

The Tamaia paper. Presentation Association TAMAIA, Women's abuse and domestic violence. CATALONIA, SPAIN.
Rakel Escuriol. 17/10/2012

Presentació de l'activitat de l'entitat en el marc de:

The COST Action IS1102 *Social services, welfare state and places*
Second International Workshop with MC & WGSC Meetings
SOCIAL SERVICES AND THE CRISIS IN SPAIN
Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV), Tarragona.
17 i 19 d'octubre de 2012

The Tamaia Paper

Introduction to the Organisation.

Tamaia is a women's cooperative. Today we are 4 women working at Tamaia, 3 of who are members of the cooperative. We have more than 20 years experience working with gender-based violence within couples and within the family.

From its beginning the project was founded on a commitment to the human rights of women and with a feminist perspective, with bases in gender studies.

We started from the principal that violence is a social problem and structural in nature, such that society itself must make available the necessary resources to enable women and their children to obtain the help they need to leave these violent situations.

One of our principal objectives is for women to create a life without violence.

Historical Perspective: In 1992 we initiated the project, working from a women's refuge in Barcelona where a group of workers and users of the refuge created the Mutual Support Group (Grupo de Ayuda Mutua) This was in response to the needs of women who had experienced violent abuse and for whom there was no provision once they left the refuge.

Subsequently we became an association and later a social work cooperative, very similar to an NGO.

We are based at Ca la Dona, a feminist space run by and for women. This space provides us with an environment for healing and support as well as for reflection and social activism. Ca la dona it's a place of solidarity. It is also important for the women undergoing therapy, since various activities take place there and, as a result, no stigma attaches to them when they visit, given that no one knows why they are there.

Within Tamaia we carry out specialized work in terms of psychosocial interventions, support in the community and therapy for women who have suffered violent abuse. The project comprises **3 programs (services)** which relate to different levels of the intervention. Our position is to take an organic and global view of the problem, and in this respect we try to influence those who have suffered violence and those who intervene, with reference to changing the beliefs and myths surrounding violence in society.

Women's support Program:

There is the **Telephone helpline**: that is answered by a therapist who gives support, guidance and information to the women, their families and friends, and to professionals.

An **Individual counseling service**: this involves providing therapeutic support for women in the process of recovering from the effects of violence. We go into more detail about this later when we discuss the recovery process.

Then, there is **Group therapy**: psychosocial help groups are formed between two therapists from the team and no more than ten women who meet at different points in their recovery. Out of this emerges the Mentoring group, women who have completed their recovery process but who continue working closely with us and who now take part in activities relating to prevention and training, and who, throughout the year, attend the support groups or provide guidance for women who are receiving individual counseling.

Prevention program

We do Consciousness-raising activities, raising awareness of the problem among different groups, such as women's groups, youth groups, as well as the general population, we also run workshops about the prevention of violence in young couples. We are also involved in social media, such newspapers and the radio. Since 1995, together with other organizations we have been putting our energies into 25N, the international day for the prevention of violence against women. And we also act as consultants to other institutions and organizations. One of the milestones for the organization was its collaboration in drafting the 2008 Catalan law for the rights of women to eradicate domestic violence.

Training Program

Through this program we promote the specialized training of professionals who are involved in one way or another in the problem. Over two decades we have developed a conceptual framework for the understanding of domestic violence, and at the same time we have formulated the first model for specific intervention and recovery.

So that is a resume of Tamaia's work

I would like to talk about

The recovery process for women in the post-violence stage

The recovery process and some of the tools used by the organization to help the women.

Tamaia works with women supporting them through the process of recovering from the effects of domestic violence. This work focuses not only on highlighting the effects of domestic violence on her life, but also on developing her capabilities and the strategies needed to emerge from the emotional isolation generated by domestic violence, as one of the Tamaia mentors puts it.

Counseling is provided not only whilst the woman is still in a violent relationship, but also afterward, once the woman has left the relationship. We know that frequently the violence will continue by means of economic abuse and possibly by the manipulation of, and damage to, the children, family and social environment.

One of the features of counseling is that we make a long-term commitment to support the women with therapeutic help over time. By this process it is the women

themselves, using the counseling relationship of trust and support, who take the lead role in their own recovery process. It is the women themselves who decide how much time they need and what point they have reached in the process. As you will see, there is an political element which is based on the women's survival capacity and the recognition and development of this capacity, as well as similarly in the rebuilding of their self-respect and independence which have been damaged through domestic violence.

We help the women to talk about what they have lived through, to name the different abuses, to take back control over their lives and to move forward without shame or guilt. We help them in their relationships with their children to regain their place as mothers whose authority has often been undermined by their ex-partner. Through the support groups they can see their own stories reflected in those of other women who have been through similar situations, enabling them to emerge from the isolation caused by domestic violence.

Recovery is about finding yourself again, the person you were before the violence began, but made stronger by past experience and self development.

I would talk now a bit about

Problems at the social level which a woman has to face when she has left her aggressor.

Currently we are facing many gaps in social provision. The measures to help women who have suffered domestic violence have not been fully implemented (for example the fund to guarantee against non-payment of pensions). Violence makes women poorer. They suffer economic abuse, go to court, they may lose employment...and, often, having no money puts them at greater risk of either not leaving the violent relationship or of returning to it.

Often the authorities fail to pay the compensation to which the women are entitled. Economic abuse continues after the separation through unfair settlements, non payment of maintenance and withholding of mortgage payments. At the level of the courts, processes are very slow and the outcome rarely reflects any blame on the aggressor to make him responsible for what he has done.

If women attempt to sue for their rights it takes a very long time for a decision to be reached and this in turn diminishes the probability that they will feel protected.

Some government services related to the justice system and even sometimes to mental health and social services are reticent about the conflicts which provoke violence against women and their children. Often they take decisions damaging to the women and there is a high incidence of secondary victimization of the women. For example the authorities don't believe what they are told, they put the women under injunction, they even monitor them more closely than the actual aggressors... Since some sectors in society are masking the effects of abuse, the responsibility for managing their problems after separation falls to the women themselves. It is vitally important that the various government services understand that domestic violence is a process, it doesn't disappear overnight, and it is hard to bring an end to domestic violence if those services normalize or minimize its seriousness.

Finally I'm going to talk about

The economic crisis and its impact on women in relation to domestic violence.

In the current economic crisis women are in a more vulnerable position. Fear of leaving a partner, mixed with the fear of facing a separation with all that that implies, in a context of economic poverty, means that women may have fewer opportunities to take such a step. We need to take into account that situations of social tension are risk factors for families where there is inequality or abuse of power. Stress caused by economic factors can unleash more attacks. This can confuse women about the causes of the violence to which they are subjected because these economic factors can appear to be a justification, so they think that once the situation gets better the attacks will grow fewer or disappear altogether.

At Tamaia more women's demands arrive through the public services, points of information to women and health care services that have become saturated.

We have also found that women are more economically vulnerable. One of the strategies that aggressors are currently using is to pressurize women through economic abuse. Many of them do not pay alimony for the children or do not pay their part of mortgage. This generates a lot of stress for women who see their survival at risk. Unfortunately, according to our experience in Tamaia, this behavior doesn't have legal effects when they get to court, so economic abuse is going unpunished. Too often Courts treat these cases as a relationship conflict and we see inconsistencies because of the separation of the civil and the criminal in a case of domestic violence

In Spain a movement to reject the advances of women is currently growing using the court system to claim custody of the children. Men who have used violence against their partners and in many cases, violence toward their children, are demanding joint custody to avoid paying the corresponding pension while continuing to have control of the relationship through the relationship with their children.

The context of the current crisis is a situation of economic violence and of loss of rights for the population in general. If we consider that women start out from a position of structural inequality, with lower salaries, more precarious and unstable occupations, then the present situation makes them even more vulnerable than previously. They may once more experience old feelings of helplessness, believing that whatever they do they can never escape a violent relationship.

Translation by Nadine Kazerounian, July 2012

TAMAIA like other social organizations, is in a situation of economic risk. Institutional funds have been diminishing since 2009 and that's why we need to find alternative ways to continue offering our services for women.

Tamaia is a little jewel created in Catalonia; and we offer a quality, specialized service. Therefore we are open to suggestions about how to continue developing this important work.

Solutions

We think that advances in the issue of domestic violence, are experienced as a threat by some sectors of society. Today there is a regression with respect to rights, in reaction to this feeling.

Training of professionals in DV is necessary. Professionals of social care, health care, and legal professionals like lawyers, judges, magistrates... In order to be able to intervene successfully, it's essential they are properly trained to understand the systemic nature of DV, how DV works between perpetrators and victims as well as the effects on women and on children.

It's important not to work alone in this field because otherwise we can feel isolated, impotent and angry. This can lead to interventions whose result is negative or harmful in spite of the best intentions.

It's important that we are aware of the different kinds of abuse: psychological, economical and sexual. Otherwise we will only look for physical violence. The perpetrators know the law and they can abuse their partners without pushing, battering, kicking them.

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