

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The described projekt belongs with the topic:

Domestic violence

MEMBERSTATE:

Sweden

NAME OF THE PROJECT:

The Frideborg project

IN USE SINCE:

1994

INFO ON THE WEB:

Not available

INFORMANT FOR THE NETWORK:

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Frideborg – collaboration prevents violence against women

Summary

The Frideborg project is a collaboration between local public sector agencies in four Swedish municipalities aimed at preventing men's violence against women. The project focuses on both victims and perpetrators. One of the project's guiding ideas is that communication and co-ordination between different agencies is essential in order to be able to deal with and prevent continued assault. The Frideborg project includes a collaboration between the social services, the prison and probation service, the police, the prosecution service, and women's shelters.

The most important interventions in the Frideborg project include:

- The creation of a separate unit with premises of its own that works with this issue.
- Increased levels of co-ordination between the agencies that come into contact with women who have suffered assaults.
- Support and assistance for women who live in relationships where they are exposed to violence.
- Working to encourage more women to report assaults to the police and to maintain the stamina needed to follow such cases through the courts.
- Offering a structured treatment programme to men who carry out assaults.
- Providing support and assistance to children living in families where violence occurs.

PROBLEM (Intelligence)

General context

The initiative to begin the Frideborg project was taken following the much publicised murder of a woman in Norrköping. Subsequent to this death, it was found that several agencies – the police, the social services, and the health service – had known about the woman and her vulnerable situation independently of one another. This led to the conclusion that the woman's life could perhaps have been saved if these agencies had collaborated with one another. Work was therefore started to find a new way of establishing collaboration between the various agencies. The objective was to formulate routines relating to how to identify and provide support to women who are being assaulted and how to prevent continued assault. Inspiration was drawn from an American project in Minnesota, where one of the important ingredients was to provide support to both the victim and the perpetrator in each case of assault.

Crime Problem

Violence against women constitutes a serious, and for the most part a hidden, social problem. Each year, a little over 20,000 cases of assault on women are reported in Sweden. In just under 60 per cent of these cases, the assault takes place indoors and the victimised woman and the perpetrator are known to one another. Since the propensity to report assault offences that take place within intimate relationships is very low, the actual level of this type of crime is substantially higher than this. Many of the women who are exposed to violence within a relationship are ashamed and find it

difficult to come forward and tell others about their problems. The step up to reporting the event to the police is even greater. In addition, many women do not know to whom they should turn with their problems and what kinds of support are available. Assaults on women may assume many different forms besides physical violence. Many women are first exposed to threatening behaviour and control strategies and often then become isolated in the home and prevented from seeing relatives and friends. This may continue for a considerable period of time before the woman is physically assaulted.

WHAT (Intervention)

Improving coordination

One of the factors led to the initiation of the Frideborg project was the absence of functional routines for the ways in which different agencies should collaborate and coordinate their efforts both to prevent and to prosecute assaults on women. The goal of this coordination work was that the Frideborg project would get to know about and come into contact with women being exposed to violence and the men responsible for subjecting these women to violence. On this basis, it would then be possible to prevent continued assaults to a greater extent. Besides the absence of a functioning system of *communication* between the different agencies, a *common view of the problem* was also lacking since there existed a number of different ways of conceiving of this problem and of how it should be defined.

Support for the women in the form of counselling

One important aspect of the work of the Frideborg project is the provision of counselling to help women cope with what has happened to them. The idea is to enable them to say no to violence, to feel that they are free to choose whether they want to continue with the relationship and to enable them to break free from the isolation to which they have often been subjected. The counselling provided is humanitarian and aims to provide the woman with victim support and with the opportunity to work through what has happened. The ambition is also to prevent continued crime, by assisting the woman to reassume control over the situation. The goals of the Frideborg project include that of improving the woman's self-esteem so that she becomes able to choose for herself and to make decisions independently.

Increasing the level of reporting

One part of the process of getting women to break the spiral of violence involves inducing them to report the assault to the police. In this regard, the Frideborg project provides assistance with contacts with the police, prosecutors and the courts. The project is careful however to clarify the possible consequences for the woman. Reporting an incident to the police may have the opposite effect and involve a risk for the woman. The idea is to present the process of reporting an assault to the police and the subsequent legal proceedings as one possibility. This path should not be taken for the sake of an outsider, but out of the woman's respect for herself and for her children. Working to increase the number of women who report assaults to the police also has a more long-term crime preventive objective. Many of the men who have assaulted their partners will often continue to do so in the context of future relationships.

Offering help to the man

The men are also offered help in the form of counselling both alone and in groups. The goal of this counselling is to help the man to define what violence consists in, and his own responsibility for his actions, and to give him the opportunity to reflect over and to change his aggressive behaviour. The background to taking this step of including the men in the project's focus is found in the fact that

many men continue to assault women when they form new relationships. Men often find ways of explaining their violence on the basis of factors outside of themselves, and fail to see their own responsibility. For this reason, the Frideborg project attempts to convey to the man what he is and isn't responsible for and what he himself can do.

Providing support to the children

The Frideborg project also includes work focused on children who have witnessed or themselves been exposed to violence. The objective of this work is to provide children with an opportunity that gives them the courage to speak about what has happened, to help them to work through it and to get them to understand that the violence is not their fault. The work conducted with children is based on material provided by Save the Children and it consists in counselling in combination with role play, play and drawing. Amongst other things, the children get to draw life-size pictures on the floor in order to illustrate that dad is bigger than both mum and themselves and that they therefore bear no responsibility for what has happened and could not have done anything to intervene. Since many women do not want to leave their partner straight away, the Frideborg project also attempts to teach the children not to intervene when an assault is taking place and how they should act if they need to phone for help. The children also learn practical things such as their name and personal identity number, how to call the police, and the nature of the social network they have around them. It is also important to work to make the children feel secure and to teach them what it is like to be treated with respect. In order to show this in concrete terms, the children's group includes both a woman and a man. This provides an opportunity for the children to see how a man and a woman can function together in a positive way.

HOW (Implementation)

Improving coordination

In order to create the opportunity for the Frideborg project to provide support to women who have been the victims of assault and to men who commit such assaults, all reported offences relating to assaults on women are sent to the project by the police. The corresponding information is also provided by the other agencies participating in the project. This information may for example be provided by the social services, the prison and probation service, or the women's shelters. This takes place in all four of the municipalities that comprise the project's catchment area in the county of Östergötland – Norrköping, Finspång, Söderköping and Valdemarsvik.

The provision of counselling to the women

Once the Frideborg project has received information about an assault from the police, a letter is first sent home to the woman. This is followed up after two weeks by a phone call. The project's phone number is included in the letter, however, and in certain cases, the woman herself initiates telephone contact. If the woman accepts the offer of help, counselling is initiated in the form of between five and ten individual counselling sessions which constitute a means of analysing the situation, with the woman being given the opportunity to describe this situation, and why she has turned to the project, and also whether she is prepared to talk about it to other women in the same situation. Subsequent participation in group counselling then takes place on a voluntary basis. The woman first has a conversation with the group leader to find out how she views the question of participation in group counselling. Group counselling is then initiated and continues for 20 sessions (of two hours per week). Each group is comprised of four to six women. The idea is that the group will become welded together and that each woman will come to have a natural place in the group and will contribute something. Participation is therefore required at every session. After three sessions, the group is "closed" to new members and no new women are able to join. When these counselling groups are concluded, the women are offered post-group counselling, which assumes a freer form

under the auspices of the women's shelter, and which takes place within a group whose membership is less fixed. In order to achieve a certain degree of continuity, one of the Frideborg project's coordinators works as one of two leaders in the post-group counselling sessions. The women are able to participate in these post-group counselling activities for as long as they wish.

Increasing the level of reporting

The women included in the Frideborg project may be given help in their contacts with different agencies if they feel they need it. This involves first and foremost providing the support a woman may need to report assaults to the police and to continue to follow the legal process if the case goes to court. Together with project staff, the women discuss what happens when violence is reported to the police, the various stages in the legal process and what happens when a case comes to court. The woman is also given information as to her right to a complainant's support person. If the reporting of an assault leads to a court case, the woman is offered assistance and support by project staff who are present to provide psychological support in connection with the court proceedings. Project staff also accompany the woman when she visits the police and family law services.

Offering help to the man

When the men have been registered as suspects in connection with these offences, they are contacted by the male coordinator. In contrast to the women, the men participate in fewer individual counselling sessions prior to the initiation of group counselling, which is for the most part related to the question of available resources. The counselling sessions attended by the men provide them with the opportunity to talk about what has happened without being condemned. By posing open questions, the man is given the space needed to feel secure. On this basis, the group leaders then attempt to find alternative ways of thinking about the situation. As with the women, the men's group meets once a week for two hours. Two group leaders lead the discussion, one man and one woman. The fact that one of the group leaders is a woman was for the most part a coincidence, but it has proved to be beneficial since it has avoided the development of an "us and them" attitude. The group therapy builds to a large extent on cognitive behavioural therapy. As a result of a lack of resources, the Frideborg project has to date not been able to arrange any post-group activities for the men who participate in the counselling groups.

Providing support for the children

The majority of the children who participate in the Frideborg project are identified through the children's mother. The project also gets to know about children through the social services, for example. Each group comprises six or seven children, who meet once a week over the course of one term (a total of just under twenty sessions). A lack of resources has meant that the Frideborg project has not been able to provide support to the children subsequent to the conclusion of this group work.

WHO (Involvement)

Collaborative partners

The work of the Frideborg project is regulated by a steering group comprised of five representatives from the agencies responsible for the project. The steering group formulates goals for the work and the work of the project is reported back to the steering group. This group also constitutes a forum for the discussion of changes in the work of the project and additional training for project staff. The steering group includes the director of the social services department for children and youth, the director of the probation service and the director of social services in Norrköping. The project also includes a reference group for agencies and organisations who come into contact with assaulted women or with men who have assaulted their partners. This reference group includes women's

shelters, the prosecution service, the police, the county council, the probation service and the social services in the four municipalities that constitute the project's catchment area. Within this reference group there is a great deal of discussion about establishing a common view of the problem. Progress reports are also produced as to what is being done in relation to these questions within each of the organisations involved in the project. This might involve practical discussions as to the workload of the police and prosecutors, or the women's shelters' capacity to provide safe accommodation. The project leadership are of the opinion that they have managed to include the majority of the actors that should be participating in the work of the project. The only actor missing is the county council, which had previously financed the work of the project, but which has now withdrawn from the collaboration.

Mobilisation

Knowledge on violence against women is often in short supply at the agencies that come into contact with this problem. In this context, the Frideborg project attempts to work to change attitudes in order to disseminate knowledge and to interest others in beginning to work with this question. This is an ongoing task since new members of staff are constantly being employed at the different agencies in question. For this reason, the Frideborg project continuously visits the police and social services to provide information to new employees and participates in the training of prison and probation service personnel. In order to create a common view of this problem, the reference group conducts an ongoing discussion as to how the problem should be defined.

Costs and funding

The Frideborg project was initiated in 1994 and was at first run on a temporary project basis. Since 1997, the organisation has been made permanent, and is financed by the social services departments of the four participating local authorities and the prison and probation service. Funding is implemented through the project staff being employed within one of the financing agencies. The social services finance four full-time positions for group-leaders, one of the group-leaders is employed by the prison and probation service and half of his working time is devoted to working within the Frideborg project. In addition to these, there are number of group-leaders who are employed as private consultants.

EFFECT (Impact)

The scope of the project

At the present time, the Frideborg project is running two parallel counselling groups for women, one group for young women, two groups for men and one for children. During the course of 2003, 248 women who had been exposed to violence came to the attention of the Frideborg project, of whom 175 came from offences reported to the police. Of these, 105 participated in the work of the project. During the same period, 207 men who had been reported for assault also came to the attention of the Frideborg project. Of these, 43 men have been in contact with the project. The work conducted with children has not been so extensive, and over the course of 2003, 59 children from families where the woman had been assaulted came to the attention of the project. Of these, fifteen children participated in a counselling group.

Project outcomes

The Frideborg project has been evaluated by external researchers. The evaluation has been conducted by means of a questionnaire distributed to 50 individuals who had participated in counselling groups within the project. Half of the study group was comprised of women, and half of men. A small group of participants were also interviewed in person. The evaluation shows that the project has been of help to the majority of both the women and the men who have participated. The

participants feel that their situation has been changed for the better. They had been given help in understanding and changing their own behaviour. The project has itself conducted a follow up of the reoffending of the men who have participated in the men's groups organised by the project during the years 1994 to 2000. This follow up shows that 36 of the 201 men who have participated in counselling groups have been suspected in connection with additional assault offences. Over the next two years, the work of the Frideborg project will be evaluated by researchers at the University of Karlstad.

Replicability

The possibilities for implementing similar projects are probably relatively good. The work of the Frideborg project is based around agencies that exist in the majority of towns and cities. The competence required to work with these questions also exists in most areas. One of the project's strengths, and one which makes it possible to replicate, is that it builds on the fact that getting different agencies to work together on these questions produces substantial collaborative benefits by comparison with the situation when each of them works in isolation. Since the Frideborg project started, a handful of similar projects have been initiated in other Swedish towns. In the majority of cases, these projects have been modelled specifically on Frideborg.

Sustainability

In one sense, the Frideborg project has broken new ground with regard to methods for working to support women who have been exposed to assault and for preventing continued crime. What was initially a temporary project has today become a permanent operation which on its own merits now constitutes one of the central bodies in the work to prevent violence against women in the four municipalities responsible for Frideborg. This suggests that the work of the project is relatively sustainable and functions over the longer term. The unique competence that is built up by working along the lines of the Frideborg project also means that it is difficult to replace or to move the work back to the individual agencies responsible for the project. One reason for this is that the work of Frideborg has become well known within the four municipalities. Since the problem of assaults on women is of constant interest, the Frideborg project often receives the attention of the local media, and also speaks out as a source of expertise in this area.

Learning experiences

- No agency role – The Frideborg project has had the ambition of avoiding appearing as a traditional public sector agency. Visitors to the project may retain complete anonymity, and no documentation or registration is undertaken. This increases the likelihood that participants will feel they are being treated respectfully and that staff can function as a “sounding board” for the people seeking help from the project.
- Working both with victims and perpetrators – One of the experiences gained by the project is that it is very important that all parties to a relationship or within a family are given the opportunity to speak about and work through their perceptions and experiences of violence.
 - Providing counselling separately – Within the Frideborg project, counselling is provided both individually and in groups. This is true for both the women and the men, and also for the children. The work is not focused on the family, however, but is instead directed towards the family members separately. Each of the parties in a case of assault has specific needs, and there is a risk that these may be lost if one is not given the opportunity to speak out as an individual.
- Adapt the work to the target group – Another conclusion that has been reached is that different solutions may be required for different target groups included in the work of the project. Amongst other things this has led Frideborg to begin a pilot project in the form of a counselling group for young women. This is because the nature of the problems faced by these women were often different from those faced by their somewhat older counterparts.

Sources and contacts

This summary is based on reports produced by the Frideborg project and on interviews with Ingrid Anund and Katarina Zetterström, who work as coordinators within the project. Information has also been drawn from the evaluation report - *Tack vare Frideborg – Utvärdering av Kvinnovåldsprojektet Frideborg i Norrköping* [Thanks to Frideborg – An evaluation of the Frideborg project on violence against women in Norrköping] (Björn Bolin & Katarina Enquist-Bolin, 1997).

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