

## **Efforts to target: The measurement of prevention of intimate partner violence**

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### **General symposium abstract**

Modern democracies strive to reduce various forms of social inequality. In particular, gender equality and gender diversity are important goals, but increasingly being called into question by populist disruptions. For decades, the occurrence of violence against women (VAW) and intimate partner violence (IPV) has been seen as one barrier to gender equality and diversity. Those forms establish human suppression at family and community levels. In addition, the exposure of children to IPV is a mediator of child maltreatment, and a risk factor for their healthy social, emotional, and academic development. The risk of intergenerational transmission of IPV is already high.

Since the 1970s, European countries have invested in social work initiatives to build reliable structures to protect victims (e.g., women's shelters), to support them in getting legal aid (e.g., counseling), and to take perpetrators into account (e.g., batterer treatment). In these efforts, intersectoral and multi-agency collaboration was a significant factor of social work practice. The 2011 Istanbul Convention by the Council of Europe aims to harmonize and strengthen national laws, policies, and services to prevent VAW and IPV, with a focus on the prevention of future violence.

Although there is agreement about the need to reduce VAW and IPV in the majority of society, there is limited evidence on effective prevention and treatment strategies. Moreover, the prevention dilemma — a well-known problem from health sciences — might apply as well: It means that marginalized, high-risk, and in-need populations do often not receive services. Thus, there is also the need to assess the specificity of populations served. Therefore, the first step is to build up a baseline of prevention research by describing the body of evidence of prevention, the stock of prevention programs in social work practice at national and regional levels, and the implementation of targeted prevention programs for people at risk. Social, health, and justice sectors should be considered. For intersectoral cooperation, communication about risk seems relevant.

The papers presented in this symposium will be about:

- 1) systematic review of the international research literature on the prevention of common forms of VAC (e.g., including sexual harassment or honor-based violence) and their efficacy,
- 2) national survey of practitioners on the stock of prevention in social work, health care, and justice in 66 municipalities in Germany
- 3) implementation of a prevention program for girls in out-of-home placement to foster healthy relationships and reduce IPV
- 4) risk assessment of domestic homicide and its conceptualization by professionals in multi-agency settings in Scotland

These studies were designed to support continuous monitoring of VAW and IPV, its prevention efforts, and professional networks. Together, they aim to bring together evidence abouts efforts to reduce VAW and IPV and thus increase gender equality are successful.

**What works to prevent Intimate Partner Violence and Violence Against Women?  
Results of a systematic review of literature**

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**Background:** Violence against women is a significant gender equality issue. The Istanbul Convention stresses the importance of preventing violence. Assessing the effectiveness of prevention programs in social work practice is critical for improving prevention efforts. In our study, we conducted a systematic review of literature to identify available and effective prevention programs addressing multiple forms of violence.

**Methods:** Data was collected from November 2023 to January 2024 using the databases Medline and PsycInfo in compliance with the PRISMA guidelines. We searched for peer-reviewed journal articles, employing a variety of search terms such as „femicide“ and „teen dating violence“, to identify programs that target different forms of violence and address various demographic groups.

**Findings:** Our preliminary full-text analysis of 206 studies and 71 reviews/meta-analyses identified a broadrange of prevention programs. Many of these programs were university- and school-based approaches, focusing on bystander intervention and preventing teen dating violence. Additionally, batterer intervention programs and gender-transformative programs were found. However, there were notably few programs designed to protect vulnerable populations such as individuals with cognitive disabilities.

**Conclusions:** Our findings suggest that effective prevention programs should be adapted to the European contexts. Furthermore, there is a critical need for more systematic evaluations, particularly of programs targeting vulnerable groups, to ensure their relevance, applicability, and effectiveness across diverse settings.

## **Analyzing the stock of prevention of intimate partner violence and violence against women in Germany**

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**Background:** In line with the Istanbul Convention, ratifying states must strengthen targeted prevention efforts against intimate partner violence and violence against women. Therefore, national policies need to know about prevention programs targeting physical and sexual violence against women and children. To provide an empirical database, the first national study on the stock of prevention was conducted in Germany in 2024.

**Methods:** A sample of 60 city and county districts was randomly selected and stratified by population size and traffic centrality. Additional six municipalities were selected as promising practices by expert recommendations. Within these districts, senior professionals of social work, child welfare, healthcare, or law enforcement were recruited for an online-survey. The experts provided information on prevention programs, specific training, and intersectoral cooperation.

**Results:** The findings revealed significant gaps in rural districts, particularly in universal prevention for boys, men, and in perpetrator treatment. In contrast, programs for women and girls were more evenly distributed. In child welfare, prevention programs for children we found available in predominantly all municipalities. However, there was a lack of programs that strengthen children in child welfare interventions. Further results of the current data-analysis and lessons learned from the study methodology will be reported.

**Conclusions:** For the first time in Germany, the study provided baseline data on the state of prevention for a local and national monitoring, and an evidence-based social policy.

**Fostering healthy relationships and preventing intimate partner violence in girls in out-of-home placement – results from a pilot program at SOS Children's Villages in Germany**

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**Background:** Adolescence is a critical developmental period for first experiences with romantic relationships and sexuality. Competencies acquired during this period are the basis for healthy relationships in adulthood. Early experiences within close relationships and interactions within the social environment influence the development of those competencies. In that regard, girls in out-of-home placement face multiple challenges in forming and maintaining healthy relationships: They were more often exposed to negative experiences in their family of origin and have to deal with repeated changes in living circumstances. Thus, they might lack supportive relationships, helping them to navigate intimate relationships and sexuality. Social workers in residential homes often do not have the time or knowledge to support girls in maintaining healthy relationships and ending abusive ones.

**Methods:** Based on a comprehensive literature review, recommendations for social workers in out-of-home care were developed. Moreover, a two-day prevention workshop on relationships and sexuality for girls in out-of-home placement was adapted to their specific needs and pilot-tested in four SOS Children's Villages in Germany.

**Results:** The presentation focuses on the key recommendations from the literature and findings from the pilot testing of the prevention workshop, mainly focusing on the changes in attitudes regarding intimate relationships. Additional information on support needs is outlined.

**Conclusions:** Due to the small sample size, generalizability is limited. However, future directions for the implementation of a large-scale program are discussed.

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**Preventing domestic homicide: multi-agency working with victims experiencing high risk domestic abuse**

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**Background:** This study explores risk assessment by professionals in a multi-agency setting for victims of domestic abuse, specifically looking at the role of MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences). MARACs are seen as a tertiary prevention measure in the United Kingdom. MARACs were developed to safeguard the top 10% of domestic abuse cases at risk of serious harm or domestic homicide. Information is shared at the meeting between representatives of the police, social work, domestic abuse services, probation, and other specialists from the governmental and non-governmental sectors.

**Methods:** This study utilised a mixed method design, involving statistical analysis, interviews with MARAC representatives, and observations of MARAC meetings over the period of one year, to understand how risk in relation to domestic abuse is understood and operationalised in professional contexts.

**Results:** (1) Lack of consensus in the conceptualisation of risk across agencies (2) MARAC actions disproportionately focus on the behaviour of the victim, rather than managing the risk posed by the perpetrator (3) Victims from minority ethnic and LGBTQIA+ backgrounds are also less likely to be heard at the MARAC.

**Conclusion:** The research specifically focuses on how risk is conceptualised within the MARAC process in Scotland, and the implications of this for the practice of assessing and managing risk and preventing further abuse. Findings will contribute to theoretical understandings of risk and inform preventative approaches, thereby strengthening safeguards in addressing and reducing domestic homicide.