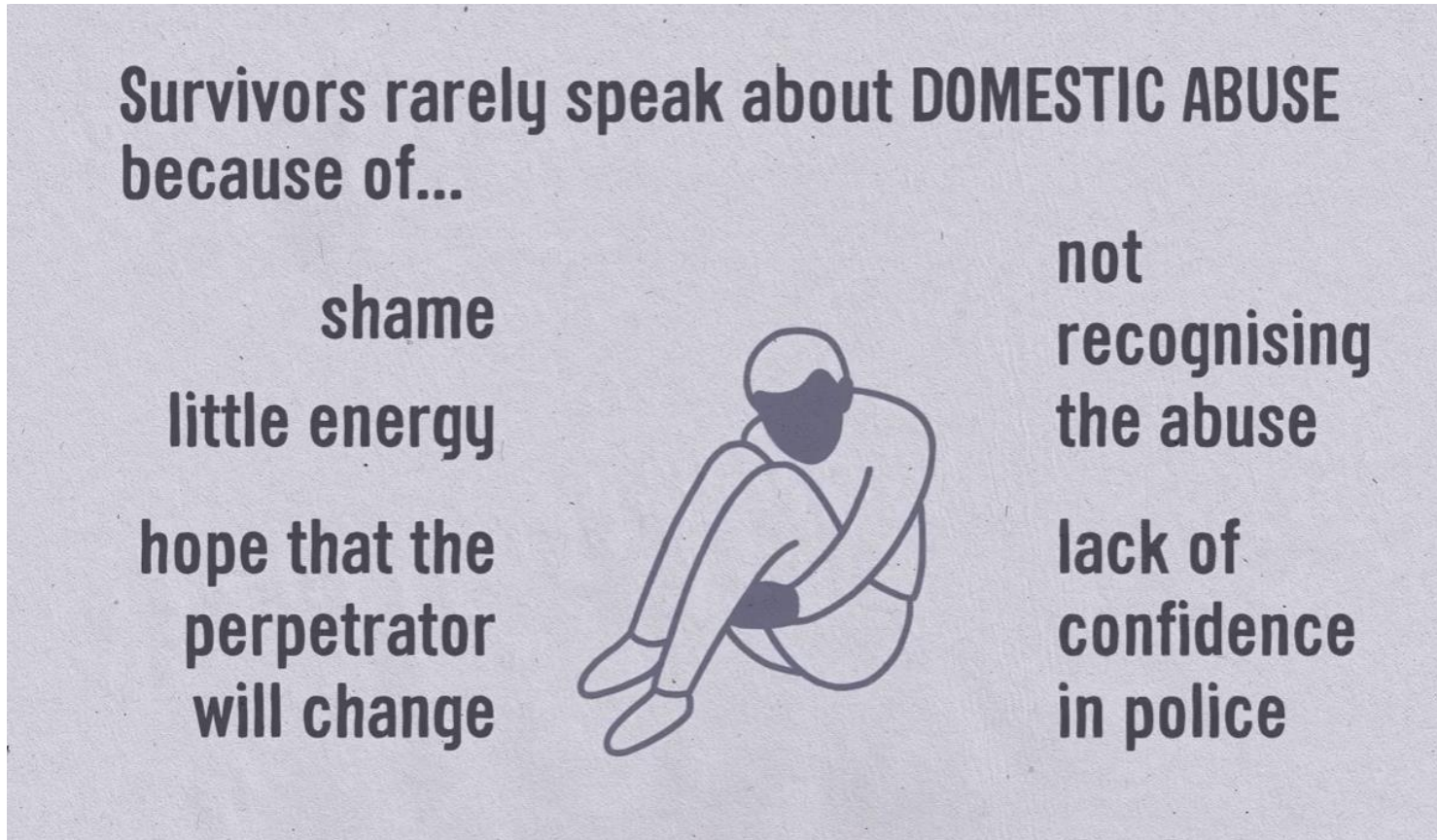


# Domestic abuse costs.



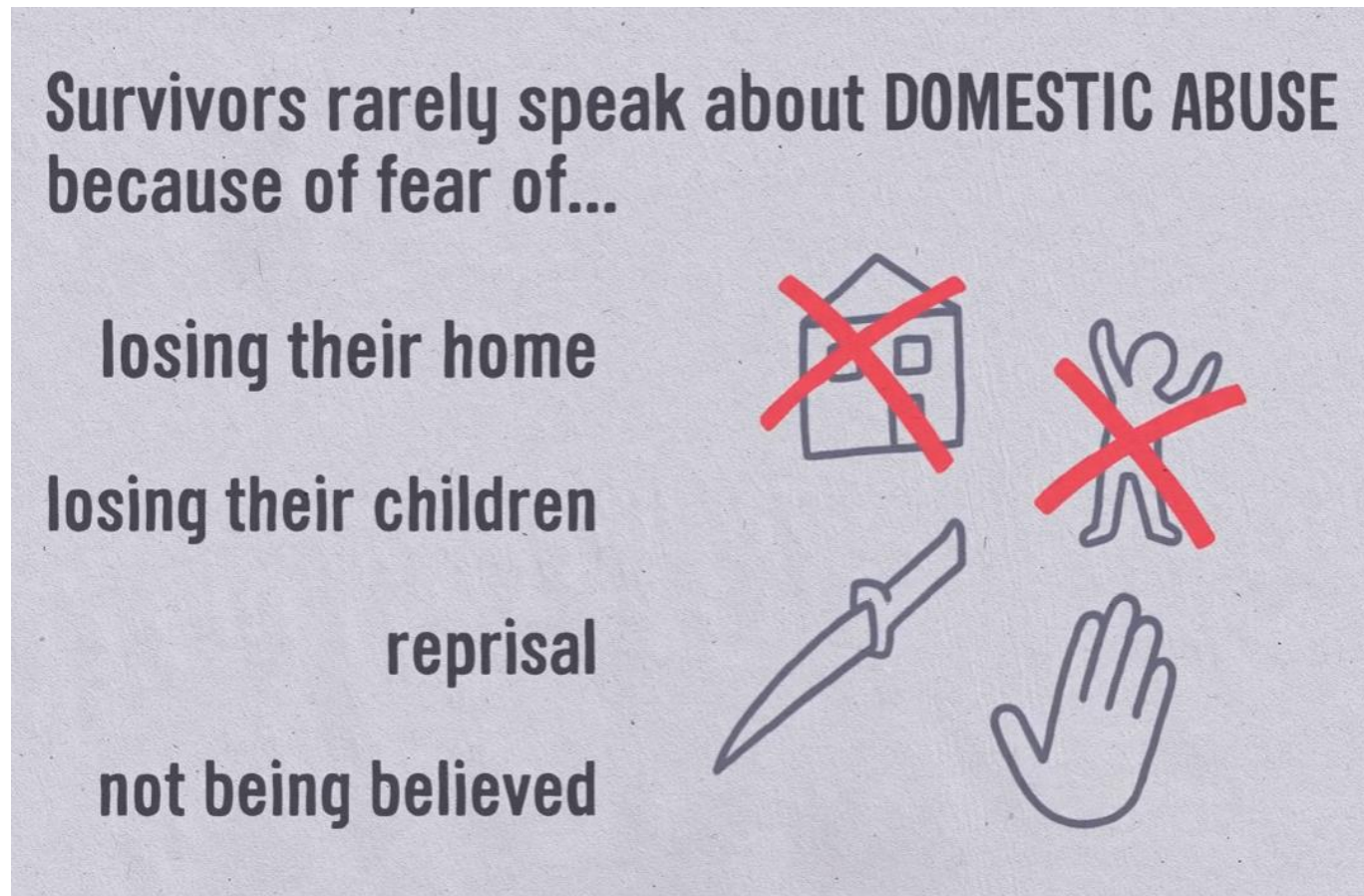
(CoE, 2013; EIGE, 2021)

# DA detection is complicated.



(Avis & Wallace, 2020; Howarth & Robinson, 2016)

# DA detection is complicated.



(Howarth & Robinson, 2016)



# DA detection is complicated.

And also the perpetrator tries to keep the survivor from telling or separating by...  
isolating the survivor from friends and family



(Hester, 2021; Howarth & Robinson, 2016)

# Frontline responders can detect DA.



**Social work**



**Police**

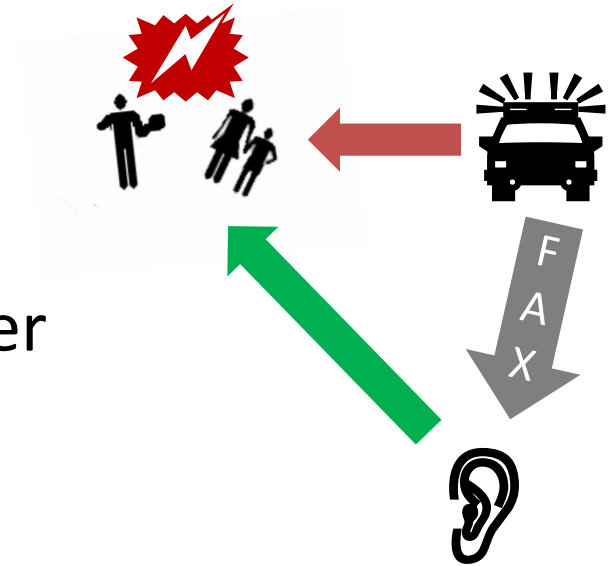


**Medical profession**

**What are strategies and best practices  
to reach couples involved in domestic abuse?**

# Interview study

- 2 German cities: Berlin and Hanover
- 12 frontline responders:
  - 7 social workers
  - 5 police officers
- Inductive coding (Goia et al., 2013)
  - Open coding on frontline responder strategies to increase domestic violence detection
  - Higher order coding into theory-based categories



# Strategies to enhance DA detection:

## **Distal**

indirect contact,  
use of media

**Campaigning**

**Presence and visibility**

**Informing**

**Proactive contacting**

**Building rapport**

**Communicating respect**

## **Proximate**

direct contact,  
nudging



# I. Distal strategies

## Campaigning

- Social sector had campaigns with **posters** (very effective, e.g. in subway trains)

## Presence and visibility

- Victim protection officers of the Berlin police are available in public areas to answer questions
- Special focus on **networking**
- Police and social sector generally provide anonymous advice by telephone
- Dilemma: Entrances of counseling centers are often inconspicuous (not marked with a large company sign), so that clients do not attract too much attention when they visit them.

## Informing

- ***We have a lot of flyers, and I think the fact sheet for crime victims is very good now..., because these victim support institutions are also listed on it. They can do something with it. There are the Internet addresses on it, today in the age of the Internet - you can find everything. (police officer)***
- *We have 100 brochures downstairs and flyers from all kinds of places. And when we take the victims to forensic medicine, there are also lots of flyers from ProBeweis, now also for rape crimes. **We also explain to the victims that if they don't want to press charges, they don't have to talk to us and can still have themselves examined.** Many victims don't know that either. (police officer)*

# II. Proximate strategies

## Proactive contacting

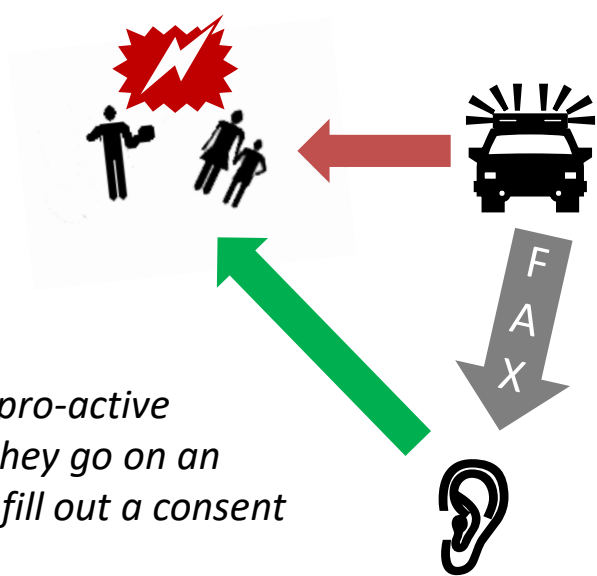
*What I can ... say about the police, ... it's very good ...: That there are pro-active faxes. The patrol cars carry information material from us. And when they go on an assignment because of domestic violence, they can ask the victims to fill out a consent **form that allows us to contact them**.* (social worker)

*We do not wait for the woman to contact us, in addition the woman gets our small HAIP business card, ... you can put it in your bra, but the proactive approach is the most important thing to **get the contact**.* (social worker)

*And then the colleague **tries it immediately by phone**, because then you still catch the energy and the acute state with ...* (social worker)

*If we as the police are in the apartment, then **we can establish that [contact to support organization for migrant victims]** accordingly.* (police officer)

- Problem: individuals who cannot be contacted



# II. Proximate strategies

## Building rapport

*First priority is to separate parties and then we record the whole thing. The people are interviewed separately, therefore also 2 cars, so that one is never alone with a person in a room for self-security reasons and if it goes, the **woman by a woman and the man by a man**. This is important with the woman because you have to **build the trust somehow and the wire to each other**, if it works somehow and that goes better. (police officer)*

*Of course, a victim must also allow her/himself to be asked questions that may contradict some statement that was made before, under other impressions perhaps. You have to **be sensitive** there, because that can also be misunderstood by the victim: "Maybe they don't believe me." (police officer)*

*I also **don't confront a woman** and say, "Say, this is already the tenth incident, it's nice that you finally come." [...] **We are very appreciative** of that, it's nice that they have come forward. We make sure that the initial interview already contains a lot of legal information about what she can do or how she can behave strategically in the next incident, because we don't know whether she will come back the next time. (social worker)*

***We do not send away anyone** who experiences violence in a family context (social worker)*

# II. Proximate strategies

## Communicating respect

*There are indeed also other case constellations and there it is important for us as police to know that we always **keep our antennas open in all directions**. And that the acceptance for men and the lobby is simply not that big when they say "I have also been beaten". (police officer)*

***We call ALL women**, no matter where the police have classified them... . And of course there were women who were immediately more in this victim role for us, although they were reported there perhaps once as a offender, or the both as well ... (social worker)*

*We don't know the fax at all. ... It's important to us: What does the woman actually want here? And that it is our big headline at all: The responsibility lies with the woman! We don't save her, we don't help her, but **we look at what we can do to support her on her way**. Not everyone has this attitude. You have to make sure that you don't slip into a system of helpers, but that you say: The woman, if she stays in a violent relationship, that is also a decision. (social worker)*

*First and foremost, **listening** is an important issue; sometimes it's enough just to explore the problem cases so that they say, "Yes, now I know what I can do next, where my options are." (social worker)*

*I've done very well with that so far, that you also **don't beduddle the victims** too much and say "Oh God, oh God!" Because if I start saying "Oh God, oh God!", then nothing happens. We are very much encouraged to be objective, to show understanding, but rather to "handle" the whole thing on an objective level and then offer facilities. (police officer)*



# Summary

Frontline responders use a **wide range** of strategies (distal -> proximate)

Strategies and support are **in line** with the respective professional background and with clients' constraints

Important to overcome gaps arising due to the professional limitations by enlarging and intensifying **interagency-cooperation**

# Practical implications

## Importance of direct contact between FLR and victims or perpetrators

- expand accessibility to social support in remote areas and during lock-down
- expand proactive approach networks

## Any, but especially the first contact is crucial

- more training needed to prepare FRL to approach and support victims and perpetrators in a non-judgemental, supportive way
- training needs to increase understanding of other FRLs' work and knowledge of the accessibility of their services

## Support FLRs in their highly demanding jobs

- awareness raising for the need of psycho-social support and supervision is needed

# Research needed

- Define the needs: Regular national victim surveys
- DA detection during lock-down or in remote places
- Detection measures of medical staff (dentists, gynecologists, midwives, etc.)



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