



Abuse and Gender Violence. A Multidisciplinary Vision (Malos tratos y violencia de género. Una visión multidisciplinar)

Spain

2006-2014

## **Master's course in gender violence improves professional practice**

### **Summary**

The launch in 2006 of the master's degree course on *Abuse and Gender Violence. A Multidisciplinary Vision* was not without problems, but it was pushed through by persistence on the part of the teaching staff. Since then it has grown to be one of the top-rated courses among students.

The course takes a multidisciplinary approach, and considers the issue from the educational, psychological, sociological, medical, media, social assistance and judicial viewpoints. It also takes the effects of violence on groups of women such as women with disabilities, migrants, minors and teenagers into account and has won an award for this. The course consists of 10 obligatory curses plus an optional one involving 700 hours of research work.

One of the keys to its success is that it uses an online platform, which allows students from all over the world – mainly Spain, but also the rest of Europe, America, and even one student from Asia – to take part. It also brings in expert professionals as trainers, meaning that it can attract high-level professionals such as judges, senators, policemen and psychologists as students, and that these can then apply what they learn in their working lives. This means it has a real impact on the way gender-based violence is dealt with by the various institutions.

With an intake of between 220 and 370 students each year, the course has so far attracted 1,800 students from different areas of Spain and other countries.

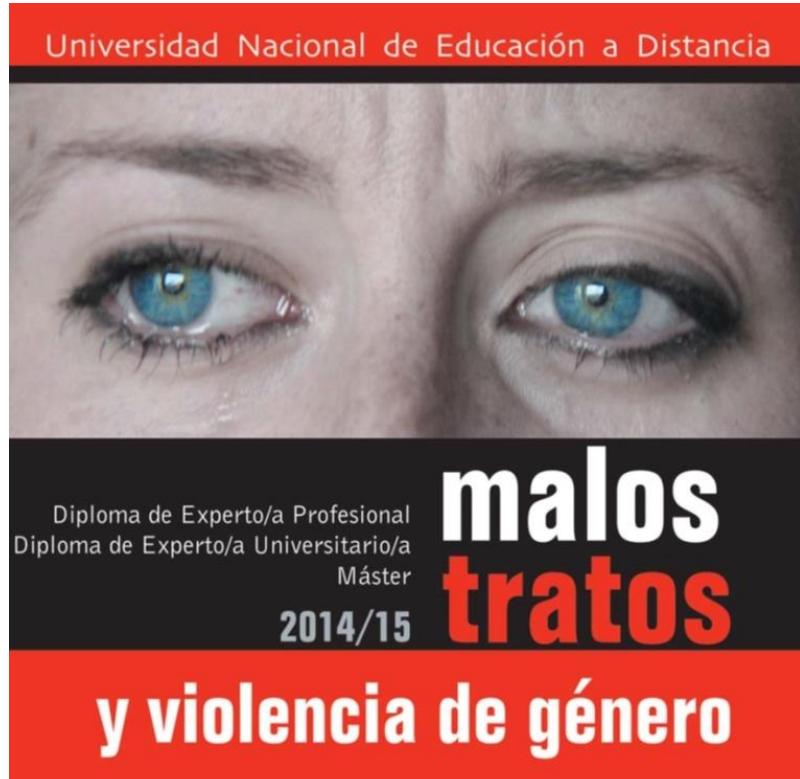
### **From domestic violence to gender-based violence**

The Organic Law on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence,<sup>1</sup> approved in December 2004 and coming into effect in January 2005, is the cornerstone of the Spanish approach to fighting gender-based violence. The law addressed gender-based violence for the first time in Spanish legislation, as opposed to the former domestic violence approach. The new legislation defines gender-based violence (GBV) as a manifestation of discrimination, inequality and power relations of men and women. It covers aspects ranging from preventive, educational and social to care and aftercare for victims, and it tackles GBV from a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach. This is the law's most noteworthy feature.

<sup>1</sup> Organic Law 1/2004 of 28 December 2004, on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence. ('Organic' or fundamental laws are those which have to pass by an absolute majority of the Congress of deputies, rather than by a simple majority.)

According to the mandatory evaluation of the application of the law, published in December 2009,<sup>2</sup> the law has led to an unprecedented deployment of measures and actions and the mobilisation of major resources. Since this law came into force, the Spanish government has invested almost €800 million in policies to prevent and fight gender-based violence.

Specific support institutions, such as an information and legal advice helpline and health care units specialising in gender-based violence, have been set up, along with special courts and public prosecution offices as well as specialised security services. Specialists in violence have been hired in healthcare and forensic services, and resources have been allocated to help women escape from violent situations.



The principles of the strategic approach, as stated in article 2 of the law, are:

- awareness-raising with the aim of prevention in the fields of social services, education, health, and media and publicity;
- guaranteed access for victims to a comprehensive system of support services, including economic support;
- strengthening of the legal framework in order to ensure the comprehensive and rapid protection of victims of GBV.

Additionally, the focus on vulnerable groups, such as immigrant and women with disabilities, has resulted in the approval of a specific plan, the *Plan against Gender-based Violence in the Immigrant Population* (2009-2012).<sup>3</sup>

### **Changing the working practices of influential professionals**

In 2006, Spain's national distance learning university, UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia), based in Madrid, launched a master's degree course entitled *Los*

<sup>2</sup> An evaluation of the application of organic law 1/2004 of 28 December on Comprehensive Protection Measures Against Gender-Based Violence (2009), Ministry of Equality, Government Delegation for Gender-based Violence.

<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/violenciaGenero/Documentacion/medidasPlanes/DOC/Plan\\_atencion\\_prevencion\\_violencia\\_genero\\_poblacion\\_extranjera\\_inmigrante\(2009\\_2012\)\\_INGLES.pdf](https://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/violenciaGenero/Documentacion/medidasPlanes/DOC/Plan_atencion_prevencion_violencia_genero_poblacion_extranjera_inmigrante(2009_2012)_INGLES.pdf)



*malos tratos y la violencia de género: una visión interdisciplinaria* (Abuse and Gender Violence: an Interdisciplinary Vision).

The course is interesting because it brings a multi-dimensional and holistic approach to domestic violence into a formal university curriculum. It attracts a lot of students, and the number has increased over the years it has been taught. More than that, it attracts students who can make a difference. It has a significant impact since the students, who include judges, senators, lawyers, policemen, social workers and psychologists, can apply the knowledge they have learnt, from practising professionals, in their own professional lives.

The course has a strong basis in human rights and gender analysis as well as a clear, appropriate and comprehensive definition of domestic violence. These are presented in a well-developed and multi-level course, which benefits from specialist expert trainers who deal day to day with the issues involved. The mix of online and on-site activities contributes to its reach and to its efficiency.

Students learn how to implement methodologies and practices in order to improve the protection of women at risk of domestic violence, which contributes to gender equality. Groups that stand to benefit professionally include judges, senators, prosecutors, lawyers, psychologists, teachers, social workers and police officers. With between 220 and 370 students a year, the course has so far involved 1,800 students from different areas of Spain and other countries.

The specific outcomes in terms of gender equality are indirect. However, the master is a key instrument in developing the day-to-day work of professionals involved in fighting domestic violence such as police officers, psychologists, judges and lawyers. It transforms their traditional practices in favour of a different and more sensitive approach, helps them to decide the correct action and raises awareness on the subject at the highest levels. An important feature is that the course approaches gender-based violence from an interdisciplinary standpoint, which improves the quality of the actions taken to tackle it. The master also influences individual attitudes towards gender violence.

## A holistic approach

The topic of gender violence is studied holistically, that is to say from very different viewpoints including the educational, psychological, sociological, medical, media, social assistance and judicial.

The master aims to provide an understanding of gender violence, and to enable participants to identify situations in which it occurs. Many of the students are women who have suffered gender violence and find the course very useful in understanding it in depth. Their participation is really helpful for them, while allowing the rest of the professionals involved in the master to gain a deeper approach to gender violence. Following this approach to the subject, it presents effective measures for the protection and rehabilitation of victims, and tools for prevention. It combines on-site and online activities. Its virtual platform hosts online classrooms, over 100 conferences, newspaper and scientific review articles, statistics and teaching material in pdf format.

It encompasses 10 obligatory courses: the origin and transmission of gender violence; language as an instrument of oppression; the victims of gender violence: the offender and the victims; children as victims of gender violence; the persistence of violence against women; the law and gender violence in Spain; the recovery of victims; psychological



features of offenders; immigration and gender violence; and disabilities and gender violence. There is also one optional course which includes 700 hours of research work.

The master provides a professional expert certificate for those students who have not attended tertiary education.

### **One of the university's best-rated courses**

Two different evaluations are conducted every year at the end of the course. On one hand, the university (UNED) launches a survey on global satisfaction on the training provided including the seminars, conferences, teaching material and the virtual platform. This shows that the master has been one of the best UNED courses out of more than 600. The professors also conduct their own internal evaluation, and this comes up with similar results as regards the students' global satisfaction. Many of them remark how the master has changed the way they understand and tackle domestic violence in their own work. The training material was renewed in September 2014, and includes monthly updated statistics.

Nevertheless two ways of improving the course are frequently mentioned:

- the virtual platform causes some technical difficulties at first – but they can be rapidly solved with the help of a well-trained technician;
- it is difficult to organise face-to-face activities such as workshops as the students are spread widely across Spain. However some workshops are already available and the major part of the students can follow them online through the virtual platform. In some cases the master has arranged local workshops with municipalities.

### **Factors of success**

The launch of the course was problematic and its success was due to the efforts of the staff who identified the experts and proposed the course to the UNED Foundation. One of the main problems experienced since then is the selection of students occasionally, male perpetrators of domestic violence enrol in the course in order to control their wives or boycott the course.

The main factors in the course's success are that it pays attention to the effects of domestic violence on different groups of women (it received the CERMI Award 2011 for its attention to disabled women); the online platform allows it to reach a considerable number of students; it is independent of political and educational entities; students have a high level of responsibility and are hence highly motivated; and professors do not belong to the university but are the best experts in each subject taught.

The experience of running the course teaches that:

- Independence from other politically influenced organisations is a basic necessity.
- The means and resources have to be adequate.
- The master boosts open-minded relations, tools and schemes in order to understand the scope of domestic violence. The approach employed throughout the course led to interdisciplinary practices and overturned stereotypes and traditional perspectives.
- As a diverse range of professionals are involved in the course, their interaction is quite positive and leads to the discovery of alternative solutions to real problems the students experience in their work.



- The master should be in permanent evolution depending on the profile of the students and professors.

The course has been offered for replication in other universities.

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