

WORK WITH PERPETRATORS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Three histories of change from men who used violence



Introduction

The following success stories of counselling processes with men who had used domestic violence were developed as part of an ongoing evaluation project on the development of the work with perpetrators in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, funded by IAMANEH (Switzerland) and coordinated by Conexus (Spain).

The stories were created to illustrate and document the changes that can be achieved through the intervention with men who used domestic violence and abuse in an accessible way. These stories can be used by the perpetrator programmes in their countries to:

- engage men to take part in their services and embark on a change process themselves
- engage professionals in other services to address domestic violence and abuse in the men they work with and refer them to a specialised programme
- raise awareness in the general public and with relevant stakeholders about the benefits of (victim safety oriented) work with perpetrators.

The following stories are based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews that were made during the months of April and May 2018 in Modriča (Bosnia-Herzegovina), and in Tirana and Shkoder (Albania) following the same

interview guidelines developed by the evaluation team. To tell the stories of change from different perspectives, the men who had finished the counselling process in the programmes, their counsellors, and their partners answered questions about the change process and its results in the three locations. In two of them, a professional who had referred the man to the programme (a social worker and a judge) were also interviewed.

As illustrated in the three stories, significant change and improvements in the safety and the lives of women and children and of the men themselves can be achieved through interventions with perpetrators, if non-judgemental support is offered to men within sustaining therapeutic relationships to help them become accountable of their violence and its consequences, to challenge underlying beliefs and attitudes and to improve their emotional regulation.



Development of work with perpetrators in the Balkans

IAMANEH is a Swiss NGO working in the field of gender and health in West Africa and the Western Balkans. In 2008 IAMANEH initiated

in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania the development of services and treatment programs for perpetrators through its Western Balkan programme, building on a decade old process of developing and implementing mostly NGO-led services for victims' protection. These services for perpetrators are based on well-grounded assessments. They work with an integrated approach which also incorporates governmental and non-governmental actors such as police, social and health system, the judiciary.

The three local organizations which deliver the services are the Office for Boys and Men (Zyra për Djem dhe Burra – ZDB), Counselling Line for Men and Boys (Linja e Këshillimit për Burra Djem - CLMB) and the Men's Center Modriča (Muški Centar). They all have their origin in long-established women's rights organizations who offer various services to victims of domestic violence such as shelters, counselling centers and SOS-hotlines. ZDB covers the Shkoder region, a very rural area in northern Albania and they have also developed a close cooperation with local schools for the prevention of gender-based violence. CLMB's intervention zone is mostly in the region of the capital Tirana but they also have an agreement with different prisons and probation offices in the rest of Albania where they work with perpetrators. The Men's Center is situated in Modriča a small city in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Additionally, to their work with perpetrators they also offer other counselling services and activities for the men of the region.

Three histories of change

1) Step by step until the light at the end of the tunnel

a story of change in a man who used violence from the CLMB in Tirana

Besnik is a 32-year-old entrepreneur from Tirana who lives together with his 30-year-old girlfriend Blerta in a small apartment in Tirana. Besnik grew up in the suburbs of Tirana in a neighbourhood where violence was a common occurrence, especially among young people and where “you only had two choices, being a victim of violence or being the perpetrator”. Despite coming from those difficult circumstances and from a poor family he managed to finish his studies at the university and he started working at an early age. He says that Blerta, with whom he has been together since high school, was his first love. Before starting the counselling programme, Besnik had many problems, financial ones, family problems, problems at work and conflicts with his girlfriend. He wanted her to obey totally and as she refused he started beating her. Even though he repented his violence afterwards, his physical violence became an almost daily occurrence in their relationship. Besnik joined the counselling programme as a self-referred case and a counsellor of CLMB worked with him in 16 individual sessions and 6 monthly follow-up sessions.

Why? The problem

The counsellor: “Initially, violence was verbal, so he was very violent through swearing, raising his voice. After not obtaining what he wanted he started using physical violence against her”

Besnik: “Before joining the program, I only saw my part and I thought I wasn’t doing anything wrong and that I was right. But when the counselling started I looked in the mirror and saw my own mistakes and faults.”

The first step

Blerta: “I was one of the persons that ‘pushed’ him to participate in the programme of rehabilitation for violent men. I had the feeling that he could change. I talked to him about this programme long after he started being violent.”

Besnik: “My friends and my girlfriend were the first ones who told me about this service...of course they are the ones who can see your problems at first.”

“My hope was that I would address the anger, because I did not want to lose my girlfriend ...”

The next steps

Besnik: “The most difficult moment was the beginning, it was a bit odd to go to a psychologist. I thought I had nothing to talk or to say to a psychologist, or to anyone else. But I was wrong, I really had to talk...especially to hear myself...”

The counsellor: “I remember the first sessions were very uncomfortable, he always kept the suspicious position and his emotional state changed from one moment to the other. But the motivation that maintained him in this service was that he did not want to lose his girlfriend, he understood that his behaviour was making things worse and worse.”

“He initially did not understand the issue of violence and didn’t really understand the impact that this violence had on his girlfriend.”

What? The changes

Blerta: “Yes, he changed a lot, now he is not using physical violence anymore. When he gets angry now he is able to control it, and has his ‘methods’ learned from the therapy on how to manage himself”.

“Now we are happier, our communication is calmer than before. We can discuss about sharing our responsibilities and duties.”

Besnik: “Yes, it has changed, the first thing is that I'm reflecting before acting ... and I'm almost another person ...”

“My participation in the programme has not only changed me in regard to my girlfriend ... There is a change of me also in society, ... I enjoy my work now, my time with my colleagues, my family and friends.

How? The process

Blerta: “The most important is his participation in this programme and also me, that I have helped him a lot and supported him to change”

Besnik: “During this programme of course I learned a lot of things ... but some that I would mention more than other things are: 1) I learned that violence does not solve things... 2) Taking responsibility, we are responsible for our actions.... And anger and violence are not the same thing”

“When my counsellor told me that he was here just for me, it was something really comforting ... I felt someone was dealing with me seriously. This made me feel good and motivated to take it seriously myself. It had not happened to me before.”

The counsellor: “We can say that the motivation was a key factor in this process, the client was really motivated to change. Also, focusing on himself and identifying some needs and feelings that he hadn't dared to explore before impacted a lot in his change.”

Final words:

Besnik: “It was a long walk with small but very safe steps.”

Blerta: “There is always a light in the end of the tunnel.”

**2) A story of success in ending violence
from the Men's Centre, Budočnost, in Modriča**

Jovan is a 40-year-old self-employed carpenter who has been married for 14 years to Elena. They live together with their daughter (14) and son (12) in Modriča, a small city in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He has another son from a previous marriage but has no contact with him. Problems within the family have existed for many years but from year to year they became more severe. If his wife did not accept his views, Jovan would use psychological and physical violence against her. Their children often witnessed these violent incidents. After an especially violent incident Elena decided to report to the police and was accommodated in the shelter of Budočnost. Jovan was referred to the counselling by the Center for Social Welfare and the police. After the referral and a few individual intake sessions Jovan participated in 16 group sessions at the Men's Center over a period of 4 months.

The case

Social worker: "This was a case where there was physical, psychological and economic violence."

The Counsellor: "When it comes to this man, he is a typical perpetrator of domestic violence. He was primarily abusive in the family."

The man

Jovan: "I thought all the people yell at their wives"

"I did not know how to deal with everything, with life in general."

"I shouted, threatened, controlled where she was going, spending all her money, and I hit her."

"I was on the verge and I thought there is no salvation for me."

The promise

Elena: "When we got married ... He was from a bad family, his father beat his mother, he had a marriage behind him and a child, and I knew it all... But he told me also that he does not have much to offer me, he was not rich, but he promised me that he will take care of me, and I will be a loved woman."

"He would not let me miss anything, not even one hair from the head... And if that ever happened, he would give me his own hair. And he ripped one hair from his head and put it in my pocket, as a symbol of his love."

"You know how many times this passed through my head when he beat me. And that kept me from going crazy. That kept me believing in him."

"For every little thing, he shouted"

"Threatened to kill me"

"That he will throw me out on the street"

"He took my salary"

The referral

Social Worker: "He came after Men's Center called him by phone, after his wife was placed in a safe house."

"We have learned about his violent behaviour through a joint intervention with the Police and we closely cooperate."

"I have noticed that there is interest in participating in further counselling talks on marital relations and the problem of violence."

"We have suggested to him, if he wishes he could address the Men's Centre"

The first step

The counsellor: "At the beginning there was the dose of denial"

"He has transferred responsibility to his wife"

"He did not consider most things as violence"

"He repeated the pattern of relationship with his father"

The challenge

Elena: “The psychologist in the Safe House told me that he agreed to be treated in the Men’s Center.”

“How did I feel? I was sad and angry.”

“I did not expect him to change. I did not believe you could help him.”

“But somewhere in the depth of my heart I was hoping that it might really help us.”

The solitude

Jovan: “I was not close with the kids. I looked into their eyes, and it was a nightmare. I knew I was doing the same thing my dad did to me.”

“The most painful moment in my life was when I came home and found it empty.”

The unknown

Jovan: “I had heard earlier about this programme, but I didn’t have a good opinion about it. To be honest, I was not overly interested in it.”

“Everything was strange to me. I must admit that it was very uncomfortable for me”

“At first I thought you [the counsellor] were going to yell at us. In fact, I expected anything, except what it was in reality.”

“The most helpful was when I had a chance to talk to you [the counsellor]. It’s because you listened to me, gave me advice and you never condemned me.”

The counsellor: “Most of the perpetrators feel very embarrassed in the first sessions, questioning themselves, but also us professionals.”

“The first five meetings are very important. That is when that ‘click’ and the confidence between them and the counsellor should happen.”

“I try to be open, professional, and just.”

The others

Jovan: “You are sitting in the room with some men, some of them even know you by sight, and now you have to talk like that, ... about violence.”

“I thought that everybody should solve their problems in their four walls. And I was actually wrong.”

“With other men, I felt like belonging to a group. Honestly, it was a lot easier for me to hear other men with similar problems. Talking to them has affected me not to feel alone with my problem.”

“Also, it means for all of us that we finally have support and that we are ready to make a change.”

His change

Elena: “Not suddenly. But, somehow, slowly, he began to change.”

“The first thing he did was to find a job and become more responsible for him and for us.”

“He never hit me again.”

“He is also much more attentive to the children. I see that the children are happy.”

“He does no longer go there to hang out with drunk people. Now he has good colleagues at work and hangs out with them.”

“Now we have more understanding. We talk more and talk about everything. When we talk nice, I feel safe.”

My change

Jovan: “Today, it is not a problem to be self-critical. I find it easier to accept my mistakes.”

“I think I'm more patient. I'm listening more and I'm not gathering my anger.”

“I think that she is still not 100% sure I'm changing, but I hope she will be over time. I think there is still a dose of fear in her. I do not expect her to forget easy the bad things I did to her.”

“With my son, especially with him, I want to build a relationship I have never had with my father”

The change

The counsellor: “After the end of treatment, he said he finally learned to fight against anger.”

“He assumed responsibility for all forms of violence”

“He understands himself better, his needs and abilities. He is pretty open when he shows emotions”.

The hope

Jovan: “And it's not too late yet. You gave me a third chance in life, and it's not a small thing. I can even tell you I'm proud.”

Elena: “I do not know what you did to him, but you helped him. My children and I are eternally grateful to you.”

Jovan: “And we have a picture in the house where the three of them [wife and children] laughed together, it was Christmas and God knows where I was. I have a plan to ask them all for a new one. For a picture with a dad.”

3) From night to day

a story of change in a man who was court-ordered to counselling at ZDB in Shkoder

Dardan (31) is married to Dafina, a 32-year-old high school teacher and they have a 2-year-old son. Together they live in northern Albania in a difficult neighbourhood near Shkoder, which became a centre of illegal activities following the political and economic turmoil of 1997. Before marrying Dardan lived for 12 years in Germany where he had many problems. Now his economic situation is stable and he works as a barman but in the past, he had ups and downs. Dardan is very jealous, which was also the main reason why conflicts started in the past. He did not allow Dafina to go out with her friends and wanted to control her life and her communication with others. Dardan was sentenced by a judge to take part in the counselling and he worked with a counsellor of ZDB in 12 individual sessions over a period of around 4 months.

Why? The problem

Dardan: “Physical violence sometimes, emotional more often. Also, I used economic violence”

I thought: “It’s normal to keep your wife under control. We don’t think of it as violent acts: crippling, giving orders, and sometimes even hitting and beating. We see it more like tools to keep order and control. It has always been like this.”

“Before, I didn’t think too much about the negative impact of my actions. It was right for me to act like this. It was my way to change things I didn’t like. It was my way of expressing my negative thoughts and emotions, especially when I thought my wife doesn’t like me, doesn’t appreciate me or she likes somebody else”

Dafina: “Any kind of violence. Physical and emotional mostly. But also other kinds of violence.”

The counsellor: “He used physical violence as well as emotional and economic violence. Crippling, insulting, and limiting his wife’s movements every day was normal. Occasionally, the client hit his wife.”

The obligation

The judge: “During the trial in court, B.H. admitted his acts of violence toward his wife. ... Albanian law Nr. 9669, ... calls for the referral of the perpetrator to counselling services for perpetrators, besides the penal measure. B.H did not have any reaction or objection.”

Dardan: “The Judge informed me about the service. She stated with a court decision that I should follow the counselling service for perpetrators at ZDB Shkoder. ... For me, it was the first time that I heard about this service. I didn’t know what it was. I just wanted to fulfil my obligations.”

“I didn’t have any motivation in the beginning, I was obligated to participate in this service. I made it clear to my counsellor that I had no interest in this service.”

The wife: “I thought it was just a strategy or a fulfilment of the obligation.”

The first steps

Dardan: “I was embarrassed because we’re not used to be part of this kind of services. I didn’t understand very well the aim of this service. In my opinion, psychological services were for mad people. Then the counsellor explained to me. Anyway, it was difficult, in the beginning, for me to talk about myself and my relationship with somebody else”.

“The beginning was very difficult, but I was obligated to participate in the counselling.”

The counsellor: “During the first sessions the client didn’t feel responsible for his violent acts. He said that he was obligated to act like this, because of his wife’s behavior. He justified his violent actions as the only communication tool to make his wife understand.”

What? The changes

Dafina: “It started like an obligation for him. But now I find him changed. He thinks and acts differently. The counselling process helped him.”.

“Yes! He is calm now. He doesn’t use violent behaviours toward me. We are trying together to rebuild a normal relationship.”

“He shows respect to me and my needs and my wishes. He is trying to understand me better and to help me with the kid’s duties. We discuss together for solutions.”

“Now he is closer to our son. ... He now goes out alone with him, without feeling the need that I have to be there to take care for the baby.”

“I feel safer now. If the future will be always like now, I don’t have to worry, or to be afraid. I hope that it will be always like this.”

Dardan: “I don’t use any kind of violence anymore. I don’t act violently.”

“I don’t have to be violent to resolve my problems or to achieve what I need. ... Being violent I was damaging my family and myself. To be honest, I feel ashamed for having used violence against my wife. It makes me feel very weak. I don’t want it.”

“I now think differently about my wife and our relationship. I try not to be jealous towards her. When this happens sometimes, I know it is this wrong way of thinking inside me and it has nothing to do with the reality, so I try to stay calm or to avoid confrontation.”

“My boy is still a little one, but I feel connected with him. I take him out to play. I stay more with him.”

“I’m more aware about my feelings, needs and emotions. I think more about myself.”

The counsellor: “The client learned that the violent actions were his decision and accepted the responsibilities for his own actions. He learned to understand his emotions and feelings, to control his reactions and to de-escalate during crises or conflicts.”

“In the beginning, using violence was normal for the client. Now he sees the use of violence as unacceptable. He shows empathy for his wife and tries to find alternatives for conflict resolution.”

“The client, after making some important changes, has returned to live with his wife and son, in their home.”

The judge: “She is safer now because she saw the efficiency of the system protecting her and her baby. She knows that the policy will protect her, the court will punish the perpetrator and the counselling services will help him change.”

How? The process

Dafina: “My husband understood his behaviour was wrong. He knows that what he has done to me is unacceptable and abnormal. The therapy helped him to accept that nothing can justify his violence. He was destroying his family and his own life.”

Dardan: “Talking with my counsellor about the moments and acts of violence was very hard for me. During this process I was touched looking at my violent actions from a new perspective. I felt very bad talking about the consequences. I was shocked and ashamed at the same time. I just wanted to change something to repair as much as I could.”

“Just reflecting and understanding what happened and why”.

“My counsellor helped me to understand and to accept the horrible impact that my actions have on my loved ones, especially my wife”.

“It was very helpful for me to talk with somebody who just wants to help you to change behaviour and doesn’t judge you.”

“I have a deep respect for my counsellor. He helped me. I trust him. I’m happy to talk with him.”

The counsellor: “In my opinion, it was very helpful to accompany the client slowly to find his motivation to change. Talking about his values and attitudes with a man was a totally new experience for him. Confronting him with the consequences of his own violence was also a turning point for taking his responsibilities.”

Final words:

The judge: “Maybe he reflected and understood that violence is not the solution of his problems but the problem itself.”

Dardan: “I believe that I have changed like ‘the night to the day’.”

Dafina: “I pray to God that this situation last forever”.

Outlook and further information

These histories of change are part of a newly initiated process of documenting the work with perpetrators in the Western Balkans. Through this qualitative documentation process, a better understanding and insight into the still mostly unknown work in this field is intended and it is also an attempt to measure the impact of working with perpetrators. This process will continue in the following months.

You can find more information about the work of IAMANEH Switzerland and the implementing organizations on the respective websites:

www.iamaneh.ch | www.buducnost-md.org | www.clmb.al | www.gruajatekgruaja.com

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Authors: Heinrich Geldschläger, Conexus, Maja Loncarevic and Isabelle Jost, IAMANEH Switzerland



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ZYRA PER DJEM DHE BURRA
SHËRBIME KËSHILLIMË PËR QJEM DHE BURRA
QE KRYEJNE VEPRIME TE DHUNËS-IVME



MUŠKI CENTAR



Linja e Këshillimit
për Burra Djem

Linja Kombëtare kundër
Dhunës në Familje 116 117