

Standards for work with perpetrators



Standards and recommendations for working with male perpetrators in the context of inter-agency cooperative alliances against domestic violence (Standards und Empfehlungen für die Arbeit mit männlichen Tätern)

In brief

It is recognised that working with the perpetrators of domestic violence pays big dividends: correctly done, it can lead to real changes in behaviour, and not only reduce the level of violence but also save public money in the long run.

Thirty-seven organisations working with violent men across Germany came together under the aegis of the Federal Association for Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (BAG TäHG) to develop a standard for their work.

The standards were developed through a three-year process of consultation sponsored by the federal ministry. They were based not on theory alone, but on the evaluation of previous projects and on the experience of people working with the issue day to day. The results of this work were discussed with organisations providing counselling, help lines and women's shelters.

The standards are propagated through a 21-day training course for professionals nationwide. However a shortage of public funding may limit their take-up.

How to hold perpetrators to account?

The German public became increasingly aware of gender-specific violence in the 1970s, when the emergence of the women's movement made rape and sexual violence an issue for public discussion. In response, from 1999 onwards, the government has formulated National Action Plans (NAPs) on gender-specific violence. The programmes at federal level are linked with initiatives at state (Land) level and with projects by non-governmental actors.

Alliances against domestic violence started to emerge in the 1980s and sexual abuse in families was systematically defined as a crime (*Straftaten gegen sexuelle Selbstbestimmung*). This was followed by the foundation of help facilities for victims of sexual abuse, and there was increasing pressure for perpetrators of domestic violence to be held accountable for their behaviour. For a long time, there was no consensus on what form this accountability should take. However, work with perpetrators has become increasingly common, especially since 2002, and a number of agencies can now look back over several years of experience in providing social training courses.

Professionalisation of work with perpetrators

The need has therefore arisen to professionalise this work, and one of the key tools in this professionalisation is the development of quality standards.

The first standards were adopted in May 2007 in Mainz by all the 37 organisations working with perpetrators in Germany and explain the way they approach their work and their methodology. Since then a working group of BAG TÄHG, the Federal Association for Work with Perpetrators Domestic Violence, has continued to develop the standards, to adapt them to the way society is developing, new research and their accumulated experience.

The standard defined by BAG TähG constitutes a new tool for work with perpetrators of domestic violence. It provides counselling services with different modules for working with perpetrators, supports their work with violent men and makes their activities more transparent and verifiable.

The design of the standards was based on a long process which brought together many years of experience and scientific knowledge. From 2005 until 2007 meetings of professionals from across Germany were held with the support of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). These meetings involved 37 organisations working with offenders from all over Germany and developed common quality standards for their work. The draft standards were discussed with representatives of the national conference of intervention projects, the federation of counselling centres and help lines, and the federation of women's shelters. This process could have been speeded up if the specialised task groups had worked simultaneously on different issues addressed by the standards.

Behaviour can be changed

The definition of the standards was based on the scientific monitoring of intervention projects against domestic violence. Between 2000 and 2004 eight programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence were evaluated, and this showed that perpetrators' programmes, supported by judicial requirements, can achieve changes in behaviour. Perpetrators' programmes share a focused and structured approach to acts of violence by men towards their partners or ex-partners. The methods used vary, but on the whole they are based on cognitive behaviour therapy.

The majority of men who have completed a perpetrator programme accept responsibility for their violent behaviour and are able to cope with their partner's needs and to accept their autonomy. Furthermore, participants completing the course showed better general social skills, an understanding of their own needs and the ability to deal with conflict. Several of the participants' partners who were interviewed during the course of the evaluation backed up this finding.

Through the development of standards, work with perpetrators has become much more professional all over Germany and this has led to the current situation where working with perpetrators is seen to make an important contribution to victim protection.

Work with perpetrators saves public money

Successful work with perpetrators has had a strong impact on protecting women and children from further violence. If a perpetrator really changes his behaviour and his attitudes concerning violence and gender roles, this has to be regarded as a great success for gender equality as well as for crime prevention. This work can even be said to have an economic value: the project evaluation estimated the costs of domestic violence for the general public, and concluded that a reduction in domestic violence is cost-saving. Thus, working with perpetrators according the standards of BAG TäHG was evaluated as being quite effective, even if the samples were quite small and there has not yet been a large national study proving the effectiveness of this methodology.

The approach shows several aspects of good practice. It holds perpetrators accountable for the violence they use. Moreover, it is based on a multiagency approach that was able to effectively coordinate all the 37 organisations working with perpetrators in Germany. And the approach was empirical: the standards were designed after a long monitoring and evaluation process of the interventions with perpetrators already in use in Germany, in order to base them on well-grounded experience and not only on theoretical assumptions.

Three essential factors have made the standards a success. Firstly, as a basic requirement it was agreed that working with perpetrators in cooperative alliances is an important precondition for effective work. Secondly, it was particularly important that the standards were developed in cooperation with women's shelters, which brought in the victims' point of view. Thirdly, the standards were not prepared in an abstract way, but were grounded in the experience of associations working with both perpetrators and victims.

The main obstacle the initiative faced was the shortage of public funding, something that may limit the development of the initiative. At the moment the Federal Association for Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence is only supported by its membership fees, but there are plans to raise funds from foundations and public sources.

In-service training

The practice is sustainable because it is supported by the Federal Association for Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence, which has continued to work on these issues. The standards are not binding, but the association has become a national contact point for work with perpetrators that many Länder are now carrying out. It currently runs fee-paying in-service training courses on how to apply the standards in practice. The courses last for seven three-day blocks and cover the basics of domestic violence and working with offenders, the practice of working with offenders in groups and individually, risk analysis, diagnostics, documentation and evaluation, working with partners, working with violent family systems, and self-reflection and clarification.

The key lessons learned from the process are that it is important to break the cycle of domestic violence by working with perpetrators in order to make them take responsibility for their actions and stop their violent behaviour. Work with perpetrators is a necessary complement to the protection of women and children.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

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[Brochure](#)



[Summary of standard for work with perpetrators](#)



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