

The Role of the Helper

- work in protecting and supporting female victims of violence and their children



Foreword

Titel:
The Role of the Helper
- work in protecting and
supporting female
victims of violence and
their children

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The shelters in Norway do invaluable work in protecting and supporting female victims of violence and their children. It is important that those who are to meet people in situations of deep crisis have sufficient knowledge of handling it. Post traumatic disorders can be prevented with adequate and sufficient help through emergency processing, psychosocial aid and practical support. Good practices will also ensure quality of work, and in the long run contribute toward helping more women with available resources.

Because of its long experience, the Oslo Women's Shelter, through the Secretariat of the Shelter Movement in Norway, was assigned to write this guide. The purpose of this guide is to increase the competence of those assisting female victims of violence, living in or using the country's shelters, and those of their children.

The Body Shop has, through several campaigns, has been engaged in the work of shelters and those against male violence against women. The guide has largely been financed through the sale of pins from The Body Shop stores around Norway.

Writing a guide is in itself challenging, with limited funds that enabled only two months of work. The guide is therefore to be seen as a beginning of a process and not a conclusive end. Some topics have been thoroughly reviewed; some have been superficially treated, while some topics have not been included at all.

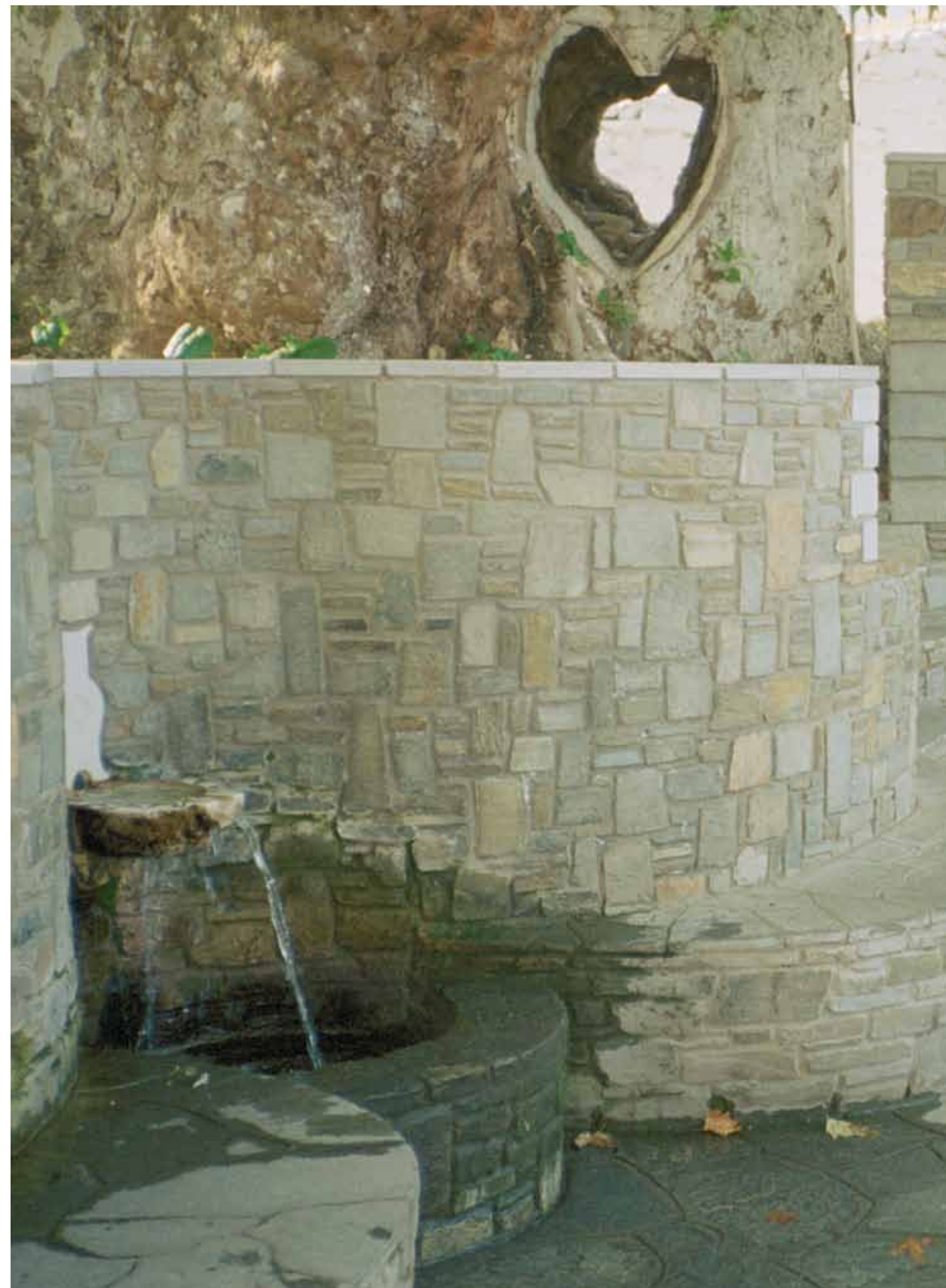
The fifty-one shelters in Norway differ in basic conditions, number of residents and employees. The movement can therefore be very different from shelter to shelter, which means that not all the topics and methods in the guide are equally relevant for all.

We would like to thank Kristin Berntsen, environmental therapist for the Oslo Women's Shelter, who took on the great task of writing the guide in such a short time. We would also like to thank Mary Vold, Lisa Ormset Prøis, Judith van der Weele and Maya Brenna Nielsen for their contributions and for inspecting the guide.

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The purpose with this guide:

To increase the competence of those assisting female victims of violence, living in or using the country's shelters, and their children.

The Women’s Shelters’ ideological standpoint

There are currently 51 women’s shelters with different frameworks, structure and organisation. The shelters should be a supplement, as well as an alternative, to public support services. Traditionally, large parts of the Shelter Movement have marked the shelters as a non-professional initiative, where the principle for help to self-help has governed the work. The ways in which helpers and users relate to each other is influenced by each individual shelter’s ideologies, values, attitudes and culture. Regardless of how the shelter is organised, the women’s own experiences with violence has to be key when they receive help from the helpers.

The helpers’ employment conditions differ from shelter to shelter and are described, among others, as guards, volunteers, environmental workers, child coordinators, day workers, general managers etc. The starting point of this guide is that all shelter employees are identified as **helpers**, because we are all here, regardless of job title or job share, to help women and children who have been subjected to male violence in close relations.

Treatment The discussion whether the shelters should be professionalised, and if they practice treatment, has been going on for a long time. At the same time we know that violence in close relations is characterised by repeated violence over time and therefore has huge consequences for women and children’s physical and mental health. Increased knowledge of the physical and mental stress, which in many cases result in developing post-traumatic disorders, makes it necessary to have well established procedures when dealing with female victims of violence in the shelters. Even though the shelters do not define themselves as institutions for treatment, more and more people recognise that staying at a shelter can lay the foundation for a continued treatment process for both women and children. This assumes that we as helpers at the shelters have enough knowledge and expertise to be able to

assist violence-exposed women and children in crisis.

Defining violence There are many different explanations for male violence against women in close relations. The principle in the guide is that the victims of violence in the shelters are met and helped according to their individual situations and needs, no matter the basis of understanding. It is the victim herself who defines the violations she has been subject to, independent of the degree of the violence or its extent. The same physical and psychological acts of violence do not necessarily have the same consequences for the one exposed to it. To understand the consequences we have to reveal the context of the violence. We distinguish between four kinds of violence:

Physical violence: use of physical force like shoving, pulling by the hair, kicking, hitting.

Psychological violence: use of psychological force like direct or indirect threats, control, harassment and neglect.

Sexual violence: being forced to perform sexual activities, rape, and other sexual assaults.

Material violence: destroying fixtures or objects and economical exploitation.

Violence turns into abuse when the attacks become a pattern characterising the relationship.

The risk of being exposed to repeated acts of violence will put the victims in a continuous state of mental alert which takes control of their actions before, during and after the incidents.

In this guide we use the term: “men’s violence against women and children in close relations” to point out that it in this context is women and children who are affected (NOU 2003:31)



Material violence:
Destroying fixtures or objects and economical exploitation.

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The Role of the Helper

Professionalism and the helper For people in crisis, the way the crisis is handled and processed is crucial. It is therefore important that they are met and assisted in a professional manner.

An appropriate way of understanding professionalism is to use Jensen's (1993) definition, stating that: "professionalism is characterised primarily by the ability of critical reflection in order to avoid working methods based on chance or habit."

In meeting a shelter worker, the victim of violence will rarely be concerned about what kind of position or what qualifications that person has. The victim will have a need for someone who is able to provide a safe, stable and peaceful environment in an otherwise chaotic situation. In this context, being professional involves us having knowledge of people in crisis and the possible consequences of having been victim of men's violence in close relations.

The help relation Being exposed to repeated violence could hurt one's ability to have good relations (Herman 1995).

When the abilities of women and children to relate to other people have been damaged, the healing process must happen through new experiences with friends and helpers who treat them with dignity and respect. The interaction between the victims of violence and the helpers must be one based on trust. This trust is gained by the helper showing affection, being available and in different ways signalling that "I wish you well". It is the helper's responsibility to develop this relation. Taking on this responsibility enables us to utilise different strategies and means in our interaction with those we are trying to assist. We also avoid the temptation of blaming the woman when we are unable to achieve the trust, or connection we want.

Helper: "I have told her many times that she must come to our appointments. She never does, but she always comes and wants to talk to me when I'm busy doing

other things. She has to understand that this isn't acceptable and that I can't help her if she continues like this..."

Helper: "I have on several occasions made appointments with her, but she doesn't come to them. I have to find out why. Maybe she has so much to think about that she forgets our appointments. Maybe I'm not being clear enough about the time of the appointments or maybe she needs to be reminded of them."

User participation/empowerment
The women and children are acting participants in their own lives, and they have to be included in the work of establishing and making decisions. The helper is responsible for making sure that the focus is on the victim of violence, and her/their needs. This requires dialogue, and a shared understanding of the reality which is to be the base for further planning. In the communication between the victim of violence and her helper the victim is the expert on her own life and experiences. She will contribute to finding out what it is she needs help for, what goals she has, and what should first be prioritised. The helper has knowledge about measures that could work in accordance to those priorities and goals. For the victim of violence to be able to utilise the help she is offered, it has to be designed in such a way that she understands the purpose of it.

Helper: "I don't know what to do. Her husband is very active and dangerous for her. I've advised her on several occasions to file a complaint against him, but she doesn't want to involve the police."

Helper: "Her husband is very active and could be dangerous to her. We've discussed filing a complaint, but she doesn't want to involve the police. We have to discuss it further, maybe later this week. I'm not sure that she's at this stage capable of considering the consequences of filing a complaint because her fear for revenge overshadows her ability to reflect upon and consider her own security."



Professionalism and the helper:
For people in crisis, the way the crisis is handled and processed is crucial.

Women and children victims of violence - a crisis perspective

Most women and children who come to the shelters have been exposed to serious repeated traumas. The chance for emerging out of a traumatic crisis is greater if one has access to high-quality assistance during the crisis. As helpers it is important to have knowledge of general crisis theory to be better equipped for working with the victims. In this guide we have tried to apply Cullberg's theories to the work at the shelters (Cullberg 1995).

Crisis theory distinguishes between two kinds of vaguely distinct crisis; traumatic crisis and development crisis. A development crisis could be triggered by external events part of normal life that could, in the right circumstances, be experienced as overwhelming. A traumatic crisis is triggered by events that threaten the individual's physical existence, social identity and safety. People in a mental state of crisis are in a state of mind where earlier experiences or taught reactions are no longer sufficient for mastering their current situation. Crisis theory divides the course of crisis into different phases that the victim goes through. These phases are not to be understood as fixed and clearly distinct – they are processes that victims go through at a different pace, and the processes slide over and into each other. The course of crisis can be divided into the following phases:

Shock or acute phase: The victim is engaged in orienting herself after the triggering occurrence. Some people can seem paralysed from the outside, but inside reigns total confusion and everything is perceived as incomprehensible and meaningless. Others can react with intense panic, shouting and screaming. The victim can be frightened and insecure, and without the ability to receive and process new information. This phase could last for anything from a couple of hours up to a few days.

Reaction phase: This phase is distinguished by the victim's pain over the loss or violation coming to fruition. The victim often experiences sleep deprivation, anxiety, memory loss,

general exhaustion and other bodily reactions. This phase can last for a couple of weeks up to several months.

Processing phase: It is now possible for the victim to keep the pain at bay for shorter or longer periods of time. This gives the victim the opportunity to work on herself and function constructively. This phase can also vary in length and could last from six months up to a year, or even longer.

Reorientation phase: The pain from the loss or violating experience is gone, or completely under control. The victim has integrated her traumatic experiences and is now able to look ahead and continue her life.

Crisis intervention during the stay at the shelter: To be able to assist people in a psychological state of mental crisis it is necessary that we, as helpers, have knowledge of what the victim has need for during each different phase. Crisis theory could contribute to understand what stage of crisis the victim is on. Experience show that most women and children are in the acute or reaction phase when they arrive at the shelter. Some come right after fleeing from or having been rescued from an assault. Others may have planned their escape over a longer period of time, maybe after earlier conversations at the shelter or with other authorities. For the majority of women and children, the processing and reorientation phases do not start until after they have moved out of the shelter. This guide will focus on the work we do towards women and children living at the shelter after having been exposed to violence and abuse.

The shock and acute phase at the shelters The state of women and children can vary from seeming totally unaffected to being clearly scarred by what they have experienced. Crisis intervention during this phase requires no specific treatment. As helpers, the most important contribution we could make is to create a maximum degree of safety during the first few days at the shelter. We can show compassion by covering basic and practical needs like security, food and clothing. Through conversations we show them that we are there to listen, and we take the time to listen to their stories - stories that can be both incoherent and full of repetition. We often find that women and children in a state of crisis have lost all meaning of existence along with their hopes for the future. As helpers, we could through our conversations stand for realistic hope, and act as their "substitute hope" during this period (Cullberg 1995).

"Sumera came to the shelter through the help of a lady who wished to remain anonymous to us who worked there. The lady disappeared without any further explanations and I was left sitting with a woman who was distinctly marked from being exposed to something without being able to express what it was. She was sobbing and trembling, and at the slightest sound she hid behind the couch or clung to me whilst shrieking with fear. I started with trying to get her to tell me what had happened until I understood that she was incapable of having a conversation. Instead I just chose to be there with her and at the same time I tried to show her by body language and my own words that she was out of danger now – that she was in a safe place and that she could continue to stay here. All our community workers got informed that the new woman was in a state of crisis and that she was in need of care and safety without us focusing on all the uncertainties about what had happened to her. After about a day, the shock had diminished enough for Sumera to be able to have her first of many conversations with me."

During the acute phase, the most important thing we can do is to create

the strongest feeling of security possible in an often chaotic situation, without expecting more than the victim can handle. The biggest mistake we often make is to have expectations to what the women should be capable of doing on their own without taking into account their current mental state.

"Farhana escaped to a shelter with her four children. She had been victim to physical and psychological abuse throughout a long marriage. The children, who were between the age two to eight, had all witnessed the abuse. The family showed different reactions to the situation. Farhana was quiet and reserved, the youngest children cried a lot while the eldest boy had a very expressive and aggressive behaviour. After the first conversation, where most of the abuse was uncovered, the environmental therapist developed a long list of initiatives that she advised Farhana to start with that very same day: to meet with the social security office, acquiring the services of a lawyer, changing her address, filing a complaint against her husband, watching out for and keeping her children active, and to register for a Norwegian language course. Farhana experienced the shelter's requirements in the middle of her acute phase as so overwhelming, that she just resigned herself and could not even deal with her children's needs for food, clothes and sleep."

Acute work The arrival is an important stage for women and children's continued stay at the shelter. During this acute phase, we must focus on the following:

Counselling upon arrival: The women can to a varying degree be affected by what happened preceding the escape to the shelter. They might not know anything about the place they have come to or what will happen next. As helpers, we try to make the situation as safe as possible by:

- Showing the woman that the shelter is a safe place where no one can reach her or get to her.
- Focusing on the shelter's confidentiality and ensuring her that we will help



Women and children victims of violence - a crisis perspective

- her on her own terms.
- Listening to what the woman has to say without asking too many questions.
During this phase the woman should not have to go into details describing the story of her abuse and, as helpers, we should be able to cope with not knowing all the details.
 - If the woman has children that are not taking part in the conversation we will also try to map out the children's situation.
 - Showing the woman around the shelter and her room, and telling her that we are available for her if she needs us. We offer to spend time with the woman and we will not expect her to take the initiative to initiate conversation or anything else for that matter.
 - We emphasise practical care that could be of importance to the woman. In all practicality this entails that if she is in need of tea, a toothbrush or to buy groceries, we help her to get these things.

Counselling sessions with children:
Children will also to a varying degree be affected by what happened in their home preceding the escape to the shelter. They might have experienced a lot of drama, and maybe they got a ride to the shelter in a police car. Some children are mostly concerned by the fact that their mother is so upset. They might know even less about the place they have come to and what will happen next than their mother. Emergency counselling sessions with the children are based upon the same principles as with the adults, but they are adjusted to the child's age and development level.

- We show the children that we are safe adults who see them and comfort them.
- We tell the children that the shelter is a safe place where both mommies and children can receive help.
- Telling the children that others have experienced similar situations could contribute to them opening up and wishing to talk about their experiences. It is then important that we listen actively and follow up on what the

- children says in later conversations.
- We show the children around the shelter and tell them what toys and activities we have available.
 - We show the children that they are welcome by being available and taking initiative to interaction and, if possible, give every new child a welcome present.

During admission sessions with children, it is important that we continue to evaluate what sort of psychological state the children are in so that they will be attended to in the best way possible. The purpose of the session should be to make them feel as safe as possible. By not asking the children about what happened on the basis that we want to shield them could make us contribute to trivialising the violence. At the same time, it is important not to refer to the father or any other assailant in a negative way because this could make the children feel interrogated and experience conflicting loyalties.

Joint counselling session with mother and child/ children: Depending on the age and in what psychological state the mother and children are in, we consider if it would be appropriate with a joint counselling session. The topics of the session could be restricted somewhat and we could, if necessary, continue the conversation after the children has gone to bed.

Treatment and registration of injuries:
As helpers, we must consider if the woman or children have the need to be examined and treated by a doctor, or at the emergency ward, and to make an appointment if the woman so wishes.

Reation phase – staying at the shelter
It is in the reaction phase that most of the work gets done during the stay at the shelter. The women and children will now be able to relate to their situation/ existence in an entirely different manner than during the acute phase. This makes it possible for the helper and woman, together, to uncover needs and find fitting solutions to them. Many of the families who stay at the shelters have great and often complex needs.

The shelters will assist women and their children after the principle of “help for self-help”. The term can be understood as assisting the women and children based on their needs, their background and their current situation into making it on their own. It is often necessary to have several counselling sessions in order to map out and get an overview of the problem areas. Experience tells us that the shelters usually focus primarily on the strictly necessary practical assistance - there is not much system to how we attend to psychological strain after being exposed to trauma. By assessing the family's psychological situation at the same time as the rest of their needs, we can make sure that the family will get the assistance they need.

DIAGRAM FOR MAPPING OUT SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Emotional and relational needs:	External needs:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The woman's history of violence- The child's history of violence- Reactions to the violence- Other violence/ violence between siblings- Have they themselves used violence against their own children?- Assessing threats with the help of a developed mapping plan- Survival strategies- Substance abuse- Personal network, family, friends, others- Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assessing strategies in relation to possible threats- Establishing contact with necessary aid agencies- Lawyer- Filing complaints- Arbitration (where children are involved)- Separation- External network- Economy- Beneficial housing rights- Married/common-law spouse/lover- Visiting rights and the child- School, day-care centre, after-school activities.

Counselling sessions as a mapping tool

Through systematic counselling sessions we can map the extent of the violence/abuse, its consequences and different measures to cover the victims' possible needs. Systematic sessions differ from informal ones in that they have a set framework.

- The time of the appointment is planned beforehand.
- The session is situated at a location shielded from outside disturbances.
- The length of the session is planned beforehand.
- The purpose and goal of the session has been made clear in advance, or is done so introductorily.
- The session has an introduction, main section, and a conclusion.
- As a helper, it is our responsibility to make the woman understand the purpose of the interview and make sure that she consents to how the information gathered will be used further.

The framework around the session should not hinder the woman or children in talking about what they want or what preoccupies them. It should instead help them and the helper to exchange knowledge and information so that the foundation for discussion towards further evaluation and planning will be as real as possible.

The women's and children's history of violence The extent of the violence should be uncovered during these sessions. To understand the woman and children's possible needs we need information about what kind of violence they have been subject too. How serious has it been? Has the children witnessed it or have they been direct victim to it? Where was the child during the physical assaults? Was the child lying in the arms of its mother and getting hit by punches? Was it clutching the leg of one of its parents while being hit by kicks, or did it make itself invisible by hiding? How has the physical violence evolved? How long has the woman and her child/children been in this relationship? How did it start? Has the violence increased gradually?

Reactions to the violence

Through counselling sessions where we focus on the violence it will be natural to ask what kind of consequences the violence has had for the woman and children. What is the extent of her fear? Does she live in a continuous state of alarm in fear of another assault? Are all her actions governed by fear? Has the physical and psychological violence become a natural part of her every-day life so that she has stopped relating to it? To what degree does the violence in her family isolate her? Does she have family, friends and a job or is she part of any other social network? Does she use her energy to hide the violence from her surroundings or does she have people who help and support her?

Does the woman have any psychological problems like sleeping disorders, depression, anxiety etc? Consult page 37 for more information regarding PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Survival strategies What has been the woman's strategy in protecting herself during the course of the abusive relationship? Does she regulate her behaviour according to what she thinks could provoke new assaults? Does she trivialise the violence? Has she subconsciously been suppressing her physical and psychological injuries after the assaults and in that way become emotionally numbed? If the woman finds herself in such a state she might not be able to evaluate her own safety and would therefore need assistance to do so.

What has she done to protect her children? Has she shielded them physically? Has the thought that they are too young to understand what their father is doing to their mother? Has the police or any other authorities been contacted for aid? Has she previously left the man and, if so, what happened then?

Session with and about children

Depending on the age of the children we try in different ways to find out what consequences the violence have had for them. If the children are too young to attend systematic counselling sessions, the mother would be a natural source of information. Do the children fear that their father will abuse their mother or themselves? Do they trust any other adults in their family or social network? Do they use a lot of energy in trying to hide the violence in the family from their friends and surroundings? Do they suffer from anxiety, concentration problems, or any other physical disorders? Is the school, kindergarten or anyone else worried about the children because they have a violent way of acting out their emotions and show other signs of anti-social behaviour?

Counselling sessions – Talking to the mother about her child/children. Many mothers avoid speaking to their children about the violence in their home. They have tried to shield them from it and think that they have not noticed the things that have been happening. Mothers might also neglect to talk about the violence in fear of increasing the strain on the children or underestimate what kind of consequences the violence has for the children's lives.

Children will often withhold their own thoughts, emotions and fears because they do not want to trouble their parents or because they are afraid that they will get mad. Children very often have a lot of thoughts and questions, and if they do not get any answers, their imagination could get more frightening than reality. As helpers, it is our responsibility to focus on the children by making their situation and their needs visible. By talking with their mother we encourage her to talk to her children about the violence in their home and showing her that she could be the most important helping factor in her children's processing. In relation to this it is important that we bring up these subjects to strengthen the mother's

managing skills. It could happen that the children would want us to help them in speaking to their mother, or vice versa. Prior to having a conversation with the children we must explain the purpose of the conversation to the mother so we can get her approval.

Working on and building relations:

Not all children in the shelters wish to talk about the violence in their home. As helpers, we need to establish a bond between us and the children so that they feel safe and develop a trust in adults being able to see their needs and taking them seriously.

The women's shelters could be the first place the children would get to talk about their own thoughts and emotions concerning their situation. The helper could, together with the children, reconstruct the traumatic episodes and lay the foundation for continued processing.

Traumatic episodes are reconstructed by believing the child's descriptions of the events. The child and the helper talk about concrete episodes and the helper recognises the child's experiences. By getting recognition for their story and its consequences the children will be better equipped to understand their own situation.



Counselling sessions as a mapping tool

Theme and content of counselling sessions with children Some children do not talk about the abuse in their home because they feel that the subject is tabooed and embarrassing. One way of getting the children to open up is to give them examples of what other children have talked about in their sessions with us. We could say that some children have seen their father beating their mother while others have mostly witnessed their parents' arguing. We could say that some get scared or angry while others just continue to play, goes to their room or comforts their brothers and sisters. Some try to talk to their parents and tell them to stop while others try to help their mother. Sometimes the parents may listen to them but most often not. Many of the children say that they love their dad but are also afraid of him at the same time. It is scary when dad is angry towards his children, and it is at times like these that it is good to get comforted by mom. Many children feel that it is embarrassing to tell other people about it. It can also be embarrassing to know that the neighbours can hear their parents arguing. Some are afraid of the police knocking on their door. It is normal for children to get mad at their mother, but it is also normal for some to take on a comforting role and to try to help her. The children often recognise the things we discuss, and feel relieved that there are others who have experienced the same things that they have, and that we know a great deal about these things. This could, in some cases, lead to them wishing to talk about their experiences. If the children open up during the session, we could together summarise the things that have happened and focus on something that could help them to manage it. In this way, they would remember our session as something positive.

Group sessions with children A lot of children could benefit from sharing and listening to the experiences of other children in a group setting. In the group sessions we focus on a shared theme instead of individual stories. It could be comforting to know that others have had similar experiences, and it could help ease possible feelings of shame. Shy and quiet children could suddenly start to talk when they get their own experiences confirmed through others. That which has been unmentionable is suddenly made normal, and they get to hear about the roles other children have played and how they have coped with their problems. The group room is adjusted according to the age of the children when it comes to how the participants are seated – in a ring, on pillows, with a screen to avoid interruptions from other residents etc. Prior to the group sessions we choose some themes to talk about. As group leader it is important to ensure that all the children are accommodated and receives equal understanding. We must also help the children not to say more than they wish and, if possible, follow up on subjects in individual sessions later.

- Examples of themes in a group session with children:**
- "I can't sleep when mom and dad is fighting"
 - "I'm scared of the police"
 - "Mom hits me too"
 - "I'm scared of and love my dad"
 - "It's my fault that we came to the shelter"
 - "I miss my things, my friends and my dad"
 - "I think it's scary when dad is angry"

After a children's group session, the helper/child coordinator follow up with a drawing session or something similar that could break the tension after having talked about difficult matters. It is also important that we talk about the pleasant experiences they have had with their mother and father.

Counselling sessions with brothers and/ or sisters Sometimes siblings wish to talk to us together. They might feel safer and might remember more when they are not alone. What becomes important at this stage is that they all get the time to talk about their experiences and that they get an understanding of the roles they have had during these situations – for instance a sister who comforts her mom and siblings while big brother sets things straight with dad. Situations might also arise where brothers and sisters get into conflicts with each other where the sister sides with mom and the brother sides with dad as his "spy".

Joint counselling sessions with mother and child/children: To share the experiences around the assaults and create a mutual background, it could be appropriate having sessions where both the mother and children participate. As helpers, we will make certain that everyone gets their say, and that no one feels rejected or feels like a scapegoat for the family's situation.

Support materials for counselling children Support materials for conversing with children we would like to refer to: The pamphlet: "Pictures – How to talk with children at the shelter", by Merete Holmsen, and the book: "Angry Man", by Gro Dale and Svein Nyhus.

Situation association: showing the children drawings of everyday situations that could relate to their own experience.

Colouring emotions: using four different colours, each symbolising different emotions, to put colours to the situation at home, at the shelter and how the children think the future will be like.

Finishing sentences: presenting the children to the beginning of different sentences that they have to finish in their own words.

Word association: the children are presented to a set of different words and asked to write down the first thing that they think of.

Visualisation: of the children and their families' past, present and future. The drawing could be done by either the children themselves or by the child coordinator.

Picture association: cards with pictures of different characters showing different emotions.

Metaphors: start telling the beginning of a story containing elements that the children would recognise and then encourage them to finish the story.

Flannelgraph: by the help of figures depicting children, adults and other things they would recognise, the children get to communicate how it used to be, how it is, and what they think or wish the future will be like.

The term ethnic minority women is used to describe women who have been born and raised in Norway who have immigrant parents, and women who have lived in the country for at least a few months. These women could be of different cultural identities, have different languages and their sense of belonging, either to Norway or their home country could vary. Some of the women come from more patriarchal and hierarchical societies where understanding of the women's roles and their level of education varies more than it generally does in Norway.

Because of this diversity, it will be difficult to generalise on what the needs of women and children victims of violence of ethnic minority backgrounds staying at the shelters would be. What they have in common with each other besides belonging to a minority could be sharing roots in or having ties to other countries than Norway.

To show some of the diversity of the women's ethnic backgrounds, we have tried to put some of the shared characteristics of the user groups into system. The different categories have been constructed in such a way that some women and children would be able to relate to one while others might be able to relate to several of them.

Women with immigrant backgrounds who have been raised in Norway These are women who have been born or raised in Norway by immigrant parents. They have a varied degree of belonging to or contact with their parents' country of origin. Some may have visited the country on holiday while others keep close contact with their family and network there. The women seek out the shelters because of abusive husbands, boyfriends or ex partners. Some of them have been victims of violence from his or their own family like fathers, mothers or brothers. Women also come to the shelters because they are going to, or threatened to, be forced into marry someone not of their own choosing.

Women of foreign origin married to ethnic Norwegian men This is women from different countries who have been brought to Norway through marrying ethnic Norwegian men. They might have children back in their home country waiting to be reunited with their mother in Norway, and they might have had children by their Norwegian husbands. These women and their possible children often seek out the shelters because of marital abuse.

Women of foreign origin in arranged marriages These are women from different countries from parts of the world where arranged marriages are common. They come to Norway by means of family reunification with their husband of the same ethnic background. He is often born or raised up and has established himself in Norway, usually with his family. The marriage was arranged by their families and they are often related to one another which make it a family matter. The parties have to a varying degree been involved in arranging the marriage – for some it may have been a desired marriage and others might to a varying degree have been pushed or forced into it. With or without children the women seek out the shelters when they have been victim of abuse by their husband or other members of their closest or extended family. Women who have married someone against their family's wishes also belong to this category. When they escape to the shelters because of abusive husbands they often feel that they are guilty of their own situation because they did not follow the advice of their family.

Women applying for asylum These are women who come to the shelters because they are victims of violence at the reception centres for asylum seekers, either from their husband, other residents or people outside the centres.

Victims of human trafficking: These are women who by use of force, threats, or other means have been exploited in prostitution (or for other sexual purposes), forced labour, military service in foreign countries or as organ donors.



Ethnicity:
Women of foreign origin in arranged marriages.

Multicultural competence

The concept of culture In working with women and children victims of violence with different ethnical backgrounds, it is often pointless to use culture as an explanation to the violence because male violence against women and children in close relations occur in all communities and in all layers of society (NOU 2003:310). Another thing to take into consideration is that the concept of culture is a constantly changing process - neither constant nor static. This is some of what Hylland Eriksen says about culture: "Culture is learned. It is to a varying degree transferred at the same time as it changes. Culture is tied to tradition, but it is more precise to say that it is rooted in human experience (Eriksen 2001). Norway does not consist of a cultural uniform population. Ethnical Norwegians are not necessarily culturally the same but represents a collective of different cultural backgrounds on an individual, group and social level.

The methodical work at the shelters towards ethnical Norwegian women and children can also be applied to working with women and children of other ethnical backgrounds. Our knowledge of violence and its consequences should be available to everyone in need of our assistance.

Culture and communication When people of different backgrounds and preferences interact, there is a cross cultural process. Our norms, values and our behaviour reflect our cultural background and the possibility for misunderstandings is greater when the complexity of the communication increases. Cultural differences could be understood as those more or less systematic differences in what we have learned as human beings (Eriksen 2001). When the helper meets a woman with a different cultural background, it is natural that her sense of reality is challenged. There is a possibility that our views on marriage, divorce, and the importance of family in decision making might not correspond. When meeting the victim of violence, it is important that we are conscious of this possibility in all help relations. The person in need of help could have different norms and values that would be more valid for her than the helper.

She could have different religious or more conservative frames of reference, and her level of education will vary. Is she from a city or from the countryside? This could be significant. The helper's competence in communication will in such a case consist of her ability to be sensitive enough to identify differences in values and sense of reality in the course of the interaction. The purpose is not to exaggerate or under-communicate cultural differences. It is the responsibility of the helper to understand the human behind the culture and shed a light on her individual need for assistance.

The woman as an intermediary To be able to assist the victim of violence we need to understand her in her own context. The most important knowledge of each woman's cultural background and her situation is gained from the woman herself. By asking the right questions she will be able to tell us what significance possible cultural, ethnical or religious factors have had for her situation. The woman possesses the knowledge of the obstacles for leaving or staying in a violent relationship having anything to do with her cultural, religious or ethnical affiliation. Our task is to help her to tell us about what kind of violations she has been victim to and what consequences they have had for her. When this is done we must focus on her own solutions, explore the resources she is in possession of and offer our own knowledge on the subject. The helper will in this process become a valuable conversational partner when she understands what consequences the different solutions will have for the woman and her life in the time to come.

Transnational adaptation In working with women and children with minority backgrounds at the shelters it could be important to figure out what strategies they have used to adapt to life in Norway and what kind of contact they have to their home country. The globalisation process has made it easier for people migrating moving to other countries to remain in contact with their home country and the social networks they have left behind. Through close contact with their family and friends, economical commitments and/or political interests transnational ties are developed across

borders. The immigrant will in this way maintain the identity tying her to her home country. By sending money to the family "back home", frequent visits and contact by phone, ethnical minorities can continue being part of the society back where they come from (Fuglerud red. 2004). For the women and children this could mean that their decisions and options are influenced by family members living thousands of miles from Norway. In the establishing phase of the work it is necessary to figure out the significance of and the extent to which the woman's network, in her home country as well as in Norway, have an influence on her options.

Collective and individual oriented societies Marianne Skytte uses archetypal models for collective and individual oriented philosophies as a frame of understanding for social work with ethnical minority families. In societies focusing on the individual, the parents stimulate the child's development of independence and individuality from the beginning. In societies focusing on the collective, the needs of the family is put before the needs of its individual members. The individual is successful when the family's goals are realised and the family is functioning

well as a whole (Skytte 2001). The below diagram show the differences between a collective and an individual oriented philosophy. The archetypes are supposed to be used as a reference in working with women and children of minority backgrounds without us resorting to cultural stereotyping. There are no societies that are purely collectivistic or individualistic and families will place themselves on different levels on the scale. During the stay at the shelter the women will be faced by a number of difficult choices where the focus will be on the consequences of those choices. To understand this process, the basis of our theory is that all actions and choices made by a person based on her/his own needs and wishes are individualistic, as opposed to collectivistic where assessments and choices are made based on the needs of the larger fellowship.

Archetypal model of individualistic and collectivistic philosophies, by Marianne Skytte

	INDIVIDUALISTIC PHILOSOPHY	COLLECTIVISTIC PHILOSOPHY
Values during upbringing	Equality. Freedom. Self realisation. Family relations based on choice. Individualism as ideal.	Mutual dependence among relatives (blood ties). A sense of responsibility towards the collective. Obedience. Sacrifice.
An idea of the individual	The individual has a value of its own.	Individual = status Rights and duties are shared according to rank and function.
Rules of conduct	Abstract. Dissolution of customs and rituals. Reason. Psychological grounds for legitimising.	Involves all known situations. Rituals, habits and customs. Moral grounds for legitimising.
Cross gender relations	Ideology of equality Indirect dominance. Romantic love.	Hierarchical. Direct, visible dominance. Choosing partner based on economy and rank.
Sanctions	Unclear. Psychological. Exclusion and indifference.	Clear. Collective. Force and physical punishment.
Authorities	Abstract. An emphasis on inner authority.	Clear. External authority.
The moral goal	Justice.	Honour.

Mapping of women and children with ethnic minority background

Establishing the situation of victims of violence is done in the same way, regardless of where they come from. To understand as much as possible about the context of the violence, there are a couple of additional factors that could be relevant for women and children with ethnic minority backgrounds:

Mapping diagram:

- Migration history
- The exile situation
- Connection to home country
- Value base
- Marriage contract
- The foundation for residency in Norway
- Family relations
- Attachment and connection to Norway
- Network
- The importance of religion

Migration history: We want find out how long the woman and children have been living in Norway. Whether the woman came to Norway when she was a child or teenager, or if she arrived through the means of family reunion with a husband in an adult stage could be of importance. It could be important whether her children have been born in Norway or have been raised some place else. The reason for her migration could be vital for her present situation. Did she leave her country voluntarily or was she pressured into marriage? Did she have to flee her home country because of persecution for her political views or any other necessities? What were her expectations towards her new life in Norway prior to arriving here?

The basis for residency: In working with the women and children, it is vital that we know what kind of residency permit they have. Many women have not lived long enough in Norway to fulfil the requirements for permanent residency and fear that they will have to leave the country if they

divorce their husband. The women need information about their rights considering continued residency in Norway. Some of the women have lived in Norway for many years and have been in several relationships or marriages.

The exile situation: We try to achieve an understanding of what exile means to each woman. Does she suffer from the loss of her homeland? Does she mourn ties that have been severed? Is the loss of her family overwhelming?

Family relations: Do anyone in her family live in Norway? It could be important if all her family and relatives live in her homeland while her husband's family live in Norway. It could be of importance if all of the woman's relatives live in her homeland while her husband's family live in Norway.

Attachment/connection to Norway: What kind of attachment does the woman and the children have to Norway and how do they themselves feel that they manage everyday life in a Norwegian context? In establishing this, we often find that the children have a different degree of attachment than the woman because they participate on several different social arenas, like at school or in kindergarten.

Attachment to their homeland: What kind of attachment does the woman and the children have to family and network back in their homeland? Does she stay in frequent contact with them and go there on vacations? Do they visit her here? Do they most important persons in her life live in her homeland? Which country does she view as her "home"?

Network: Many women and children victims of violence are afraid that their network will not continue supporting them after breaking with the violent husband. Some fear sanctions like being banished or being talked about behind

their backs. We must strive to find people in their network that can help them get on with their lives.

Value base: In our work with the women and children we could use the model for individual and collective philosophies as a foundation for understanding the basis of their values. A prerequisite is therefore that the discussion is relevant according to the problems she is facing.

The importance of religion: We need to find out how important religion is for the woman and children, and the family as a whole. The question of religion and its importance on values and processes for change should be mapped out to the same extent as for ethnic Norwegian women.

The marriage pact: How the marriage was arranged could yield information about relevant obstacles in breaking out of it. Arranged marriages are an alliance between families where several parties have been part of the arrangement. Forced marriage means that either the man or the woman had no real option of saying no to the marriage. We try to establish to what degree the woman herself has been involved in the arrangement and what obligations the marriage involves for her and her family.



Network: Many women and children victims of violence are afraid that their network will not continue supporting them after breaking with the violent husband.

The child perspective

Children are exposed to and get affected by violence in close relations by being victim to it themselves or seeing and hearing their mother being exposed to it. The starting point of our work is that all children at the shelters have witnessed violence. In a family where the father uses violence against the mother, the assaults will also have an effect on the children. As helpers, we should base our work on the children's individual situation, and what consequences the violence could have for them.

Adverse effects The child's principal need of security is damaged when the person who is supposed to care for and protect her/him is the one causing pain and fear.

Common reactions:

- Anxiety of being hurt or seeing their mother get hurt
- Depression
- Insecurity, uneasiness
- Low self esteem
- Guilt. Taking responsibility for the violence
- Symptoms of trauma
- Difficulties adapting
- Feelings of anger and being powerless
- Sorrow
- Concentration problems
- Making demands to themselves about ensuring the protection of their mother
- Guilt and shame
- Bedwetting

The children's needs at the shelter: The helpers at the shelter need to take the violence and the children's situation seriously. They must not only be treated like the children of a battered mother but also as separate individuals with their own needs. We have to develop a practice on how we can manage to meet the children in the same fashion as the women.

Children as a user group with their own rights and needs separate from their mothers: The children should have their own helpers at the shelters. The task of these helpers would be to reveal the violence the children have been victims to and to work together with the mother, and possibly their helper,

to map out their children's needs. By sharing the workload in this way, we can focus our attention on both the child and the mother, and it would ensure both their individual needs to be made evident.

Children with ethnic minority backgrounds: If the child has been brought up together with a large extended family she/he could suffer several different kinds of loss when it breaks from the family. The child could for example experience losing family of importance outside of Norway. Some children are victims of more than one assailant. Children suffering from a break in their family often loose their social network in the same process and often have problems creating new networks.

Methodical work with children at the shelters: Children should mostly have access to the same services as the women: Crisis intervention, security, counselling sessions to uncover violence, and threat evaluation. Counselling sessions focused on problem solving, children's groups and follow-up work should be adapted to the child's age and development. There are a lot of myths revolving the issue of talking to children who are in crisis after having been victims of violence. These myths involve not having enough knowledge about what reactions the children could have during or after a session. Helpers might be of the opinion that we should wait until the situation has calmed down and become clearer. The problem is that we do not know how long it would take and how many obstacles that had to be overcome before their lives would stabilise. The helpers at the shelters must represent safety, respect and compassion, and show the children that they can cope with their stories.



The child perspective:
In a family where the father uses violence against the mother, the assaults will also have an effect on the children.

Practical/external needs

The practical needs will show themselves parallel with the mapping conversations. As helpers, we will together with the woman figure out what type of practical assistance is necessary and how to gain access to it. A joint individual evaluation to establish if the woman is capable of acquiring the help herself or if the helper will have to assist her with establishing contacts or accompany her to the actual authority must also be made. It is important for the mother to be urged to inform the school or day-care centre about the situation so that the needs of the child can be taken care of.

The Doctor The emergency ward or the General Practitioner will assess injuries and find suitable treatments in case the woman or children have recently been victims of abuse. Here, the injuries are registered, which could be important if the woman would later wish to press charges. Registration of injuries will also help substantiate the abuse, in case the woman does not have residency on an independent basis, but wish to apply for one.

The Police It is the police who investigate charges of assault and violence against women and children. Regardless of whether the woman files a complaint or not, she could get her situation evaluated in order to find out if it would be appropriate for her to get a restraining order against her assailant to ensure the safety of her or her child/children. The restraining order could apply only to the woman, but could also apply to her children if it is needed. The police can decide if the woman and/or her children could have the need for personal alarms. The police can also, on their own initiative, prosecute the assailant if they come across severe criminal cases.

The Department of Social Services
The purpose of the Social Services Act is to:

- a) Promote financial and social security, to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged persons, to contribute to greater equality of human worth and social status, and to prevent social problems,
- b) Contribute to giving individuals

opportunities to live and reside independently and to achieve an active and meaningful existence in community with others.

Lawyer The lawyer will provide legal assistance in cases of separation, divorce, child custody, legal rights, residence permit, filing and prosecution, restraining orders etc. The extent of the woman's rights to free legal assistance and how much of the legal fees she would have to pay herself must be clarified with her lawyer at an early stage.

Local Housing offices Some municipalities have their own housing offices, while others have put this responsibility over on other public bodies. Women and children at the shelter has a need for public bodies that can be accommodating in finding them a new place to live and alternative financial arrangements.

Child welfare services

The purpose of the child services is to:

- a) Ensuring that children living under conditions that could be harmful to their health and development get the necessary help and care before it is too late.
- b) Contributing to safe conditions for children to grow up in.

School

The school will arrange for the children to continue their lessons, even when they live at the shelter. They will assess the necessity of someone following the children to and from school, or initiating other security measures until the situation has been stabilised. The school should nevertheless be informed about the situation so they can ensure the children's needs.

Kindergarten

The personnel are informed about the child's situation to make the stay at the kindergarten as safe as possible. It is important for the child to uphold daily routines to ensure a predictable everyday life.

Public health service General practitioners, health clinics for children, health clinics for young people, Child and youth psychiatry, adult psychiatry.



Practical/external needs:

The school should nevertheless be informed about the situation so they can ensure the children's needs..

The threat Our experience is that several lower level security measures have a good effect on the security and safety of the women and children. As helpers it is necessary for us to work together with the woman to map out the extent of the threats against her and, possibly together with the police, figure out one or several appropriate security measures. By mapping out the threats against the woman she will develop strategies for mastering her anxiety and thus take control of her own life. The goal of the security work is to ensure that the women victims of violence will manage to step back in to public space and regain the social network they want for themselves and their children. For those women and their children feeling threatened, we will conduct a detailed risk evaluation. As helpers at the shelter we meet women and children who tell us about very serious offences like severe physical violence, death threats and attempted murder. We know that the violence often increases during break-ups by the assailant in different ways keep on threatening and stalking the family. Children are especially vulnerable if they are forced to be together with him, or when the mother hands them over to or picks them up from their father. Women employ different strategies, both conscious and unconscious, to protect themselves from recurring assaults. Some isolate themselves by almost becoming invisible, by avoiding to go out or to seek out the company of others. Some are not able to relate to the danger of new assaults and attempt to continue with their lives without any plan to safeguard themselves or their children.

Women on the run For some women it would seem that the only solution for escaping the assailant is to run away to some place as far away as possible. Some wish for assistance in changing their identity and to erase all their tracks. Our experience is that we should not contribute to sending women and children across Norway without first trying other options. The consequences of living a life on the run become obvious when meeting with women and children who have been running from

place to place over a longer period of time. It is often difficult to establish a new home in an unfamiliar place without a lot of planning beforehand. Norway is a small country and, if the stalker/assailant wishes to spend his time finding them there is a large chance that he will, sooner or later.

We experience that women and children continue running, even for a long time after the abuse ended. This is very unfortunate for the development of the children, because they frequently have to change schools or kindergarten. By constantly being on the run, the woman and children will never get the opportunity to process their traumas. The strain can get so big that it leaves little room for anything else in their lives other than fear itself, and then the escape itself. At a professional level, we can not condone that the women are encouraged to take such an important choice; to either flee or move when they are in crisis. Being in a state of crisis makes people unable to realise or contemplate the consequences of their actions or choices.

A potential move, as opposed to an escape, should only be considered when the woman is no longer in crisis and she is able to make estimates on how she and her children could manage to establish themselves in a new place.

Risk assessment

Phase 1: Initial mapping

During the acute phase, it is important to get an overview of who and what the women and children are afraid of. It is important that they themselves get the opportunity to talk about what is bothering them and why they are so afraid. During this phase we seek to get a picture of how the woman herself experiences it at that time. We get an image of who she pictures when she is afraid, who frightens her the most, and what the threats consist of. The woman's experience is vital during this stage even though her descriptions are coloured by her fear, and could in several ways be contradictory. At this early stage we do not confront the woman with facts or critical questions as this could lead to her not daring to tell us because she is scared that she will not be believed.

- Who are they afraid of?
- Most of all?
- Less?
- Least of all?

“When Salma escaped she did not dare to leave the shelter. She had to be accompanied even though she was only going to the shop right next door. She feared that “all” the Pakistani in Oslo were out to kill her now that she had left her husband and his family. After several mapping conversations it was clear to both Salma and us that the person she feared most of all to meet was one of her husband’s younger brothers. She knew from experience that he was violent, even in public. She was less afraid of her husband as she figured he was relieved that the marriage was now over. The person Salma feared least of all was her father-in-law who had never been directly cruel to her.”

Phase 2: Getting an overview of the family:

This is the phase where we map possible threats posed by family members – it is not always the husband who is central in the abuse. It could be members of the husband's family who pose the biggest threat against the woman and children, or someone in her own family. In some cases it could be some of the people the husband surround himself with who is the threat.

- Identifying the head of the family
- Mapping the family structure of power
- The family decision structures
- Threats from her own family having an amplifying effect on her

“Salma had been victim of physical and psychological abuse from several of her in-laws who also lived with her and her husband. Even though it was several of the men who performed the physical assaults Salma was very clear that it was her mother-in-law who decided what kind of status and position she had in the family. Her mother-in-law defined Salma as a poor housekeeper and that the rest of the family should treat her likewise. Those who did not agree to the way she was treated, like her father-in-law, did not dare to do anything else than ignore her all together. Her

husband was the one least active in her abuse seeing as he had been in prison during most of the marriage and for the most part lived his life outside of the extended family. Salma’s own family back in Pakistan was very strongly against a divorce. They tried to push her back to her husband using threats saying that her brothers would come to Norway to kill her, or that she would get killed immediately after she was sent back to her home country. Salma understood the threats to be real at the same time as she felt the strain of not being supported by her closest family through this difficult situation.”

Phase 3: Getting an overview of the risk

When the woman is no longer in an acute mental state of crisis the threats can be assessed with a more critical approach, and when she starts getting over her fear of new assaults, she will be able to evaluate the threats more realistically.

- Who threatens with what?
- Who threatens who?
- What do the threats consist of?
- Family activity

“It was the brother of Salma’s husband who threatened her with a beating if he figured out where she was hiding, but it was her mother-in-law who decided that Salma’s escape had to be revenged, and this was an assignment she passed on. It was also her mother-in-law who threatened her with saying she would be sent out of the country if she did not return to the family. Both her parents and her brothers threatened to kill her over the phone. According to Salma her mother was most likely against both killing and threatening her, but she was forced to do it by Salma’s father. Salma was also certain that her in-laws were pressuring her family into believing that the divorce was her fault and that she had to be punished for it. Working with Salma we determined how active each of the assailants was in continuing to threaten her. It was her husband’s youngest brother who on different occasions sought her out to call her horrible things and made threats about killing her and sending her back to Pakistan. The rest of

Safety measures

her in-laws did not try to contact Salma directly but instead put pressure on her family. The phone threats from Pakistan were very frequent during some periods."

Phase 5: Locating the one responsible for the violence:

During the different mapping phases, the extent of the risk will be clearer for the woman, and she will be able to start the work of finding appropriate measures towards bettering her safety.

- Where do the people who threaten her live?
- Where do they frequent?
- How do they move around?
- With who?
- How many people pose a threat?
- Who are their allies?
- Potential allies in his or her family?

"Salma's in-laws lived in a part of the city not far from the shelter. When asked, Salma could tell us that the most of them mainly kept to that part of the city, where they had their social network, stores, health services etc. It was the younger male family members who had work and friends outside, especially in the centre of the city. After a while it became apparent that it was the youngest brother, and possibly his friends, who posed the biggest threat to physically harm Salma in public. It was also apparent that it was Salma's mother-in-law who encouraged her son to continue harassing her, and that it was she alone who was responsible for pressuring Salma's family in Pakistan. It was not possible for Salma to find anyone in her family who would have been able to help her during this period because the conflict level was so high across the borders of the countries."

Security measures should be proportionate to the risk assessment

As helpers, we will evaluate and suggest appropriate measures to improve the woman's security. We have knowledge of what kinds of measures that exist and how to get access to them. The woman has to feel that the measures are suitable to her situation and she will also undergo a process to make her aware of how she can contribute in increasing her own security. By thoroughly mapping out the threat against the woman, her assailant and his activity will become

apparent. As helpers, we can separate between external measures (measures executed by other authorities) and internal measures (measures executed by the woman herself). Internal measures the woman herself can contribute with could for instance be not to visit places where there is a reasonable possibility that she could meet her assailant or his allies. She could practice asking for help at the closest shop or store in case her attacker threatens her on the street. The woman has to know how to call the police over the phone, if necessary.

External security measures

Filing a complaint:

Filing a complaint could in itself have a preventive effect by making the assailant stop his stalking in fear of prosecution. For the woman, the act could signify that the responsibility for the violence lies with the assailant, and that the public authorities have to protect her. This depends on her being met by police who are competent in assisting women and children who have been victim to violence in close relations.

Restraining order:

When a victim of violence explains her situation for the police without filing a formal complaint, the police can decide to later issue a restraining order on the perpetrator. The woman should be made aware that the police can issue an official complaint if they were to consider the circumstances as particularly serious. The restraining order could apply to the woman, the children, or both. A restraining order of this kind involves the perpetrator not being permitted, under any circumstances, to contact the woman or the children. A restraining order on the home of the victim/s means that the perpetrator is not allowed to stay in the home until a legal sharing of the ownership has taken place. The restraining order should, after a certain time, be affirmed in the District or City Court. A restraining order could be of great help to the woman and/or children, regardless of if the perpetrator complies with it or not. When the restraining order has been confirmed and issued to the perpetrator, any attempt to make contact will in itself be a criminal offence.

Personal alarm:

Following an application from the woman, or in view of their own evaluation, the police could issue her and/or her child a personal alarm. According to the police, children are rarely issued personal alarms. They also report that the alarms connected to the regular phone lines will be discontinued and the mobile alarm will be the only alarm issued by the police... By triggering this alarm the police will supposedly be able to identify the location of the woman with a margin of error of about half a meter. This alarm will also enable the police to quickly respond to the emergency. The police can hear everything that is being said after the alarm has been activated and it is only they who can turn it off after it has been activated. This is to prevent the perpetrator from turning off the device.

Separated mediation:

The strain can be too great for women with children who are undergoing a separation to meet for a joint mediation at the office of family affairs. Even though her physical safety will be well taken care of at such a meeting, her fear of the man can make her unable to attend the mediation. It is important that we inform her about her right to ask for a separated mediation.

Information for other public bodies

Depending on how real the threat is, it could be appropriate to inform other public bodies like the child's school, kindergarten, workplace etc. about the situation. This is to give them advice on how they should conduct themselves and how to handle the situation if the perpetrator seeks them out to get in touch with the children.

Changing names:

In principle, you can change your first and last name as often as you like. First time applications are considered by the General Register Office (Folkeregisteret). All applications thereafter are considered by the County Administrator's Office (Fylkesmannen).

Confidential address:

The General Register Office can make the decision to block the address of the person in question. To have your address blocked you need to meet

certain conditions – you need to have documentation stating that there is a risk of death or bodily or mental harm. Such a decision is limited to a period of one year at a time. If the woman or child is in need of any further protection, they can reapply. There are two levels of address blocking:

Code 7:

Confidential address: The address is kept secret from public view, but public bodies that have access to the central registration office also have access to the address. It is the registration office of the woman's local authorities that treat confidential address applications.

Code 6:

Strictly confidential address: The real address will only be available in the files of the Inland Revenue Service. All enquiries by public bodies would be informed that the address has been blocked and is not available. It is the Directorate of Taxes that grants someone a strictly confidential address. The woman hands in a written statement through the Register Office for the need to live on code. The need for having your address blocked must be documented by a police report, doctor's certificate or some other relevant statement. Living on code is, as a rule, time-limited, and to get a renewal the need must be documented.

Change of identity:

Changing your identity involves being registered in the Registration Office under a false name and personal identification number. The fictive personal information is transferred to various public authorities and private enterprises. The person's real identity is erased from the National Registration Office and it will be impossible to find out that she is living under a new name and personal identification number. This permission can also be given to other members of the same household. Change of identity is regarded as a last resort and the rules surrounding this process are very strict. Applications for change of identity are forwarded through consulting the local police district, and are decided by the Police Directorate. These decisions can be appealed to the Ministry of Justice and the Police.

Security measures based on the woman's actions

There is almost no purpose in activating different security measures if the woman can not make use of them and be an active participant in her own security. As helpers, we can contribute to increase her consciousness revolving security.

Availability: Many women experience getting frequent calls and text messages on their mobile phones from their assailant or his allies after they have broken out of the relationship. Together we could review the problem, how she handles the phone calls and messages, and what effect they have on her. Does she try to have a dialogue with the perpetrator? If she does, what does she hope or want to gain from communicating with him? Is she constantly available for his calls and messages? Has she come so far in the break-up process that she has changed her number and become unavailable to him?

Recapturing public space: Women who have been traumatised and frightened to such a degree that they do not dare to go outside at all have to be worked with systematically. After a thorough threat assessment where the attacker/assailant/perpetrator, his movements and activity have been identified, we can be of practical assistance in helping the woman to practice being outside without exposing herself to unnecessary danger. We can make the woman conscious of different reactions she might have if she would meet her attacker out on the street. Would she get paralysed from fear and because of this unable to act, unable to think clearly? How could she avoid this? For a period of time we could walk with her and try out different ways for her to protect herself. The goal would be to give her a few options for what she should do the day she actually meets her attacker again.

The woman could learn how to treat every door as a possible way of escape. She could be trained in seeking out the nearest store or public area. She could shout for help in case he follows her or is acting threateningly. She has to know how to trigger her personal alarm, in case she has one. She needs to know the number for the emergency

telephone support line and how to communicate her emergency. It is equally important that she avoids places where she knows that there is a good possibility for stumbling into her attacker or some of his possible allies – she should therefore avoid places where there are little to no people, where it could be hard to call for help or attention of others.

“Anne had lived in a relationship defined by severe physical violence and psychological terror for many years and she was clearly marked by the abuse. She had run away from her husband on several occasions and stayed at the shelter many times but she always went back to him again. During her last stay she had been equipped with a personal alarm and her husband got a restraining order against him. Despite this Anne was convinced that her husband would some day kill her and it was possibly this strong sense of fear that made Anne unable to utilise her security measures. Her husband sought her out constantly outside the shelter and Anne apparently followed him home voluntarily. He would take her home, expose her to new violence and then bring her back to the shelter afterwards. He would call her at all hours of the day and she would go to meet him. It did not even occur to Anne to use her personal alarm, or call for help in any other way. For short periods he did not actively seek her out and this triggered an even stronger sense of fear in Anne, making her contact him instead. All these actions were governed by the fear she had of being killed. Not until her husband was taken into custody did she feel safe enough to start working on her own psychological traumas.”



Recapturing public space:

The woman could learn how to treat every door as a possible way of escape.

Community work at the shelters

In the work with women and children at the shelters, this guide has so far focused on the individual follow-up the victims of violence could be in need of. For those women and children only staying temporarily at the shelter, the stay will pose several challenges. It is necessary for us, as helpers, to alternate between a subject oriented and a community oriented perspective. Subject oriented work is based on the needs of each individual woman or child while the community oriented work is based on different tasks connected to common areas used by the tenants.

The shelters can arrange for physical, mental and social factors leading to safety and welfare, which in turn is a prerequisite for growth and development. Having a well planned and structured community work can help the women and children to acquire new knowledge and new strategies for coping with their situation. These skills could also be useful after they leave the shelter.

Measures the residents could benefit from in a shared community at the shelters:

Community: At the shelter, women will meet others who have also been victim to domestic violence. Knowing that other people have experienced similar things could contribute to decrease feelings of shame and guilt, thus, building a foundation for further processing.

New networks: The shelter could be an arena, for both women and children, where new social networks are established and continued after they have moved out of the shelter.

Model learning: Women and children learn from each other's different ways of handling their problems and/or challenges.

Meeting points: The common area gives the staff and residents the opportunity to meet for informal conversation. Information that might not have been uncovered in the individual, systematic problem solving sessions could get shared during these informal conversations.

The goal of joint community work:

- The focus is shifted from the individual to the community where the residents must work together towards finding common norms and mutual goals for how they want their social environment to be like.
- A joint social community arranges for a gathering of cultures between residents with different backgrounds and experiences.
- During the informal conversations between the residents and the shelter workers, important information that might not have been uncovered in individual, systematic problem solving sessions might be shared.
- Through group activities, the residents and workers get to experience each other in different ways and develop a different kind of bond than they would in a formal situation.
- Strategies for managing and self-assertion are developed.
- Residents get to practice talking, to have opinions and to stand for something.
- It sharpens the residents' focus, what they like and want, which could lead them to set individual goals.
- It could lead to changing possible racist attitudes
- The community becomes active instead of static and passive

Arranging for active community work:

Managing community work could be understood as a form of actively influencing other people. It requires that the community workers have an understanding of the women or children's everyday needs and enough knowledge to account for the measures we initiate. Planned, systematic community work prerequisites that we do not act randomly in the different situations we find ourselves in (Linde og Nordlund 2003). There are usually several different, traumatised women and children living at a shelter at the same time. For a while, they have to share living space, kitchen and bathroom. Some of them might have been at the shelter for a long time, while others have just arrived after an acute crisis. This requires that we have knowledge about how people could react in a crisis, and how the course of the crisis might influence them. Before

we can have an opinion on a mother's capacity for taking care of her children, we have to be able to distinguish between what could be reactions to the crisis, how emotionally scarred she is from the abuse, if she has had access to relief, and how much is a real lack of ability.

Examples of different evaluations of the same situation:

"Report from a community worker: A new woman has arrived with four children - all under the age of six. The situation upstairs has gotten way out of hand. The children have made a mess of the kitchen and the mother does not bother cleaning up after them. The living room became very noisy and two of the children ran into the community worker's office on several occasions, even though the mother has been told that she is to be responsible for watching them while they are at the shelter. She just sits there doing nothing to stop them. She seems very passive. The woman has gotten a copy of the house regulations but the children still run the halls long past their bed time disturbing all the other residents. From now on, I think we need to be strict".

"Report from a community worker: A new woman has arrived with four children - all under the age of six. They are all showing signs of having been exposed to something. The mother is in shock and is not capable of receiving any information. Because of this, I have not gone through all the house regulations with her. The children were very restless and seemed frightened. The two oldest kids were very attention seeking and sought us out on several occasions in the community worker's office. The mother needed help to watch her kids, because it could be difficult calming all four of them at once. Neither the mother nor her children were able to sleep. I think they might have the need for a close follow-up and a lot of help the next couple of days."

It is important that the helpers are available for assistance and to arrange group activities in the common areas of the shelter. These activities could include crafting workshops, baking, or cleaning the refrigerator. The point is to invite to a joint effort. It is also the responsibility of the helper to motivate new residents and making them feel safe so they have the courage to take part in group activities.

A prerequisite for systematic community work is that the helpers have a mutual attitude towards their work. This does not necessarily suggest the need to act the same way or employ the same measures in different situations. In community work involving people, the emphasis should be on creating a safe environment, structure and predictability. This could of course be difficult at a shelter where the women and children are in different phases of crisis and where the situation at worst is dominated by chaos and at best diversity. By community work the helpers need to have a mutual understanding of when it is possible to demand something of the residents.

- They need to decide when it is appropriate to listen and to be caring.
- They need to decide when it is useful to make demands of the resident – demands from which the women and children can manage and grow on.
- The helper must decide when it is really necessary to make demands.

In practice, this would be to initiate situations that are perceived as difficult. If a mother repeatedly fails to put her children to sleep at the appointed time, it is the helper's role to find out why. The explanations could be many, and complex. Maybe the mother is too tired to instruct her children? Does she not know that it is supposed to be quiet at the shelter at night? Has the mother practised entirely different bedtime and sleeping routines prior to arriving at the shelter? Are the children agitated and frightened because of the violence they have experienced? Has a lack of bedtime routines in the family been a problem for a long time? Are they in need of help getting these routines in order? By figuring this out, the helpers could evaluate and consider different measures that could make these routines much easier for both the mother and her children. This will in turn contribute to a more peaceful environment.

Model learning:

For mothers in crisis, understanding advice and guidance might seem confusing and incomprehensible. One appropriate measure could be for the helper to actively join in on the situations that are perceived as problematic, either by the mother or the helper herself. She will help with evening routines, give guidance if necessary and discuss possible alternative solutions to the problem areas.

Follow up work after leaving the shelter

Plans of action The woman and the helper start by making concrete plans of action early in the process of moving out of the shelter so that the woman and children will feel safe during the establishment of their new lives. As a starting point, the helper and the woman make a joint decision on which measures would be useful after moving out. Precautions must be made to accommodate possible changes in the plans along the way, depending on what kind of challenges the woman and children will face.

Concluding child session In a concluding child session, it is important to hear about their thoughts on their new lives. Some worry that their mother will not be able to take care of them on her own while others look forward to move in to their new home. To put a positive closure on the stay at the shelter, we try to arrange for the children to say goodbye to their new friends and to encourage them to stay in contact with the shelter. The children are offered to continue the group or individual counselling sessions, with the approval of their mother.

Coordination of external measures Women and children with complex problems and no knowledge about the different available support services require that the help is communicated and coordinated by people who know their history and their needs. During the establishing phase of their new lives the helper could assist in meetings and help in the contact with the support services. The goal of the follow up work is to assist the woman to seek help through the regular support service and to hand over knowledge and experiences to key individuals she must deal with in the future. During this phase the helper will act as the woman's "guardian" in dealing with new authorities or other parties.

Advice and guidance counselling: The woman will often be in need of advice and counselling in connection with problems she and, possibly her children, face trying to live on their own. These problems could be of practical or legal nature, she might be in the need of guid-

ance or need help in filling out forms, or she might need a referral to various support services.

Home visits

Both women with or without children can get one to several home visits after moving out of the shelter, if they want to. One of the purposes for this is to give assistance to single mothers after breaking up with their assailants. For women who have broken out of a larger extended family, the transition to having the lone responsibility for the children could pose several challenges. It is most optimal if both the woman and the children's helpers go on the home visit together. Both the woman and her children get individual counselling sessions. During the visit, we talk about relevant problems that they face in re-establishing their lives and possible ways to solve them. The woman could together with her helper compose a written plan of action. This plan could contain both long term and short term goals and what measures that should be prioritised to reach them. It should also clearly state who is responsible for doing what. At the end of the home visit, there should be a joint summary with the focus on what the family actually manage doing.

Continuous risk assessment: Some women and children experience that their assailant continue being a threat to them after they have moved out of the shelter. He could do it directly by stalking them or indirectly by various forms of control for instance in situations where he is together with or handing over the children. As helpers during this phase, we can contribute to make the woman continuously evaluate and actively discuss measures in connection to her own security.

Trials: Some of the follow-up work can be to assist the woman within the legal system, both in criminal proceedings against her assailant and in cases involving visiting rights, care and legal custody of the children. The work will consist of supporting the woman through the mental strain of the legal proceedings. We will be called as witnesses to give testimony in several cases where we need to mediate our knowledge about the family to the court. By using the notes from her journals, our testimony will be as precise as possible. To be able to do this, we need a written statement from the woman allowing us to keep her personal information, even after she has moved out of the shelter. The statement should include for how long the approval is valid and in what cases it should apply. If the woman has not given her consent and given a written statement cancelling their client confidentiality, the workers at the shelter can not give testimony in the court proceedings. However, the court can request a statement on confidential information without the woman's consent if needed. The main rule in such an event is that a competent authority (i.e. the county administrator's office) has to approve it, or the court must make a ruling to decide that a statement must be given. Basically, this means that the shelter workers are duty bound to testify in a possible criminal proceeding, as described in paragraph 108 of the Criminal Proceedings Act.

Managing sessions: When the woman experience her life as more secure and has been able to distance herself to some extent from the abuse, it is natural for physical and mental reactions to the violence to set in. She could suffer sudden panic attacks, sleeping disorders and concentration problems, even depression. We could help the woman see the connection between the violence she has been subject to and her reactions. A prerequisite for managing is that the woman gets the chance to talk about the assaults and abuse. Women with strong reactions would also be in need of learning how to handle them, for instance through relaxation methods. When talking to children, we try to get

them to tell us about how they are feeling. Is all well at school and with their friends? Is there something they want us to talk to their mother or someone else about? It is important to keep the child socialised during this phase. This could be entirely positive for some and entirely negative for others but, for most, it is a mix of both.

Comments: Experiences from the Women's Shelter in Oslo show that women and children victims of violence in close relations have very individual needs when it comes to follow-up measures. These measures should not be followed chronologically or follow any certain schedules. How the different women make use of these kinds of services vary to some degree. Some participate in stages as they face new problems, while others make use of one or more services at the same time. In the phase immediately after moving out of the shelter, many women have need of a lot of practical follow-up, like establishing contact with external services. When all the practical bits and pieces are in order, it is common for the mental reactions to the abuse to surface. The goal is that the services should be available when the women feel that they need them. For instance, when the mental problems/reactions get too difficult, or when the children change their behaviour after having been with their father.

Service offers for women who do not stay at the shelter

It is hard to put a number to the magnitude of men's violence against women and children in close relations. Despite many different surveys, we know that there are extensive dark figures. The number of residents at most shelters have been pretty stable the last couple of years while the number of daily visits is increasing. These are women who come to the shelters for advice and counselling. Women who are not in need of protection in the form of housing might be in need of other services.

The women's shelters should be a low-threshold service where the barriers for seeking help are low. At the same time, we know that it could be difficult for someone to share the violations they have been subject to. Conversations with the victims over the phone do not necessarily give us an adequate foundation to evaluate the woman's needs for help. Thus, we try to encourage the woman caller to come down to the shelter and talk to us, without any obligations, so that the possibility of maybe uncovering needs and offer assistance becomes more realistic. The different services offered to women who do not live at the shelter will in most cases be the same services we offer to women and children who have moved out of the shelter.

Sorting sessions: Many of the women who come to the shelters are overwhelmed by all their troubles. Her life situation might be experienced as confusing for other people and overwhelming for the woman. Thus, the first step is to help her to arrange her different problems so it becomes more evident what effect they have on her situation. The second step of the process is to help her figure out what she should concentrate on solving first. We need to match the pace of the woman, try to figure out where she is in the process, and watch so we do not exceed her tempo. It is her priorities that are to lay the foundation for further actions and, as her helpers we need to accept her choices, even though we might not agree with her priorities or her solution.

Clarifying sessions: Women seek out the shelter to find out if our services are something they would wish to take advantage of. These could be women who are not sure if they have been abused enough to warrant assistance. The myths that it is only women with visible signs of physical abuse who live at the shelter still exist, and we must be an active contributor to invalidate these myths. When talking with women seeking help without quite knowing how to define their needs, we need to be able to pass on information about different forms of physical violence and its consequences so that the woman might recognise them.

Counselling sessions: Women also come to the shelter to get information about their rights, the support services, and how to make use of other measures. As helpers, we should have a substantial knowledge about rights and duties relating to the support services or we should offer to make an enquiry into the matter if she finds it relevant.

Children who have witnessed violence: Mothers sometimes seek out the shelter because they worry that their children might have been harmed by witnessing their abuse. Thus, it is important that we know what consequences it could have for the children, what kind of reactions they could have to them, and what measures we could make in light of this. If we do not have the necessary knowledge, we are obligated to refer her to a child coordinator at the shelter or another child counsellor if available.

Counselling during the break-up phase: Women who have broken it off with a violent partner often seek the protection of the shelter in fear of being subject to new assaults. As helpers, we could during this phase together with the woman make a risk assessment, just like we would do with women staying at the shelter. We could be of further assistance in developing safety plans and maybe even mobilising the police or other authorities.

Planning sessions/escape: Women seek the shelters to get advice and assistance when they have decided to leave a violent partner. They are uncertain of how the partner might react when they really do leave, and they are scared that the break-up would provoke even more aggression from the assailant. We could assist in discussing different options for safeguarding the women, during the break-up phase. Women planning a break-up depend on several strategies to safeguard themselves because they can not predict how their partner will react. Some might have the need for temporary protection, and for some it might be enough to have established contact with the shelter in case a dangerous situation should arise.

Processing sessions: Women who have been living for a longer period of time without their assailants might struggle with after-effects of the violence. In our experience the reactions become stronger parallel with the increase in safety. We can offer regular sessions at the shelter where the woman can get assistance in telling her story by putting her strong emotional reactions into words. The goal of these sessions is to make her memories of the violence diminish, taking up less space in her life, and viewing the violence as something of the past. During this process we focus on the woman's new roles and opportunities in a life without violence.

Courses: Many women have the need to meet other women with similar experiences of violence. As helpers, we could organise courses with relevant subjects. The themes for these courses could be everything from physical violence, reactions to violence and what effect it has on love. To create the courses into a safe arena, they are arranged as educational classes and it is up to each individual participant if they wish to listen or take a more active role with asking questions and commenting on different subjects. The courses rotate, they can be followed individually and you do not have to sign up for them. This way the woman's anonymity is ensured, if that is important to her. The participants are always offered to make appointments for

individual sessions following the lessons if they want to.

Groups: The Women's Shelter in Oslo organise closed, time limited groups for women who live or have lived in violent relationships. The group process is based on the participants sharing their experiences, recognising them and acquiring different strategies for mastering them. Parallel to the groups, the women are offered to attend individual follow-up sessions.

The women seeking the shelter rarely make use of only one of our services. A clarifying session could trigger the woman to initiate the break-up process with her violent partner. Consequently, the woman could have the need for other kinds of further assistance. Our experience is that the women utilise different combinations of our services according to what phase they are on in their own process.

Psychological reactions after being exposed to violence

Being exposed to violence poses a threat to their existence, and the reaction is often stronger when the violence has come to an end and the victim experiences a sense of security. Experience tells us that many women only have psychological reactions long after moving out from the shelter. These reactions can be frightening and some women can view their reactions as proof that they are seriously ill. Our responsibility, as helpers, is to have knowledge of various reactions, make them seem normal and get the woman to understand the connection between her reactions and the violence she has been victim to. The reactions can be understood as normal reactions to an abnormal situation.

Normal reactions:

- Anger
- Sorrow
- Fear/anxiety
- Forgetfulness/memory loss
- Nightmares
- Sleeping disorders
- Isolation
- Concentration problems
- Becoming overly active
- Depression
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Numbness

Phases of healing after being exposed to violence:

Phase one: Ending the violence. The focus here is on safety and security. The victim of violence is not able to concentrate if she is still in danger. Getting her to understand that her reactions are normal and teaching her how to manage them is important.

Phase two: During this phase, the victim has a need to sort out and manage her thoughts and experiences. She can do this by getting access to information about necessary measures and processes. She can get insight by reading and hearing about other people's experiences, by keeping a diary and notes, and by being an active participant with regards to reactions and/or problems she face.

Phase three: This phase is about daring to live again, take risks and to have faith in love and in the future as a whole.

Women and children at the shelters

– a trauma perspective Women and children coming to the shelters have often been exposed to recurring traumas. As their helpers at the shelters, we should be able to recognise symptoms of trauma and knowledge of how to treat these at an early stage. On this subject, we have based the guide on Judith Herman's book about psychological trauma as a consequence of being exposed to violence (Herman 1995).

Trauma could be described as an overwhelming, mental strain where the victim experiences a feeling of intense fear, total helplessness and lack of control, and a threat of being destroyed.

Traumatic reactions become stronger when it is impossible for the victim to act. When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human self defence system shuts down. Thus, trauma destroys a complex system of defence that is integrated into our being. A traumatic incident involves a threat against the child's or the adult's physical and mental integrity, whether they have witnessed trauma or been exposed to it themselves.

A person's reactions after a traumatic episode greatly depend upon the extent of the trauma, and its duration. For women and children being exposed to recurring traumatic acts by people they have a close relationship to, the consequences could be severe. One consequence could be that they perceive the world as unpredictable and unsafe when they are hurt by those who were supposed to protect them.

Many of the women and children that come to the shelter and have been exposed to long term trauma develop problems or symptoms collectively known as: post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD).

Symptoms of post traumatic stress disorders can be put into three main categories:

Signs of increased alertness:

- Being on edge
- Irritable
- Problems sleeping
- Aggressiveness
- Muscle spasms
- Anxiety

Reliving the trauma:

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Recurring events

Avoiding behaviour:

- On a mental level
- On an emotional level
- On an action level
- Withdrawal
- Isolation

Increased alertness When having been exposed to recurring trauma over time, the body will often react by entering a chronic state of stress - women and children walk around in a constant state of alarm, as if the father might return at any moment. This over-activation continues both in a waking and sleeping state, and could cause a number of different sleeping disorders. The women we meet tell us that they can not get control over their thoughts. They suffer from memory loss and have problems concentrating. The physical pain and the fear take so much energy that it is difficult for the woman to relate to the present.

"Kristin had moved out of the shelter several months ago. During the initial process, she was very optimistic, and had a lot of plans for the future. She had managed to break out of a long term violent relationship, she had gotten a restraining order against her former partner he did not contest, and she was no longer afraid of him. Kristin had been granted rehabilitation pay and was on her way to get an education. After a while she came to the shelter again frustrated that she was unable to keep up with her classes. It turned out she had great difficulty sleeping. She would

lie awake for hours trying to sleep, and when she at last fell asleep, she would wake up several times during the night. She would be exhausted in the morning. Some times she was so tired that she was incapable of attending school, and when she was there she could not concentrate on her classes. She was also worried that she would lose her rehabilitation pay is she did not pass all her exams."

Reliving the trauma For many people experiencing violence, it is like the trauma continues even when they are safe from harm. Long after the physical or psychological assaults end, trauma victims relive the violence, over and over, like it is being done to them at present. It is like time has stopped at the traumatic moment. Fragmented memories about the violence sneak up on them in the form of nightmares and flashbacks. Reliving the trauma could be triggered by sensing or meeting something or someone reminding them of the assailant or trauma. Everything reminding you of something that would provoke reliving the trauma is called a trigger.

"Eli came bustling into the shelter she had been staying for about a month. She was trembling and started hyperventilating. It took quite a while before she was able to account for what had happened. It turned out that a red car looking like the one belonging to Eli's husband had been parked outside her work place when she was on her way home. This provoked powerful memories for her, and she relived the rape again..."

Avoiding behaviour: When reliving a traumatic incident provokes such a strong emotional pain and fear, people tend to take conscious and unconscious steps to avoid it. The women we meet at the shelters have different strategies to avoid situations that remind them of the assaults. One strategy could be to go into isolation; she stops to go out and severs all contact with her friends and network. The woman could also try to protect herself by trivialising the violence she has been subject to; "it wasn't that bad, and I want to forget it,

Psychological reactions after being exposed to violence

put it behind me...” Consequences of the different avoiding behaviours could mean an isolated existence, which in turn strengthen the woman’s fear of reliving her traumatic experiences. By keeping the trauma at a distance by consciously or unconsciously trivialising the violence or denying that it ever happened, the woman might find that she can manage for a while. In the long run, the possibility is great for her developing other symptoms because most of her energy has been spent on not reacting.

“Saima was perceived as difficult to cooperate with by the social services. She would not comply with any of the measures that were initiated for her. She could neither follow the Norwegian language classes or any of the other qualifying measures out of fear that she would be exposed to new assaults by her divorced husband. The caseworker meant that this was just a bad excuse; Saima’s ex husband did not even live in the same town, how could he be so dangerous for her...?”

Trauma treatment: Traumatized people in the acute phase need a stable environment, and an ability to manage their own reactions. The goal is for the victim to develop strategies to be able to keep the pain at a distance, and to control when to be thinking about it. The victim must learn how to enter and exit the pain, and to control when to think and when to feel. This phase lays the foundation for later work on trauma management where the goal is for the victim to integrate both feelings and emotions, and experiences shall become pale incidents in the victim’s life.

The inner wall: Early stage trauma work can be understood as the metaphor of an inner wall. The brain can push painful experiences behind that wall, for a time. This inner wall is the victim’s mental capacity to keep bad memories at bay, to be able to sort triggers that could provoke reliving the traumas, and to live in the present. During this phase, the victim has the need to develop a thick wall. By experiencing stress, illness, inadequate sleep or being exposed to

danger, this wall would become thin. The woman could then get overwhelmed by anxiety and reliving some of her traumas. The wall is strengthened by actively choosing to shut off the memories, by having a good night’s sleep and by experiencing good things. The wall is strengthened by reaching defined goals. Concentration problems could be a result of having a thick wall; she neither remembers telephone numbers, dates of birth or other necessary information. By drinking alcohol or using illegal substances the wall could be perceived as thick and the pain might go away, but it usually disappears completely afterwards.

As shelter workers, we focus on the following during this phase:

Security work.

Crisis intervention.

Normalising the reactions.

Identifying triggers that provoke reliving the traumas.

Resource oriented sessions so that the woman can gain access to fond emotions and earlier experiences. Talking about these resources will construct the inner wall.

Regulating work with trauma themes. In counselling sessions we ask questions that stimulate an intellectual rather than an emotional response; “what happened?” instead of “how did you feel?”

Setting realistic, everyday goals that the woman can master. By reaching these goals the inner wall will become thicker. To actively figure out what should first be prioritised.

Processing: Early stage trauma work involves building a good wall while later work will consist of cleaning out the stuff behind the wall. When doing this, you take parts and fragments from a memory that disturbs your present life and work on integrating it into your regular memories until they too become regular memories. When this is done, the horrible experience and pain will be a thing of the past.

In many cases women victims of violence will be in need of someone to support them while they work towards a life without any form of psychological follow-up from the support services. Other women will be in need of psychological follow-up to manage their traumas. As helper, we can not refer them to any specific place for or form of treatment. We can advise the woman to try and find the treatment she feels she benefits the most from.



Trauma treatment: Traumatized people in the acute phase need a stable environment, and an ability to manage their own reactions.

What do we do when women go back to their assailant?

As a helper, it could be frustrating when the woman chooses to go back to her assailant after staying at the shelter. You could have spent a lot of time with her and feel that all your work was for nothing. You could also be worried about the woman suffering new assaults by going back, and it might be especially difficult if the woman has any children. In situations like this, it is important that we do not criticise or in any other way condemn her choices. Breaking out of a violent relationship is often a very long process, and we could try to understand our part in helping her as a part of that process.

The reasons for the woman returning to her assailant could be complicated. Worst case scenario is that the fear of him is so strong that it feels safer for her to be around him so she knows where he is and what he is doing. She is governed by her fear to such an extent that she is unable to orient herself in a new existence, fearing that he will show up and steal her away. Many women have invested a lot of time and love on the relationship and it might be difficult to abandon such a project. Women can be afraid for their economical situation after a divorce, and others think that they should stick it out for the sake of the children. The hope that the man will change can make the woman wish to continue the relationship. Our experience is that women have empathy towards their assailants; they see his violent actions as a by-product of illness; he does not really mean to be violent. The woman feels that the he needs her and that she could help him to get better. Feelings of guilt because it was she who let him down by not giving him a chance to change could make it difficult to go on with her life.

For women of arranged marriages, it could be expectations from their families who make them go back to their violent husband. The woman might feel that it is not possible for her to leave a violent husband as long as she does not have permanent residence permit, because being sent back to her homeland is perceived as more threatening than the violence she must endure.

“Neda stayed at the shelter with her two kids after being exposed to psychological and sexual marital violence. Neda’s family and members of her husband’s family took it upon themselves to initiate mediation between the married couple. The result was that Neda went back to her husband against him promising to respect her and treat her according to that. A year later, Neda and her children came back to the shelter. Her husband had started abusing her again, even worse than before. He had not kept his part of the bargain, and Neda could now demand a divorce with the families support and understanding.”

As helpers for women considering going back to their assailant, we have to, through dialogue, try and get a hold of the reasons for her wanting to go back. If she is trying to trivialise the violence she has been victim to, we need to try different ways of making it obvious to her. If she chooses to go back we could together come up with a plan for what she could do if she was exposed to new assaults. The most important thing we can do is to motivate and make her certain of that she can come back to the shelter without feeling ashamed if she needs to.

When a mother takes her children back to an assailant, it is necessary for us to consider the danger the children are exposed to. If we have a serious concern for the children’s lives or health, we are obligated to report this to the child welfare services.



Going back:

As a helper, it could be frustrating when the woman chooses to go back to her assailant after staying at the shelter.

Women and residence permits

A relatively large number of the women seeking help at the shelters have been brought to Norway through family reunification with their husbands here. If the woman has not lived in Norway long enough for her to get a permanent residence permit, the basis for her staying in the country is the marriage to her husband. The man could be a Norwegian citizen or have other legal grounds for residency. When she leaves her husband, she will no longer have the necessary requirements to warrant a legal residency. UDI (the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration) has developed guidelines for treating matters involving the acquirements of getting new residency for foreign women after they have left their husbands; consult Rundskriv UDI 02-117 SODA.

Abuse during the relationship The purpose of the second alternative of part six of the regulation of paragraph 37 is that women should not be forced to stay in a relationship where they, or possibly their children, are being abused, in fear of loosing their legal residency. The abuse can be of physical or psychological character, and might have led to a reduction of the woman's or the child's life quality. There are no strict requirements for substantiating the abuse, and the woman's own testimony is emphasised.

Social or cultural conditions of her home country The difficulties the woman will face by being returned to her home country must be a consequence of the termination of her relationship and her status there as divorced or separated. There will be performed a gender focused evaluation where both the general situation of her country and the woman's special circumstances must be included.

To summarise, the regulation opens up for the possibility for women who have gotten permission through family reunification to have their residency approved independently under these circumstances:

Alternative 1: if the woman or her children have been abused in the relationship, she will get a residency permit.

Alternative 2: if the woman could get into unreasonable trouble because of the social or cultural circumstances in her home country, she might get a residency permit.

Foreign women who have been sent back to or abandoned in their home country Women who have been tricked into going back to their home country under false pretences like going on vacation and then being left there while the husband goes back to Norway, have the same rights as mentioned above. For more detailed information, see UDI's website: www.udi.no

It is the police who prepare cases where women reapply for a residence permits. The woman is called in to an interview to give a personal statement that will form the foundation of the police report. Supplementary documentation for the woman's statement could be a medical certificate, a police report and statement from the shelter or a psychologist. The permanent residence application, together with the police report and any other possible additional documentation is sent to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration for processing and ruling.

Legal assistance Women who apply for residence on an independent basis because of abuse do not have the right to free legal advice. The background for this is that there should be a liberal practice on leading cases where the woman claims that she could be in trouble if returned to her home country or in case she or her children have been abused in the relationship. Applications based on claims of abuse are usually granted on principle, so there should be no need for legal assistance except in cases of potential appeals. In such an event, free legal advice should be granted (Rundskriv G-73/96)

Experiences from the Women's Shelter in Oslo Women without permanent residency in Norway are often without knowledge about their own rights in relation to continued residency in cases of separation or divorce. Threats about being thrown out of the country and having her children taken away from her is often part of the abuse. Our experience is that women like this do not seek out the shelter until they see that the threat of being killed or sent out of the country is real. Returning to their home country could have several possible consequences for the women. For some, it could mean economical ruin with no prospects for an income-producing future. For others, the consequences could be getting exposed to sanctions like being banished from, or getting killed by their own or their husband's family. Women with children also fear for their chance to care for and be together with their children in their home country where they might have few to no legal rights.

Our experience is that women with residency because of family reunification who apply for independent residency on the grounds of abuse get their applications granted. In our role as helpers, we must thoroughly inform the woman about her rights to apply for independent residency. The shelter can make a written statement about the woman's background and history to send with her application. This would be of great help for women who have been living in isolation, having no knowledge about the Norwegian society and language, because they could have problems understanding and exercising their rights.

"Fatma was called in to the police in connection to her application for residency on independent grounds. During her one year long marriage, she had been victim to severe violence and sexual assaults. According to her summons she had to provide for her own interpreter, if she needed one. Fatma brought her uncle. She was not aware of the purpose of the meeting, and hoped

that the police would quickly renew her residency permit. The police asked her to tell them about her marriage to her former husband. Fatma thought that it was embarrassing to talk about the abuse in front of her uncle. Instead, she told the police that she had been bored a lot during the marriage and that it would become even more boring to go back to her home country because she would not have the opportunity to work. The interview was over in half an hour, and the Directorate of Immigration had no information indicating that she fulfilled any requirements for continued residency."

Processing time The processing of applications on residency on independent basis at the Directorate of Immigration could take a long time. It is not uncommon for women to wait for one year to get a decision. The uncertainty during this period could be a great strain on the woman. Her fear of having to go back amplifies the traumas she has been victim to during her marriage, complicating the necessary managing process. Mental reactions like sleeping disorders, anxiety and concentration problems could render her unable to profit from Norwegian language courses or other measures of integration. As helpers during this period, it is important that show the woman that we understand why she is living in some kind of vacuum, and that we do not get frustrated when she does not show the degree of progress we feel she should when it comes to school and qualification. Experience tells us that women in this phase need us to stay positive and act as their hope when they fear the worst.

Work with an interpreter

To ensure equal treatment and a tailored service for women and children victims of violence, we have to use interpreters when communicating with people who do not speak Norwegian. The women and children get the opportunity to tell their story in their own language and we, as helpers, ensures that important information do not get lost in the communication. When talking about abuse, and other sensitive topics, we should not use family or friends of the woman as interpreters. Children should never be used as interpreters for their mothers at the shelters; they should not have to take on the responsibility of mediating assaults against their mothers, but have the opportunity to be attended to according to their own needs. In the systematic work with mother and child, we have to employ professional interpreters who have undergone training and are familiar with the ethics of interpretation, and are capable of maintaining the role of a neutral translator. When advising on practical subjects and giving general information, we do not have the same, strict requirements for the role of the interpreter, and we can make use of family or friends if the woman so wishes.

This is what we require of the interpreters:

- They should give information about their role, before we start.
- They should explain about their absolute confidentiality.
- They should only translate what is being said, and everything being said.
- They should translate in “first person”.
- They should not take on a supporting role.

The interpreter’s expertise effects the quality of the communication, and experience tell us that the professionalism of the interpreter vary a great deal. As helpers, we can prepare the interpreter sessions by being conscious of the difficulties the woman might experience during them.

Gender: It could be difficult for the woman to talk about the abuse she has been victim to, especially with an interpreter present. Several kinds of abuse could be tabooed, for example rape and other forms of sexual violations. Before we book an interpreter we should check if it would be easier if the

interpreter was a woman. Most women choose to have a female interpreter present when talking about these kinds of abuse, some do not care either way, and some prefer male interpreters.

Nationality/ethnicity: Many women are occupied by what country or region the interpreter is from. Norwegian ethnical communities are rather small, and the possibility of being recognised by the interpreter is very present. We experience that most women do not want an interpreter who knows their husband or family in fear of gossip, or because they feel the subject is too intimate and personal to discuss in front of them. Some women find it comforting to have an interpreter from the same country or region with matching dialects and preferences. Many countries have several different spoken languages with local dialects, and in larger cities, it is possible to choose interpreter out from language, dialect, and country or region.

Interpreters and confidentiality: Professional interpreters follow the rule of absolute confidentiality. Of course, there have been incidents where that confidentiality has been broken by the interpreter passing on that information to someone else. The quality of the interpreter session will nevertheless deteriorate if the woman has reason to suspect that the interpreter’s confidentiality is not to be trusted, justified or not. It is necessary for us to be sensitive in relation to the woman’s fears and to find possible ways of calming her.

“Zobia had through several interpreter sessions at the shelter told us about severe psychological, physical and sexual abuse through a three year long marriage. Through a concrete risk evaluation, Zobia got to the conclusion that she wanted to press charges against her husband because she believed that this would make him stop harassing and threatening her. The shelter made a deal with the police about pressing charges and pressed the matter that Zobia was dependent on having a female interpreter to make a statement about the severe violations she had been victim to. This was not taken into account by the police when Zobia was called in to make her statement. The police had hired an elderly, male interpreter from her own region. The result of this was that Zobia

told them about a couple of isolated incidents and the case was quickly dismissed. The most serious consequence of this meeting was that Zobia no longer trusted the police to be the right authority to protect her against her husband.”

Using interpreters for children: It could be impossible for the children to understand if the interpreter is talking in “first person” when interpreting, if they are too young. They would not understand that it was the helper asking questions and not the interpreter. This could easily create confusion and needs to be tested in order to find a practical way of communication.

Interpreting culture: Several interpretation agencies offer services for culture interpretation. These interpreters have a broad cultural expertise from the country they come from that he could contribute to putting into a Norwegian context. Our experience is that culture interpretation is not suitable in a client conversation/conversation where the woman is supposed to talk about her experienced violence. It is inconsistent with the shelters’ ideal about subject oriented assistance that women should be placed in a cultural context, because of the interpreter, in an uncovering or managing session. Nevertheless, it could be useful for the helpers to make use of a cultural interpreter on their own when there are certain topics or phenomenon we wish an increased knowledge or understanding of.

Loss of information: Using an interpreter takes a lot of time when message and response must first be received and then processed and retold by a third party. The possibility of information getting lost on the way becomes greater, and repetition and frequent summarising could be necessary. Even though the interpreter gives us a language translation there might be a need to specify what we mean by our different definitions.

We have to make sure that the helper and the woman have a mutual understanding of different definitions and complex processes. We often experience women conducting themselves according to the laws and rules of their home country, thus,

needing an introduction into our practices.

“Fatima told us that the last thing she wanted to do was to divorce her husband, even though he had exposed her to brutal assaults and threats against her life. The reason for this turned out to be that Fatima was convinced that she would also be separated from her children in the same process because it was common practice in the country she was from for the children to stay with their father and his family after a divorce. Fatima was also under the impression that she would not be able to care for her children alone because she had no income. She was in a deep state of crisis and unable to receive information about parental rights and duties in Norway. We had several interpreter sessions before Fatima was able to understand and make use of the information we gave her about separation, divorce and child custody.”

The interpreter as a helper: By using the same interpreter through the whole process, the possibility for the woman to get a close relationship to the interpreter is possible. The interpreter is often seen as a helper, in addition to being a translator. This could have a positive effect on the process, but it should be discussed with the interpreter so that the ethical guidelines for the interpreter’s role are in place.

Looking after the welfare of both interpreter and user: During the sessions at the shelter, the professional interpreter could experience getting emotionally overwhelmed by the stories she listens to. Even though it does not happen very often, the interpreter might become unable to hide her emotions. As helpers, we could try looking after both the interpreter and the woman by acknowledging that it is painful to listen to the horrible and unjust experiences the woman has been victim to.

Phone interpreter: The woman might, in some situations, not wish to talk with other people present. A phone interpretation could be an alternative. In smaller places where everybody knows everyone, this could be a suitable service offer. The interpretation should be done the same way as in a regular interpreter session, except through the speaker of the phone.

Conclusion

The purpose of this guide is to raise the level of competence among the helpers who assist women and children victims of violence at the shelters. The problems and themes that have been described would cover much of the work at the shelters. Our society is constantly changing, influencing user groups and their needs, and requires that we continually develop and adapt our services.

To be able to put the work tasks in working with the women and children victims of violence at the shelters into system, and at the same time be able to develop them, we can use a problem solving model. The different phases are not static or predetermined but, rather, processes of different lengths; in our work, we go back and forth between the different processes, independent of the sequence of the model.

Problem solving model for the work at the shelter:

Crisis intervention	The work on assisting women and children victims of violence in crisis.
Mapping out the situation	The work on mapping the violence and its consequences.
Evaluation needs	The work on assessing the women's and children's needs, internally and/or externally.
Recommending different solutions to the problems	The work on discussing different mastering strategies with the women and children.
Initiating measures	The work on initiating external and internal measures.
Following up on measures	The work on following up the different measures.
Evaluation	The work on the repeated evaluations of every measure during the different phases of the problem solving model.

The purpose with this guide:
to raise the level of competence among the helpers who assist women and children victims of violence at the shelters.

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