
***Comparing Sexual Assault Interventions* project:
Latvia Case Study Report**



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1 Background/Introduction

This case study on sexual assault service was undertaken as part of the project Comparing Sexual Assault Interventions project which is funded by the European Union through the DAPHNE III Programme 2007-2013. The aim of this case study was to identify the mechanisms that exist and do not exist in each service, like forensic, medical, psychosocial and criminal justice. To get to know the positive and negative impacts of these models of intervention on the health, social and criminal justice outcomes of victims of sexual assault, from the point of view of the victims as well from service providers.

The report is based on partially structured interviews of sexually abused victims that were developed on the grounds of the questions anticipated for the focus groups. The report summarizes the interview data provided by the service providers using the benchmarking & evaluation tool developed by the project.

In Latvia sexual assault is a deeply hidden and unrecognized problem about that the society is not ready to talk and discuss yet. Anonymous questionnaire should be anticipated in the research to find out the opinion from as many as possible sexually abused victims about the available services and their quality.

The main recommendations proposed by this case study are the following:

- To organize education activates and inform the society. Regular and planned information and education campaigns of the society in the media environment are needed. Making of stories and advertisement rolls in cooperation with all services to educate professionally and establish emotional attitude of the society.
- Develop a training system for the professionals who interact with victims of sexual assault. Protocols and guidelines on sexual assault interventions should be established for each sector as well.
- More learning should be encouraged and shared between countries to help understand and support the development of different intervention models.
- To develop EU directives with recommendations on the legal, medical and psychosocial provisions, how to deal with sexual assault in a way which protects and promotes victims' rights and well-being.

2 Methodology

Seeing that in Latvia no institution (public or private) like a focal point for women who have been sexually assaulted the meetings was organized with different institutions and organizations that provide services for victims. These institutions and organization included:

- Police, which investigates the case;
- Legal aid which enforce the law and protect women's rights;
- Forensic expertise which collect evidence;
- Medical aid, gynaecologists, which treat injuries;
- Psychological support for mental health;

The research was made in Riga and the surrounding where half of the inhabitants of Latvia live. Interviews were arranged with: psychosocial and medicine workers, providers of legal services, responsible employees of police and forensic medicine experts. The quality, availability and lacks of the provided services were discussed.

Since it was necessary to talk to women who have suffered from assault, the service providers were asked to give the details. All contacted service providers refused it substantiating that the contact details of the victims is confidential and won't be given.

Psychosocial aid services were the only ones who responded to help to find women. The statistics of the consultation of these services is such that during the last year only 5 of all registered consultations were marked as the cases of sexual assault. It stated that it will be impossible to arrange the focus group for women who have suffered from assault. To reach the target group – women suffered from sexual assault, information was put on the social site www.calis.lv

Interviews in presence with two sexually abused women were arranged in the framework of the project: one responded to the information on the internet site, the other was a client of the crisis centre.

3 Sexual assault services in Latvia

In Latvia all services (police, forensic science, medicine, psychosocial and legal services) work that can ensure the support and investigation for women in case of sexual assault. At the same time there is no organization in Latvia that would provide these services in one place. All these services work independently one from another and their operation is not mutually agreed and coordinated.

If an act of sexual assault has happened, a woman can promptly contact or go to the State Police (10min to 1h), she can call the crisis phone and receive immediate consultation.

3.1 Police

First the woman has to submit an application with detailed information about what has happened so that the police can commence a criminal proceeding about the case of sexual assault. Before to write the application, the procedure is explained to the woman how the criminal proceeding will be advanced.

Having written the application, the victim meets the investigation officer and she tells in detail what has happened. The investigation officer is the one who instructs the operative team to collect the materials and sends the woman to the forensic expertise. When all required proofs are collected the accusation is brought and the investigation officer gives the case to the public prosecutor.

The public prosecutor meets the victim and the woman once again has to tell everything that has happened. The case is supplemented with the required documents and the case is delivered to the court. The public prosecutor is the one who determined whether the hearing will be open or closed, he/she can also determined whether confrontation will be arranged.

At the court the woman also has to give evidence and tell in detail what has happened.

The police try to ensure a separate room where the victim can meet the investigation officer and give evidences. In case it is possible the police ensure that the investigation officer is of the same sex. The documentation of cases is stored in locked cabinets.

All actions performed by the investigation officer are based on the Criminal Proceedings Law. A police officer studies at the academy on how to conduct the investigation procedure in 1-2 days lecture course. Training how to work in cases of sexual assault was arranged several years ago.

The police have the information on the psychological support services and they inform also the woman on the possibilities to attend it.

3.2 Legal aid

At the lawyer who works within the framework of the crisis centre it is possible to receive one free consultation. The lawyer provides information on the rights of the woman, and if necessary, he/she helps to write the application to the police. The lawyer informs the woman on her rights, explains the legislation and informs about the investigation procedure.

The lawyers have no standard forms how to work in cases of sexual assault. Action protocols with other institutions are not agreed and approved. The lawyers ground on their experience and knowledge.

3.3 Forensic expertise

Forensic medicine experts perform expertise according to the instruction of the person directing the proceedings (police). The patient arrives herself or she is brought with the transport of the police.

In Riga the dispensary works from 8:30 – 16:00, in other times the expertise is available in the police office or the expert goes to the reception of the medical institution in case the woman has arrived in the police and she needs also medical id.

Forensic medicine experts provide information to the person directing the proceedings, not to the third person. Forensic medicine expertise centre cooperates only with the police and goes to give evidence also to the court; sending to the psychological aid services is not given.

3.4 Medical aid, gynaecologists

Medical aid in Riga is given by the gynaecologist on duty at the reception. The patient can arrive herself or together with the police. The doctor assesses the bodily injuries and their severity and accurately documents them. In case the woman has arrived together with the police, the forensic medicine expert also participates in the examination – forensic proofs are collected at the same time.

In case the woman has arrived alone, the doctor takes the samples according to the protocol – vaginal discharge from the back cupola on two glass slides and a pledget on that a sample from the back cupola of vagina is taken. The samples are stored – if the woman wants to institute a proceeding, they are delivered to the forensic medicine expertise. The woman is informed about the possibility to turn to the police. The medical institution can

inform the police about what has happened if the woman wants it. If she refuses – the police is not informed.

Information about the psychological and social support services is given only if the woman asks it.

3.5 Psychological support

In Latvia psychological support is available both in several crisis and consultation centres and also individually at the psychologists or psychotherapists. Women who have suffered from violence can go to these centres or they can be sent by the police or the social service.

Hotline works day and night where the woman can receive psychological support and also information about other support centres and the police. When calling or meeting at presence, the consultant assesses the self-injury risk of the woman, post-traumatic stress syndrome, necessity for safe shelter for the woman and her children. Standard form is not applied in the assessment; instead they use the experience and knowledge how to work in crisis situations. During the negotiation next times for meetings are planned with the woman. If necessary, the consultant contacts also the persons working in other sectors.

In case the victim attends the consultation centre, the number of times the woman has to tell what has happened is decreased within the framework of the particular institution. Action protocols (verbal) are elaborated inside the institution, and giving support is arranged for the woman – a victim of sexual assault. Patient data safety and confidentiality is ensured. All actions are documented. A team of experts has regular meetings where special cases are discussed and supervisions arranged.

In case the woman attends a consultant for a longer period of time, mutual cooperation is discussed and feedback is given. It is offered to fill in a questionnaire and make entries in the book of gratitude and complaints.

Practically all consultants working with the clients study or have already acquired the bachelors degree in psychology or social work. Training about crisis intervention is arranged regularly that can be attended by the consultants at their own initiative.

Most of the psychological support centre work independently of other service providers. Regular meetings are not determined mutually with the service providers working in other sectors. Internet site google is used as the database about the available services.

In Riga there is only one psychological aid service that receives regular funding from the municipality. Finances and activities of other centres depend on the awarded grants and the target groups they are intended for.

In case information appears in mass media about an extraordinary case, the psychologists give their opinion. On the grounds of the event, articles are also published, with that they try to pay attention to sexual abuse and its consequences.

4 Presentation of findings from the case study service

In Latvia sexual assault against a woman is still a taboo issue. Information about it can be found neither in mass media nor on the internet sites. Since it is not talked about, nor educated about this subject, then of course stereotypes and preconceptions predominate in the society.

Psychological support centre are those that try to activate the issue about the sexual assault. They write projects within the framework of which provision of free consultations, arrangement of training for other experts and information of society are ensured. On the grounds of the fact that the awarded funding is not regular and constant, free consultations are also irregular and the educational work is chaotic and without a joint methods.

In case of sexual assault experts from different fields involve. A woman (victim) in such situation has a difficulty to focus attention, remember the everyday things and finding out the, for example, in the police about all investigation process, she feels even more powerless to remember and implement all bureaucratic requirements.

At the moment in Latvian internet environment only one article can be found where the basic items are described what must be done in case of sexual assault.

As all services: police, forensic medicine, medicine, psychosocial and legal services admit, among them there is no purposeful and structured cooperation. Each professional works in his/her area and knows only general things about other service providers. Mostly the information about other service providers is searched on the internet (google), not in common training or seminars. No model (standard) form is elaborated in the services with that to work in cases of sexual assault. In Latvia there is no service (social rehabilitator) that would provide regular support for the woman and help to complete the required formalities, would listen to, support and encourage.

No protocols and joint standards are elaborated in state or private institutions how to work in cases of sexual assaults. Mainly all representatives of their profession act according to their discretion in case of sexual assault. The employees are not trained how to talk to persons in crisis situations. Their comments and insecurity about themselves lead to that the victim feels not understood and undervalued. Illiterateness, stereotypes, blaming, disbelief, lack of emotional intelligence are those factors that disturb mutual cooperation and qualitative aid.

The greatest lacks are seen in the work of the police. Work of the police is based on the Criminal Law that determines strict limits and procedural operations. On the grounds of the fact that no standard forms are elaborated that would *soften* the investigation in case of sexual assault, the woman is repeatedly victimized when she has to tell several times what has happened. In the police there is great turnover of staff (during the investigation up to 3 inspecting officers can change).

In case a woman has decided to perform a legal procedure, she has to devote very much of the private time. Legal procedure can last even several years, that means that it becomes more public and bureaucratic and even more persons get involved and find out about it. The statistics is such that most of the commenced criminal proceedings are not lead to a court.

Education and interest of the employees of different institutions about the sexual assault against a woman depends on the initiative and general understanding of the employee himself/herself. Documents are kept in safe places and their confidentiality is observed but at the same time standards of ethics are violated when the employees at the presence of the client/patient discuss other cases. It makes a conviction in the victim of sexual assault that his/her case also will be discussed with other unauthorized persons. The victim feels respect and sympathy only at superficial level without a true sensitivity.

In Riga in the crisis centre free psychological support consultations are available five times. A psychotherapy course is required so that a woman could wholesomely return in her life rhythm after what has happened. It means that the victim must invest own financial resources when attending the psychotherapist, psychiatrist (if necessary) and the lawyer so that the aid was lasting and qualitative.

Arrangement of self-aid groups is the initiative of psychotherapists and psychologists. Support groups are arranged rarely when victims of sexual abuse are among several colleagues.

Women are not satisfied with the period of time that must be spent when waiting for a consultation or meeting with an expert. If the registration is in a week, it seems for the victim in a crisis situation as a long and distressful period. In Latvia there have been cases that the psychological expertise is a year and a half after the acts of sexual assault.

In all institutions where the victim is examined, he/she has to tell in detail about the case of sexual assault (it can be up to 9 times). For example, one has to go ambulatory to the control visit at the doctor (if such is necessary), it is not possible to get to the same doctor (so everything must be told once again).

In case the victim wants to do the citizen's duty to protect other women and inform the society about the crime, different obstacles are created so that she wouldn't meet the responsible employees and give the evidence.

From the one side institutions try to ensure the expert of the same sex, but from the other side the woman has no possibility to choose which expert to talk to. It is important in cases if acquaintances or friends of the victim work in the respective institution.

The Criminal Law of Latvia is outdated, the forms of sexual assault are not defined precisely. There are lacks in legislation, for example, a police office can involve the victim in the investigation process to get the required proofs and documents.

Laws that are adopted and approved are not implemented in life, for example, the legal instruments that the oppressor cannot approach the victim's home.

Creation of the public opinion about the sexual assault against a woman is not implemented systematically. This issue becomes topical when an extraordinary event has happened that has come into focus of mass media.

In Riga there are not enough forensic experts women. In case a woman has turned to the reception of a hospital in the evening or at night – the forensic expert will definitely be man.

Emergency contraception is not available in the medical institutions. STI testing in the hospital is impossible – it must be made ambulatory (also for charge). HIV prevention it is possible to receive only at the Infectology Centre of Latvia.

Although there is a separate room for the inspection by a gynaecologist, the doors are not locked during the inspection.

5 Assessment and recommendations

Based on information from research using the benchmarking & evaluation tool and partially structured interviews, this case study report makes a number of recommendations. These recommendations are aimed to all services providers which respond, support and deal with the different needs of women who have been sexually assaulted.

- Police need to improve confidentiality of victim which means to provide that victim is listened by the police officer of the same sex, allow to choose the expert in cases familiar persons work in the institution also provide a separate room where to give evidence;
- Police should educate society and give detailed information what is sexual assault and what can be the types thereof as well inform about the procedural operations in cases of sexual assault;
- Forensic medical examination need to ensuring an expert of the same sex day and night;

- Medicine services should paying more attention to the privacy of victim, for example, lockable inspection room also to receive improvement of STI testing and prevention at the hospital and day and night;
- Medicine services need to provide first meeting without time limit because is important to inform victim on the possible physiological and psychological consequences already at the first time;
- Psychosocial services should regularly arrange support groups for woman who have suffered from sexual assault;
- Each sector need to established **protocols** or **guidelines** on sexual assault interventions and these should include compulsory training on understanding all the dimensions of sexual assault;
- All service providers should develop a **standard form** that is complied with in all cases of sexual assault;
- Each sector should elaborate a **training** program for their employees so that they would understand the importance of the problem about the sexual assault. On this training focus should be not only to technical aspects but also to crisis intervention and attitude, behaviour and sensitive communication with the victims. Training has to be regularly repeated;
- All sector need to activate sexual assault **issues** among the experts to increase the understanding and quality of services and professionals who assisting to victims of sexual assault should be educated;
- All professionals need to facilitate the mutual **cooperation** as well service providers should develop inter-institutional procedures for integrated intervention in cases of sexual assault;
- All sector together need to clearly designed **client journey** and develop continual support system for victims of sexual assault;
- Sexual assault services need to develop and agreed with common indicators for **evaluation** system. Important form service users to get the feedback about the quality of the services;
- More learning should be encouraged and shared **between countries** to help understand and support the development of different intervention models;
- The EU should require Member States to follow **EU Directives** on sexual violence. These would include recommendations on the legal, medical and psycho-social provisions needed in a country to deal with sexual assault in a way which protects and promotes victims' rights and well-being;

5.1 Education of the society

Regular and planned information and education campaigns of the society in the media environment. Making of stories, broadcasts and advertisement rolls in cooperation with all services to educate professionally and establish emotional attitude of the society.

In case of sexual assault the society looks for the guilty persons not paying sufficient attention to the victim. To admit that the victim has suffered and provide support so that the victim is able to continue a wholesome life.

Explain what is sexual assault and what its forms can be, for example, touching of sexual organs also is defined as sexual assault. Give explanation that forced sexual relationship between the spouses also is sexual assault.

Confidence of women and trust in them must be promoted. It is important to tell and make conviction in youth of school age that nobody has the right to touch him/her without the consent of the teenager, and if someone is doing it, it is a punishable action.

To make brochures in Latvian and Russian where the basic things are described that must be done in case of sexual assault.

To make an internet site where to summarize information right about the sexual assault against a woman. Information where the information about all services is provided what and why must be looked for, how important it is and how much time it will take. In case a woman has decided to commence a legal procedure, make a description about how the judiciary works, what is the proceeding like and what institutions she will have to visit.

To place descriptions or experience of other persons about the idea and things that help to undergo what has happened. To popularize the aid services of other countries such as USA *online chat*, that can be used by other persons knowing the English language.

It is important the all this information is easy to comprehend and understand because being in a crisis situation it is difficult to focus, perceive difficult information and remember it.

6 References

<http://www.lu.lv/studentiem/studijas/ka-studet/ieteikumi/personibas-resursi-un-riski/ja-parciesta-seksuala-vardarbiba/>