



Factors conducive to  
violence against women,  
violence against children  
and sexual orientation  
violence  
and possible interventions

## **A) Factors conducive to violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence**

There is a consensus across research and theory that interpersonal violence is multi-factorial and arises through the confluence of interacting influences at different levels. Reflecting this knowledge, the available research evidence was compiled and main factors extracted. In the following, the **factors at play in the model of perpetration** are summarized and briefly explained; for more background see the research review.

### **Macro level**

refers to overall cultural, historical and economic structures of a society. Persistent gender inequality and failure to recognize children's and LGBT rights belong here, as do attitudes devaluing women and/or children and imposing normative regimes for gender and sexuality. Development and influence of the media permeate society on all levels. The law is a macro factor that defines some acts of violence as more serious, while treating others as not deserving of sanction, and establishes the responsibilities of agencies and the rights and claims of victims to redress and support.

- 1) "DEVALUING WOMEN" represents the material and cultural subordination of women, gender inequality of power, and patriarchal ideas of femininity and of sexuality, underpinned by normative beliefs about the proper spheres of women and men, the societal value of these spheres, and the legitimate relative power balance between women and men in each sphere. They include values for sexual and for family relationships that idealize women's compliance with men's wishes and needs, and thus give the appearance of legitimacy to men imposing their will on women.
- 2) "MASCULINITY" serves on the macro-level as keyword for the hierarchical power and recognition of normative heterosexual masculinity, generating pressure to conform to masculine standards; it includes social recognition of claims and rights for men, but at the same time, defining norms that men must fulfil. Features of such masculinity are variously described, including concepts such as heroism, the ability to face up to and overcome fear or pain, and sexual conformity, meaning heterosexuality and successful sexual performance.
- 3) "CHILDREN'S STATUS" refers to persisting traditions in which children are not recognized as the holders of fundamental rights and are expected to submit to expectations and demands of adults. In this, children retain some elements of a legal and cultural status as property of the parents or families, and as subordinates to those responsible for their education or care. Children are also perceived as naturally weak and vulnerable and as not having a real capacity to know what they want or need or what is good for them.
- 4) "MEDIA VIOLENCE" characterizes the availability and socially accepted use of media that present violent actions as rewarding and successful, while sexualizing violence and portraying women and/or children as available and vulnerable sexual objects. The impact of the media, and more recently, the internet and interactive video games, on interpersonal violence is controversial, but the media are clearly a powerful influence on the culture, through the constant representation of acts of violence and their linkage to sexuality and to images of gender. Research links sexualized violence in the media to increases in violence towards women, rape myth acceptance and anti-women attitudes.

- 5) “IMPUNITY”: Failure of the law to prohibit or sanction violence or to ensure protection, legal systems that confer (e.g. by exceptions) rights to the use of coercion, control or violence. The concept of impunity is used in international discourse on violence against women more broadly to characterize state inaction, both in not holding perpetrators accountable and in permitting power relations and structural conditions of discrimination to remain in place. To sharpen the focus on policy measures, this factor represents the absence of legal provisions.

### **Meso level**

refers to the larger institutions or organisations that regulate social life and within which individuals and families negotiate their lives. Norms and values about subordinate or compliant behaviour for women or children are on the meso level when specific to a community or milieu. This level also includes presence or absence of a consistent policy, as well as the rules, procedures and (lack of) resources for agencies that could or should supervise, intervene, offer help or enforce sanctions.

- 6) “FAILED SANCTIONS” – Failure of agencies to set limits or implement sanctions despite existence of legal norms and agency duties. Research studies on rape, sexual harassment and intimate partner violence provide evidence that men see themselves as more likely to engage in VAW, and actually do re-offend more often, when they perceive or experience that it has no negative consequences for them. This factor should be understood broadly to include all (in-)action by responsible agencies that set limits to violence, such as insisting that parents accept help in order to raise a child without abuse.
- 7) “HONOUR CODES” – Community or collective enforcement of honour, shame and subordination based on gender, xenophobia, fundamentalism, or tradition. The term “harmful traditional practices” in UN documents can be questioned, since practices harmful to women such as wife abuse and rape have long been part of the dominant cultures of Europe. Honour codes create an expectation of approval by families, or within communities whose members immigrated from outside the EU, and permit justification with reference to traditions or laws in countries of origin, based on control of women for the perceived good of the collective. Traditions and cultural values may be invoked as excuses for personally motivated acts of violence, or used to cover material motives such as immigration permits. Subgroups within the majority population may also employ a concept of honour to enforce a rigid gender regime.
- 8) “HATE GROUPS” – Organized social groups promoting intolerance or hate as well as aggressive action. Although such groups can arise locally on the micro-social level, they do the greatest harm when they connect to larger organized networks such as right-wing extremist political parties or movements and their organizations, ideological networks that propagate notions of a mission to cleanse society of danger or evil attributed to homosexuals, ethnic minorities and/or other out-groups. In this context, gender and sexual norms are not ideals so much as imperatives to be defended and enforced, and there are often links to racism. Those who do not fit or conform to the norm are also, however, seen as legitimate and easy prey for aggressive impulses.
- 9) “ENTITLEMENT” – Norms generating assumptions, for example, of men’s rights over women, supported by social beliefs in male entitlement to sex and services from women. This rests on societal patterns of gender inequality, dominant masculinity and devaluing women. Entitlement also can be perceived as the right to do as one likes with ones own children. Different forms of violence are linked to different substantive concepts of entitlement. Subjectively, the perpetrator’s experience is often one of not being respected

or of being powerless, but the underlying premise is that an intimate partner/ husband/ father/ mother/ authority figure has the right to unquestioned acceptance of demands.

- 10) “DISCRIMINATION” – Gender-based discrimination is embedded in social organisations such as workplaces or educational institutions, including the definition of relatively privileged territories reserved for (heterosexual) men. Depending on the area of violence being examined, it can be primarily discrimination against women, or discrimination against anyone who does not fit the heterosexual mould and can be suspected of a “deviant” sexual identity or orientation (LGBT). Toleration of discrimination in organisations of all kinds creates a permissive environment for harassment.
- 11) “POVERTY POCKETS” – High concentrations of poverty and social exclusion create environments of depleted resources and often high rates of crime, in which violence - for example, on the streets or in schools - becomes an everyday experience. Research indicates that being poor or having a low educational level do not in themselves lead to violence. Living in a neighbourhood or region in which material resources, access to education and to regular employment or to cultural resources are very low, and in which social exclusion, racism or discrimination prevail, contributes to violence in everyday life and in families.

### **Micro level**

refers to dynamics and formations of the face-to-face group: peer groups, close relationships in the immediate family or household, the classroom or workplace as a site of day-to-day interaction. These can reinforce or mitigate the effects of ontogenetic factors. It is on this level that general social norms are translated into expected or socially approved practices. Thus, while gender stereotypes have historical and cultural roots, their impact on the perpetration of violence is most clearly recognisable when they shape perceptions of what is “normal” in the way men, women and children think and behave.

- 12) “STEREOTYPES” – Gender-unequal values and norms in family or immediate social networks, including personally endorsed gender-stereotyped perceptions of what men and women, girls and boys, good mothers and their children “naturally” are or should be like. In modern societies there is a considerable range of variation in permissible gender-related values and norms, but the face-to-face context of interaction specifies what is accepted, admired, considered abnormal or actively sanctioned. Peer groups and families as well as social environments can maintain or revitalise stereotypical thinking about gender and sexuality and form pockets of resistance to modernity.
- 13) “OBEDIENCE CODE” – This factor characterises established and recognized methods of coercive discipline and strict normative expectations of obedience from children, and these are traditionally different for daughters and sons. Traditionally, the obedience code also applied to wives, but while traces still can be seen, it is no longer widely accepted as an explicit code in much of the European Union, although here, too, there are “pockets of resistance” to modernization.
- 14) “FAMILY STRESS” – Multiple sources of stress for and in families are clustered together in this factor: social isolation; depleted resources; high family conflict and low family cohesion; intra-familial escalation of conflict processes. Indicators of family stress appear regularly as significant variables in the research on child maltreatment, but some part of intimate partner violence, especially in the form of situational couple conflict, is related to an accumulation of stress factors.

- 15) “REWARDS”– A wide variety of sources of satisfaction and perceived rewards for violence are included: the meaning differs depending on the form of violence in focus. Rewards can be social recognition and admiration (for example for having proven oneself a man), simple profit or material gain, the satisfaction of having silenced an irritating family member and gotten one’s way, sexual or other kinds of pleasure. “Conducive contexts” offer rewards for practicing dominance or control. Rewards are one clear motive behind economically profitable forms of violence such as trafficking or child sexual exploitation. But for some, the acts of violence are themselves rewarding, as when sexual aggression lets the perpetrator feel powerful and in control.
- 16) “OPPORTUNITY” – This factor covers context conditions that facilitate the use of violence towards selected target persons, including ease of access to potential/vulnerable victims. Rewards and opportunity are often flip sides of the same coin, but this is also an independent factor: knowing that an act will have no consequences, or that there will be no resistance, can in itself lead to using the means that are easily at hand. A number of experimental studies on sexual coercion have found that many young men, when offered an imaginary scenario in which rape or sexual harassment would have no consequences for them, said that they would take advantage of the situation. Opportunity can also consist in doing what peers or colleagues also do and expect.
- 17) “PEER APPROVAL” – Peer-groups (especially in adolescence) supporting anti-social behaviour or violence and reinforcing hostile masculinity and aggression constitute a factor at this level. While childhood experiences predispose boys in particular to aggression, peer-groups in adolescence that practice and reinforce antisocial behaviour have been found to mediate the development into sexual aggression as well as violence within the family (both intimate partner violence and child abuse). Several studies have found that men’s likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault co-varies with the level of rape-supportive attitudes among their peers.

### **Ontogenetic level**

can also be called the “life history approach”; it includes those factors in the biographies of individuals that contribute to a disposition to resort to violence or even to find satisfaction in violence. Empirical research on violence against women and violence against children typically measures characteristics of individual in their development and personal environment. Much of this research identifies correlations but cannot provide explanations. Longitudinal studies are useful for developing grounded hypotheses about causal links.

- 18) “POOR PARENTING” – Growing up in families that are unable to offer basic care and secure attachment; “unskilled parenting” summarizes a range of deficits, including those resulting from a parent’s own history of maltreatment or abuse. Longitudinal studies suggest that neither having witnessed violence in the home as “model” for imitation, nor suffering direct violence from a parent is a robust predictor of later own use of violence. Unskilled parenting may inhibit or damage the basic emotional security and the images of relationships that a child acquires, as well as damaging the capacity for empathy.
- 19) “EARLY TRAUMA” – Early exposure to violence in the home, to an abusive father-figure, or to other (sexual or nonsexual) abuse of trust, as well as other traumatic childhood experiences fall into this category. Additional conditions must be added for childhood exposure to violence to translate into a propensity to use violence actively. Violence in the family of origin, often both witnessing abuse of the mother and experiencing maltreatment, raises the probability of antisocial behaviour patterns, especially among

boys. Girls are more likely to grow up believing that no-one can or will protect them, and some of them may later be unable to protect their own daughters.

- 20) “EMOTIONS” – Negative childhood experiences damage the basic capacity for attachment, but emotional disturbances can also arise from other sources. There is considerable research evidence showing correlations between the use of violence and personality dysfunctions, including emotional dysregulation, empathy deficits, inability to handle aggression and depressive-avoidant tendencies. Severe psychopathology is not included in this model, as it has a much more general impact on anti-social behaviour and is not specific to the forms of violence linked to inequalities of gender, sexuality or age.
- 21) “COGNITIONS” – Poor or hostile social information processing, cognitive distortions, strongly inadequate perceptions of children, women, LGBT or those different from self. Batterers have been described as living in a “bubble” in which the perspective of a partner never enters into the perpetrator’s perception of reality. Cognitive and affective inability to understand a child’s behaviour often triggers maltreatment. Hostile attribution patterns – a disposition to assume that what others do or say is intended to provoke or show disrespect - can be already present or can follow from failing to understand child development. Cognitive distortions acquired during adolescent sexual socialization support notions that conflate coerced sex with consensual sex, and establish contempt for homosexuality as the norm.
- 22) “MASCULINE SELF” – Hostile and defensive masculine self-concept, including approval of VAW, general hostility towards women, need to prove self as a “real man”. This factor includes the research variable “hostile masculinity, a significant predictor of violence against women and sexual orientation violence; it is often measured by scales of acceptance of the use of force and violence for men, rape-myth acceptance, and adversarial beliefs about the relations between women and men. Masculinity of self promotes self-absorption and has a very negative impact on emotional development, suppressing empathy and encouraging externalized aggression.
- 23) “DEPERSONALIZED SEX” – This factor characterizes antisocial sexual scripts and intimacy deficits, ensuing patterns of arousal by domination, predatory sex without regard for needs of the other. Childhood experiences of sexual abuse, interpreted through the lens of constructing a masculine self, may contribute to a depersonalized sexual socialization oriented to conquest and control.
- 24) “STIMULUS ABUSE” - Alcohol or drug abuse, habitual or excessive use of pornography or other encouraging or disinhibiting means of self-stimulation can all contribute to one or the other form of violence. The mechanism here may be to stimulate mood change or heighten (sexual) fantasies. Social psychological research has established that the effects of consuming alcohol (chemically a depressant) depend very much on the consumers expectations of what the effect will be. Alcohol abuse is linked to physical violence, but (contrary to widespread opinion) not to rape, while pornography is linked to sexual violence. More specific connections appear in the path models.

## **B) Possible interventions**

The study of perpetration raises the question of how the knowledge summarized in the research review could be addressed. Most of the following interventions have been used in the path models. Many of them are to be found in different Member States as model projects or NGO initiatives. If the goal of reducing violence is to be pursued seriously, a legal framework is usually needed, for example ensuring sustainable funding and referral by statutory agencies, or setting priorities and entrusting an appropriate body to issue guidelines and standards for intervention. Since inclusion in the visual interactive model has space limitations, only brief keywords are used to characterize each intervention. The interventions are intended to show possibilities for interrupting paths that may lead to violence, thus potentially reducing the likelihood or the prevalence of the specific form of violence in question. Users of the model are invited to think about how these interventions might be implemented in their national or regional context, or if they do not seem practical, to imagine alternatives.

### **Child abuse and neglect**

**EARLY PREVENTION:** By legislation (duty of funding and provision) ensure wide availability of qualified preventive education and support, especially for parents at risk, and develop methods to include fathers.

**PROHIBIT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT:** Prohibit all corporal punishment, by parents or caregivers as well as in institutions.

**PREVENTIVE WORK WITH YOUTH:** Develop psychosocial interventions for youth on an antisocial developmental path and ensure state funding and evaluation of school- and NGO-based preventive work.

### **Child sexual abuse**

**QUALIFY TEACHERS:** Provide all professionals working with children with knowledge and skills to recognize signs of abuse and to strengthen children's self-confidence and personal safety.

**IMPLEMENT EQUALITY:** Establish stronger legislation on gender equality and children's rights, spelling out standards, responsible actors and methods and accountability.

**SET LIMITS TO MEDIA:** Use legislation to obligate internet providers to remove or block access to child pornography and establish media standards to prevent sexualized depiction of children.

**RISK ASSESSMENT:** Establish standards through legislation to ensure evidence-based assessment and therapy of child sexual abusers, drawing on all levels of the perpetration model.

### **Intimate partner violence**

**STOP BATTERERS:** Impose measures of immediate protection and ensure that social workers, police, prosecutors and courts are trained and obligated to intervene with zero tolerance in every case.

**WORK WITH PERPETRATORS:** Require identified batterers to attend gender-based cognitive-behavioural counselling programs after screening.

**CHANGE IDEAS OF HONOUR:** In cooperation with NGOs and communities, develop processes to reduce social approval of extremist or fundamentalist beliefs and attitudes.

**EARLY PREVENTION:** By legislation ensure the availability of preventive education for parenting, including engaging boys and young men.

### **Rape and sexual assault**

**PROSECUTE RAPE:** Ensure recording of all reports of rape, thorough investigation and, where evidence permits, prosecution.

**IMPLEMENT EQUALITY:** Establish stronger equality legislation with standards, responsible actors, methods and accountability.

**SET LIMITS TO MEDIA:** Establish human-rights-based standards and bodies to limit media depiction of violence, sexual coercion and degrading portrayal of women and of children, with state funded media watch.

### **Sexual harassment**

**END DISCRIMINATION:** Inspection and penalties with a strong legal foundation to ensure workplace measures for gender equality and respect, and ensure effective procedures for protection and redress.

**PROHIBIT HARASSMENT:** Prohibit sexual harassment as a course of conduct causing fear or distress in any context and make protection measures available.

**IMPLEMENT EQUALITY:** Make anti-discrimination laws effective by providing for remedies and sanctions.

### **Sexual orientation violence**

**ESTABLISH LGBT RIGHTS:** Remove all exceptions in criminal law excusing violence and all provisions discriminating against LGBT persons.

**PREVENTIVE YOUTH WORK:** Develop methods of youth work and education on non-violence and sexual ethics and guarantee state funding for school- and NGO-based preventive work.

**END LGBT PREJUDICE:** Develop and establish awareness-raising and educational approaches with multiple methods to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against LGBT.