



An Evaluation
of the battered-women's shelters in Thüringen (Germany)
– Summary –

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: In accordance with JOHNSON'S differentiation between "Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence" the starting conceptual point of our evaluation is the observation that the forms of domestic violence are multiple and that - as STRAUS et. al have shown - men and women are involved in different ways. In addition, - just like systemic family therapy (e.g. Virginia SATIR or Paul WATZLAWICK) - we see violence as a form of communication, domestic violence then as an expression of a disturbed pattern of relationship. And it is this pattern and not the isolated individual that must be changed.

Starting from these theoretical assumptions the main criterion for good work of battered-women's-shelters was formulated: the staff there must be able to distinguish between these different forms of violence and must be able to grasp the different degree of involvement of the partners in domestic violence. For example if a low conflict-solution-competence of the partners is the cause of domestic violence both men and women must be supported in developing strategies for better conflict-handling; if the cause of violence is an on-going one-sided "terrorism" by one partner then for example the relationship must be dissolved.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: in Thüringen (a federal state of Germany in the former GDR with 2,1 million inhabitants) there are 16 refuges for battered women (in German: Frauenhäuser). Our study is based on open interviews with the executives of these 16 shelters, additionally we requested some data with a questionnaire: the number of women and children seeking help in 2007 and 2008; their socio-demographic characteristics; the duration of stay. The interviews were conducted by a female interviewer during July and August 2007. The study was conducted in behalf of the Ministry of social affairs and health of Thüringen.

MAIN RESULTS:

- / The shelters' staff overwhelmingly conceptualised violence as "masculine violence", thus there is a clear dichotomisation between men as offenders and women as victims;
- / Almost all interviewed executives of the refuges see themselves as "partisan", as women's advocates (in German there is the term "Parteilichkeit"). Therefore for them an integration of men in the process of developing strategies for solutions is undesirable, systemic approaches are widely unknown;
- / The staff does not regularly take part in supervision-sessions, in general the funds for staff-training are very small; most of the staff-training is organized and conducted by feminist organisations;
- / There was no consistent method for documenting the cases of help-seeking women and there existed no unified statistical census in the shelters. Above all no distinction was made between a single case and a person in the statistics;
- / The help-seeking women in Thüringen often are socially underprivileged: women with low degrees of education and unemployed women are overrepresented in the sample of 2007 und 2008;
- / The help-seeking women stay only for a short period of time in the refuge (approximately 50% for only one month); as estimated by the staff of the shelters about 60% of help-seeking women are returning to their former partners after leaving the shelter.

The German version of the study can be downloaded from: http://iaiz.aim-site.de/fileadmin/PDF/Publikationen/Perspektive/perspektiven_der_frauenhausarbeit_-_endbericht_-_webfassung..pdf

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