



# GUIDELINES

FOR SETTING UP  
AND RUNNING A  
WOMEN'S REFUGE



Women's  
Support  
Center



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6. Management, Personnel and Financial Administration</b>	<b>45</b>
1.1 Definitions (what it is, what it is not)	8	6.1 Management and organisation	46
1.2 How this manual was compiled	8	6.2 Basic considerations	46
1.3 Purpose of the manual and target groups	8	6.3 Planning and implementation of management tasks	47
<b>2. Theoretical Background</b>	<b>9</b>	6.4 Management areas in a women's refuge	48
2.1 The causes of violence against women	10	6.5 Staff and internal management	50
2.2 Acts of violence against women are human rights violations	11	6.6 Fundamentals of personnel management in a women's refuge	50
2.3 Violence against women in figures	11	6.7 Staffing levels	51
2.4 Forms, patterns and impact of violence against women	12	6.8 Workload and remuneration – risk factors	52
2.5 Violence also takes non-physical forms	12	6.9 Work schedules	53
2.6 Violence as trauma and destruction of the sense of self	13	6.10 Staff training	53
2.7 Living in captivity	13	6.11 Further training of staff	54
2.8 Identification with the aggressor – the stockholm syndrome	14	6.12 Supervision	54
2.9 The close relationship between perpetrator and victim	14	6.13 Volunteers or university interns	56
2.10 The impact on children	15	<b>7. Safety and Security Measures</b>	<b>57</b>
2.11 Empowerment	15	7.1 Technical security precautions	58
2.12 Numerical requirements for women's refuges and support services	16	7.2 Confidential addresses, anonymity	59
2.13 State funding and organizational structures for women's refuges	16	7.3 Police protection – police security plan	59
2.14 Appropriate help for women and children – feminist principles	17	7.4 Individual security plans and assessment of threats	60
<b>3. Goals and Principles</b>	<b>18</b>	7.5 Fire prevention and other safety precautions	60
3.1 The goals of a women's refuge	20	<b>8. Community Life in the Refuge</b>	<b>61</b>
3.2 Protection and safety	20	8.1 Refuge guidelines – rights and responsibilities	62
3.3 Empowerment	20	8.2 Fair procedures – hearing	63
3.4 Social change	21	8.3 Obstacles to participation	64
3.5 Who are refuges for? The target groups	21	8.4 Further aspects of communal life in the refuge	64
3.6 The principles of a women's refuge	22	8.5 Participation in external evaluations	66
<b>4. Founding a Women's Refuge</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9. Public Relations and Awareness Raising</b>	<b>67</b>
4.1 Founding a women's refuge	26	9.1 Providing information about women's refuges	68
4.2 Initiative	26	9.2 Obstacles – what information not to give	69
4.3 Legal basis	26	9.3 Training courses	70
4.4 Outline planning	27	<b>10. Networking and Cooperation</b>	<b>71</b>
4.5 Location	27	10.1 The role of women's refuges in networking and cooperation	72
4.6 Infrastructure	28	<b>11. Additional Social Needs and Recommendations</b>	<b>73</b>
4.7 Room plan	28	11.1 24-hour help lines	74
4.8 Private sponsoring	29	11.2 Non-resident counselling and support	74
<b>5. Services for Women and Children</b>	<b>30</b>	11.3 Long-term support and therapy	74
5.1 24 hour services	31	11.4 Withholding of custody and visiting rights for violent fathers	75
5.2 Counselling	31	11.5 Migrant women and women with disabilities also require protection from violence	75
5.3 Rights and Responsibilities	33	11.6 The unsuitability of inter- personal and family therapy and mediation in violent	75
5.4 Group work	35	11.7 Working with perpetrators	75
5.5 Safety/Safety planning	35	11.8 Feedback from women who stayed at the women's support center shelter and evaluation	76
5.6 Leaving the refuge	37	<b>12. Literature</b>	<b>78</b>
5.7 Services for children	38	<b>13. Appendix</b>	<b>88</b>
5.8 Goals of services for children	38	Appendix I – Armenia and International Documents	88
5.9 Services for children during the stay	38	Appendix II – Safety Planning	89
5.10 Staff Requirements	42		
5.11 Infrastructure	43		
5.12 Obstacles / Drawbacks	43		
5.13 Guidelines / Basic Principles for working with children	44		

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## P R E F A C E \* \* \*

The present Manual is designed to meet the need for establishing comprehensive standards based on international approved practices for starting and running a domestic violence shelter. This is extremely important particularly in countries like Armenia which did not have in the past domestic violence shelters and where the best practices have not been standardized. "Away from Violence" sets out first and foremost to address the practical issues involved for women who establish, organize, run and work in a refuge, although the publication also deals briefly with the specific theoretical background to violence against women.

A team of experts from eight countries contributed to the compilation of the material contained in this Manual. The Women Support Center NGO (WSC) in Armenia has used the crux of this Manual with the permission from Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) and adjusted it to the reality in Armenia while deleting those sections that are not relevant to Armenian reality or practice. Since WAVE is a European organization, the examples given are from that region but identical realities exist in United States and elsewhere as the phenomenon of gender based violence and the approach to offer services is universal based on years of research and experience in dealing with survivors.  
The editorial team

\*\*\* the underlined sections of this doc are additions to the original WAVE document from WSC.



# INTRODUCTION

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and children is a violation of human rights. Indeed, it is one of the most frequent human rights violations world-wide. The principal cause of the physical and psychological injuries inflicted on women and children is violence committed in the domestic sphere – in the family and in intimate relationships. Recent studies show that between one quarter and one third of women in Europe are subjected to violence at the hands of individuals in their immediate social environment. With few exceptions, the perpetrators are men: partners, husbands, fathers or brothers. In Armenia these numbers are much higher: one in six murders is due to domestic violence according to the Investigative Committee data, and most of the victims are women.

Given the socio-economic conditions prevailing in our society, many women and children who are abused by a member of their family are forced to leave their homes in order to escape from the violence, save their lives and find protection and safety. A large proportion of them are admitted to women's refuges. Refuges constitute the key institutions in endeavors to combat violence against women and children. Since the first refuges were set up in the early 1970s, they have acted as an important factor in social development, not only by providing women and children with a safe environment but also by promoting equal rights and opportunities between women and men and by enforcing the fundamental human right to bodily, emotional and mental integrity.

In Europe the social issue of male violence against women and children was marginalized as a taboo topic until the early 1970s, in Eastern Europe until the early 1990s. The very first women's refuge was established in London in 1972. Other refuges were opened in the British Isles before the movement spread to western, central and northern Europe, later to southern Europe and, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, to the countries of eastern and southeastern Europe. There are currently around 1500 women's refuges in Europe as a whole, and only two small ones in Armenia.

But many European countries - in particular countries in southern and Eastern Europe - still suffer from a shortage of women's refuges offering protection to abused women and their children. Women who decide to establish a refuge in their home town frequently encounter insuperable obstacles: the lack of financial support or the lack of political will on the part of the national or municipal authorities. When money does sporadically become available, these women try to keep their refuge open for as long as possible.

The mere provision of (unprotected) accommodation for victims of domestic violence is not enough. Empowerment is a key factor which refuges offer abused women and children: they are encouraged to take charge of their own lives, and their self-confidence is boosted. The women and their children living in a refuge should finally regain the feeling of living in safety.

*Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)*, functions as a European network of women's support organizations combating male domestic violence. With the help of the EU Commission (Daphne Program) the WAVE Office has to date compiled an extensive database containing information on violence prevention in almost all European countries and listing over 2,000 organizations. In the year 2000 WAVE drew up a training program suitable for use throughout Europe for professionals who deal with victims of violence.

The present Manual, likewise financed by the EU Commission's Daphne Program, is designed to help in the process of formulating and subsequently applying European standards.

The Manual defines guidelines and methods for providing professional support for victims of domestic violence.

### 1.1 Definitions (what it is, what it is NOT)



Since many countries are at a different level of development in combating domestic violence, it is useful to include in our information both what a refuge IS and can do, and also, what it is NOT. When coping with very limited scope for presenting this information, build on the experiences of staff and volunteers to define the most common points about which potential clients, other service providers, and potential donors were not clear in the past, including such objective issues as regional limits of acceptance, maximum duration of stay and myths like "refuges break up families".

In the new EU Member States there are at least a few women's refuges, and support organizations have increased in number and scope in the last few years. In countries like Georgia and Ukraine the situation remains difficult. Economic crisis and political instability have spawned not only higher levels of domestic violence but also other forms of violence against women. Despite the obstacles, women in many countries – also in Eastern Europe – are setting about the task of establishing women's support services. In Russia, for example (and this is true of other countries as well), women's organizations have succeeded in opening a network of more than fifty women's crisis centers within the space of a single decade (ANNA Association No to Violence). The present Manual is intended to help all of these initiatives.

### 1.2 How this manual was compiled

The present Manual defines practice - oriented standards based on more than 25 years of experience (and 6 years of running a domestic violence shelter in Armenia). Quality standards need to be founded upon clear - cut fundamental values (see chapter 3). Experts and refuge workers from eight countries with many years of service in the field have pooled their practical and theoretical knowledge to make up the consistent, practice - oriented approach which this Manual elucidates. Setting up a refuge entails finding answers to innumerable questions, such as: What security precautions need to be taken? Which facilities are needed to provide counselling or a play area for children? How do you publicize the availability of a women's refuge when its address has to be kept confidential?

Over and above providing answers to practical questions relating to the setting up of a women's refuge, the project's implementing organization, *Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)*, and the project partners (from Finland, Italy, Portugal, Austria, Greece, Hungary and Romania) set out to define quality standards for refuges.

### 1.3 Purpose of the manual and target groups



The primary goal of this Manual is to provide practical assistance to those who are setting up a refuge. Given the widely divergent standards in women's refuges from one European country to another, publishing a joint manual on the setting up and running of a refuge is an attempt to help improve standards where they urgently need attention and to initiate a process of harmonization as a means to enhance quality. The Manual's primary target group comprises women experts planning to set up a refuge and women working in a refuge.

However, the task of providing services for victims of domestic violence cannot be left solely to women's organizations. For many years now refuges and women's organizations working in the field of combating male domestic violence have been calling for adequate state funding for refuges. Thus, another important target group of this Manual comprises politicians, state authorities, state funding bodies and/or private sponsors. Finally, the Manual is intended to provide representatives of professional groups, journalists and members of the public with further information on the role of women's refuges in society.



THEORETICAL  
BACKGROUND

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The basis of the work of women's refuges is an understanding of the causes of domestic violence against women, the forms it takes and the impact it has on the victims. Violence against women needs to be considered and analyzed in the historical, political and social context of gender relationships. Any attempt to treat violence against women as an individual problem or as a matter of dysfunctional interaction will inevitably fall short of reality and will thus achieve little in terms of change. International bodies have again and again stated this view in documents and recommendations and have explicitly condemned violence against women as a human rights violation.

### 2.1 The cause of violence against women

"Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement." (United Nations 1996, 75)

In the historical context, the process by which the modern state emerged assigned power within the family to the man (Sauer 2002). Men's dominance of women in the family unit was then perpetuated in laws and social norms and structures. Despite the fact that in Armenia women were granted the right to vote since 1920s, and many occupied important roles in society, yet, they were subordinated to their father or husband and they were prevented from making decisions about their own lives.

Even in Europe, many of the old patriarchal structures remained in place well into the twentieth century. In some countries women were not given the right to vote until after World War II. The marriage laws in many countries continued to define men as the head of the family right up to the 1970s, and women were obliged to obey. Marital rape is still not a punishable offence in every European country. In the early seventies it was the second women's movement which (again) raised the issue of structural and inter - personal violence against women as a social issue. Women found themselves routinely exposed to violence at the hands of their husbands or partners. Many women discovered that the state and judicial authorities took little interest in combating this violence.

In many cases violence committed by husbands or partners went unpunished, even when women dared to come into the open with their experiences and brought charges against the perpetrator. The state did - and to some extent still does - little to prosecute domestic violence. The authorities tended to waive their exclusive executive powers where domestic violence was concerned, conceding the rule of force to the husband - if not legally, then in practice. In many areas the equality of women and men has been enshrined in law, not least thanks to the EU's non - discrimination policy. In practice, however, many instances of discrimination and inequality remain. This is a factor in the constraints which compel women to continue living in violent relationships and which make it difficult for them to break free. Action to combat violence against women can thus be effective and reduce the level of violence only if the issue of structural inequality is addressed.

Many prejudices and preconceptions live on, and these stand in the way of victims receiving the support they need. Victim blaming - the tendency to ascribe the fault for violence to the victim - has not been wholly eliminated. And women continue to encounter prejudice in the police and judiciary which ultimately benefits the perpetrators to the detriment of the victims. Prejudice and victim blaming in society are a key factor in the continuation of violence against women, because they give men the feeling that their behavior is condoned.

### 2.2 Acts of violence against women are human rights violations

The first time that a major international agency recognized violence against women as neither a "private" nor a "national" problem was at the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna. Women's organizations from all over the world had prepared the ground and drawn up a petition signed by half a million people (Bunch/Reilly 1994). The conference's final document, the Vienna Declaration, said that acts of violence against women constitute human rights violations, even when they are carried out in the so-called private sphere (United Nations 1993a).

The Vienna Declaration stated: "The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights [.....]. Gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice and international trafficking, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be eliminated." (United Nations 1993a, 18)

This places responsibility on the state for ending violence and safeguarding the effective protection of its female inhabitants. A key document on combating structural and personal violence against women is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Unlike declarations and resolutions, this convention is binding upon all states that have signed and ratified it and must be implemented. By April 2004, 177 states had ratified CEDAW, including Armenia, and deposited the document with the United Nations.

The CEDAW Committee General Recommendations Nos. 12 and 19 call on States Parties to "provide appropriate protective and support services for victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence." Therefore, Armenian government has an international obligation to provide these services-see appendix 1-**List of Documents Signed or Ratified by Armenia**

### 2.3 Violence against women in figures



Violence against women is recognized as a serious societal issue that has reached global epidemic proportion. Over 90% of all domestic violence incidents are crimes committed by men against women. UNICEF estimates that globally up to half of all women and girls in some countries have experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner or family member (UNICEF, 2001). Statistics based on research data from around the world show that violence against women generally occurs within the family.

In Armenia, according to research carried out by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in 2011, an alarming 60% of respondents were subjected to domestic violence during their lifetime, and nearly 40% reported domestic violence within the last two years at the time of the survey. From 2010-2016, 40 known cases of domestic violence murders have been reported, and approximately 58 children have been left without their mothers. This figure does not take into consideration several additional unreported cases. For a small population of about two million, this number is alarmingly high.

## 2.4 Forms, patterns and impact of violence against women



The international literature abundantly documents the importance of social and cultural factors in inducing women to reconsider their decisions to seek external help and/or leave their violent husbands (Mahoney, 1994, 60, McWilliams/McKiernan, 1993, 50-55, Dobash/Dobash, 1998, Kirkwood, 1993, Chatzifotiou, 2004). Violence against women affects a large number of individuals/victims, who pay a high personal, physical, psychological, mental, familial, social and financial price for surviving the violence (Stanko/Crisp/Hale/Lucraft 1997).

Traditional values in patriarchal societies suggest that being a wife and mother are the most important roles for a woman. Moreover, in Muslim and Arab societies it is also held that women only fully live up to their role when they are married (Boabaid, 2002). Such remarks have also been expressed in Armenia from state officials and conservative groups backed and financed by Russia.

<http://epress.am/en/2016/12/24/adoption-of-domestic-violence-law-in-armenia-opposed-by-pro-russian-groups-report.html>

Not surprisingly, society places the burden of family harmony on the woman, with the implications that a failed marriage is her fault. This suggests that 'commitment' to the relationship constitutes a salient factor in the decision to keep silent, suffer the violence and not seek help for a long time (Strube/Barbour 1983, 786). Thus, the deeply ingrained ideas that marriages should be preserved at almost any cost for the sake of the family and that a wife acquires the stigmatized status of a divorcee are combined with the notion that she is the one to blame for the break-up of marriage. All these preconceptions are strengthened by friends, relatives and the representatives of social agencies, and they are important factors that deter a woman from seeking external help and leaving a violent relationship.

If women and their children are to receive appropriate and effective support, it is necessary to understand the dynamics and mechanisms of violent behavior.

## 2.5 Violence also takes non - physical forms

Violence exists not only in terms of physical behavior. Violence serves the end of exerting power and control over the victim, breaking and subordinating the victim's will. The US psychiatrist Judith Herman (1992) compares the patterns of violent behavior towards women with techniques used in torture. Many women who have suffered violence at the hands of their partners report being subjected to various forms of psychological abuse such as isolation from the outside world, verbal abuse and denigration, threats and intimidation, or being forced to perform futile or humiliating acts. It can happen that the perpetrator alternates this kind of violence with periods in which he is affectionate, brings the woman flowers or takes her out to dinner. Such behavior will confuse the woman and make her think that perhaps there is hope after all, that the man does have his good sides and could change. In reality, the man is simply manipulating her into staying with him and abandoning her thoughts of separating from him. In the context of the violent relationship as a whole, the man's occasional affectionate behavior must be seen as a strategic aspect of his violence.

## 2.6 Violence as trauma and destruction of the sense of self

Violence is a traumatic experience whose wounds are by no means confined to physical injuries. The aim of violent behavior is to destroy the victim's self-esteem and break down her resistance. One consequence of violent behavior is that the victim lives in constant fear of further violence. In many cases it is no longer necessary for the perpetrator actually to commit acts of violence: threats and the memory of previous violence are sufficient to ensure that the woman does what the abuser demands. Judith Herman offers the following explanation: "Although violence is a universal method of terror, the perpetrator may use violence infrequently, as a last resort. It is not necessary to use violence often to keep the victim in a constant state of fear. The threat of death or serious harm is much more frequent than the actual resort to violence. Threats against others are often as effective as direct threats against the victim. Battered women, for example, frequently report that their abuser has threatened to kill their children, their parents, or any friends who harbor them, should they attempt to escape" (Herman 1992, 77).

Many women have no way to protect themselves against violence, which may be inflicted on them over a period of many years, even after separation from the abuser.

## 2.7 Living in captivity



"My husband didn't want me to go out by myself. When he went to work he would take all the keys with him, so I couldn't lock the front door. If I'd gone out, either I would have had to leave the front door open or I wouldn't have been able to get in again. So I wasn't locked in, but I still couldn't go out." (Laura, testimony given to the Women's Refuge Counselling Centre in Vienna). "We lived in Meghri, my husband would not even allow me to hang the wash out of the window so other men won't look at me, I could not even go out to buy bread for the children. I was a prisoner" (Gohar, testimony given to Women's Support Center in Armenia).

Women subjected to violence by their husbands or partners are often prisoners in their own homes. Perpetrators control all their movements, preventing the woman from leading an independent life. As the above example shows, the prison walls are often not visible from outside. Herman makes the point succinctly: "Political captivity is generally recognized, whereas the domestic captivity of women and children is often unseen. A man's home is his castle; rarely is it understood that the same home may be a prison for women and children. In domestic captivity, physical barriers to escape are rare. In most homes, even the most oppressive, there are no bars on the windows, no barbed wire fences. Women and children are not ordinarily chained, though even this occurs more often than one might think. The barriers to escape are generally invisible. They are nonetheless extremely powerful. Children are rendered captive by their condition of dependency. Women are rendered captive by economic, social, psychological, and legal subordination, as well as by physical force" (Herman, 74).



## 2.8 Identification with the aggressor - the stockholm syndrome

One effect of constant exposure to violence is that the victims may start to identify with the aggressor and act on his behalf as a survival strategy. This subordination of the victim's will is not a voluntary decision but a direct result of violence. The aggressor may not just demand the woman's subordination but also that she loves him. Herman comments: "The perpetrator's first goal appears to be the enslavement of his victim and he accomplishes this goal by exercising despotic control over every aspect of the victim's life. But simple compliance rarely satisfies him; he appears to have a psychological need to justify his crimes, and for this he then needs the victim's affirmation. Thus he relentlessly demands from his victim professions of respect, gratitude or even love. His ultimate goal appears to be the creation of a willing victim." (Herman 1992, 75)

Identification with the aggressor as a response to being trapped in an apparently hopeless situation is referred to as the "Stockholm Syndrome". This phenomenon was first observed after a hostage-taking in the Swedish capital: the hostages began to form a relationship with the bank robbers, and the bonds became stronger and stronger. After the bank robbers were eventually overpowered and detained, some of their former hostages even visited them in prison. Every person is prone to the Stockholm Syndrome – that is, to identifying with the aggressor – if four conditions pertain: the person's life is threatened; the person cannot escape (or thinks she / he cannot escape); the person is cut off from the outside world; and the aggressor is at least sporadically friendly. Psychologists Graham and Rawlings (1998) note that these conditions often pertain in cases of domestic violence, and that the victims may also show signs of developing the Stockholm Syndrome. In such cases the woman will be terrified of doing anything to provoke or anger the aggressor. She will try to gain his favor and act as his ally. It can happen, for instance, that the woman seeks to protect him by such means as refusing to disclose the actual cause of her injuries or claiming to have hurt herself.

## 2.9 The close relationship between perpetrator and victim

The close relationship that exists between the victim and the perpetrator and the woman's economic or social dependence on the man make it very difficult for her to defend herself and free her from abuse. A stigma exists in bringing charges against a member of one's own family. For understandable reasons, women have problems speaking openly about violence and calling the police. On average only 25% of cases of domestic violence are ever reported. The remaining 75% remain undeclared (European Women's Lobby, 2000). Experience shows that women may be abused as many as thirty times before they go to the police. In Armenia, as the victim is victimized by accusing her of breaking up the family, the stigma of divorce, having no place to go and no means to support herself, as well as not having available support centers and being denied help in the past, many stay in abusive relationships and life threatening situations on the average for 10-15 years before seeking refuge.

## 2.10 The impact on children



Children are always affected by violence committed against their mothers, and in many cases they themselves are abused by their fathers or stepfathers. (Hester / Mullender 2003). Research has shown that ninety per cent of children are either in the same or the next room when violence occurs. One third of them witness the abuse, try to protect their mother and may be abused themselves (Asian Women and Domestic Violence, Information for Advisors, 1995, 2 / Women Against Rape, 1998, 2).

A study carried out in the United States established that in 70% of cases in which women were abused the children were also subjected to violence (see Bowker/Arbitell/McFerron 1988). This is also true in Armenia. The fear that things will worsen if the abused woman takes action and seeks help from outside constitutes an important reason for not reporting the violence, deciding to stay in the violent relationship and suffer the violence, and not seek help. More and more at WSC Armenia, we come across of sexual abuse towards children in families where domestic violence exists.

Children therefore need the safe surroundings and the support which refuges offer as much as their mothers do. More than half of the residents of refuges in general are children. Those children who are exposed to their father's violent behavior towards the mother are more likely later to become perpetrators or victims themselves. Boys are more likely to grow up to be perpetrators, girls to suffer violence (Appelt/Höllriegl/Logar 2001). It is essential that children are given help and support in dealing with their experiences of violence.

## 2.11 Empowerment

Violence leaves deep scars on both the body and the soul, and it destroys the individual's self - esteem and independence. It must be remembered, though, that women and their children who have been subjected to violence are not merely passive victims of their experiences. The women will devise a variety of strategies in an attempt to halt the violence and defend themselves, while children will seek to help their mothers by screaming, calling the police or trying to stop their fathers' violence. Women will watch their partners closely to see when an outbreak of violence seems imminent, and then flee to safety; they will try to placate the man if he comes home in an obviously aggressive mood, and they will protect their children from him at the risk of being beaten themselves. These are just a few of the survival strategies that women living with a violent partner often adopt. They develop great expertise in dealing with the situation, and they should on no account be regarded as mere victims. It is important also to see their strengths and their will to survive. Any tendency to classify such women as weak and incapable of independent action or even as pathologically abnormal not only does nothing to help them but further undermines their position.

Every woman has the right to lead her life as she deems fit and to make independent decisions in this regard.

Institutions with a strong bias towards administration and control are poorly suited to promoting the goal of empowering women. This is why women who are subjected to violence, and their children, need refuges whose planning and operational approach - as elucidated in the present Manual - are specifically gauged to address these needs. If women are to receive the kind of help and support which they require, they must be treated with respect for their strengths, with sensitivity, empathy and a perceptive awareness of their needs. The goal of work in a women's refuge is thus to strengthen and empower women so that they become capable of leading an independent, self - determined life free of violence.

## 2.12 Numerical requirements for women's refuges and support services

Every country should provide a sufficient number of women's refuges. At least one refuge capable of admitting women and children round the clock should be available in every region, including rural areas. Every woman should be able to reach it quickly. Transport must also be available to take women and children to the nearest refuge. Each country should operate a nationwide toll-free helpline for women as their first point of contact. Regional phone lines should also be staffed round the clock in the refuges to handle emergency admissions.

Many refuges operate a mobile counselling service and provide non-resident counselling services in the refuge. These are also extremely important services for victims of violence. As in the public health sector, the field of violence prevention requires a wide range of services to support and meet the needs of women and children exposed to violence. These include safe accommodation in the refuge, mobile counselling, emergency helplines, and outreach services in rural areas, intervention centers, and accommodation programs. It is always very important that the victims have a CHOICE of options.

Important though legislative protection against violence is, it should not be viewed as a substitute for women's refuges. The experience gained in Austria, where legislative protection against violence has existed since 1998, shows that women's refuges continue to be necessary.

Here are some reasons why refuges continue to be necessary even when effective legislative protection against violence exists. Not every victim of violence wishes to turn to the police and the judicial system and bring legal charges; some prefer to go to a refuge and stay there as long as necessary. Women who are at high risk need safe accommodation during the separation process, because the law is not capable of providing complete protection against violence. Some women cannot or do not wish to remain in the dwelling: be it because it is associated with the trauma they have been through, or because their husband's relatives live next door or with her.

## 2.13 State funding and organizational structures for women's refuges

Women's refuges provide important psycho-social support and, like other social facilities, should be regarded as an integral part of the services which the state operates on behalf of the general public.

This implies an obligation on the part of the government and the state authorities to ensure adequate funding for women's refuges and other women's service organizations. The financing of women's refuges should be safeguarded by law and cover all of the costs of running a refuge on professional lines. Women's refuges, helplines and other support services can adequately address the existing needs only if they can rely on funding that is contractually guaranteed for several years (or an unlimited period). In recent years those modern democratic states that regard the provision of public health and social care as a major obligation have tended to entrust more and more state functions to NGOs. These NGOs are independent, non-profit associations meeting needs and providing services within the fields of social work and social policy. Women's refuges in Europe are for the most part run by women's NGOs, which have over the years acquired a great deal of practical experience and expertise in providing support for abused women. This structural form of service provision for women has proved very effective and should be taken over when new projects are launched. Women's NGOs are more flexible in the ways they provide support, and victims of violence tend to have fewer inhibitions about turning to an NGO than to a state body.

Co-operation between governments and women's support services has proved successful and produced beneficial results in many countries. The formula for success is thus "private - public partnership."

It is important that the state bodies insist on compliance with quality standards (as formulated in the present Manual) but that they also respect the professional independence of the institutions concerned. Continuous internal and external evaluation is needed to underpin the quality of the work in women's refuges and support services (see the chapter "Documentation, evaluation and quality control"). It should be remembered that quality is possible only if the requisite financial resources are available.

## 2.14 Appropriate help for women and children - feminist principles



Abused women and their children cannot be expected to seek refuge in shelters for the homeless or other social welfare institutions which are not gauged to their specific needs. It is simply not enough to provide abused women and children with a roof over their heads. What is necessary is a system of women's refuges whose concept and operational approaches uniquely suit them to providing precisely the support which abused women and children need. Protection and safety rank among the most important criteria of a refuge. But it is equally important that women and children should not be consigned to institutions in which they again forfeit their right to self-determination. The planning and goals of a women's refuge should be directed towards strengthening and empowering women and children.

The UN Declaration on Violence Against Women identifies the historical imbalance of power between men and women as the cause of violence. Women's refuges thus pursue an approach which envisages women liberating themselves from violent relationships and emancipating themselves from the control of men, whether or not they remain with their partners or leave them. The work of women's refuges aims to end violence. Whether or not a woman terminates the violent relationship is her own decision, which must be respected. It would, however, be misguided to pursue the objective of preserving the family rather than first and foremost seeking to halt the violence.

It must be made absolutely clear to violent men that there can be no justification for violence and that the responsibility for ending it lies solely with them. The practical experience gained by European women's refuges over the last three decades has shown that feminist and emancipatory principles and approaches work well in providing abused women and their children with the support which they need (Hanetseder, Bern/Stuttgart/Wien, 1992). Government and state bodies can and should take this experience into account when setting up and enlarging women's services against violence.



## GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

## 3. GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

Women's refuges are set up and run by women. They offer counseling and support for women by women. As a rule men are not allowed access to shelters. Women's refuges are run by private, non-profit and non-party women's associations. This helps to reduce victims' reluctance to establish contact, and it safeguards their anonymity.

A women's refuge provides safe accommodation in which women and their children who have been subjected to domestic violence can live without fear of being abused. A women's refuge offers special services and safety precautions. The guiding principle of working with abused women is a strong commitment to advocate women's rights and the empowerment of women to live an independent and dignified life.

Women's refuges fulfil a vital role in combating violence against women. Their functions go far beyond just providing shelter and a safe place to stay. In a refuge women and their children receive the kind of support which enables them to deal with their traumatic experiences, to end the violence, to regain their self-esteem, and to lay the foundations for a self-determined and independent life. Women's refuges offer crisis support and on-going counselling and support in all matters related to the violent experience (legal issues, housing and job problems, therapy). Women's refuges are communal environments in which women and children become acquainted with a different way of living together. Women's refuges also fulfil a public role: they seek to raise awareness of the issue of domestic violence, co-operate with and offer training programs for professionals, organize events, participate in activities in the field, are engaged in preventative activities for schools, and much more besides.

A women's refuge is defined by:

- 🎗 its specific goals,
- 🎗 its clearly defined target groups,
- 🎗 its operating principles,
- 🎗 its specialized services and staff (see chapters 5 and 6)
- 🎗 its specific safety precautions (see chapter 7)

Only if a refuge fulfils all the functions listed above and described below and in the relevant chapters can the term women's refuge be applied.

### 3.1 The goals of a women's refuge

A women's refuge pursues a set of goals which should be clearly defined from the very beginning. This serves to ensure the quality of the services provided. Women's refuges have a role to play in preventing violence against women and children. By their very nature they aim to prevent further violence in that they offer victims of violence a safe environment and support to stop a recurrence of the violence. Abused women and their children need thorough care, practical support and accompaniment in legal procedures. They need counsellors who support them. Services have to meet the needs of abused women. Both crisis support and long-term therapy are needed in order to overcome the traumatic experiences.

However, women's refuges usually also take part in or organize activities in the field of primary and tertiary prevention (see chapter 5). Thus, they play a key role in an overall approach to combating and preventing domestic violence against women and their children.

### 3.2 Protection and safety

First of all it is important for victims of violence to be safe. Recovery from domestic violence trauma cannot occur if safety is not established. Safety must therefore be given the utmost priority in refuges (see chapter 8).



### 3.3 Empowerment

Violence is a traumatic experience, an experience of being powerless and at the mercy of somebody else. The aim of any support for victims of violence has to be to overcome powerlessness and to empower these women so that they can lead a self-determined life (again). Women who have become victims of violence should not be labelled "ill" or "distressed", which would further weaken their position. Being weak is often the consequence of being exposed to violence. Violence leaves marks not only on the body but also on the mind and the self-esteem. Some approaches for working with abused women go wrong in that they see these weaknesses as characteristics of the women, who then become pathological cases. The experience of experts in the refuge movement shows that it is vital to regard women as the experts in their situation. They need support to realize and understand their situation and how it was possible for their partner to exert power over them. Understanding the mechanisms of violence enables them to develop strategies to resist violence effectively. The ultimate goal is to live a life free of violence.

The philosophy behind the Best Practice Manual by Women's Support Services in Armenia, is based on the empowerment model of services and interventions with staff and program participants. The empowerment model provides an environment in which each individual is responsible for his or her actions by supporting his or her right to make choices about themselves and on how he or she chooses to live their life. An example of domestic violence shelter staff member working from an empowerment model would be a person supporting a resident's decision to return to an abusive relationship. Although the staff member may not agree with the resident's decision, as someone who is empowering others she must support the decision and discuss safety planning and assures her that she can always receive additional services should she want them.

The empowerment model focuses on cultivating an atmosphere in which the individual makes her own choices and decisions. Over time we have learned from survivors that what they need most is support, encouragement and the resources to achieve their goals, not someone telling them what to do (much like the abuser does). If we make decisions for the resident then practice has shown that they are not sustained. Others can offer advice, support, assistance or affection but not cure. A good therapist or staff is the one who validates a victim's experience and helps her to regain control over her life. A staff's personal values should not be projected onto the survivor. The latter MUST make her own decisions and staff is there to provide information to her and skill-building support.

### 3.4 Social change

Women's refuges aim to eliminate preconceptions, attitudes and behavior patterns in society which are the breeding ground for and perpetuate violence against women and children.

Women's refuges set out to raise awareness of

- the situation of the women and children
- the impact which domestic violence has on society
- effective ways of dealing with the issue
- effective ways of ending violence against women and children
- the benefits a non - violent society would have

### 3.5 Who are refuges for? The target groups

Women's refuges should be open to all women who have become victims of physical, psychological, emotional, sexual and economic violence committed by a partner, former partner or member of the family.

As pointed out in chapter 2, most victims of domestic violence are women, most of the perpetrators are men. However, women are in some cases abused by female partners or by a - usually older or higher - ranking female member of the family as in mother-in-laws (particularly in hierarchically structured societies).

A refuge should be open to all women regardless of age, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, legal, social and marital status, political allegiances and economic situation.

The age of a woman can pose problems. If a woman is not yet of age, legal difficulties can arise. In this case co - operation with the child shelter is important.

Women's refuges are also refuges for children.

Domestic violence also affects children, because they are either victims themselves or witnesses of the violence perpetrated against the mother. Both types of experience can be traumatic. Furthermore, women might not be willing to seek shelter in a women's refuge if they were not allowed to take their children with them.

The confined living conditions and absence of privacy in women's refuges make it reasonable to impose an age limit for boys. If boys are not admitted on account of their age, though, it is the refuge's job to find accommodation for them, in a hostel or elsewhere.

One alternative can be to have special apartments for these families which might have a separate entrance, for instance. It is important that each refuge decides on a policy in the light of the available possibilities and alternatives.

We have to be very clear that domestic violence / violence in intimate relationships is just one form of violence against women. Women also become victims of other forms (trafficking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual assault, rape in wartime ...). In general, it is up to the individual refuge to decide what group of survivors of violence are also taken in apart from survivors of domestic violence. The considerations should be based on the services that can be provided and also on the safety provisions. Women's refuges are usually not for women who are homeless, although it has to be taken into account that a lot of homeless women have a violent past and/or present and thus should have the right to a place in a refuge.

Women's refuges might have problems in adequately helping women suffering from substance abuse or acute mental health problems.

Substance abuse and mental health problems are very often connected with traumatic experiences linked to domestic violence and sexual abuse. Since at shelter we don't have resources to deal with drug abuse and psychiatric problems, it is advised to co-operate in these instances with specialized services.

### 3.6 The principles of a women's refuge

The goals of refuge work are embedded in fundamental principles which determine all aspects of refuge work. These principles are:

#### A. Feminist analyses

Male violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women and a reflection of existing gender relationships in society and in politics. It must therefore be regarded primarily as a social and political problem. Women's refuges need to fulfil a political function in that they create awareness of the social, historical, cultural and political framework that fosters male violence. Activists seek to give women and children a voice to speak out against violence. Society has to make perpetrators responsible for their actions. The feminist principles as implemented in the refuge should demonstrate ways for women and children to free themselves from violence.

#### B. Women helping women

Abused women suffer greatly from being dominated and abused by their male partners. It is therefore important for them to receive support and help from a female counsellor specialized in the field. Women victims of violence also suffer from being in a weak position and from having lost faith in their own abilities and strength. Thus, the refuge serves as a model for women to experience their own ability to lead an active and self - determined life. This is also reflected in the structure of the refuge, where women not only work at the grassroots level but also handle the household responsibilities. It helps the women to rethink and overcome stereotyped gender roles. This principle also applies to other women's support services.

### C. Advocacy for women

Acting against violence means adopting a clear stance and condemning violence against women in all its forms ("There is no excuse for violence"). Trying to stay neutral on what has happened entails the pitfall of tolerating violence. Women who come to the refuge do not have to offer proof of the violence they have undergone. It is important to believe what they say and to treat them without preconceptions. Victims need advocates who stand beside them and support them at every step that needs to be taken. Advocacy and solidarity are essential.

It is always the perpetrator who is responsible for the violence. Adopting a clear stance against any form of violent behavior demonstrates condemnation of violent acts but not condemnation of the perpetrator as a person.

### D. Team work (and flat hierarchies)

Women's refuges trace their origins back to the women's (rights) movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which called for equality and non-discrimination in every area of life.

The organization of the refuge should also reflect these goals by promoting democratic principles, sharing power and avoiding excessively hierarchical or bureaucratic structures. In many refuges the staff works as a team, and management duties and responsibilities are shared. Even if the refuge has a director, it is still important to work on a team basis and to involve the refuge workers in all the decisions and enable them to participate in the development of the service. These structures ensure that interaction and relationships are not based on exerting power from top to bottom but that people can live and work together in an atmosphere of solidarity and equality. This management structure is called "horizontal" because it is not focused on a top executive giving orders downward, but for staff to work as a team and make decisions together.

### E. Participation and democratic structures

Democratic structures and the opportunity to be involved in the various aspects of refuge life are very important principles. In all refuges there are regular meetings which are the basis of participation for the women. It is important to be careful that women's refuges are not turned into institutions in which the women's lives are dominated and controlled but that the women are included in all the operational processes. The power of the husband should not be replaced by the power of the institution. The staff are called upon to handle power carefully and to enforce the regulations in the house in such a way that they provide orientation without putting too many limits on the individual freedom of the women.

### F. Right to self - determination

It is important to respect women's right to decide about their lives (see Section 3.3 "Empowerment"). Very often relatives, friends and professionals in caring organizations try to tell the woman what to do. Some think she should separate from the perpetrator, others tell her to give him another chance. Unfortunately, it happens quite often that these people are disappointed or even annoyed if she does not follow their advice. Such advice can create even more pressure for the woman and is experienced as not helpful at all. It is important to convey to the woman that only she is in a position to decide and that her decision will be respected. The aim of an intervention is to end the violence, not to end the relationship. The right to self-determination is an important principle. How long a woman wants to stay in the refuge (within the three-months period) and if she wants to separate or not is solely up to the woman.

### G. Confidentiality / Anonymity

To protect a woman's rights and her integrity, it is necessary that she is able to decide which information is passed on to authorities or others. Therefore no information should be passed on by the refuge or by the counselling center without the woman's consent. Exceptions must be made if the life and health of women or children are at stake (i.e. suicide attempts, acute danger through the violent partner, or women abusing their children).

Women should also have the right to receive counselling and support without having to reveal their identity.

### H. 24 hour service and no time limit for stay

A woman who has to flee from her husband needs immediate support and protection. She should be able to reach a women's refuge 24 hours a day every day. In women's refuges at least one staff member should be on call so that she can admit the woman. If there is more than one refuge in a town, at least one should be able to take a woman and her children in at any time. In principle, women and their children should be able to stay until they feel safe and empowered to lead a life without violence. However, we must make sure that dependency is not created with the team/institution. It is advisable that stay at the shelter should not exceed 3 months in order not to create dependencies. However, no woman is forced to leave if her safety is in danger or has no means of sustenance.

### I. Accountability

A refuge has a responsibility and is answerable to the women and children, to the organization and its members and to society in general. The activities and the conduct of the refuge have to be transparent and comprehensible.

### J. Principles regarding the quality of service

Professionalism is a prerequisite for the full implementation of principles. The staff have to be adequately trained and paid. Provisions must be made for further training and supervision. The number of staff must be gauged to the number of women and children in order to provide all the necessary support and services and meet the requirements. Some refuges are dependent on support by volunteers. Volunteers have to be well trained. Resources should be managed economically and efficiently. Quality standards should be checked through regular quality control.

### K. Principles regarding structure and funding

Refuges should be run by non - governmental, non - profit, and non - party women's associations (see chapter 2.13). Women's refuges need adequate funding by the state, as they fulfil necessary functions for society; they give shelter and support to battered and abused women and their children.

### L. Services free of charge

Support services for women and children victims of violence should be free of charge, as women have little or no income. This is to ensure that women and their children in need can find shelter independently of their financial status.



## FOUNDING A WOMEN'S REFUGE

## 4. FOUNDING A WOMEN'S REFUGE

A women's refuge is more than safe accommodation. It is a place where women and their children who have suffered from violence committed by the husband, boyfriend or other relative, can become acquainted with solidarity amongst women and a non-violent environment, where they are protected and safe. Not only are operational principles necessary to fulfil the goals as presented in the previous chapter; the infrastructure also has to meet certain requirements in order to open new doors for these women and their children.

This chapter deals with setting up a refuge. It is designed to serve as a guideline on how to get started. It covers the main steps to be taken, from elaborating the original idea to opening the doors for the first time.



### 4.1 Founding a women's refuge

Founding a refuge involves thorough planning and the work of a group of totally committed people. This chapter details standards and recommendations relating to the original initiative, the legal basis, the identification of needs and outline planning, the drawing up of detailed plans, the need for lobbying and fund-raising, the location, and the infrastructure.

### 4.2 Initiative

The core of an initiative to set up a women's refuge should be made up of people with a basic knowledge of the forms, patterns and impact of violence against women. They must believe and understand the mission to prevent and combat domestic Violence (DV).

A large number of women's refuges were founded by feminist women's initiatives. The refuge movement, at least as far as its early development in Western, Northern and Central (non - communist) Europe is concerned, is directly related to the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. The ideas and goals are based on the principles of equality and gender - democracy. The results achieved within a relatively short period of time led international bodies to recognize and acknowledge the important role of women's NGOs in the prevention of violence against women and children and in protecting them from male violence.



### 4.3 Legal basis

The initial group has to make a decision on a legal form which the refuge will assume. Legal stipulations may vary from country to country. However, a non - profit, non - governmental organizational form is desirable.

Some kind of established legal status is necessary to be able to apply for any funding. Basic responsibilities and duties must be defined; this is usually mandatory when registering an association / organization. However, legal status does not automatically secure financial support by either public or private sponsors. It is advisable to make careful inquiries, if necessary to seek legal advice, and to look at the legal basis of other NGOs. It is also important to consider who is able and willing to assume responsibility (governing board) and what eligibility criteria will be applied to board members (someone who identifies with the goals and principles, has expert knowledge of the field or is a public figure and/or politician).

### 4.4 Outline planning

It is essential to draw up detailed outline planning before any practical steps are taken. This plan should consist of:

- ✚ substantive planning in terms of capacity, services to be provided, and duty rosters
- ✚ a management plan for the refuge
- ✚ a building plan that includes security precautions
- ✚ a staff plan
- ✚ two budget plans (one for the start-up phase, a second for the annual running costs of the refuge)
- ✚ a plan for co-operation
- ✚ a fundraising plan.

### 4.5 Location

An appropriate building not only has to meet the capacity requirements as defined above; it must also be designed and located in such a way as to ensure maximum protection for women and children.

Ideally it should be feasible to keep the refuge address secret. If the building is located in a small town and/or in a rural area and/or in a very open society, keeping the address secret might turn out to be very difficult. However, this doesn't have to mean that it is impossible to set up a refuge, only that even greater care has to be devoted to security measures. It is important to have sophisticated technical security equipment and good co - operation with law enforcement and administrative personnel and the neighborhood (see "Safety"). It can also be advantageous if a woman can choose between a close and a distant refuge location. If the perpetrator has been assessed as very dangerous, it is preferable to accommodate the woman (and her children) as far away as possible.

Depending on the size needed, various options are open. A refuge can be a single house or an apartment in a larger apartment building. If it is an existing building, it has to be checked to see if the requirements as laid out under the headings "Infrastructure and Room plan" can be met. If sufficient financial means are available, it can be advantageous to have a house newly built for the purpose. It is beneficial to plan the shelter in a location that has close by school and kindergarten so children can benefit from public education. Also the shelter is better to be located close to a transportation hub so women can have easy access to go to vocational training or work places.



## 4.6 Infrastructure

Life in a refuge is of course different from living at home. Usually, there is less space, and some rooms have to be shared. This puts a lot of strain on women and children. It is therefore important to make life as comfortable as possible.

- 🎗 The following considerations should be kept in mind:
- 🎗 Women and children need an appropriate environment to be able to recover from their traumatic experiences.
- 🎗 Individual needs must be respected. The right to privacy and the scope for individuality should be guiding principles throughout the planning. These considerations presuppose the chance to be on one's own, not only when tending to one's personal hygiene.
- 🎗 The refuge should be accessible for women with disabilities.
- 🎗 A women's refuge is also a house for children and young people
- 🎗 Recent experience in some countries shows that refuges which are quite large tend to create a feeling of living in a hotel in the negative sense; they tend to be "anonymous" because it is difficult to get to know each other and to share. It becomes very difficult to create a "community" feeling in large refuges.

*Example: A helpful approach might be to imagine that you yourself have to spend some time in a refuge. Shouldn't it offer attractive, spacious rooms with cooking facilities and a clean bathroom? The services provided include free meals, child care, children's play area, counseling, medical care. Although this may initially sound unrealistic, it is important to remember that women and children who have undergone violence have a right to the best possible support.*

## 4.7 Room plan



### Rooms for women

There should be a room for each woman and her children. If there is a large area available or a second living room, additional cots can be placed.

Women (and their children) who seek shelter in a refuge are in a crisis situation. This cannot be compared with going on holidays and sharing a dormitory in a hostel or a mountain hut. To enable them to recover from their traumatic experiences, it is essential to create an environment which offers opportunities for solitude and rest. Financial resources are hardly ever so plentiful that a refuge can really offer five - star hotel service.

## Shared rooms

A women's refuge is also a place in which women with past similar experiences come together. This gives them the chance to become acquainted with solidarity among women and to understand that partner violence is not a personal but a social problem, that the violence can be halted, and that living together can take many different forms.

There should be at least two larger rooms, a spacious kitchen. One large room should serve as a living room. The other should also be usable for group activities and should be large enough for celebrations (for all the residents plus staff). Some refuges offer training courses for women. This also has to be considered when planning a refuge. Women should have the chance to cook and take their meals together. Since women very often come with just a few clothes, it is necessary to have good washing machines and possibly a dryer.

### Rooms for staff

One room and preferably with a bathroom should be for the staff. A separate crisis center at a different location should have rooms for counselling and administration.

## 4.8 Private sponsoring



Private donations should be always sought out for special acquisitions, while the regular running costs of a refuge should come from state funding. It is important to contact organizations, businesses and individuals for donations of used clothes and shoes, baby and household items, toys, etc.





SERVICES FOR  
WOMEN AND  
CHILDREN

## 5. SERVICES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Women's refuges offer a variety of support services, carry out a wide range of activities and fulfil a vital function in society. As far as the services are concerned, refuges provide shelter, crisis support and counselling for battered women and their children – also for non-residents or former residents. Moreover, women's refuges seek to prevent male violence against women: they set out to raise public awareness of the issue of violence, its causes and consequences and the necessity for specialized support services for victims. A network of supportive individuals and organizations and close co-operation with other professionals help to achieve this goal. To ensure the quality of services it is necessary to maintain documentation and to carry out evaluation.



### 5.1 24 hour services

It is essential that women receive crisis support and that they can come to the refuge at any time, even during the night.

Resources of accommodation may unfortunately be limited. There should be a policy on how to handle capacity constraints. However, it should be a matter of principle that no woman in acute danger is turned away and forced to stay with or return to the violent partner.

When there is only one women's refuge in a given region, then this refuge must be open round the clock to admit women and their children. If a region or city has more than one refuge, at least one must be open on a 24 - hour basis. Transport should be available cost free to enable women and their children to get to the refuge without having to worry about the costs.

Going into a refuge is usually not the first step a woman who is abused by her partner will take. The first personal contact is usually established by phone. Many refuges also operate a 24- hour helpline and counselling on the phone. Again, at least one 24 - hour helpline should be available in the region/city to provide crisis support on the phone and assist in referral to the nearest refuge. It is important to ensure the widest possible publicity for the emergency phone numbers of refuges and helplines, so that women are aware of the existence of this support and actually turn to refuges for help. A refuge worker should always speak to a woman before she comes to the refuge (see the section on "Admission procedures" below).

### 5.2 Counselling

Counselling is one of the key services provided by women's refuges. Counseling is also offered at crisis center for non - shelter women which are at a separate location. Sometimes these centers also work as contact points for women who need a place in a refuge.

However the counselling service is organized, the most important consideration is that a woman subjected to violence is offered professional counselling and that she is informed about all the services available to her and her children.

The first meeting serves to establish a relationship of trust. The refuge worker should listen carefully and identify the needs of the woman seeking help. Women have the right to receive professional and non - judgmental support, no matter what decision they take. The counsellor must always guarantee to the woman that all information is treated confidentially and that she can remain anonymous.

It is important to assess the dangerousness of the violent man (see Risk Assessment questionnaire - available at WSC) and to elaborate safety planning (see the section on "Safety" below). The woman seeking help should also be given information about her rights and opportunities. Some of the information can be in written form. For her own safety it may be necessary to advise her not to disclose the information to the perpetrator.

It is also important to identify the resources and social network (family, friends, community services and so on) to which the woman can turn for support. The survivor decides what three goals she wants to accomplish before coming out of shelter. For example, she may want to find a place to live, find a job, enroll children in kindergarten or get vocational training, as well as pursue criminal justice. These goals are accomplished with support of social workers. An individual plan with goals set up by the survivor should be drawn up for each woman together with the social worker.

### Admission procedures

How can women and children find the refuge? There are different models. In one the refuge is linked to a crisis center whose address is publicly known, while the refuge address is kept secret. The woman will come to the admission/crisis center first. In the second model the refuge - with a secret address - is contacted by phone and the woman seeking help is given the address of the refuge. There are also refuges which pick up the woman at a pre - arranged meeting place.

The woman (and her children) should be admitted by a professional refuge worker. Since many refuges do not have enough personnel to be staffed on a 24 - hour basis, this might be difficult. At all events the woman should have the right to receive professional crisis counselling within the first few hours of her stay in the refuge.

Coming to a refuge may at first be a very bewildering experience. It is important to provide intensive help and assistance at the beginning of a woman's stay, and she should have a contact person from the start, ideally the refuge worker who admitted her or who carried out the first counselling. This is an important factor in establishing a relationship of trust and helping the woman to get her bearings. One should not underestimate the stress caused by the crisis situation the women and children are contending with, compounded by the stress of a completely new environment and dozens of unfamiliar faces. The staff should be welcoming and warm within boundaries.

*Example: Many refuges have a notice board with pictures of all the women working in the refuge, together with their names and functions, to help the women and children get to know the staff.*

If the woman seriously affected by trauma it is advisable to allow for 3 - 4 days for recovery before initializing orientation or any planning. After the orientation phase the woman should be designated a counsellor who should then be her contact person throughout her stay in the refuge. Often this will be the same person who was there for her at the beginning and with whom she has developed a close relationship. If this is not possible (for instance because the chosen counsellor is booked out at the time), a viable alternative should be found in consultation with the woman.

When a woman comes to the crisis center or to the refuge, an evaluation of the needs of the woman and children and the degree of risk they are at should be carried out (danger assessment, safety planning, and intake forms for women and children are available at WSC). The woman and children should be given the most important information about the refuge, and should be made familiar with the guidelines for life in the refuge (Rights and Responsibilities booklet is available in Armenian at WSC). If the woman scores as high risk but does not wish to go to a shelter, she must sign a form indicating that shelter was offered to her but she refused.

### 5.3 Rights and responsibilities



Living in communal arrangements requires certain organizational practices as well as safety considerations. Framing guidelines as "Rights and Responsibilities" rather than "Rules and Regulations" aligns with the core principles of empowerment and self-determination which should be integrated across all components of shelter services to ensure women's rights are truly promoted by service providers.

If a shelter resident does not participate in services, seek her out and ask if her needs are being met. The approach again focuses on relationship building and avoids the judgmental label of a resident being "non-compliant" with shelter rules. Staff should also be alert to cases of severe depression when the resident is not socializing, or their eating and sleeping patterns are not in order.

Rights and Responsibilities should be designed with flexibility and responsiveness to women's needs and complement or be part of shelter policy. This document should be offered and explained to each resident of the shelter during the first days of stay.

At first contact, it is not necessary to go over the ways one can get kicked out of the shelter for it can be isolating and alienating and invoke a sense of authority and control from the abusive relationship the individual just left; Focus on advocacy as opposed to rules: rule enforcement should not take up the majority of the time of an advocate. It undermines the relationship of trust among the staff and between them and the participants.

Following up with individuals who break the rules, can be a helpful indication that something larger is going on (depressions, anxiety, the need for a break). It can be an opportunity to help work with the victim towards her goals.

**"Rights and Responsibility" (in Armenian) is available at the WSC upon request.**

### First phase of stay – reflection period

The first phase, the reflection period, is the period in which the woman becomes familiar with the refuge and the staff, in which she recovers from her traumatic situation, gets used to living in the refuge, reflects on her needs and concerns, and starts making decisions on the next steps she will take. This phase can last from some hours to several days or even weeks.

In this phase the woman has to decide if she wants to stay in the refuge or go somewhere else and if she wants to separate from her partner temporarily or permanently. It is important that the counsellor conveys to her clearly and repeatedly that it is up to her to make the decision, that she has the right to stay with her partner as well as the right to leave him. It is also very important that the woman knows that she can always come back to the refuge, even if she went home in-between. If the woman decides to go back to her partner, it is necessary to discuss the issue of safety and to develop strategies together with her on how to protect herself and the children, and how and where she can get support.

Some women ask whether violent men can change, if the abuse will stop. That is why it is very important that they need to understand the dynamic and facts about DV. It is especially important at this stage to ensure that the woman receives intensive and carefully thought-out counselling, because it is at this stage that most women decide whether or not to return to their partners.

### Individual counseling and empowerment

During the individual counselling sessions all the woman's needs and concerns are evaluated and priorities are established. An individual schedule for counselling and supporting the woman is drawn up. The professional's job is to discuss with her the full range of available options and to support her in achieving her goals.

Women need support in making their own choices. They must receive support in the process of empowerment and in the strengthening of their self-esteem and self-determination. It is important to make a woman feel that she has the power and the right to choose and can determine what she is going to do with her own life. She should also have the opportunity to talk frequently about her experiences of violence and to reflect on them (if and whenever she wants). We should bear in mind that women victims of violence sometimes need a long time before they develop enough trust and courage to talk about their experiences of abuse, especially about sexual abuse.

With the support of the counsellor, the woman comes to understand what strategies her partner used to gain power and control over her, and this enables her to develop strategies to resist and protect herself. Social workers should also give women practical assistance in dealing with various administrative bodies and accompany her to the police, to court hearings, hospital, school registration, etc. It might also be beneficial to talk about women's role in society, about gender stereotypes and gender (in)equality and similar topics and to enhance her awareness of her own role as a woman.

Even bearing in mind that our goal is to empower women and children, there is the danger that we might act for her instead of with her. This comes from the power imbalance that is inevitable between the woman seeking help and the counsellor. It is therefore important for the counsellor always to reflect on the relationship and to ensure that the woman feels supported, not disempowered. It is of paramount importance for staff and counselors to provide trauma informed services. Counselors must be trained in trauma and recovery process. Supporting staff must understand how trauma affects the victim's behavior. For further information about trauma, please see "Guidelines for Domestic Violence Service Providers".

## 5.4 Group work



Women's refuges offer various forms of group work. Group work is a valuable supplement to individual counselling in that it enables women to realize that they are not the only ones undergoing abuse by their partners.

Reflection groups or theme-specific groups are a space for women to discuss various topics: violence but also any issue they feel to be relevant to them. In addition to individual counselling, groups are a tool for helping women in the refuge to become aware of themselves as well as the social environment. The aim is for them to regain their self-confidence and promote interaction with other women. It is therefore important that the group participants feel responsible for the group process. Another specific form of group work is groups in which women discuss their roles as mothers, their problems in bringing up their children etc. Types of group work are: Explaining DV, Parenting Skills, Good Nutrition, Women's Health, Building Self-Esteem, Budgeting, Yoga for relaxation and anti-depression. Another form of group work is the creativity group, in which women have the opportunity to express themselves by means of painting, singing, acting, etc.

The groups should be facilitated by a refuge worker or counselor. A good model could also be to run the group jointly with a woman living in the refuge. Women's (individual) voices/opinions must be respected in these groups. Those running group work must receive proper training so they can be sensitive to the needs and specificity of traumatized DV victims.

## 5.5 Safety/Safety planning

The top priority of all counselling and refuge work is to ensure the safety of women and their children. IN Appendix 2 "Safety Planning", it goes over the appropriate safety measures that must be planned and implemented independently of the woman's decision whether or not to stay in the refuge. On safety in the refuge see chapter 8.

### Legal aid

Women victims should be informed of their legal rights and opportunities. Every refuge should provide legal information and support in legal proceedings and procedures.

Legal information should cover:

- ♀ Specific laws concerning immediate and/or long - term protection from violence
- ♀ Police procedures
- ♀ Restraining orders
- ♀ Matrimonial and divorce laws
- ♀ Parental/custodial rights
- ♀ Migration laws
- ♀ Criminal law
- ♀ Victims' rights and compensation under criminal and civil law
- ♀ Social welfare benefits
- ♀ Property rights, etc

Social workers should also accompany women to the police, to court, and to other legal institutions and should help them to prepare for legal procedures and court proceedings - for instance, by providing information about the sequence of events or by organizing role games in which the woman can practice giving testimony. It is also important for the woman to be accompanied to criminal court proceedings, to prevent secondary traumatization.

In complex legal proceedings it is necessary for women to be represented by a lawyer. It is advisable to select women lawyers who identify with the cause of the victims, who adopt a sensitive approach to representing their clients, and who are willing to take on the case for no fee.

### Support in financial matters

When a woman arrives at the refuge, it is important to support her in financial matters. If a woman does not have an income of her own, the first step is to help in finding resources. In many countries women who cannot support themselves financially are entitled to social welfare. It is an important function of the refuge to assist women to obtain social welfare without time-consuming administrative delays.

A refuge also serves the purpose of helping women to secure their rights and enforce their financial claims (e.g. alimony payments for herself and the children, unemployment benefits, children's allowances etc.).

The refuge must see to it that the woman's partner does not have access to her money. If children's state benefits are transferred in the perpetrator's name, this must be changed so that the benefits are paid to her.

### Support in housing matters

Women who are subjected to domestic violence, and especially women with small children, are often faced with the prospect of destitution, if the perpetrators refuse them access to money or an independent income as part of their control strategy.

If for any reason women cannot stay in or return to the family home, it is necessary to assist them in housing matters. It is advisable to co-operate closely with the local authorities and housing offices to raise awareness of the plight of abused women. These public bodies should feel responsible for giving such women immediate access to temporary accommodation at low rent.

### Support in health - related matters

When a woman is admitted to a refuge, she may need medical assistance right away. Refuge workers should accompany her to the medical services and ask for comprehensive documentation of all her injuries. Forensic documentation could serve as evidence in court. Many women in Armenia have STDs from their partners and often are unaware. OBGYN check ups are recommended. Also many women suffer from head injuries and this must be given special attention. The shelter can offer only primary medical care. Children must be screened that their vaccination is to date. Children have often health problems due to conditions that the abuser forced them to live in. Many women affected by trauma develop many illnesses and the shelter social workers will try their best to assist them - however, each case must be evaluated and determined if it can be addressed financially.

## Support in job - related matters and training

It is an important function of the refuge to support women in job-related matters, to assist them to keep their job or to get a job or enroll in a training program.






Violence is an obstacle to the employment and equality of women. A woman may, for instance, lose her job because her violent partner harasses her at her place of work or prevents her from going to work. It also often happens that women quit their job or are dismissed because they cannot go to work after being beaten. The support of the refuge or the counselling center in job matters is therefore very important. One further function is to encourage and assist women who are unemployed to find a job or to improve their qualifications.

Women can be supported when they apply for a job or are preparing for the job interview, by doing role-play with them, for example. Refuges also work closely with employment programs and vocational training centers.



## 5.6 Leaving the refuge

Leaving the refuge is a major step for every woman. It is the start of a new life and has to be well planned. The refuge workers should assist a woman so that, when she leaves the refuge, she and her children (ideally) have:

-  a steady income: salary and/or social benefits;
-  safe housing (temporary accommodation or a house/apartment of her own);
-  arrangements for the children: kindergarten, school, medical assistance and other necessary services;
-  safety plan: elaboration of a safety plan taking into account the new living situation of the woman and children (see Appendix 1);
-  arrangements for further support and counselling (for the woman and her children) by the refuge or other services.

When she leaves the refuge, the woman should be reminded not to pass on information about other women, children and staff at the refuge and to keep the address of the refuge secret.

## Support after the stay in the refuge

After leaving the refuge the woman and her children should have continuing access to all the services they need. There are again different models on how to organize support. In countries where crisis centers for victims of domestic violence exist in addition to women's refuges, women can receive support from these counselling centers with regard to legal issues or other specific issues or they can return anytime they are faced with an issue.

When a woman does not have the chance to make use of these services, it is important to inform her about the local services and to collaborate with them.

## 5.7 Services for children



Children of abused women need special attention while living in the refuge. Qualified staff and special play rooms for children are necessary. Sufficient budgetary means must be allocated to the care of children. Often they need psychological counseling or relaxation therapy which can be done with the permission of the mother.

Children who come to the refuge are witnesses and often also victims of violence; in either case they had a traumatic experience. Special attention to their needs is therefore necessary. Research also shows that girls face a much higher risk of becoming victims and boys of becoming perpetrators of violence in their adult life than children who grow up in a non-violent family. DV is a learned behavior and this is very damaging for the psyche of a child.

## 5.8 Goals of services for children

**To ensure children's physical and emotional safety and promote their sense of security.** Children accompanying their mother in refuges may be injured and may suffer from various health problems. Referral to medical care may be needed. Safety planning is also an important issue in refuge services for children.

**To improve children's mental and emotional health and well - being.** This is a long - term goal of children's services but may acquire priority in crisis situations, when self - harm behavior patterns occur. Through the support given to children's emotional and mental health, their safety can also be enhanced .

**To help children to regain and enjoy their childhood.** Children who have been exposed to domestic violence may take an adult role or may feel anxious or tense as a consequence of what they have experienced. Through playing, relaxing and simply having fun they can enjoy their childhood again.

**To support the mother - child relationship.** Mothers are in the best position to help their children to recover from effects of violence. Conjoint work with the mother should be considered as a way to address children's needs.

## 5.9 Services for children during the stay

### Comprehensive and high - quality services

Services for children have to include crisis intervention, psycho - social, pedagogic, therapeutic and group - dynamic work. Children who have witnessed or themselves been subjected to violence often suffer from a lack of self - esteem, in many cases also from anxieties and aggression. Some children may demonstrate auto - aggressive behavior. Most of the children show signs of reduced capabilities and a slowing of their development. Their social competences may also be impaired. Psychosomatic symptoms are very frequent (sleeping problems, nightmares, tummy and headache, nausea, bed - wetting, eating disorders, stuttering, fears, etc.).

Coming to a refuge poses new challenges and entails hardships for children. When women seek refuge, their children face an equal degree of crisis and disruption in their lives. Professionals working in refuges note emotional and physical difficulties experienced by children during their stay. Health problems as well as acute feelings of loss, anger, fear, sadness, confusion and guilt and various adjustment problems result from the following refuge conditions (Peled / Davis 1995):

- ⊗ recent crisis following the witnessing of violence at home
- ⊗ disruption of normal coping patterns and support systems following separation from the father and extended family or from friends, school, home, etc.
- ⊗ the demand for rapid adjustment to a new living situation
- ⊗ difficult living conditions, including lack of privacy and high emotional intensity displayed by other residents
- ⊗ emotional and/or physical unavailability of their mothers because of their own emotional turmoil and the practical demands imposed by the need to rearrange family life.

When working with children in refuges, it is important to take into consideration their individuality and uniqueness in the process of dealing with the consequences of violence while bearing in mind the common experiences and needs they may have. Children's needs during their stay in the refuge often require crisis intervention and ongoing emotional support, medical attention, co-operation with the educational system, legal and child protective services and academic help, and work to help mothers with parenting skills.

### Admission

Usually it is women who request admission to a refuge, while children accompany the mothers. At the reception stage an initial assessment of child and mother is needed. It is also important to prepare the child for refuge life and for the changes that will occur; this is a way to convey to the child a sense of safety.

Areas of initial assessment:

- ⊗ Establish the emergency level of the situation and the need for crisis intervention
- ⊗ Identify the needs of children and mothers in order to develop their safety plans
- ⊗ Assess the impact of abuse on children
- ⊗ Assess the protective factors, children's and mother's resources for protection, health and safety

Preparing children for the experience of refuge life can be accomplished by:

- ⊗ Explaining the aims, goals and activities of the refuge
- ⊗ Assuring them that the refuge is a safe place
- ⊗ Informing children about the refuge's rules and the policy on confidentiality
- ⊗ For boys 15 and older other arrangements must be made

Intake form samples for women and children and Risk Assessment questionnaires are available at the WSC.

### Individual work



Individual counseling with a child psychologist (with mother's consent) provides the child with a supportive environment and allows him/her to develop a trusting relationship with an adult, which could represent a model for future relationships. These sessions focus on the feelings of the children (fear, confusion, loneliness, guilt, anger) and their needs. The counsellor helps the children acknowledge their experiences and recognize that they are not to blame for the violence of the adults. Strengthening a child's self-esteem is an important issue in this work. Recommendations for individual counselling of children: Create a safe therapeutic environment:

- ⊗ by clearly communicating to the child that she/he will not be forced to talk about things she/he does not want to discuss
- ⊗ by explaining confidentiality issues

Address safety planning from the beginning. Safety plans for children should be realistic, simple and age appropriate. Possible safety strategies to empower children are: (1) how to avoid situations of prior violence, (2) how to phone, (3) how to obtain emergency assistance, (4) escape logistics, (5) what to do if they are kidnapped. Safety plans should be developed with the mother and the child and should be rehearsed.

The topic of termination should be addressed early on the counselling process. Discussing separation and preparing for it is an important issue for children affected by violence. Children do not always need formal counselling; sometimes they simply want to meet an adult informally. Having someone to talk to who is glad to spend time with them can be a rewarding and positive experience for children.

Counselling and working with the child varies according to the child's age. With adolescents it is possible to work out how they can feel safe again and what kind of agencies they or their mother can contact. In working with young people one can address their attitudes towards friendships and relationships and how they think about domestic violence. It may be useful to talk about attitudes towards domestic violence and social change, that it is a crime, that no-one has the right to abuse another person (Mullender / Debbonnaire 2000).

### Group work

Group work is recognized as an effective intervention with children and young people exposed to domestic violence. Formal or informal group sessions may be organized in a refuge. A supportive accepting environment is fostered, and this gives the children the opportunity to support each other and to learn new and effective ways of interacting and communicating their feelings, thoughts and needs.



The goals of most groups for children include helping children to define violence and the responsibility for violence; express their feelings (including anger); improve communication and other skills; enhance self - esteem; develop social support networks; develop safety plans; and enjoy a positive experience. Educational, informational or preventive groups may be made available. Group activities should take into account the age of the participants and their developmental level and should respond to the needs of culturally different or disabled children.

### Conjoint work with mothers

Services for children in refuge should not be confined to practical work with children; working with mothers should be considered equally important, because they can give the best support to the children's needs. Generally mothers that come to shelter affected by trauma or depression, are either neglectful of their children or very aggressive towards them using physical punishment as the only method of discipline. Therefore, special parenting skills must be thought to mothers. In some cases child workers can work individually with the mother; appointments can be fixed at her or the counsellor's request. The aim is to convey children's needs, fears and problems, when the children ask for this or if the situation requires it (for example, violence in the refuge). Another way of working with mothers is the group (mothers' groups), where child counsellors have the opportunity to share the children's point of view in terms of their age, observing the constraints of confidentiality. With regard to the methods (supportive or confrontational) utilized during the work with mothers, parenting skills counseling as to convey and advocate the children's needs. Parenting skills trainings are available from Save the Children, UNICEF and WSC. In addition a booklet in Armenian geared for parents of children in DV families is also available at WSC.

### Play therapy

Play therapy is a valuable method when working with children who are developmentally or emotionally unable to express their feelings, thoughts and experiences through words. Play is the child's natural medium of communication, which he/she uses "to manage his/her fears and anxieties about abuse, express his/her feelings about what happened to him/her, and demonstrate his/her knowledge and understanding of relationships. Play therapy allows the child to represent symbolically those events that generate fear and anxiety and helps the child to move toward resolution and integration of frightening experience." (Urquiza & Winn, 1994, p. 59) Play therapy can also be utilized during individual and group counselling.

### Art therapy / Expressive art therapy





Art therapy is an important method of communication, assessment and treatment. The child utilizes art to express feelings and emotions that he/she is unable to articulate in words. Drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, drama, music or storytelling can help children to release accumulated tensions and anxieties. Individual and group work can benefit from this method.

### Recreational and educational activities

Play and recreational activity sessions in an informal setting that are not focused on violence are good opportunities for promoting peer support between children. Sport, walking, movement, dance etc. can be provided. Some children may need educational support for improving their school - related abilities.

### Support during judicial interventions

A child who needs to testify at court proceedings benefits greatly from being introduced to judicial procedures by a specialist (psychologist, clinical social worker) who understands and can prepare the child for her/his appearance in court. Recommendations for supporting a child during a court hearing:






-  a week or so before the hearing, escort the child to the court building
-  take the child to the courtroom where he/she will testify and allow the child to sit in the witness chair
-  tell the child about the role of each person and where they will be sitting or standing
-  offer the child all such emotional and informational support as is necessary to make the child as comfortable as possible with this part of the judicial procedures

### 5.10 Staff requirements

#### Professional staff

Child care workers need to have adequate training in the psycho-social field as well as specialized training. Child psychologists, childcare workers and pedagogic experts can work to support children in refuge. Volunteers can support the work of the professional child care workers, as children need as much attention as their mothers when they come to the refuge.




#### Staff requirements:

-  full-time children's advocates on the staff are needed to provide services or develop referral sources
-  qualifications in the fields of psychology, social work, teaching
-  staff for children need to be thoroughly trained in assessment procedures, crisis intervention and counselling techniques for children
-  knowledge of the dynamics of domestic violence, child development
-  knowledge of the legal aspects of child protection

Co-operation with the other counsellors/therapists at the refuge is necessary, especially with those working with mothers, to improve the well-being of children. Professionals working with children often have to co-ordinate and collaborate with other professionals, such as police, prosecutors, attorney, and judges.

#### Number of staff members:

At least one child care worker is recommended per small to medium size refuge, in order:

-  to be able to fulfil all the tasks as listed above professionally and for the benefit of the children
-  to facilitate the exchange of experience
-  to guarantee that the children are cared for in cases of sick leave or holidays.



## 5.11 Infrastructure

### Special rooms and equipment

Adequate space for care and recreation for children should be provided. Counseling of children and adults is preferable to be done at the crisis center and not at the shelter. It is good for women to change environment and also there is less distractions and noise at the crisis center.

Rooms should comprise:

- playroom(s) with a range of equipment for children and youth of all ages, therapeutic toys, dolls, dollhouses, puppets, blocks, balls, sand etc.
- games: board games or games that require the child to construct or solve problems in creative ways; drawing, painting, writing etc. supplies; educational material,

At the shelter would be good to have:

- a multi-function room,
- a room for leisure activities,
- a garden where children and their mothers could benefit from physical and recreational activities,

The rooms should meet the special needs of children who live in a refuge. In particular these needs are:

- security,
- communication,
- solitude,
- creativity and
- movement (to express oneself, to release tensions, etc.).

Well-lit rooms, void of breakable objects are recommended. Rooms should provide for accident-free games. Toys and games that promote cultural diversity and satisfy the needs of children with disabilities.

For administrative and organizational matters, the psychologists and social workers need a separate office equipped with telephone and computer which is advisable to be at the crisis center and not at the shelter.

### 5.12 Obstacles / Drawbacks

Very often support for children is dependent on private donations and income from fund - raising events. This is particularly critical since children's needs are at least as important and urgent as women's needs when they come to a refuge. Either as witnesses or victims of violence, they are traumatized in varying degrees. This is intensified by the fact that children had to leave their homes, leave behind their clothes, toys, pets, and are taken out of their familiar environment (kindergarten, school, friends, relatives, etc.). Their mothers can provide only limited support and care.

Child care workers have to step in, address these specific needs, and begin a process of reappraising what has happened. In a refuge there are children of all ages, from different social and cultural backgrounds. Working with these children also means coping with a high fluctuation and different levels of traumatization. Inadequate resources for either staff or infrastructure severely impede any progress that could be made to the advantage of the children during their stay in the refuge.

## 5.13 Guidelines / Basic principles for working with children



In working with abused children, their well - being and safety have the foremost priority; The refuge is there to stop the abuse and protect the child and to meet her/his basic needs. Working for children who have suffered abuse also means **counselling with adults**, especially with those who assume the responsibility for the well - being of the child. One of the best ways to support the child is by helping the mother, who has the role of non - abusive caretaker/trustworthy person in order to address the child's needs and to protect the child from further abuse for as long as needed. The mother will be involved in finding optimal solutions and bringing about the necessary changes for resolving the situation. **A guide - book for mothers is available at WSC in Armenian.**

Psychological work with children on current abuse issues can be addressed only after safety is assured. The approach and mode of work should result in the child understanding that the abuse wasn't his/her fault. In developing a dialogue with the child it's important:

- That meetings take place in a familiar environment
- To explain to the child why she/he is coming to counselling or therapy
- The non-abusive/trustworthy adult has to give the child permission to talk about everything
- To clearly establish that the violence/abuse is not their fault
- To use clear and simple sentences and direct questions and to avoid sentences starting with "Why?" which often lead to a self-defensive situation or transmit the message that she/he is responsible for what happened or has been a part of it.
- To talk with children about "good" and "bad" secrets. This is important for children who have been sexually abused and asked to keep it a secret.
- To give them the opportunity to talk about sexual problems using their own words/language – sometimes children take over the perpetrator's "ugly words"
- To use drawings, puppets – it is much easier for the child to explain the abusive event using non-verbal means
- To keep direct eye contact with the child without touching (this may be similar to an abusive situation, because (s)he is with an adult who expects him/her to do something)
- To talk about feelings, especially about fear, threats and ambivalence
- Not to create new secrets, new promises, to say thank you for trusting at the end of the meeting and to explain the next steps
- To understand and to take into consideration in intervention and assistance the dynamics of the abuser-victim relationship. The children's supportive system (non- abusive parent, non-abusive relatives, psychologists, therapists, social workers, and others) has to be aware of the fact that recurrence of any abusive behavior towards the child will traumatize him/her again and exacerbate the damage.

A situation that should be avoided is the normalization of abuse through attitudes, behavior or messages that promote clichés of thinking, minimizing abuse or wrong-doing, insufficiently prepared approaches – especially when intervening to stop persistent abuse of the child.



MANAGEMENT,  
PERSONNEL AND  
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION

## 6. MANAGEMENT, PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The protection and support which refuges provide for women and children subjected to domestic violence are founded upon clearly defined goals and principles. Their realization requires efficient management and professional organizational standards, the availability of specially trained and highly committed personnel, and comprehensive budget planning.

### 6.1 Management and organisation

Running a women's refuge calls for professional organization throughout the operation. Refuges have evolved a range of management models to facilitate standards of efficiency and professionalism in the implementation of their goals. In some refuges the staff as a whole work on a team basis, running the refuge jointly. Another model envisages team management combined with individual responsibility for specific areas, whereby the area leaders draw up and implement their planning independently but report to the team. Other refuges are run by a director.

These are not the only models. Each refuge should develop the management structure which is best suited to the prevailing circumstances. At all events the refuge workers should respond flexibly and with an open mind to each new challenge and be prepared to discard structures that are no longer appropriate.

### 6.2 Basic considerations

Below we offer some basic considerations on the topics of team work, authority and responsibility, personnel rights, and management culture.

#### Team work

A key consideration is that the principles of horizontal management, democratic structures and participation should be observed both in the management of the refuge and in the way the team members work together. As has been pointed out, the refuge workers act as role models for the women and children living in the refuge, and their goal is to demonstrate that women are capable of managing a facility independently and or working together on an equal footing.

An excessively hierarchical structure - as for instance when one person takes all the decisions alone - would be a poor example of empowerment (see chapter 3). Moreover, modern management research has shown that staff who co-operate in a team and are involved in the decision-making process work more efficiently and happily and produce better results. Management problems need to be detected in time and solved effectively. It may be, for example, that the work of a refuge is impeded by protracted decision-making processes, because everybody is invited to participate in all the decisions. Then again, broad consultation in every area can lead to conflicts, which are equally obstructive. It is extremely difficult to run an operation on a joint basis if the team is large. If the team is larger than 6 - 7 people, difficulties occur: decision-making becomes too time-consuming, and the quality of the work may suffer. A larger team works better if one person is in charge.

The guideline for establishing the organizational and management structures is the attainment of the highest possible standards of efficiency and professionalism.

### Authority and responsibility



While the preferable structure will always be the team that works together on an equal footing, there are generally formal structures of authority which need to be respected. If the refuge is run by an association, for instance, this will normally consist of a governing board and members. The governing board bears the ultimate responsibility for everything the association does and is liable in financial matters. The board can delegate management tasks to the refuge team as a whole or to one or more individual members. Refuge workers will usually be salaried employees.

### Positive management culture - consultancy in organizational questions

Like any other organization, women's refuges pass through various stages of development. Problems can occur at any of these stages. While the refuge's services are being planned and developed, it is advisable to make use of regular external consultancy, which might take the form of coaching (of individuals), team supervision, or organizational consultancy. Team supervision is designed to help develop team cooperation, while organizational consultancy is generally more comprehensive in scope and involves consultancy for the entire organization - that is, also for the association as a whole, the members of the board and so on. Inevitably, consultancy costs money, and the costs should be included in the budget planning. Supervision should serve not only as a forum for discussing counselling issues but in general as a means of enhancing the quality of the refuge's work. If sponsors ask why consultancy is necessary, a suitable answer would be that it is important to invest in good management, because management problems can cost a great deal of energy and thus also resources and money. A positive management culture, job satisfaction, motivated staff able to contribute their full potential and their creativity - these are extremely important factors in refuge work and in combating violence against women and children.

It is advisable to start making use of consulting services right from the early stages of refuge work who can provide ongoing and outstanding consultancy/training. The staff has to display not only professional credentials but also have intuitive skills that befit the tasks for the position. It is not necessary to have a social worker degree but it is mandatory to have proper training.

### 6.3 Planning and implementation of management tasks

Management skills are required in various areas of refuge work, where careful planning and the clear-cut assignment of duties and responsibilities are called for.

#### The clear-cut assignment of duties and responsibilities

This is an essential prerequisite for management efficiency. The assignment of duties and responsibilities should be laid out in writing in the refuge's operational planning. The following questions might be helpful in drawing up a management plan:

- Which management areas exist?
- Who is responsible for which area?
- What do the duties and responsibilities involve in each case?
- Who takes the decisions in each area, and on what basis? (alone, in consultation with the team, on the basis of information provided by the team ...)
- Job description

## Good planning



It is important to draw up meticulous plans for each area of the refuge's work, to make sure everybody in the team is aware of this planning, to monitor the effectiveness of the planning, to evaluate it and where necessary to fine-tune it. Precise planning is in itself a factor in quality assurance. Here is a checklist for planning the work in the various areas:

- ⊗ Draw up detailed plans (objectives, tasks, resources, schedules...)
- ⊗ Present the planning to the team
- ⊗ Take decisions
- ⊗ Implement decisions
- ⊗ Monitor and evaluate: what works, what needs fixing?
- ⊗ Present the results to the team
- ⊗ Fine-tune the planning

## 6.4 Management areas in a women's refuge

Depending on the management model chosen, the administration of and responsibility for the various areas of a refuge can be assigned to one manager or shared among several. There follows an outline of the various management areas in a refuge. Responsibility for the running of each area should be assigned to one of more refuge workers (but not too many, because this impedes efficient management). However the management areas are assigned, it is essential that every management area is covered.

### Management area: counselling and support (individual counselling, group work)

This area includes the planning and running of the support services which a refuge provides for women and children. Many refuges can be reached round the clock, operate a helpline and can admit women at any time of the day or night. One focus of work in this area is organizing these round-the-clock services. There are several models for this. They include:

- ⊗ A staff member who stays in the refuge during the day and is available on her mobile phone
- ⊗ Staff person during the night who is also available on her mobile phone
- ⊗ A 24 - hour (local or national) helpline providing crisis support and, where needed, establishing contact with a refuge

Social workers do the admission procedures for new women and children coming to the shelter. At least one shelter staff must be at reach at all hours of the day.

### Management area: working with children

The members of the refuge staff who care for the children will generally assume responsibility for this area. Here too, the services provided for children need to undergo ongoing scrutiny in terms of planning, implementation and adjustment to changing conditions i.e. children age group and needs.

## Management area: democratic structures and community life in the refuge

In this area the objective is to ensure that community life in the refuge is as far as possible a positive experience for the women and children, that they feel at ease, and that they can live without anxiety and stress. The essence of this task is the fostering of the refuge's "culture" as one aspect of its overall management culture (see chapter 8). That means dealing with conflicts and applying the principles of conflict management. Responsibility for this area should be assigned to one or possibly two staff members who should ideally be trained in working with groups and in conflict management.

### Management area: internal communications, team meetings, association

Internal communications is an aspect that should not be neglected. Information needs to be passed on promptly and effectively. Other aspects of work in this area are: publicizing the guidelines for life in the refuge and other necessary information; and planning and holding regular team meetings, association meetings and meetings between the staff and the governing board. Case studies and evaluations of the beneficiaries must be done with entire staff on a weekly basis.

A key function of women's refuges is to provide protection and safety for its residents (see chapter 8). All team members should be responsible for this and be involved in the planning and implementation of safety procedures.

### Management area: personnel

This is one of the classical management areas and should logically be assigned to the person / the body responsible for the refuge. It covers a wide range of responsibilities:

- ⊗ Finding new personnel: writing job profiles, interviewing, selecting
- ⊗ Employing and training new personnel
- ⊗ Closing off the employment of departing personnel
- ⊗ Formulating work contracts
- ⊗ Overseeing the flow of information to the staff in anything new
- ⊗ Informing staff of their rights
- ⊗ Assisting staff members in their current job and their career planning (What work am I doing now? How do I feel about it? In what ways should my job grow?)
- ⊗ Providing support when problems occur, preventing burn-out
- ⊗ Support in the event of conflicts between staff members
- ⊗ Organizing supervision
- ⊗ Handling holiday leave, other leave, replacements for sick leave
- ⊗ Fostering a positive management culture, organizing staff outings, birthday parties, celebrations for positive achievements and communal reflection on failures or unsolved problems etc.

Note: Personnel must be told that they are obliged to maintain confidentiality, and they should agree to do so in writing when they sign their work contracts.

## Management area: internal administration

Administration is one of the more extensive management areas. Refuges tend to have a high turn-over rate, as some women and their children move out and new arrivals take their places. The furniture and equipment are constantly in use and frequently need repairing. It is a daunting undertaking to keep the refuge in shape to the extent that its residents can live there in comfort. Repair men should come to the shelter when women are not present there (they can be brought at the Center or use the time when they are out for other tasks).

The cleaning and cooking in a shelter up to 5 bedrooms should be done by the women survivors. This keeps them busy, helps them to build their self-esteem, acquire household administration skills and develop communication skills. Also, women should not feel that they are in a five star hotel but that they have responsibilities. This will help them in their transition to their living alone and shared lodging arrangements. Also mothers are in control over the hygiene, cleanliness and diet of their children which in itself is empowering.

## Management area: co - ordination of volunteers and trainees

Many women's support organizations also include volunteers on their staff. There are two reasons for this: because the organization is under-budgeted, but also because it is important and expedient to integrate volunteers in certain areas of work. The volunteers are in turn multipliers whose acquired knowledge and experience in the field of combating violence against women and children will be of benefit elsewhere. Many refuges also take on trainees who work there for several weeks or months as part of their training program (e.g. social studies). Selecting, instructing and supervising trainees also requires planning. In Armenia, confidentiality is hard to maintain, therefore, involving volunteers at the shelter is not recommended. Given that in Armenia, especially in the regions where social and family ties are very strong, volunteers can pose challenges to confidentiality principle.

## Management area: statistics, data compilation, evaluation and quality control

The on - going compilation of work - related data and the drawing up of statistics and reports make up another important area of work. Obviously, this should be handled by members of the staff who have the necessary specialized qualifications. Continuous evaluation and quality control are further aspects of work in the refuge.

## 6.5 Staff and internal management

### 6.6 Fundamentals of personnel management in a women's refuge

Years of experience gained by women's refuges in Europe have shown that a woman who has been subjected to violence by a male person can more easily open up and trust if she can talk to another woman. It is therefore one of the principles of work in women's refuges that they are staffed by gender - sensitive female personnel. There is also a socio - political reason behind employing gender - sepcific female personnel: since violence against women is gender - specific, the approach to ending this violence also needs to be gender - specific. It was not society as a whole that raised the issue of male violence against women; rather, it was women themselves who initiated the movement to halt this violence. Women have been subjected to severe discrimination, which has disadvantaged them. Violence is one of the most severe forms of discrimination. By initiating and implementing projects like women's refuges and helplines, women have brought the issue to the attention of society. This model of politics "from the bottom up" is typical of women's organizations and of other social movements that address the needs of specific groups.

Sufficient financial resources are a prerequisite for opening a refuge, but having adequately trained and motivated staff is an equally important factor. Women working in a refuge need a clear motivation. It is important that they are fully committed to the goals and principles of refuge work (see chapter 3). The aim of training is to gain specific expertise on the issue of violence which will enable the staff to offer effective support to other women. It is vital to recognize and adequately remunerate their work. Refuge staff should be paid according to their qualification and the standard salaries for these qualifications (i.e. in accordance with collective salary agreements). When setting up a refuge, the association must decide which services to provide, then which professional skills will be required by these services, and finally which other supporting skills will be needed.

Refuges usually need a wide range of qualifications in order to carry out their complex work. Skills and qualifications in the following areas are called for: crisis intervention, individual and group counselling, group work, conflict resolution and mediation, training in social work, therapeutic skills in working with traumatized victims, psychological and pedagogic qualifications, legal training, leadership and management, fundraising and financial management, public relations, cultural mediators, language skills etc. As refuges usually cannot hire professionals from all of these fields, it is necessary that refuge workers have multiple qualifications and skills and that they receive adequate training.

Once the staff have been trained and the service is up and running, further on-going training becomes very important to increase the aggregate experience and gain a more specialized expertise which will allow the refuge to increase the depth of the services provided and to tackle new problems (like opening other refuges, offering different services ...). Training, together with regular supervision sessions, will help the staff to maintain and develop their professional skills and also to foster an awareness of their experience on both an emotional and a cognitive level.

## 6.7 Staffing levels

The size of the refuge, the number and type of services and the organizational structure in place (separate refuge, combination refuge / crisis center) should be taken into account when determining the number of staff. Refuges with a separate counselling center usually have two teams, one managing the services in the refuge and the other team managing the helpline and the counselling services. There are several essential services that should be provided for the women and their children (see chapter 5).

### Example - staff needed in a refuge

The following calculation is a guideline for the staff resources needed in a medium - sized refuge - 5 - 6 women and their children, providing the following services. However, social workers, psychologists and lawyers also assist women that come in at the crisis center whether they are in no need of shelter or older beneficiaries that might need services.

4 full time staff at the center : Coordinator, Assistant, data collector and Hot line during the day  
3 social workers - full time  
1 psychologist for adults  
1 psychologist for children - part-time  
2 full time staff during the day - 1 adults, 1 for children  
1 responsible person for shelter items and shopping  
3 night staff - to use on rotation basis or 1 permanent  
2 lawyers  
1 psychologist supervisor P/T

The above-mentioned list can be smaller or larger depending on the size of the shelter. The above calculation method does not include those personnel resources needed for specialized responsibilities: an accountant, PR experts and so on. In calculating staffing levels, it is important to remember that staff members will take holiday or sick leave and will attend further training. So a refuge's staff budget must also include substitutes for the regular staff.

## 6.8 Workload and remuneration – risk factors



As pointed out above, it is important that the number of staff matches the workload and that the level of remuneration likewise matches the professional skills required. It is a caring profession that involves working with people who are highly traumatized, so it warrants the same social status as equivalent professions in other fields. It is vital that the staff workload is closely monitored (as a group and individually) and that various steps are taken to reduce it, such as increasing the number of staff or closing down some of the services if the funds are not sufficient to hire more personnel. The human and professional resources must be safeguarded to ensure that they are available for the services provided to women.

This means that each group and each refuge worker individually is responsible for a certain area, should have the time to plan their work, time to carry it out, time to evaluate the work done, and last but not least time to fine-tune the way a project / intervention is carried out.

The risks involved if the workload is too great (not enough staff) or the salaries are inadequate (professional expertise not recognized) are:

### Staff burn - out:

The staff are no longer able to provide professional help (poor standards of care, conflicts with colleagues, feelings of impotence / disproportionate power, avoiding responsibilities, lack of personal freedom or even the complete loss of structure of the service);

### High fluctuation in staff:

This will prevent the organization as a whole from gaining experience and raising the level of expertise. Also, changing staff often obstructs the relationship of trust that is created between the survivor and the service provider.

## 6.9 Work schedules

When drawing up work schedules / duty rosters for the refuge, the group or the coordinator (depending on the organizational model chosen) should bear the following general guidelines in mind:

- First, one person should be responsible for the duty rosters and management. That person should draw up a schedule that meets the needs of service provision. The roster needs to be distributed and approved by all the staff, and there have to be rules for
- Switching duties (a minimum number of days in advance followed by approval by the duty manager).
- Some of the services are provided 24 hours a day 7 days a week, while other services (like counselling, children's activities, therapy and so on) are usually available only during office hours.
- Shifts can be decided on a monthly basis but with the possibility of making changes on a fortnightly basis. When planning the monthly roster, take into account days off for those working on the night shift, and staff for special forthcoming events.

Depending on the size of the refuge and the possible emergencies that can occur, it is preferable that - apart from at night - there are always two refuge workers present in the refuge.

## 6.10 Staff training

The objective of staff training is to create competence areas in the field of intervention and the prevention of violence against women and children, and familiarity with the practical aspects of work in the refuge. The approach followed is the feminist approach based on empowerment (see chapter 3.3). The trainers need to be qualified trainers with several years of experience. The training includes an initial phase, which should be relatively intensive, consisting of a course of at least 80 hours (10 seminar days or two weeks' work), followed by ongoing training and supervision sessions with other staff members.

The contents of the training program can be divided into:

- a basic module** including scientific and theoretical aspects of gender violence (definition, prevalence of the problem, forms of violence against women, cycle of violence, short and long - term impact of violence, trauma and recovery, perpetrator strategies); guidelines for intervention and empowerment (to provide protection and safety, to name the violence experienced, to re - assign responsibilities stressing social responsibilities, to take the victim's side, to believe her, to do more than just respecting her choices, jointly to draw up a plan for her safety, to consider the complexity of the intervention...); networking with other agencies on a local, national and international level
- one or more **specific modules** in accordance with the refuge's organization, the different services provided in the refuge (admission, helpline, counselling, prevention, public relations, etc.) and the target groups (women, children, adolescents, elderly women, disabled women, migrant women, etc.)

It can be very useful if some or all of the workers spend a period of on-the-job-training in a refuge that is already up and running. When new refuge workers are taken on, they should also receive this initial training, in the form of one to one training sessions with an experienced refuge worker and working side by side with a number of experienced refuge workers.

## 6.11 Further training of staff

The initial training needs to be followed up by ongoing training. In order to maintain the quality of the services provided, the refuge needs to run regular further training sessions on more specific topics such as sexual abuse and violence against children, trafficking in women, legal amendments, support for women and children with disabilities, post-traumatic stress syndrome, etc.

Another way to enhance the staff's skills is for them to attend conferences, seminars and other events on gender violence, combined with reading specific material on the issue. Every member of staff should be free to devote at least two weeks a year to further training.

Finally, exchanging training with other refuges on a local, national or international level is a valuable way to improve services and prevention measures. Another aspect of the training consists of enhancing awareness of gender violence.

## 6.12 Supervision

Supervision is a means of reviewing and improving one's own work. Supervisors are specially trained experts who provide counselling on a team, group or individual basis. In many countries supervisors are affiliated to associations which have formulated standards for supervisor training programs and which publish lists of qualified supervisors. It is advisable to look for a supervisor who is sensitive to gender issues and has experience in the field of violence against women and children.

A professional distance is a necessary element in effective supervision for a team or a whole organization. One quality criterion is therefore that it is carried out by an external supervisor.

Supervision has to take place within a defined setting, which relates to both the attitude and the rules established in order to carry out the task in the best possible circumstances.

Supervision should be compulsory for all the staff and volunteers: no worker is professionally reliable if she isn't ready to work on herself.

Every refuge should provide at least team supervision. It makes sense for individual supervision to be available as a means of reviewing counselling work. This is especially important in the case of new staff members.

The frequency of the supervision sessions depends on the number of staff and on the overall experience of the group. It varies from monthly sessions to weekly sessions if the service has just been established.









## Why supervision is so important in a refuge

Supervision is a major and indispensable part of the caring staff - survivor relationship. The Secondary Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome makes supervision necessary, because it arises from caring for or listening to people who have undergone a trauma. Refuge workers are continuously exposed to traumatic stories told by the women. Workers may also witness a woman by her partner in court or if he breaks into the refuge or crisis center.



If a woman's personal situation makes one of the staff workers feel uneasy by causing strong emotions (such as anger, a sense of impotence or disproportionate power, pity, love, etc.) or by bringing back the memory of past personal experiences or else by creating a standstill in the caring relationship, supervision can help to find new ways of going on with the work with the woman. This is achieved by helping the staff member to work through her own emotions and become aware of her own experiences on both a cognitive and an emotional level.

The relationship with either a woman or a child will sometimes bring up emotions which can make it difficult to continue working by creating confusion, collusion or entanglement.

Situations that can bring about the need for supervision are:

-  the anger created by somebody breaking the rule of secrecy;
-  mourning the loss of a woman when she leaves the refuge;
-  the feeling of powerlessness if a woman decides to go back to her violent partner;
-  the problems and difficulties encountered in everyday relationships with women;
-  conflicts among colleagues;
-  the enforcement of the refuge rules and the conduct to follow in the event of a woman breaking the rules;
-  the management of staff meetings;
-  the respect and consideration for the different roles among the refuge staff

The results achieved by the supervision are generally:

-  resolution of the emotional blockages;
-  reassurance and support in going on working with women who have been severely traumatized.

Of course, experienced refuge staff are also qualified to give advice to new staff members and to help them review their work. This form of internal support is termed "intervision" and is not the same thing as supervision.

Supervision may also usefully be applied to organizational development, in which case it will serve as a forum for discussing the facility's structures and functions and for promoting its development and goals (see the section on Management).

### 6.13 Volunteers or university interns

Whether or not a refuge takes on volunteers must be an individual decision. The principles advocated in this Manual state that staff in refuges should be paid and refuges should not be forced to rely on volunteers because of lack of financial means. The basic services should be covered by paid staff.

When working with volunteers, the following requirements should be met:

- ♀ The work of volunteers should be coordinated by one refuge worker who is responsible for all matters relating to the volunteers.
- ♀ Volunteers should be women with an awareness of gender-based discrimination and strong motivation to devote some of their time to working with women and children who have been subjected to violence.
- ♀ When a woman applies for a post as a refuge volunteer, she should be interviewed about her expectations and ideas.
- ♀ Only after this interview should both parties decide whether the woman is suited to the work; if so, then an agreement should be signed detailing the duration of the voluntary work and the responsibilities involved.
- ♀ Volunteers must accept the rules of the refuge (secrecy, code of conduct, etc). Volunteers must receive adequate training and supervision.
- ♀ Volunteers need to receive maximum respect for their work. Minor acts of carelessness towards a colleague can happen (keeping someone waiting, forgetting to pass on important information etc.). This kind of lapse can have more serious consequences if it happens with volunteers. It might give them the feeling that their work is not important.



SAFETY  
AND SECURITY  
MEASURES



## 7. SAFETY AND SECURITY MEASURES

Women and children seeking shelter from physical abuse need a safe place where they are protected from the violent behavior of the partner or father or other relatives. In some cases the perpetrators persist in their aggressive and threatening behavior towards women and children even when the latter are living in a refuge. Often they want the woman to return home, and they employ a variety of strategies to secure this goal: imploring, begging, bringing flowers and promising that they will never again be violent. The failure of these strategies to produce the desired effect may result in sudden outbursts of violence. Some violent men are extremely dangerous, refuse to come to terms with the separation, and resort to massive, life-threatening violence.








It is not only the women and children living in a refuge who are in danger: the refuge workers and other people can also be at risk. Many refuges throughout Europe have had to contend with violent attacks, although the toll is fortunately not always as severe. Nevertheless, a women's refuge must always be braced to deal with threats and attacks.

Security, then, is a key issue, objective and agenda in women's refuges. It is short-sighted of state authorities to try to save money in this field, because in extreme situations security precautions and systems can save lives. The police are responsible for safeguarding the safety and security of the public as a whole and thus also of refuges, so it is important to involve them in the drafting of security strategies and the formulation of a security plan. Cameras, direct emergency line with the police stations for immediate response are mandatory.





**There follows a checklist of important points relating to security:**

### 7.1 Technical security precautions

Technical security precautions are extremely important in a women's refuge. The necessary standards require the following precautionary measures:

-  Safe **entrances** which cannot be forced open. Entrances should always be kept locked, and access to the building should be monitored. Ideally there should be a **technical monitoring system** (cameras, automatic opening and locking devices for doors).
-  If the building has several entrances, this is a safety hazard, so a refuge should have only **one main entrance**. Any other doors to the outside should be kept locked and barred so that they cannot be forced open.
-  A **yard or garden** are an asset for the women and children but pose a security risk. The yard or garden should likewise be secured against forced entry, and it should not be possible for anyone to look inside, throw objects or shoot. This means a high wall, a barrier, a protective fence or an alarm system.
-  The **yard or garden gate** should also be secure, and the refuge workers should make a habit of locking it, especially at night.
-  **Ground - floor windows** are a security risk, and ground - floor rooms facing onto the street should not be used as living or working areas.
-  Windows - at least those that are located on the ground floor or can be reached from the outside - should have **gratings**.
-  Every women's refuge should be equipped with an alarm system by which the police can be called in the event of an emergency.

**Summary of the most important security features:**

-  Strong, secure doors
-  Doors permanently locked, monitored access area
-  Gratings on windows
-  Direct emergency line to the police.



### 7.2 Confidential addresses, anonymity

The addresses of many refuges are kept confidential in order to safeguard the security of the women and children living there. Only the Hot Line number is publicized. Women seeking help are given the address only when they actually go to the refuge. In some cases the women and children are picked up at a public place by prior arrangement and taken to the refuge. But even if the address remains confidential, it can still be found out, especially if the refuge has existed for some time. Hence the need for additional security precautions.

In small towns it is often impossible to keep the location of a refuge secret. In such cases it is advisable to switch to an offensive strategy: everybody is told where the refuge is, the address is publicized, and the police and local authorities are involved in the security planning.






Especially in rural areas it can be very important to involve the neighborhood in order to ensure that a threat is detected in time and help can be organized promptly. The relevant institutions and the people living in the vicinity should be assigned active roles in the security planning (e.g. frequent police patrols, neighbors are informed and asked to notify the refuge or the police if they notice anything suspicious).

Each refuge should decide for itself on the basis of its location and the resources available which strategies to adopt and then draw up its own security plan below. Where safety is concerned, it is essential to stick to the rules and to make sure that everybody always complies with the safety procedures.

### 7.3 Police protection - police security plan

Effective co - operation with the police on security issues is indispensable. Before the refuge opens, a security plan needs to be drawn up, and this should be subject to constant revision.

**The necessary security precautions and features include the following:**

-  The refuge should have a technical security system by which the police can be called directly in the case of a serious threat (button - activated alarm line to the police station as used in banks)
-  The police should be in possession of a ground plan of the refuge and know where the entrances are, what facilities are located where etc.
-  There should be a contingency plan for emergencies
-  There should be regular meetings with the police to discuss security issues
-  Like all security plans, this one should be evaluated and updated at regular intervals (annually).

## 7.4 Individual security plans and assessment of threats

Some women and children are at particularly high risk because the perpetrator concerned has been assessed as very dangerous. Perpetrators may threaten and endanger not only their own partners but also other people in the refuge, as the examples quoted above show.

It is therefore very important that the dangerousness of the threat posed by the perpetrator should be assessed on an individual basis with each woman in the refuge and that a security plan be drawn up for:

- the duration of her stay in the refuge
- the event that she goes back to living with her partner
- the event that she decides to separate from her partner and live by herself.

Everybody in the refuge should be aware of perpetrators who have been assessed as particularly dangerous, and special security precautions will have to be enforced at certain times. One extremely important measure is to make it clear to the perpetrator that definite limits apply – that, for example, it will not be tolerated if he waits in front of or close to the refuge in the hope of meeting his partner and/or children and talking to them. Conversations in front of the refuge can be extremely dangerous and are a frequent occasion for violence. A woman staying in a Viennese refuge, for instance, went to the front door to talk to her partner and try to “calm him down”, with the result that she was severely injured. The man wanted her to return home and, when she refused, pulled out a knife and stabbed her. By the same token, any meetings outside the refuge can put the woman at high risk.

As explained in chapter 2, there is a particularly high risk of severe, possibly life - threatening violence during the process of separation and divorce, and special attention must be paid to security considerations during these times. Since trials in Armenia can last for one year or more, the victim can reenter the shelter if the situation becomes dangerous during the court sessions.

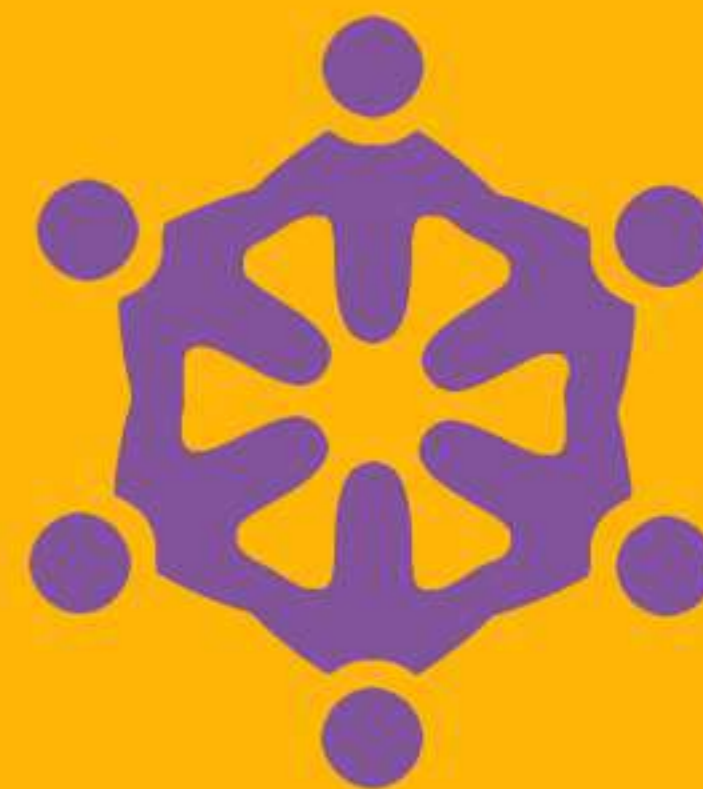
Many refuges use a checklist in assessing the dangerousness of a perpetrator and another checklist to draw up individual security plans with the women in the refuge (Checklist available at WSC in Armenian).



## 7.5 Fire prevention and other safety precautions

It goes without saying that refuges must comply with other safety standards as well. For example, they must take the necessary fire prevention precautions.

The same obviously applies to other safety measures like child - proof wall plugs and safety standards relating to toys, household appliances etc.



COMMUNITY  
LIFE IN THE REFUGE

## 8. COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE REFUGE

Refuges provide services that should meet the highest possible standards of efficiency and professionalism and therefore need a certain degree of institutionalization. Institutional structures have their role to play, but they harbor the danger that the institution's rules may assume greater importance than the people on whose behalf the institution was established. Structural principles can loom so large that they rob the individuals' freedom and take control of their lives. A refuge must therefore be careful to maintain a judicious balance between the interests of the individual, the community and the institution.

Generally speaking, life in a refuge should be planned in such a way as to safeguard the following:

- The greatest possible degree of individual freedom – respect for privacy and human rights
- No more requirements and rules than are necessary in the given situation
- Participation, co-determination and consultation
- A spirit of solidarity and community
- Scope for feedback and complaints

The hallmarks of life within the refuge community are: autonomy, solidarity, and respect for diversity and human rights. These considerations leave their mark on both the refuge's internal organization and its discernible character, making up its unmistakable corporate identity.



### 8.1 Refuge guidelines - rights and responsibilities

Women and children who seek shelter in a refuge are invariably in distress. The first thing they need is to feel safe and get their bearings. It is therefore very important to explain to new arrivals about the structures and principles of life in the refuge.

Refuge Guidelines should exist in written form and be available in Armenian and Russian. The Refuge Guidelines should list the principles of the refuge, the rights of the women and children living in the refuge, the services provided to them and the rules and responsibilities. Refuge guidelines should not be made up exclusively of prohibitions and obligations.

Rules serve as the foundation for living together and thus need to be observed. At the same time, though, it is far easier to comply with rules if one understands why they exist and they are important. It is therefore necessary to explain the purpose of the rules. The residents should perceive the rules as an aid to peaceful co-existence not as coercion, even less as arbitrary regimentation.

In practice people tend to forget about rules, so it is important to keep repeating them - before something happens rather than after the event. Women and children might find it difficult in the beginning to bear everything in mind; they need time to find out and understand how the refuge works.

Complying with security rules can be a matter of life or death, so refuge residents should constantly be reminded of their importance.

### Modifying the rules

The rules governing refuge life should be binding, but they should not be immutable, so it is important to keep reviewing them in the light of their appropriateness. The residents should be involved in the formulation of the rules and their approval – for instance, at a refuge assembly. However, the refuge staff should establish those rules that absolutely have to be observed (like security regulations).

It should be clear and understandable to the residents which rules can be changed and which cannot. The principles by which a refuge is run are part and parcel of the facility's corporate identity and cannot be modified at will. This too needs to be explained carefully.

### Right to freedom of choice

Special mention should be made of the right to self-determination in terms of the resident's own life. In practice this means that the resident has the right to leave the refuge at any time or to return to her violent partner if she wishes. However, she can always turn to the refuge again for shelter and support. In many cases women leave the refuge strengthened by the resources which they will need in finding a way out of their violent relationship.



### 8.2 Fair Procedures - hearing

One of the most difficult decisions that have to be taken in a refuge is whether or not a woman who has broken the rules and agreements should be prematurely dismissed from the refuge. Many women have nowhere else to live, which makes it very difficult for the refuge staff to expel her - and then there are her children, who also have to suffer the consequences. But if no decision is taken, other women and children might suffer.

One fundamental consideration should be which behavior or which offences are so serious that they warrant dismissal. Because the consequences can be extremely far-reaching, this form of sanction should be used very sparingly, and there should be other consequences for breaking rules. We have also to bear in mind that rules are guidelines for communal living, and it would be unrealistic to demand that they should never be broken.

Often refuge guidelines define norms but do not prescribe procedures and sanctions in the event of non-compliance. It is therefore important to establish formal procedures to deal with infringements in a constructive manner. Any such procedures must include and respect the rights of the women concerned.

A fair hearing which the residents can understand helps to build up and maintain trust in the refuge. Intelligible procedures avoid decisions taken by the staff appearing arbitrary. This is one way of offsetting the imbalance of power between refuge staff and residents. A system of 3 warnings before expulsion can be enforced, except for gross security violations where immediate expulsion can occur.

## Conflict resolution team

Living conditions in a refuge can often be cramped, and this easily leads to conflicts which must be defused as quickly as possible. Several of the staff members should therefore have received training in mediation and conflict resolution, so that they can form a conflict resolution team. It is also advisable to pass on conflict resolution skills to the residents.

## 8.3 Obstacles to participation

Women and children living in a refuge might be reluctant to participate, especially at the beginning of their stay. They need time. However, the staff should always provide for their involvement in the planning and practical running of the refuge. It is important to invest special energy in the residents' involvement. The resultant processes of argumentation, discussion, decision-making, dealing with conflicting interests and other conflicts are, as has been stated, a valuable learning process for everybody concerned.

It might save time if the refuge staff took all the decisions on their own, but the residents would soon get the feeling that they are being "administered" instead of being empowered actively to determine their own lives and that of the refuge community. A further drawback of top-down decision-making is that people who are treated like children tend to behave accordingly by putting up resistance or becoming passive but not acting like the independent-minded adults they are.

## 8.4 Further aspects of communal life in the refuge

Over and above their rights and responsibilities, there are further factors molding the communal lives of the women and children in a refuge. Non-violence and an equitable allocation of power are important goals, although they are not always easy to realize. The women have an active role to play in life in the refuge, as reflected in the available scope for providing feedback, participating in external evaluation and becoming involved in the process of social change. Diversity and solidarity afford opportunities which need to be used as widely as possible.

## Preventing violence





Every refuge upholds the important principle that no violence is tolerated. When a number of people live in cramped conditions under a single roof, as they often do in a refuge, there are bound to be conflicts and emotional outbursts. Psychological and physical violence can occur even in a refuge - between the children and young people, between the women or towards children.

One important pillar of community life in the refuge is a constructive approach to dealing with violence. It is not enough to proclaim the rule that violence is not allowed. Non-violent co-existence requires everybody to make an active contribution, detecting and preventing potentially violent conflict and practicing a constructive manner of handling conflicts (see above). One aspect of this is the need for women and children to learn to stand up for themselves in the face of violence.

Children and young people also need to learn that a refuge is a place where violence is not tolerated. It is therefore necessary to work with mothers on non-violent education.

## Balance of power

Even in a refuge, despite the best intentions of establishing equality, power is not distributed equally. The refuge workers are in a stronger position than the residents, while the children are in a weaker position than the adults. Women who speak the language of the country concerned are at an advantage over those who don't, and so on. It is impossible to eliminate these imbalances in a refuge, so it is all the more important to deal with them effectively. The goals should be:

-  To create an awareness of power imbalances and to address them
-  To offset them where possible (e.g. through involvement and upholding the rights of the residents)
-  To treat difference and diversity as strengths rather than drawbacks (e.g. pointing out that a woman speaks such-and-such a language - and perhaps others too - rather than that she doesn't speak the local language)
-  To work constantly on the goal of preventing the abuse of power.

As has been outlined above, participation and the practice of democratic structures are important approaches to reducing the unequal distribution and abuse of power and preventing violence.

## Suggestions and complaints

One feature of the democratic and professional organization of a refuge is that women who have availed themselves of the services provided by a refuge are asked for their feedback. The purpose is to carry out an internal evaluation and thus to improve standards. The responses should include both positive and negative aspects of life in the refuge.

There are various methods of collecting feedback. One is by means of a questionnaire to be filled out when a woman leaves the refuge. Another option is a "letter box" for suggestions and complaints. Feedback should be anonymous: residents have to rely on the help of the staff, so that voicing criticism personally could be difficult.

There should also be a body or a person to which a resident can address complaints if she feels her rights have been infringed.

However the refuge organizes this, the idea is that every resident should be informed where she can register complaints. Refuge workers are extremely committed and do their best. Still, they can make mistakes and overlook someone's problems when things get hectic. The right to lodge complaints should be taken seriously as a fundamental civic right in democratic societies.

## 8.5 Participation in external evaluations

Regular external evaluations are another important means of monitoring and improving the quality of service in refuges. Women and children availing themselves of these services should always be invited to take part in such evaluations.

### Involvement in social change

The residents should not just be involved in internal processes within the refuge and the molding of the structures of communal living but should also be given the opportunity to participate in outside activities, public relations and awareness raising work. Of course nobody should be compelled to participate, and safeguarding women's security and anonymity must take precedence. On the other hand, women need to be treated as socially aware and active individuals and be invited to contribute to various activities in line with their interests and needs.

Examples:

- Refuge residents are involved in the preparations for International Women's Day on March 8, October 1 –remembrance day of Armenian DV victims, and the campaign "16 Days Against Violence" from November 25 to December 10
- Residents accompany refuge workers to meetings with politicians

### Solidarity

Another major objective of life in a refuge is to promote solidarity. Planning joint activities, offering mutual support, carrying out activities in the refuge or talking to each other about what one has been through are just some of the various ways of strengthening the feeling of solidarity. For example one woman who worked as a hairdresser decided to do hairstyling for women at the shelter. Or if one beneficiary had to go out for work or police deposition the other women looked after the children. Women who have spent some time in the refuge act as role models for new arrivals; they may serve as "mentors", helping the women who have not yet got their bearings. Some women who have stayed in a refuge return as volunteers or staff members. These are extremely important factors in the empowerment process.



PUBLIC  
RELATIONS AND  
AWARENESS-RAISING

## 9. PUBLIC RELATIONS AND AWARENESS - RAISING

It is the aim of public relations and awareness-raising to create and influence the process of public discourse, communication and the perception of male violence against women and of women's refuges. This is also a government responsibility. PR is a must! Who is supposed to care about women's refuges if not women activists and refuge workers themselves? Male violence against women is still a taboo in many countries. Public interest seems low. Single contacts and isolated supporters cannot ensure the continuation of refuge work. Refuge workers need supporting networks for successful PR.

### 9.1 Providing information about women's refuges

When founding a women's refuge, it is important to bear in mind that even a women's refuge needs some kind of 'advertising'. There are several reasons for providing information about the work of a women's refuge. These are:

- To make the existence of a women's refuge publicly known
- To underline the importance and the benefit of such an organization
- To create a positive image within the local environment
- To build confidence within the political and social environment
- To persuade important players / the public to back the refuge's concerns and goals
- To create supporters' networks for reasons of political lobbying and financial support

When developing a comprehensive information policy and formulating the message, there are five points that absolutely must be taken into consideration. The first is decisive in developing a corporate identity:

Who are we?

Two questions deal more generally with the final output:

- Who are the target groups?
- What methods have the highest multiplication factor in relation to our means? And the last two questions relate more directly to content:
- How do we define the services we offer? or What is a/our refuge, and what it is NOT?
- What are the implications of giving information about our refuge in terms of safety and confidentiality?

Messages should be disseminated in the media. Examples of PR instruments:

- Stickers for buses, taxis, public transport
- Posters for schools, youth hostels, hospitals, doctors, lawyers, social services, counselling centers, churches
- Information material, leaflets, flyers, folders
- Website
- Regular newsletter
- Press releases and newspaper articles
- Participation in panels, expert meetings, conferences or political lectures
- Organization of events like fund - raising parties, public exhibitions, marches
- Acceptance of invitations by political parties, local associations, social organizations etc.
- Radio, television and newspaper interviews
- Collaboration with politicians and other decision - makers
- Public speak - out (letting victims and relatives of victims talk publicly)

### 9.2 Obstacles - what information not to give

The conclusions below are drawn solely from incidents that have actually occurred.

Once a flyer or even an official letter leaves our hands, we can no longer decide where it will end up. Even if it is only circulated in the refuge itself, info materials have a life of their own, as it were. Taking this into account, if the secret address is an important feature of the service, it is crucial not to use either the address or pictures of the house anywhere in any kind of information material, including the letterhead of the refuge. The anonymity of the refuge staff might be another safety issue to consider; so before automatically listing staff members with photographs in the public yearly report, consult each other. It is unrealistic to assume that the people you address for funding and the people from whom you want to hide your refuge do not have anybody in common. However tempting it might be to organize a fund-raising event at the refuge, consider another location. Donors have to come to understand that by maintaining a policy of strict confidentiality, you are actually doing your job, and the price of their support cannot be an event which jeopardizes the existence of the service.

### National co - operation

A common form of co - operation is multi - sectoral. It can occur between different types of NGOs as well as between NGOs and municipal or government bodies. In both cases, the model that seems to be most often used is that the refuges contribute the expertise as well as qualitative and quantitative data relating to the phenomenon, whereas the partner organization has a strong mainstreaming effect, thereby making target groups which are not as easily accessible to the refuge more open and understanding to the issues at hand. One example of co - operation between different NGOs is Amnesty International's global violence against women campaign, for which they chose regional and national strategic partners in the form of women's NGOs active in the field of violence against women. As for NGO - government Organization cooperation, the most successful examples so far have been training seminars and other activities organized together with the police and prosecutor's office.

### 9.3 Training courses

Training material, supporting materials and activities are available at the Women's Support Center for both beneficiaries and staff.

#### Internal training courses

As one cannot get a standardized degree that qualifies for working in a refuge, most refuges offer training to their new recruits, be they volunteers or staff members. So far this seems to be the best way to ensure a continuity of the service. Such training courses can have a role in integrating new people into the team, so it is advisable to include experienced staff members or volunteers in the training program, either as resource persons or even as trainers.

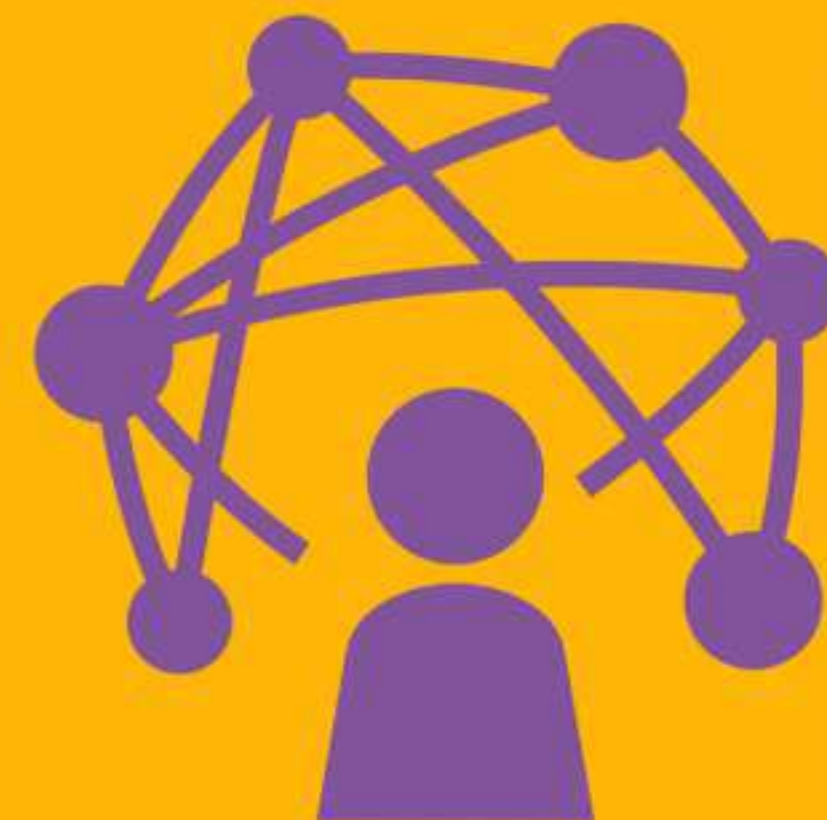


#### Training courses for partner organizations

Refuges, whether they operate their own 24-hour hotline or not, rely heavily on services that refer clients to them, or which work with the women and children who stay in the refuge. Whether offered by the refuge or jointly organized by several services, agencies and institutions, training courses provided to staff in other agencies are very useful. The content might vary widely depending on the given circumstances: in some countries awareness of domestic violence is higher than in others. Therefore some training courses might go into more detail about how and what the refuge does for its clients, whereas others might stress the basics of domestic violence.

##### Some recommendations for such training courses:

- Whenever possible, these training courses should take place outside the usual working space of participants.
- The training course should involve a small group (maximum 15 participants), which enables the trainers to facilitate most of the learning process through interactive exercises rather than frontal presentations.
- The training team should include both refuge trainer and a trainer from the sector whose members are being trained; in mixed-gender groups it is important that the training team is also of mixed gender.



# NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

## 10. NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

Women's refuge work is embedded in a network of institutions and services which can be supportive for the abused woman's issues if the representatives of these institutions are well informed about the special dynamics of domestic violence. Refuge workers have to discuss with their clients which procedures may be necessary and which institutions have to be contacted or could offer some kind of support. They accompany their clients to some of these institutions if they wish – to the police or the court, for example. As a result, women's refuges cooperate closely and continuously with other agencies. It is therefore advisable to develop strategies of cooperation and networking in good time, so that they are in place if needed.

### 10.1 The role of women's refuges in networking and cooperation

**Networking and co - operation among women's refuges takes place on two levels:**

- On the one hand, it is very important to develop networks with other women's refuges and women's support services active in the field of prevention of domestic violence. Such support services include women's counselling centers or women's helplines in the region and nationwide. A network of support services for abused women and their children serves as a source of support and exchange internally as well as a common voice against violence against women externally. This highly issue - specific coalition can be broadened by involving other women's NGOs in order to make a joint stand for women's rights.
- On the other hand, inter - agency co - operation is a necessary instrument to support abused women and their children and prevent domestic violence in general.

Women's refuges provide their knowledge and expertise to other professionals working in community or government - based services e.g. social and health care professionals, police, judges, prosecutors and teachers.

It is important that refuges are involved in education and public awareness raising activities in communities (although it is the government's responsibility to provide education programs for professionals and similar activities). Refuges can also initiate these activities.

Through co - operation refuge workers can also promote the rights of the victims in services and in communities.

Co - operation with other agencies can prove difficult. The reasons include the following:

- lack of knowledge of each other's work, goals and problems
- sector barrier thinking (or territorial thinking)
- domineering behavior
- negative competition
- shortage of financial resources
- problematic attitudes, prejudices and bad experiences.



# ADDITIONAL SOCIAL NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## 11. ADDITIONAL SOCIAL NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Assistance and intervention in cases of violence against women must be comprehensive in scope and gauged to the specific situation of the woman and her children. What is needed is crisis support followed up by medium and long-term support strategies.

Women's refuges have to be integrated in a system of preventive action and activities. The following section gives a brief overview of the most important aspects of such a system.



### 11.1 24-hour helpines

A toll-free **24-hour helpline** that provides support and crisis counselling and refers women to face-to-face services such as refuges, counselling centers or the police is an essential part of support services for women victims of violence. Support by a helpline is often the first step to a safer life.

Every country should operate at least one nationwide women's helpline. These helplines should be funded by national governments and operated by women's NGOs (or government) with long-standing experience in providing counselling and support for victims of violence.

### 11.2 Non - resident counselling and support

In addition to refuges, women exposed to violence should be able to turn to non - resident counselling services. Many women need counselling and support but do not (yet) want to move into a refuge. There should thus be an adequate network of counselling centers. For severely traumatized women and children, additional facilities - like trauma centers, where they can rest for a few hours - are necessary. Trauma centers should provide counselling, child supervision, meals, medical care and crisis support. Many countries still do not have such centers.



### 11.3 Long - term support and therapy

Long - term support should be available for women who have been exposed to violence. In some cases this support may have to continue for a year or more. Herman ("Trauma and Recovery") says that trauma can be remedied only after the woman has gained a feeling of being safe. After leaving a violent relationship, a woman may undergo psychic crises and depression. It is important to make long - term therapy available to such women free of charge.

### 11.4 Withholding of custody and visiting rights for violent fathers

Especially during the separation phase, children run a high risk of undergoing violence. An English study (Hester 1998) shows that children may be subjected to various forms of violence when a father exercises his visiting rights. Men may take revenge on their wives by inflicting violence on the children.

A violent fathers does damage to his children and thus disqualifies himself from the role of father. Before he can exercise his custody and visiting rights he must terminate his violent behavior, face up to the fact that he has a problem with violence (for instance by attending an anti-violence training course), and work slowly and without pressure on helping his children to gain or regain their trust in him. So during the initial phase of separation a violent father should not be given visiting rights. Only when the violence has stopped and the father is working on his problem should contact with the children gradually be restored – provided that the children want to see him.

In Armenia, often we see that children especially boys are kidnaped as preference over other siblings to exercise control over the wife.

### 11.5 Migrant women and women with disabilities also require protection from violence



Unfortunately such specialized services do not exist yet in Armenia. However, as much as possible existing services should provide support such as counseling and legal services. Refugee women should have access to counselling and therapy in their mother tongue or in the language which they speak best.

### 11.6 The unsuitability of inter - personal and family therapy and mediation in violent relationships

Inter - personal and family therapy and mediation are unsuitable approaches to dealing with a violent relationship because they take too little account of the threat to the victim and the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. Domestic violence against women is not a problem that occurs within the relationship but is caused by the person practicing the violence. Work on terminating the violence should therefore be confined to the perpetrator (see below).

### 11.7 Working with perpetrators

**To terminate the violence it is necessary to work with the perpetrator. Perpetrator programs are just one form of intervention; they need to be integrated in an overall intervention scheme and coupled with legal protection and support for the victim.**

*(Gondolf 2001, in Logar/Rösemann/Zürcher 2002).*

The victim's needs and safety must be the first priority in perpetrator programs, which must always work in close cooperation with women's support services. Unfortunately in Armenia (at the time of printing) there is no legislature to protect the victim, mandatory perpetrator programs and moreover, no specialized centers to work with perpetrators.

## 11.8 Feedback from women who stayed at the women's support center shelter and evaluation



Vartiter: "When I arrived at the shelter with the children I was in a daze and very scared. I thought that I was going to live like in a dormitory with no heat and bathroom but I just wanted to be away from him, I was so scared. It was such a relief to see a warm, welcoming nice home with all the comfort. The kids started to play with the toys and I was so relieved."

Melania: "I did not think I could live with other strange women and share bathroom with them. But slowly we bonded very well. I heard their stories and they heard mine and it all seemed that we are a family".

Mariam: "I was upset that I could not use my cell but I understood the security issues and the staff was so nice and patient in explaining to me everything. I felt like I was part of a community."

Anna: "I was very worried about the kids. Will they adapt to the new location, will they eat well, will they be able to go to school, will I be able to provide for them?...there were so many questions going through my head. But I worked with the social worker, I set up my goals and together we reached them. Things are not perfect or easy but at least I am free of that terrible abuse and freight. After 3 months I was able to see things more clearly and believe in myself that I can be ok without that abuser husband".

Alla: "At times it was difficult at the shelter. I was wondering if I made the right decision but I did not dare go back. There were many nights I was awake, and the children were making so much noise at the shelter. I remember how I just wanted to be alone and just hope that it all was a bad dream. I felt so hopeless. Now things are different...I think of my future and I feel I have more strength. The staff was very nice and supportive and they made me realize that I am strong. I think I am."

Anonymous questionnaires for victims help evaluate practices to better serve the women at the shelter and through their feedback evaluate the effectiveness of the shelter services. Questionnaire samples are available at WSC in Armenian.

Statistics of the victims in a database format is also another tool necessary to evaluate the services and record follow - up as well as gather statistics. WSC maintains a confidential database for statistical purposes and categories can be flexible depending on the data that needs to be collected. Also the center does 6 months and 1 year follow up calls and that data is also collected.

Evaluation may contain an analysis of the services which the organization provides, its operational policy and activities and their impact. Impact is often hard to evaluate, but the difficulties of evaluation should not be exaggerated. The impact is manifested in changes visible in the service user's life resulting from service use. What is crucial is the formulation of the evaluation criteria and indicators, measurement and an information - based assessment. The criteria may be based on, for example, clients' needs, the goals of actions and activities, the implementers' objectives, professional standards, regular practices and norms, the law, ethical values, circumstances or costs.

The implementation of evaluation is governed by needs and principles. The key persons in service activities are the clients, whose needs should determine the evaluation and its implementation. Evaluation can mean that the participants are given a voice and space. In empowerment evaluation, which stresses the inclusion of service users, the latter become key implementers of evaluation as well as creators of the evaluative targets and criteria. Empowerment evaluation helps the recipients of activities to participate and learn, and it also enlarges their sphere of independence. The aim is to increase an individual's ability to direct the course of his or her life.





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## LITERATURE

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