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Risk assessment and case documentation instruments used by frontline responders of Domestic Violence (DV)

In the framework of the research project [IMPRODOVA](#), based on 296 personal interviews we addressed existing on-the-ground risk assessment procedures and instruments in respect to case documentation and their use by frontline responders (FLR) of high impact domestic violence (HIDV): the police, the medical/health sector and the sector of the social work/NGO professions. We examined whether risk assessment and case documentation procedures exist when handling HIDV. What kind of risk assessment instruments and related case-documentation mechanisms are used? What are the critical shortcomings of these tools? Professionals from the field drew attention to the fact that cooperation and information sharing among various actors is particularly important with a view to prevention and a prompt response to DV. The research identified the following key problems: many countries lack formal, standardized risk assessment and case documentation. Some countries use effective instruments discretionally in certain police units, or other FLR's. Regarding the latter, good practices slowly spread in the countries and across the sectors. Cooperation and information sharing among FLR's regarding risk assessment and risk-related case documentation procedures are missing from many countries' practices.

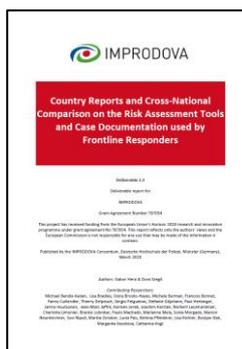
In the eight European countries under study (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Scotland and Slovenia), risk assessment protocols for DV cases vary on a large scale, regarding their level, scope and methodological background. Differences between the participating countries need to be taken into consideration both regarding risk assessment and case documentation protocols. In some countries formal risk assessment tools are missing, in other countries risk assessment is sector- and region-specific, we see local and national level protocols alike. In one third of the countries, there are no formalized, standardized risk assessment protocols. In some of those countries where formalized tools are used, risk assessment is rather static, meaning that risk is examined and evaluated at a certain stage of the procedure. The timing of the risk assessment imposes certain limitations on the procedure. In Finland, Portugal, Scotland and the city of Berlin, risk assessment is dynamic, meaning that it is processed on an on-going basis as new information is received or incidents occur. Dynamic tools ensure to accompany the procedure and acknowledge certain risks in a timelier manner. Among others, these tools cover several, internationally recognized models, such as 'MARAC – Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference', an internationally used, victim-focused information sharing and risk assessment meeting, monitoring the victim's situation on a regular basis, and attended by all DV frontline responders; 'DASH - Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence', a Risk Identification and Management Model, implemented in the UK and 'SALFAG' - an automatized online tool, which recommends next steps and a classification of danger through a number of red boxes that show the increase of victims' endangerment. In some other regions of Germany as well as in France, Slovenia and Hungary there are no formal, standardized risk assessment procedures in use to indicate risks of DV cases. Police units try to access risk without specific guidelines. In Slovenia, the police are a member of a multidisciplinary team, managed by the Centre for Social Work that has its own risk assessment tool, and the police receive the results of the Centre's risk assessment. In Hungary, there is a checklist-based risk assessment procedure,

discretionally used in relation to the ordering of 72 hour restraining orders. In France, there is a generic procedure of risk assessment which is applied to all crimes, and not just DV cases under the terms of ‚Personalized evaluation of the needs of the victim‘. The idea is that law enforcement organizations pay attention not only to identify and to arrest suspects, but also to protect and support victims. Once the criminal complaint report is transmitted to the prosecutor’s office, the prosecutor can decide to further examine the victim’s situation, having recourse to a specialized NGO, which has developed acknowledged expertise in conducting ‘social investigations’.

Most countries put emphasis on the following, typical shortages of risk assessment: the rigidity of existing formal risk assessment tools and the lack of sensitivity concerning each individual case may result in false assessment and negligence towards risk situations that do not ‚fit in the boxes‘. Thereby many professionals across the countries argued that using formal tools has to be accompanied by comprehensive and regular professional training and personal expertise. The lack of multidisciplinary cooperation across the sectors in risk assessment and case documentation was mentioned as a further problem. Unified risk assessment and case documentation protocols are the preconditions of such an endeavour. The last important remark was related to the timing of the risk assessment process. Based on the fieldwork experience it would be beneficial to use a dynamic approach of risk assessment and re-evaluate risks on an ongoing basis.

Risk-related case documentation seems to be a labour- and time-consuming task in all countries. Different countries developed different practices, while the documentation of DV incidents is often not carried out in homogeneous, standardized and formalized procedures. On the one hand, one should be aware of these differences and must not develop general, ‚one size fits all‘ materials. On the other hand, the diversity of the IMPRODOVA countries can serve as an opportunity to find and disseminate good practices and introduce them as promising models. In countries where there is no unified system or where systems are not effective, regulations and practices often ensure a lot of discretion of the content and the modes of documentation. Discretionary processes, informal notes and lack of standards for DV case documentation impede on collaboration between FLR agencies. The lack of appropriate case documentation may hinder effective response to violence.

Despite the diversity, several respondents agreed that decreasing the bureaucratic burden during DV case documentation would be a legitimate endeavour. Some of them recommended more IT support; digital-, and non-paper based systems to be developed. An integrated, easy-to-use ICT platform, available on mobile technology on the scene of a DV incident, could greatly support the work of FLR’s. Such a system could provide not only significant support for the work of the police but also contribute to information sharing between various FLR organisations and institutions (among police, health and social work sector) and thereby make interagency cooperation more effective. Of course, the regulations of GDPR have to be taken into consideration while developing such an ICT tool.



Free download of the full research report:

https://improdova.eu/pdf/IMPRODOVA_D2.3_Risk_Assessment_Tools_and_Case_Documentation_of_Frontline_Responders.pdf?m=1585673380&

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