

MySecrets Cosmetics – a hoax advertising campaign spreads the message against domestic violence



Yes, yes, that is important. And I see that you've brought someone for a product demonstration.

“

Enough is enough. It is up to you to ask for help (Nu is het genoeg. Hulp inschakelen heb je zelf in de hand)

”

In brief

Dutch policy on domestic violence is based on addressing three of its causes: intergenerational transmission of the use of violence, invisibility of the use of violence and gender-related power differences between perpetrators and victims. Targeting the general public and victims of domestic violence, it tries to raise awareness of the issue, break the taboo that many women have on speaking out, and convey information on where to go for help. It works hand-in-hand with policies to improve early signalling by professionals and to improve the quality of shelters for battered women.

Every year, the government runs a media campaign against domestic violence, using radio, television and the internet. In 2010 it used an innovative tool: it launched a hoax range of cosmetics designed specifically to allow women to hide the injuries they sustain when they are battered. The products were branded *MySecret Cosmetics*, and were promoted using a make-believe television interview on a programme called *Women & Business*. The interview lasted less than two minutes, but attracted so much attention that it merited an item three minutes long on the evening television news.

The campaign has had measurable effects. Phone calls for help increased by between 35% and 50%, and willingness to call rose from 50% to 59%. Knowledge of the available support centres and what to do in cases of domestic violence rose from 6% to 11% among the general public and from 10% to 21% among people already involved in episodes of domestic violence. Willingness to visit the website increased from 58% to 72% for the general public and from 63% to 76% for victims. During the campaign period, the campaign's website had 21,900 visits. This is reckoned to be very efficient, given that the campaign's total spend in 2010 was €505,000.

A joined-up policy on domestic violence

The approach of the Dutch Ministry of Justice^[1] to domestic violence is set out in the last Action Plan on Domestic Violence 2008-2012, which describes three causes of domestic violence: intergenerational transmission of the use of violence, invisibility of the use of violence and gender-related power differences between perpetrators and victims.

Consequently, policies are directed towards combating intergenerational transmission, promoting openness about the issue and taking a gender-specific approach to domestic violence. With its gender-specific analysis and approach to power differences, the policies are directly linked to policies on emancipation.^[2] Their central objective is to prevent and combat domestic violence by promoting a so-called continuous approach (prevention, signalling and intervention) for all target populations.

The approach is comprehensive: criminal justice measures and assistance should reinforce each other. Therefore criminal justice and social service institutions work closely together.[3]

In parallel, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has developed a policy on violence in dependence relationships, as set out in the Policy Memorandum *Beschermd en Weerbaar* (Protected and Empowered).[4] Although this policy has a broader approach and targets a larger population, it has a comparable objective: prevention and early signalling by professionals; shelter for victims; assistance for victims, perpetrators and children. It coincides partly with the Action Plan on Domestic Violence mentioned above. Important elements in this programme are the reinforcement of the Advice and Support Centres on Domestic Violence and the improvement of the quantity and quality of shelters. This ministry also insists on the context in which this policy has to be placed. It refers explicitly to the emancipation of women and men as necessary conditions for successfully combating domestic violence.

This overall approach has allowed the Netherlands to be among the European countries with the highest figures of reported and/or registered domestic violence and violence in dependence situations. More than 60,000 instances of domestic violence are reported to the police every year. These figures reflect the high level of public awareness and the adequacy of infrastructures for notifying and reporting.

Annual campaigns – enough is enough

In 2007 the national government started an information campaign for the general public (using radio, television and the internet) under the title *Nu is het genoeg. Hulp inschakelen heb je zelf in de hand* (Enough is enough. It is up to you to ask for help). The campaign was repeated in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. A specific telephone number and website have been created. It was based on a television commercial in which a witness of domestic violence tells his story. The commercial is intended to encourage onlookers to seek help. The radio commercials call on victims, bystanders and perpetrators to seek help.

Each year the campaign identifies a specific message and tools to transmit it, thus signalling a growing emphasis on prevention especially through public campaigning and information. Within this context, the campaign run in 2010 is particularly interesting because it uses a mix of traditional communication tools (editorials in magazines and newspapers and programmes on radio and television) and innovative ones (the *MySecrets Cosmetics* online video).

MySecrets Cosmetics for battered women

In 2010, the awareness-raising campaign brought the 'hidden' problem of domestic violence to the public's attention in a special way via the special on-line shop *MySecrets Cosmetics*.

This on-line shop[5] was promoted as selling a brand of make-up specifically designed for every woman who has something to hide: a unique range of products that helps mask bruises, seals and shines cut lips, and removes blood stains. Banner ads, mock advertorials on fashion and beauty websites and an online film (a make-believe webcast of a show called *Women & Business* that interviews the founder of *MySecrets Cosmetics*), drove traffic to the site, where the hoax was revealed. In reality, a click on the website led to the campaign message: "There is a better solution to the problem of domestic violence. Call 0900 126 26 26 for advice and help. Or visit www.steunpunthuiselijkgeweld.nl".

Awareness raised by over 10%

The 2010 awareness raising campaign aimed to increase prevention and social and public awareness on the issue of domestic violence. Its expected outcomes and impact were an increased demand for support and reports motivating victims to seek assistance and support. With this campaign the government – through the online video *MySecrets Cosmetics* – wanted also to convey the message that domestic violence is unacceptable and that there are no justifiable excuses. The campaign took literally the idea that domestic violence cannot be covered up.

An evaluation was carried out in order to assess the campaign's reach. It found that 74% of the general public recognised the campaign statements. The entire campaign was well appreciated by the general public (7.3) as well as by the people already experiencing domestic violence (7.4). The radio spots, banners and television spots were individually highly appreciated and the whole campaign was assessed higher than average in all aspects by both the general public and people already experiencing domestic violence. The campaign was described as "remarkable", "attractive" and "able to provide new information". The most spontaneously mentioned message was "It is important to seek help".

Generally speaking, during every campaign period there is an increased demand for police assistance and help from support centres with an increase in the number of requests for help. In the 2010 campaign the number of phone calls increased by between 35% and 50%. Among the general public the willingness to call rose from 50% to 59%. Knowledge of the available support centres and what to do in cases of domestic violence also increased. Prior to the campaign, only 6% of the general public and 10% of people already involved in episodes of domestic violence knew where to go for help and advice. After the campaign, these percentages had increased to 11% and 21% respectively. Willingness to visit the website increased from 58% to 72% for the general public and from 63% to 76% for people already experiencing domestic violence. Actually, during the campaign period, the www.shginfo.nl site had a total of 21,900 visits. On average they looked at six pages and stayed connected to the website for between five and six minutes.

An efficient and effective campaign

The campaign also presents a clear, appropriate and comprehensive definition of domestic violence and conveys its message through a strong communication strategy that uses an innovative tool. Moreover it takes a victim-centred approach and is aimed to transmit the helpline number to victims.

The national awareness-raising campaign contributes to the wider policy of breaking down the unequal gender power structure that is at the basis of domestic violence. Thus its impact on the wider environment is linked with an increase in gender equality. Awareness-raising initiatives are also important from an effectiveness and efficiency point of view. The costs of domestic violence include costs for assistance by the authorities (police, judicial system, healthcare and shelter), production losses, claims for social security and immaterial damage. A tentative calculation of the first item only indicates that assistance given by the Dutch authorities in relation to domestic violence costs about €271 million a year^[6] while the overall cost of the campaigns (including media and website maintenance) were €1,256,000 in 2007, €914,000 in 2008 and €505,000 in 2010.

Enough is Enough was a joint initiative of the Ministry of Justice (Ministerie van Justitie), the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport) and the Dutch Domestic Violence Support Centre (Steunpunt Huiselijk Geweld). It was financed by the National Action Plan on Domestic Violence. The national policy gives the policy sustainable financing. From January 2012 a new domestic violence campaign with the focus on partner violence, elderly abuse and child abuse has started. The budget for this new campaign is approximately €1.2 million.

Success factors

Some of the reasons for the campaign's success are that the messages were directed to the general public as well as victims and perpetrators, and that it used a provocative tool – the hoax advertising campaign which caught the public's imagination. The controversial idea of using victims of using domestic violence as a business opportunity triggered discussions via blogs and twitter. Daily newspapers picked up on the buzz this campaign generated, and MySecrets Cosmetics got a whole three-minute slot on the evening television news. Nevertheless, many women are still ashamed to denounce violence and this can still represent an obstacle for any campaign.

[1] Ministerie van Justitie (Ministry of Justice) (2008). Plan van aanpak Huiselijk geweld tot 2011 'De volgende fase'. Den Haag: Ministerie van Justitie.

[2] See also Emancipation Monitor 2008: Merens, A., & Hermans, B. (2009). Emancipatiemonitor 2008. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau / Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.

[3] Ministerie van Justitie (Ministry of Justice) (2008). Plan van aanpak Huiselijk geweld tot 2011 'De volgende fase'. Den Haag: Ministerie van Justitie.

[4] Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport – VWS) (2007). Beschermd en weerbaar: Intensivering van de opvang en hulpbijgeweld in afhankelijkheidsrelaties. Brief van 10 december 2007. Den Haag: Ministerie van VWS.

[5] www.mysecretscosmetics.nl has now been taken offline

[6] Movisie, 2009. Huiselijk geweld: Cijfers en feiten. Utrecht: Movisie.

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Further information

Steunpunt Huiselijk Geweld



MySecrets Cosmetics video



Publicis showcase on MySecrets Cosmetics campaign



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Downloads



Enough is enough - Awareness raising - Netherlands

EN (PDF, 352.65 KB)

Metadata

TOOL: Awareness-raising