

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) is partner to the project "Prevention of Violence against Girls and Women in Patriarchal Families" coordinated by Kvinnoforum, an organisation in Sweden, and funded by the European Commission within the framework of the Transnational Exchange Programme Phase II.

In the second phase of the project, activities are focused on honour-related violence and its main features were to facilitate and speed up the exchange of learning concerning HRV (Honour Related Violence) through a mapping survey of existing prevention and support services in participating countries; to organise national trainings for frontline staff in the public sector and NGOs; to develop methods of cross-sectoral cooperation on a national and international level for relevant actors; and to focus specifically on the role of the police.

In this project honour related violence has been defined as the "violence occurring when families with 'honour-norms' violate girl's, women's and boy's rights". (UN Convention on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and laws in the country of immigration).

THE CASE OF CYPRUS

Within the framework of this project, MIGS produced a report that became part of a resource book on honour-related violence entitled "Honour Related Violence - European Resource Book and Good Practice". The survey aimed to map existing prevention and support services from different actors in society; describe the extent to which cooperation exists between these actors; to identify and describe at least one example of best practice concerning work against honour related violence; and form a network of those working with these issues in Cyprus¹ (experts, front-line staff, NGOs etc).

The survey includes an important discussion on the term Honour Related Violence (HRV), which in Cyprus gains a different meaning and importance. 'Honour' is a complex and important term in Cypriot culture and reputation and a good standing in the community are of fundamental importance. 'Honour' is the excuse for much of the violence in Cypriot society, although it is not named as such, particularly within the family. Honour is invoked in the case of socially "unacceptable" behaviour sexual relationships, either a wife who has an affair, a daughter who has a boyfriend without the approval of the father, or a sister who has a boyfriend without the approval of the (older) brother.

Despite this, the term "honour-related violence" was virtually unknown to the agencies that participated in our survey, and crimes often committed in the name of honour are not classified as such. The results of extensive interviews and questionnaires show that the term HRV is not used as such by the relevant actors that deal with similar issues, and, as a result, the term generated considerable

¹ The report in question only covers the southern part of the island, which is controlled by the officially recognized Cypriot government.

confusion and perplexity. In most cases, HRV is seen as domestic violence and, in this respect, the working terms for such crimes are domestic violence, violence against women, child abuse, sexual abuse, rape, and trafficking in human beings. Most organisations claim to be guided by the 2000 Law on Domestic Violence (Law 119(1)/2000) which does not incorporate or make any special reference to HRV. As a result, violence occurring due to family honour that cannot be classified as either domestic violence or child abuse receives is ignored and as a result no special treatment is provided to the victims.

Consequently, the report focuses on domestic violence, violence against women, and child abuse as these are the three most frequent terms encountered in the course of the interviews. These crimes can still be classified as HRV, especially since the most often-given excuse for such violence is the protection of family 'honour'. While the researcher acknowledged the important difference between domestic and other forms of violence and HRV, these distinctions do not exist in Cyprus and, thus, one of the major goals of the report was to make the relevant actors aware of these distinctions.

The report attempts, for the first time, to document the occurrence of HRV in Cyprus describing existing research and recorded figures, with references to statistical data and their findings. However, it was very difficult to draw conclusions on the occurrence of HRV from the figures provided by NGOs, public bodies, and existing research. Statistics in Cyprus are poorly kept both by public bodies such as the police (who have been collecting data only since 1997) and NGOs (only one NGO provided MIGS with figures). Furthermore, data is not analysed or utilized in any way, however insufficient this data might be. Moreover, the obvious lack of research on HRV or related issues indicates the immense need for such projects and quantitative data to provide a more accurate picture of the extent of these crimes in Cyprus.

Using the only existing law for combating domestic violence in Cyprus as its reference point, the survey identifies and describes the existing support and prevention services provided by different actors such as the police, social services, schools, legal service, health service and various NGOs. During the course of the research, it soon became obvious that the services provided, in many cases, do not correspond to certain guidelines laid out in public policy, but more importantly, that the policy itself is in need of upgrading and reinforcement. Several recommendations are made to this effect by MIGS in the report such as the incorporation of HRV in the Law on Domestic Violence, and the introduction of minimum limits in sentencing for HRV crimes. Another important finding is the serious lack of funding for government social services and NGOs dealing with these issues, creating difficulties both in support provision but also the much needed prevention programs.

Overall, the support offered in Cyprus for victims of HRV is extremely limited due to certain financial obstacles, a fact which is, indeed, a result of the Cypriot culture and its assumption that domestic violence, violence against women and children, and HRV are not priority issues. Also, the fact that there is no clear distinction between HRV and domestic violence means that victims of HRV crimes may not be receiving adequate support. The survey documents existing support measures such as social, financial, legal and psychological support, health services provided to victims, and sheltered housing.

Prevention programmes were extremely difficult to locate, as they are almost nonexistent and are considered second priority after support to the victims. The report suggests that prevention should be given equal weight to victim support as HRV constitutes a vicious circle that needs to be addressed in a comprehensive manner for effective results to be achieved.

Cooperation in Cyprus among different actors is still undeveloped. Although interviewees claimed that cooperation exists, it is poorly coordinated and not adequately supported or even encouraged in some organizations. It is the recommendation of this report for the state, in cooperation with organizations working on this issue, to create a National Action Plan for the fight against HRV.

Finally, the report clearly demonstrates that legislation in Cyprus, despite recent improvements, is in need of upgrading, renewal and close monitoring as current laws do not adequately cover in the combating of HRV and are poorly implemented.

The full text of the report can be downloaded from the following website:
<http://www.kvinnoforum.se/PDF/HRV2005.pdf>.