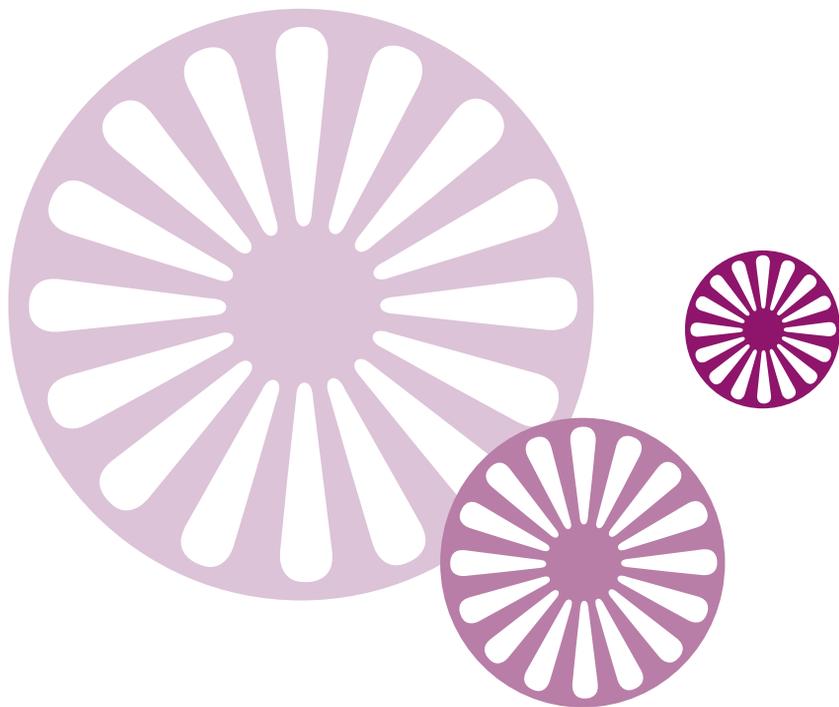


Tackling male violence against  
Romani women:  
Recommendations for the  
prevention, detection and  
intervention



Empowering Women Against  
Intimate partnership violence  
in Roma communities





---

Tackling male violence against  
Romani women:  
Recommendations for the  
prevention, detection and  
intervention

---



Empowering Women Against  
Intimate partnership violence  
in Roma communities



**Written by:**

Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada – Surt. Women’s Foundation. Private Foundation



**With the collaboration of:**

Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini – Giacomo Brodolini Foundation

Fundación Secretariado Gitano – Roma Secretariat Foundation

Международният център за изследване на малцинствата и културните взаимодействия (ИМИР) -  
International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations

Asociația Femeilor Țigănci Pentru Copiii Noștri - Roma Women Association For Our Children

**November 2012**

Toolkit written in the framework of the Empow-Air: Empowering Women Against Intimate partnership violence in Roma communities project. JUST/2010/DAP3/AG/1266 Co-funded by the European Commission’s Daphne III Programme to combat violence against children, young people and women (2007 - 2013).

The information and views set out in this Toolkit are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

- 1. INTRODUCTION: AIMS AND CONSIDERATIONS ..... 5**
  - 1.1 WHY IS THIS TOOLKIT WRITTEN? ..... 5
  - 1.2 WHO IS THE TOOLKIT FOR? ..... 5
  - 1.3 HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT? ..... 7
  - 1.4 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ..... 7
  
- 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ..... 8**
  - 2.1 UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ..... 8
    - 2.1.1 What is violence against women? ..... 8
    - 2.1.2 False assumptions around violence: breaking stereotypes ..... 8
    - 2.1.3 Cycle of violence or about how VAW operates ..... 9
    - 2.1.4 Consequences of VAW on women’s lives ..... 11
    - 2.1.5 Recognising diversity of experiences ..... 11
  - 2.2 ROMANI COMMUNITIES ..... 12
    - 2.2.1 Key elements on Romani communities ..... 12
  - 2.3 KEY ELEMENTS ON VAW AND ROMANI COMMUNITIES ..... 14
  
- 3. PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ..... 15**
  - 3.1 WHAT DOES PREVENTION MEAN? ..... 15
  - 3.2 OBJECTIVES OF PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ..... 16
  - 3.3 PREVENTION PRINCIPLES ..... 17
  - 3.4 PROPOSAL OF PREVENTION ACTIVITIES ..... 19
  
- 4. DETECTION OF VAW WITHIN ROMA COMMUNITIES ..... 20**
  - 4.1 IDENTIFICATION DIFFICULTIES AND THE NEED OF ACTIVE DETECTION ..... 20
  - 4.2 KEY INDICATORS ..... 22
  
- 5. INTERVENTION ..... 22**
  - 5.1 INTERVENTION PRINCIPLES ..... 22
  - 5.2 INTERVENTION INTO PRACTICE: ADEQUATE AND NOT ADEQUATE ATTITUDES/  
RESPONSES ..... 24
  
- 6. CARE OF PROFESSIONALS ..... 28**
  
- 7. CLOSING REMARKS ..... 29**
  
- BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 30**



## 1. INTRODUCTION: AIMS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Welcome. Before you start using this Toolkit, here there are few notes to help you find your way around it.

### 1.1 WHY IS THIS TOOLKIT WRITTEN?

The objective of this Toolkit is twofold. On the one hand, it aims at sensitising professionals by providing key conceptual information on violence against women<sup>1</sup> (VAW) and on the Roma communities' social and cultural organisation. On the other hand, it aims at providing resources and guidelines on how to prevent and detect VAW, as well as on how to intervene in cases of violence.

The Toolkit is elaborated in the framework of the project Empow-Air: Empowering Women Against Intimate partnership violence in Roma communities<sup>2</sup>. Empow-Air is a two year European project co-financed by the European Commission under the III Daphne programme to combat violence against children, young people and women.

### 1.2 WHO IS THE TOOLKIT FOR?

The Toolkit targets professionals who deal with VAW and/or who work with Romani communities, especially social services professionals, local authorities, and civil society organisations, i.e. women's organisations and Romani organisations working both at local and national level.

Taking into account the complexity of the topic, it was thought that it could be useful to define in a more concret way some key elements of the profile of the professionals who may use the Toolkit. Thus, in order to use the Toolkit properly, it is recommended that professionals develop the following competences.

Regarding technical competences, it is recommended that professionals have basic notions of feminism, gender relations and gender-based violence. Moreover, it is also important they have knowledge on Romani communities. Additionally, knowledge on intercultural contexts, on the resources and services available in the area, as well as knowledge of the current legislation on VAW are also relevant and useful knowledge.

On the other hand, it is also recommended that professionals have the following transversal competences:

---

1. The manual focuses on intimate partnership violence.

2. The Empow-Air project is coordinated by SURT. Fundació de dones. Fundació privada, based in Barcelona, and counted with the following partnership: International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (Bulgaria), Giacomo Brodolini Foundation (Italy), Gypsy Women Association for Our Children (Romania) and Fundación Secretariado Gitano (Spain).

- **Relational competence:** capacity to understand perceptions, needs and attitudes of other in order to interact in a constructive way. Moreover, the capacity to communicate and interact in an agreeable way. It is necessary that the professionals are aware of the communicative process being established and that they ask the adequate questions in order to ensure a good understanding. Also related to communication issues, it is important that professionals know how to interpret, transmit and control non verbal messages. Finally, active listening and positive reformulation are also recommended abilities.
- **Adaptability competence:** capacity to interpret and to adequately fit to new and changing situation. Moreover, professionals should develop the capacity to negotiate.
- **Intercultural competence:** capacity to effectively work within intercultural contexts. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate interpret and interact in an adequate, flexible and effective way with people from different cultures and cultural codes in a variety of cultural contexts. In practice, intercultural context is a process of training to understand, recognise, value and respect people from different cultural context and, in doing so, to work with them. It implies an effort to take distance from one's own culture and, at the same time, the capacity to establish an empathic relation with the rest of the cultures.

On the other hand, intercultural competence is linked to the notion of cultural humility. That is to say that, professionals can not know everything about other cultures and that the capacity to ask and obtain key information is essential.

To develop intercultural competence also means to be aware of the historical dynamic of cultural interaction, i.e. to understand, for example, that historical experiences of discrimination can lead to situation of mistrust that may generate communication difficulties.

The development of the intercultural competence aims at avoiding, at least, two attitudes: cultural resistance and cultural blindness. Cultural resistance is understood as the unwillingness to question or admit having any prejudice or potential for unfair behaviours. Professionals' expectations are that people from an ethnic minoritised<sup>3</sup> communities need to be assimilated by the majority society. Moreover, cultural differences are understood as part of the understanding difficulties. On the other hand, cultural blindness is understood as the tendency to deny differences or the uniqueness of people. Statements such as "we don't want to make ethnicity or culture an issue" are made. "Equal treatment to be fair" attitude is applied without assessing how cultural diverse communities are included and responded to in service delivery.

---

3. We use the term minoritisation rather than "minority" or "minority ethnic group" to highlight how groups and communities do not occupy the position of being a minority by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example) but acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical process. This approach permits identification and analysis of continuities and differences of positions between women from different minoritised groups – so opening up the black/white divide to generate further inquiry into how specific forms of racism and gender oppression intersect (Burman, 2004).

### 1.3 HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT?

One of the most important things is that the Toolkit should be adapted to women's reality and not the other way around. The Toolkit should be used as a manual of reference and professionals should adapt their intervention to the specific needs of each woman, as well as to the specificities of the context. Moreover, as stated before, the Toolkit is an introduction to a wide and complex topic. Thus, it presents very basic information. To base the intervention only on the information presented here would be a simplification, and thus, an error. Therefore, the Toolkit presented here may be useful as a first introduction to the phenomenon of VAW within Romani communities. However, professionals aiming at dealing with VAW within Romani communities should receive a longer training and a more comprehensive preparation.

The Toolkit is available in English, Bulgarian, Italian, Romanian and Spanish. The English version is the original one and it presents general guidelines, without contextualising the information in any specific country, whereas the national versions do refer to the national contexts<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.4 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The stand point of the Empow-Air project is that VAW is the most widespread violation of human rights. Analysis of the phenomenon of VAW concluded that no class, race or nationality were exempt from it. This statement was an attempt to emphasise commonality in women's experience of gender-based violence. However, global feminism has increasingly questioned this assumption of commonality and emphasised the need to also recognise the diversity in women's experience of violence, in the State's responses to this violence and in women's ability to access help and support.
- VAW within Roma communities is a complex phenomenon due to several reasons such as the pervasiveness of patriarchal structures and the fact that it is an area where sensitive issues like Roma identity and gender roles get mixed in.
- Although culture is crucial to understanding and combating VAW, we cannot rest on simplistic notions of culture. Rather, we must address how different communities' cultural experiences of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, economic exploitation, and the like. Culture should not be confused with patriarchy. Instead, we should look at how patriarchy operates differently in different cultures.
- It is important to avoid ethnocentrism and cultural relativism and to start developing intercultural competence already when reading the Toolkit. Moreover, a feminist perspective is also required in order to understand VAW as a structural violence taking place in a patriarchal context where gender gets intersected with other forms of oppression such as racism and economic exploitation.

---

4. The different versions of the Toolkit are available in the website of the project: [www.surt.org/empow-air](http://www.surt.org/empow-air)

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

#### **2.1.1 What is violence against women?**

VAW is a structural phenomenon rooted in the unequal power relations between women and men in the framework of the patriarchal society. It is an expression of male power and it is used by men to reproduce and maintain their status and authority over women. In this sense, it is an instrumental violence that is functional to men and the patriarchal system.

There is no single country in the world where women are free from violence, and there is no single area in any woman's life where she is not exposed to the threat or realisation of acts of male violence. Therefore, VAW is to be considered the most widespread violation of human rights.

The Platform for Action of Beijing (1995) defined VAW as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

As stated before, VAW is a structural phenomenon and has nothing to do with pathologies or individual aggressive behaviour. It is neither an isolated nor an incidental phenomenon. VAW is a structural historical phenomenon resulting from patriarchal societies characterised by the imbalance of power existing between women and men. Based on a false male superiority, the patriarchal system aims at ensuring male domination over women in order to control women's lives, their bodies and their sexuality. Within this context, VAW becomes an indispensable control mechanism of the patriarchal system.

VAW can take a variety of forms, i.e. physiological, physical, sexual, economic and social violence and it can take place both at public and private spheres. In the framework of the Empow-Air project, the focus is on male intimate partnership violence against Roma women taking place within the family unit.

#### **2.1.2 False assumptions around violence: breaking stereotypes**

Apart from the brutality and the serious prevalence of the phenomenon, there is one more thing that is even more alarming; that is the social acceptance of VAW. VAW is tolerated, legitimated and even trivialised. Men have the monopoly of violence and they exert it against women because they feel entitled to do so.

There are several mechanisms through which society denies, legitimises, normalises and minimises VAW. One of these mechanisms is a series of false assumptions and stereotypes surrounding VAW. These false assumptions justify VAW and make women responsible for suffering it.

All these stereotypes and false assumptions around VAW carry the risk of society condoning violence. Moreover, the false myths around male VAW allow perpetrators to act with impunity and legitimacy and to create unsafe environments where violence is tolerated. Furthermore, the broad lack of understanding about the dynamics of VAW contributes to the isolation of its victims.

The table below presents some of these false presuppositions and stereotypes that legitimate VAW.

#### **Legitimation of violence against women**

- Jealousy and control are signs of love
- Women choose to be subjected to violence if they remain in the relationship or in the family home
- Women are partly responsible for the violence suffered: “If he beats her it is probably because she has done something to deserve so”
- Men exert violence because they lose control or because they have taken drugs or alcohol
- VAW is a private issue and should not be discussed outside the family

#### **Non-legitimation of violence against women**

- Respect and autonomy are signs of a healthy relationship
- There are several complexities that need to be taken into account to understand women’s decisions
- Women are never responsible for the violence suffered. The only responsible is the person exerting it
- Men exert violence because they feel entitled to do so in the framework of a patriarchal system
- VAW is a public and political issue that needs to be discussed in the public arena

### **2.1.3 Cycle of violence or about how VAW operates**

The cycle of violence is an adequate and convenient model to explain how VAW works. Following that model, the violent attitudes and acts do not appear from anywhere, but there are part of a gradual process. As explained by the model, VAW lasts for long periods of time and, at the same time, it increases its frequency and degree of intensity day by day.

The model explains that VAW has 3 main phases: accumulation of tension, outbreak of violence and emotional manipulation or honeymoon. The graphic below illustrates the cycle of violence:



The more the cycle is completed the less it takes to complete it again and again. Moreover, as the circle is repeated, the violence usually increases in frequency and severity. The cycle repeats itself and, overtime, the honeymoon phase usually shortens, while the tension and the violence phases lengthen. In this sense, some people refer to it as a spiral of violence.

It is important that professionals know that violence gradually gets worse and that VAW is not a constant factor but it is rather cyclical. Knowing the dynamics of VAW will help professionals to carry out a more adequate intervention.

### **2.1.4 Consequences of VAW on women's lives**

The main consequence of VAW is the perpetuation of a system that allows violence to take place. VAW prevents women's oppression to be overcome and perpetuates gender inequality. Moreover, VAW shapes women's place in society, since violence and the threat of violence keep women in a subordinated position, while violating their right of freedom and security.

Furthermore, VAW has terrible consequences in all spheres of women's lives: health, labour, relationships and social life, housing, economic situation and legal aspects. Thus, VAW has an unquestionable impact on the quality of life of women, reducing their capacities of development and well-being, and preventing them to live safely. VAW is a phenomenon affecting all dimensions of women's life, increasing their vulnerability in society where women are already in a situation of inequality when compared to men<sup>5</sup>.

### **2.1.5 Recognising diversity of experiences**

As an attempt to emphasise the commonality of women's experiences of gender-based violence, the first analysis of the phenomenon concluded that there were no class, ethnic or nationality difference when it came to gender violence experiences. However, mainstream definitions of VAW are incomplete if they do not include the specific forms of violence, as well as the specific consequences and impacts that this violence has on women depending on their ethnic background. In this sense, although patriarchal values may be widely shared, women from diverse ethnic groups may differ in the type of violence they experience and in their responses to it. Thus, it is important to go beyond the traditional discourse that homogenises the experience and to understand and recognise the diversity of experiences of violence.

Culture is crucial to understanding and combating VAW. However, it is extremely necessary to avoid simplistic analysis of the role of culture in legitimating it. In most cases, cultural explanations that are used to justify VAW result in a certain degree of moral relativism. In this sense, violence experienced by minoritised women is rendered less visible, as something that can be overlooked or even excused for 'cultural reasons'. Sometimes violence is portrayed as a normalised part of the culture, assuming that 'it is a cultural thing'. However, VAW is not acceptable in any culture and culture cannot ever be an excuse for violence to take place. VAW is never 'just cultural' and, therefore, acceptable. As important as it is to move from the discourse of 'women blaming', it is also important to avoid the 'cultural blaming'. Culture cannot be confused with patriarchy. VAW is not a cultural issue, but it is rather a mechanism of the patriarchal system to maintain the subordination of women.

Having said that, and as stated before, VAW can take variety of forms and it can have diverse impacts on women's lives depending on the socio-cultural context in which vio-

---

5. For more information on the effects of violence on women's lives check the European Daphne project GVEI: proposing new indicators. Measuring violence. [www.surt.org/gvei](http://www.surt.org/gvei).

lence takes place. In this sense, there are some specificities of the Romani society (social and cultural values, traditions and ways of defining gender identities, among others) that do have an influence on the experiences of VAW. The prevalence of the phenomenon, the forms it takes, the impacts on women's lives, the possibilities and the capacities of women to cope with it, and the social imaginary around violence are influenced by the social and cultural values of Roma society, and by the situation of social exclusion and marginalisation in which a part of its members live in.

## 2.2 ROMANI COMMUNITIES

### 2.2.1 Key elements on Romani communities

The tables below present some key elements regarding the social organisation of Romani communities, the materialisation of patriarchy through the family, and the main features of Romani women and their position in the society.

#### Social organisation

- Heterogeneity: Romani people are not an homogenous social group. They rather constitute different communities with diverse cultural expressions and forms of organisation
- Dynamic: Romani cultural identity is dynamic and diverse, and changes that changes over space and time
- Supremacy of social identity over the individual one: Individual decisions, and the consequences of them, have a social impact. Individual choices are strongly influenced by (gendered) social norms
- Whereas the respect of the norms is rewarded with social recognition, its transgression is penalised
- As holistic cultural system, Roma individuals are valued and recognised in relation to their role within the community
- Everything related to personal interests is subordinated to family decisions and the future of the community is more important than any individual life project
- Fidelity and respect of the tradition are behaviours specially valued and that allow recognition of individuals as part of the community
- Romani communities are characterised by a wide gap between their living conditions and those of the majority population. Part of the Roma population are at risk of marginalisation facing a wide range of socio-economic problems: social inequality and discrimination, poor living standards, poor health and housing difficulties

### **Patriarchal system within Romani communities and the family as the social institution**

- Within Romani communities patriarchal system is strong and plays an important role in the creation of both social and individual identities
- Romani identities get interrelated with traditional gender roles. The result is the definition of social gendered roles which are especially limitative and restrictive for women
- Family is the core institution of Romani communities. It is around this social institution that identities are built and roles are defined
- Romani family refers to an extensive family that is more like a wide net rather than a nuclear family
- Roma family is the place of belonging, of self-preservation and protection. However, the family is also a space of strong social control that may limit women's freedom and autonomy
- Family is the institution where cultural values are preserved and transmitted generation over generation, especially through the role of women as principal carer and educator
- In most of the cases, the family exerts a strong social control on women in order to ensure that they respond to the social role assigned

### **Romani women**

- Romani women are a heterogeneous group. They respond to a great variety of situations, needs and ways of life
- Romani women identity is based on the intersection of several patterns of discrimination. Romani women suffer discrimination for being women within the patriarchal system and for being part of a largely stigmatised and socially excluded ethnic group
- Aspects such as submission to male authority, chastity before marriage, fidelity, motherhood and a prominent sexual division of work are important in the constitution of Romani women's identity
- Roma women are not autonomous individuals and they represent the honour of their families. Any decision that a woman may take represents and involves her whole family. All decisions need to be agreed by the community and they must be in line with the social gendered norms established
- Roma women need to guarantee the honour of the family by fulfilling social expectations. If, for any reason, the honour of the family is questioned, it is likely that women are pointed out as being the ones responsible for it

## 2.3 KEY ELEMENTS ON VAW AND ROMANI COMMUNITIES

After having gone through the concept of VAW and the main features of Romani communities, the table below presents key information on VAW within these communities:

### VAW within Romani communities

- Several types of violence operate at the same time
- Violence operates during the whole life time and it has enormous impact on women's lives
- The first episode is not an isolated incident. It is normally the beginning of a long story of violence that increases in intensity and hardness
- Violence takes place in both public and private spheres
- Violence is exerted by intimate partners and by other family members

### Conceptualisation of VAW within Romani communities

- VAW is a really sensitive and complex topic
- There are several reactions in front of VAW:
  - Legitimation: VAW is understood as something that can be justified
  - Normalisation: VAW is understood as something understandable and even excusable
  - Invisibilisation, occultation and negation: there is silence around the phenomenon and it is pretended that it does not even exist
  - Responsabilisation of women: in some cases, when violence cannot be negated, women are pointed out as being responsible for the violence suffered
  - Not acceptance: part of the community does not accept violence, speak out and denounce it

### Capacity to identify VAW, reactions of the family and use of services

- Difficulties for Roma women to identify and verbalise VAW due to the social legitimisation of violence
- Roma women fear that if they share they suffer violence they would ruin the image of the whole family

- Roma women fear that if they share they suffer violence they would be blamed for the violence suffered
- The reaction of the family in front of the violence is essential in its resolution
- In general, there is a lack of trust towards mainstream services. Moreover, in most of the cases these services are not prepared to attend the necessities of Roma women. Both aspects together generate big difficulties for women to access them.

### 3. PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

#### 3.1 WHAT DOES PREVENTION MEAN?

VAW prevention is any action, strategy or policy aiming at keeping violence from occurring and reducing the overall likelihood that anyone will become a victim or a perpetrator by creating conditions that make violence less likely to occur. In doing so, prevention action also aims at hindering the normalisation and legitimisation of VAW.

Prevention strategies may also include sensitisation actions targeting population, especially women, making explicit the fact that violence is neither justifiable nor tolerable. Sensitisation activities are a set of pedagogical actions aiming at generating changes and modifying the social imaginary of the population that should lead to the eradication of VAW.

Prevention action should both consider both situations where violence has not occurred, so that violence indeed does not occur, and identify situations where violence has occurred in order to avoid its chronification.

#### What prevention is

- Based on skill and knowledge building
- An on-going process, which requires leadership and commitment
- Community owned and integrated into the fabric of the community

#### What prevention is not

- A one-time educational programme or event
- One skill-building session
- A programme that is entirely planned, implemented and evaluated by a sole service provider

### 3.2 OBJECTIVES OF PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As stated before, prevention of VAW aims at reducing and eliminating the possibilities of violence to take place. In order to achieve this general purpose, any prevention strategy should aim at identifying the causes of VAW, eliminating sexist myths and stereotypes and recognising the negative impact that VAW has on women's lives. Moreover, it should also try to desnaturalise gender roles, generate social rejection towards VAW, and foster the knowledge of existing resources and services. Each of these objectives is explained in the tables below.

#### Identify the causes of VAW

VAW has nothing to do with pathologies or individual aggressive behaviour. It is neither an isolated nor an incidental phenomenon. VAW is a structural historical phenomenon resulting from patriarchal societies characterised by the imbalance of power existing between women and men.

#### Eliminate sexist myths and stereotypes

Within the patriarchal system, men are associated to a masculine role. Society expects from them to be strong, active, independent and brave. By opposition, women are associated to the feminine role, with lower social prestige. It is expected from them to be sentimental, passive, dependent and fearful. The current sex-gender system establishes a hierarchy that structures unequal power relations between women and men that result in an unequal distribution of knowledge, property, income, responsibilities and rights.

#### Recognise the negative impact that VAW has on women's lives

The main consequence of VAW is the perpetuation of the system that allows violence to take place. VAW prevents women's oppression to be overcome and perpetuates gender inequality. Moreover, VAW shapes women's place in society, since violence and the threat of violence keep women in a subordinated position, while violating their right of freedom and security.

VAW has terrible consequences in all spheres of women's lives. Suffering VAW has consequences at diverse spheres of women's life, such as health, labour, relationships and social life, housing, economic issues and legal aspect. VAW has an unquestionable impact on the quality of life of women, reducing their capacities of development and well-being, and preventing them to live safely.

### **Desnaturalisation of gender roles and generation of social rejection towards VAW**

Due to the naturalisation of gender roles, gender inequalities are accepted and not questioned. In this scenario, male VAW is also understood as something that men have the right to, as something natural and legitimated. The false superiority of men over women leads to the false thought that women are properties of men; that men have absolute control of women's bodies and that they are entitled to exert violence against them. Prevention actions aim at the delegitimation of VAW.

### **Foster, among society, the knowledge of existing resources and services**

All members of society have the right to access services providing information and support. In order to be able to access them, it is first required that people are aware of their existence. Thus, prevention action should also aim at fostering, among society and especially among women, the knowledge of existing resources and services dealing with VAW.

## **3.3 PREVENTION PRINCIPLES**

The table below presents 9 prevention principles that should guide any strategy or programme aiming at preventing VAW within Romani communities. The principles refer to several key aspects that should be taken into account when designing and implementing prevention programmes. The principles bring up issues such as the type of actions, the timing of the programme, the importance of intercultural competence and the need of systematic evaluation. Moreover, the principles also refer to the importance of trained staff and the fact that prevention programme needs to be a part of a broader strategy. Finally, we recommend that mainstream services are fostered all along the prevention strategy and that Romani communities should be broadly involved in both the design and the implementation of prevention strategies.

### **Multiple level action**

- Prevention programme planning, implementation and evaluation should address individual, relationship, community and society levels
- Within Romani population community based programmes are more likely to have the expected success
- Importance of development of partnership and cooperative work among different relevant stakeholders: civil society, health professionals, educational institutions, etc.

### Multiple teaching method

- Prevention strategies should include multiple teaching methods, such as some types of active, skills-based component, so that they address multiple learning processes

### Enough exposure

- Effective prevention programmes emphasise the need of high contact/exposure with participants within a concentrated time frame. Research has shown that one-time programmes focused on raising awareness rarely produce behavioural change. Thus, it is important to develop prevention strategies that are concentrated and can be sustained and expanded over time
- Prevention programmes should happen at a time so that they will have maximum impact in a participant's life

### Tailored programmes

- If programmes do not have a sufficient level of intercultural competence may be irrelevant for intended beneficiaries
- Effective prevention programmes should tailor their content and approach to be culturally appropriate and relevant to their participants. They should demonstrate inclusion of diverse cultural beliefs, practices and community norms. Moreover, they may require an anti-oppression framework to be effective
- It is essential to know how VAW is understood and what are the culturally appropriate ways to engage community members

### Systematic evaluation

- Effective prevention programmes should incorporate an evaluation strategy to provide important ongoing feedback to the planning and implementation processes to continually improve them, making positive outcomes more likely
- All action should be structured and quantified in concrete results. To this end, it is necessary to establish a long term evaluation strategy

### Training to staff

- Staff should be sensitive, culturally competent, and should have sufficient training, support and supervision before and while implementing prevention programmes

### Integral strategy

- Prevention strategies need to be part of a broader anti-discrimination strategy to eradicate VAW
- Moreover, prevention activities within Romani communities should be developed in the framework of other actions of promotion of the community

### Foster use of mainstream services

- Prevention of VAW should foster the use of mainstream services among Romani women and Romani population
- Prevention strategies should foster links and cooperation between Romani communities and mainstream services such as health care services, educational services, etc.

### Participation of Romani communities

- Any prevention programme should be designed with the participation and collaboration of members of the Romani community
- It is essential that prevention actions are transversal to all community areas and sectors
- Prevention strategy should have a practical approach with concrete and measurable results in order to be able to involve the community

## 3.4 PROPOSAL OF PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

After having defined both the objectives and the principles of an adequate prevention strategy, this part of the Toolkit presents a proposal of prevention activities to be carried out with Romani women<sup>6</sup>. As it has been stated along the Toolkit, prevention activities need to be included within a broad prevention strategy. Prevention is not just a onetime activity. Instead, prevention should be thought and implemented during an extended period of time and within a general prevention framework. Therefore, the activities presented are concrete examples of actions and dynamics to prevent VAW that should be used within a broader strategy of violence prevention in any context (social, education, etc.). The idea is to offer a general overview of which kind of activities should be organised as

6. This proposal is an adaptation of some of the dynamics presented in the manual *Salir adelante. Prevención y sensibilización de la violencia de género dirigida a mujeres inmigrantes* (Moving forward: prevention and sensibilisation of gender based violence against migrant women), published by Fundación CEPAIM. The manual is the result of the workshop "Salir adelante", which is an adaptation of the workshop "Break Through" developed in the framework of a Daphne project in 2004.

The manual *Salir adelante* is available at: [http://issuu.com/cepaim/docs/manual\\_salir\\_adelante](http://issuu.com/cepaim/docs/manual_salir_adelante)

well as which topics and themes should be covered. The aim is to provide the reader with concrete prevention activities and dynamics that may be carried out when working on the prevention of VAW with Romani communities.

All the activities target women and, thus, are thought to be implemented with groups of Romani women. Other activities targeting a broader audience should also be thought and implemented in order to carry out a comprehensive and integral prevention strategy targeting the whole Roma community.

The descriptions of the activities are available in the electronic annex of the Toolkit available in the web site of the project: [www.surt.org/empow-air](http://www.surt.org/empow-air).

## **4. DETECTION OF VAW WITHIN ROMA COMMUNITIES**

This part of the Toolkit aims at presenting significant elements regarding the detection and the identification of VAW within Romani communities. To this end, the lines below put special emphasis, on the one hand, on the identification difficulties and the need of active detection and, on the other hand, on key identification indicators.

### **4.1 IDENTIFICATION DIFFICULTIES AND THE NEED OF ACTIVE DETECTION**

VAW is understood as something complex and complicated to deal with. In many cases, the effects of violence cannot be noticed straight away and that makes detection and identification more complicated. In cases of psychological violence, the detection is even more complicated, since its consequences may not be as obvious as physical injuries.

Moreover, the legitimization, normalization and occultation of VAW within Romani communities make the detection and identification of it even more complicated. In most of the communities there is neither space nor the will to recognise and tackle the problem.

Despite the difficulties, active detection<sup>7</sup> may be a useful mechanism for early identification. Active detection is especially used within health services and it is about carrying out screening and routine interviews to women attending the services. However, it is believed that this method could be also used in other context. Taking into account that VAW is a complex phenomenon often explained with the metaphor of an iceberg, the screening method may be useful to detect and identify hidden situations of violence. Moreover, the screening method may also bring about other positive factors such as to raise awareness around VAW among both professionals and women, as well as the society in general.

The way professionals detect and identify violence, as well as the first steps that the professionals take in the intervention, will determine the whole intervention process. Thus, it

---

7. Active detection and the screening method are mechanisms normally used in the health care sector. Several protocols for the detection of VAW state that those mechanisms are highly appropriated for early detection of VAW. The catalan protocol is a good exemple of it: [http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/icdones/temes/docs/protocol\\_marc.pdf](http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/icdones/temes/docs/protocol_marc.pdf) (only available in Catalan)

is extremely important that professionals know how to take these first steps in an appropriate way to ensure that the process gets to its end in a successful way.

The table below presents some general guidance questions to ask women when carrying out the screening process. It is really important to ask the adequate questions in the adequate moment. That is to say that professionals need to be able to create a trustful atmosphere where women are comfortable to share personal and intimate aspects of their lives.

Before the professional starts asking concrete questions, it may be an adequate idea to introduce and contextualise the topic of VAW saying sentences such as:

- VAW is a serious and widespread phenomenon. That is the reason why, regularly, I ask this kind of questions to all women attending the services.
- A lot of women experience violence exerted by men all along their lives.

After the contextualisation, the professional may continue with more direct questions such as:

### **Broad questions**

- How are things at home?
- How are you and your partner relating?

### **Specific questions**

- You seem a little bit nervous, is everything all right at home?
- When I see injuries like this I wonder if someone could have hurt you.
- Is there anything else we have not talked about that might be contributing to this condition?

### **Direct questions**

- Are there ever times when you are frightened of your partner?
- Are you concerned about your safety or the safety of your children?
- Does the way your partner treats you make you feel unhappy?

When asking these questions it is important that professionals make sure that women understand what the professional is asking. In this sense, it is important to ensure that professionals use a language which is clear and understandable for women from diverse socio-cultural contexts. If professionals do not do that, they will fail in providing an adequate intervention and women may abandon the process even before starting it.

## 4.2 KEY INDICATORS

Apart from the questions presented above, professionals can detect and identify that a woman is suffering violence through some key indicators. The table below presents the most common indicators of violence:

### Consequences of physical injuries

- Bruising, multiple injuries, minor laceration, injuries during pregnancy, ruptured eardrums, delay in seeking medical attention, patterns of repeated injuries, etc.

### Consequences of threats, coercion and insults, social and economic control

- Anxiety, panic attacks, sad mood, confusion and fear, social isolation, self-isolation, stress and/or depression, stress related illness, drug abuse (tranquillisers and alcohol), chronic headaches, vague aches and pains, sleeping and eating disorders, suicide attempt, psychiatric illness, gynaecological problems, etc.

### Other indicators are when women may...

- Appear nervous, ashamed or evasive
- Describe their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- Seem uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner
- Go with their partner, who does most of the talking
- Give an unconvincing explanation of the injuries

## 5. ATTENTION OF WOMEN

Once VAW is detected an adequate intervention is required. Here below, intervention principles that should guide any intervention with Romani women who find themselves in a situation of violence are presented. Afterwards, there is a brief insight on 'intervention into practice' where 'not to forget' and 'to avoid' responses when dealing with VAW within Romani communities are presented.

### 5.1 ATTENTION PRINCIPLES

The table below presents 7 principles that should guide any intervention with Romani women who find themselves in a situation of violence. The principles refer to several key aspects that should be taken into account when carrying out intervention and counselling with Romani women. The principles bring up issues such as the need of a feminist and

human rights approach, the importance of achieving safety and the need to respect women's individual values. Moreover, the principles also refer to the importance of confidentiality, trust and the right of privacy of women and the need of professionalism. Finally, it is also stressed the importance of intercultural competence, as well as the importance to learn from women while working with them.

### **Feminist and human rights approach**

- To understand VAW as a structural and legitimated phenomenon taking place within a society where male dominance is legitimated and where men feel entitled to use violence to maintain their privileged position
- To reject any attempts to pathologise and blame women suffering violence
- VAW is a violation of human rights and it is unacceptable in any form. Thus, it is necessary to ensure that the professionals' intervention is in line with Human Rights standards

### **Prioritise the importance of achieving safety**

- Safety of women and children who have experienced or who are experiencing gender-based violence is of paramount consideration in any response to VAW and it must be addressed

### **Respect women's values**

- Uphold the right of women to make their own decisions
- Responses to VAW must take into account the needs and experiences of women and children from diverse backgrounds and communities, including: cultural and linguistic diversity, geographical location, disability, sexuality and age

### **Confidentiality, trust and right of privacy**

- Confidentiality, trust and right of privacy are key elements to ensure an adequate intervention. Professionals working directly with women suffering violence should foster the creation of a trustful atmosphere while ensuring privacy and confidentiality

### **Professionalism**

- Professionals intervening with women victims of gender-based violence should have the required training on both VAW and intercultural competence in order to provide adequate responses to women's demands
- Importance of team work and collaboration and coordination among different services

### Intercultural competence

- VAW is not acceptable in any community and culture is never an excuse for violence
- The similarities and differences among women point out the need for flexible, culturally sensitive and diverse responses. Recognising their differences, and the factors that enable women to act, are critical to any future solution

### Learning from women

- Explore how culturally diverse women themselves construct and interpret their situations. By learning from women, services are in a better position to explore the barriers women face, to evaluate a set of viable responses and take a cooperative approach to building solutions that take account of this understanding

## 5.2 ATTENTION INTO PRACTICE: TO NOT FORGET AND TO AVOID ATTITUDES

Once VAW is detected, it is necessary to attend women in a way that their needs are met. Attention is understood as the set of actions designed and implemented to accompany women so that they are able to get over the situation of violence and its consequences.

There are several official protocols<sup>8</sup> that describe how to carry out a coordinated intervention against violence against women. These protocols describe the concrete actions that professionals should carry out. This Toolkit does not describe those actions but it provides tips on which are those attitudes that cannot be forgotten and those others that need to be avoided in order to ensure a high quality and efficient intervention.

### Not to forget:

- **Being culturally competent:** professionals must avoid cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Professionals have to be aware of their own cultural assumptions and respond to the unique and specific needs of Roma women. Professionals should know about the social organisation of Roma communities as well as the situation of Roma women within their communities. Moreover, professionals must avoid one-size-fits-all approach and adapt their intervention to each woman's needs.
- **Guarantee confidentiality:** professionals must guarantee strict privacy so that women trust the service and professionals working there. The creation of this atmosphere of

8. For example, the Regulation framework for a coordinated intervention against violence against women (available in Catalan)  
<http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/icdones/menuitem.351404635dde900639a72641b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=c796517bb3c02210vgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=c796517bb3c02210vgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=default>

confidence may help women to feel safe. It is important to remember that, while attending mainstream services, Romani women may be breaking cultural norms which may put them into danger. Thus, confidentiality and privacy must be guaranteed.

- **Respect women's will** during the whole intervention process. The intervention of the professional should start with a concrete demand expressed by women and should be based on women's motivation.
- **Acknowledge complexities:** professionals must acknowledge and deal with the complexities that characterise Roma communities. Romani women's decision may be affected by multiple concerns and fears, such as the response of the community in front of her decision to break the silence and denounce the violence suffered.
- Professionals should encourage women to understand that they have the **right to live without violence**. Professionals should make sure that women accept that violence is never justifiable and that they are not at all responsible for the violence suffered.
- Professionals should recognise the **possibility of existence of learned helplessness**. Learned helplessness is a psychological condition in which a human being has learned to believe that she or he has no control over a situation and that whatever she or he does is futile. In situations of learned helplessness people see themselves as the problem itself. They see the problem as pervasive, permanent and unchangeable. Women victims of VAW may suffer learned helplessness and may recognise themselves as inefficient because of the continuous disqualification they have received in a personal level. Moreover, an atmosphere that legitimise and normalise VAW may increase the feeling of learned helplessness. It is possible to recover lost self-esteem and autonomy and the professionals should work towards to this aim.
- **Ensure a trustful atmosphere** that facilitates the possibility for women to express and share their experiences. To develop an empathic, receptive, understanding attitude. The attitude of the professional should allow for the unloading of contained emotions (such as anxiety, crying, fear, blame, contradictions, etc.), grasp them with serenity and empathise with women's pain. Moreover, professionals should take special care in the use of non-verbal language which includes appearance, facial expression, gesticulation, posture and proximity. Also the tone of voice, silences and inflexions of the professionals may help the creation of confidence and reliability.
- **Ask only needed information.** Professionals should try to avoid women explaining their history over and over to different professionals.
- Professionals should **believe women without questioning** their version of the story

#### **To avoid**

- **Maintain a situation of dependency:** the detection of a situation of violence may generate anxiety and uneasiness also among professionals. In some cases, and as a defensive mechanism, professionals may advise a woman to leave her partner and to

report the situation of violence to the police as soon as possible, without giving the time and the space to the woman to decide and without taking into account woman's socials and cultural context. In doing so, the partner is substituted by the professional regarding the decision making, maintaining the woman in a situation of dependency. In these cases, misunderstandings among women and the professionals may arise. Women may feel themselves misunderstood, and even not respected. That may lead to abandoning the service and neglecting any further violence suffered.

- **Undervalue the sensation of danger** expressed by women. It is essential that professionals believe women and do not question their feelings and their sensations. Romani women may fear the reaction of their community even more than the violence exerted by their partner. In this sense, it is essential to understand the social consequences that any individual act may have.
- **Lead women to a forced decision.** The key idea is to guide rather than to induce. Thus, professionals must respect women's will and they cannot impose any decision on them.
- Have an attitude of **discredit, disrepute, judging, lack of empathy, and imposing rhythms.**
- **Give women false expectations.** It is important that professionals provide women right and trustful information. Professionals should avoid transmitting not realistic information. Professionals should ensure that women understand the risks.
- **Undervalue the sensation of danger** expressed by women. It is essential that professionals believe women and do not question their feelings and their sensations. Roma women may fear the reaction of their community even more than the violence exerted by their partner. In this sense, it is essential to understand the social consequences that any individual act may have.
- **Recommend couple therapy or family mediation.**
- **Have attitudes** such as:
  - a) **"It is all the same"**: it overlooks the particular barriers minoritised women face, both in seeking support and in having their oppression recognised as VAW.
  - b) **"Softly-softly"**: strategy as a non-stigmatising route to not "scare women", assuming that they would, and to not offend the community. However, this approach can lead to a situation where there is no space for talking about violence.
  - c) **"Cultural privacy"**: professionals do not get involved for fear of being labelled of racist. Supposedly, professionals respect women's cultural privacy. However, this attitude leads to cultural relativism and it bolsters patriarchal relations within minoritised communities making VAW more invisible
- **Secondary victimisation:** it relates to the further victimisation following on from the original victimisation exerted by any of the professionals that will work with the victim

after the aggression. A secondary victimisation is produced by inadequate and unfair treatment: lack of understanding and support, careless or aggressive ways of asking questions, accusations of responsibility for an offence, stigmatisation. Another attitude that leads to secondary victimisation is the “less eligibility” principle, which expresses that certain social groups deserve less attention because they did something to deserve, in part, their situation of disadvantage. Secondary victimisation cause more defencelessness and increase psychological consequences on women.

- Have **authoritarian and paternalistic attitude**. Some suggestions on how to avoid these attitudes would be:
  - a) Not asking: What made you stay together with your partner? What did you do to provoke his violence? What could have you done to avoid it? Did you participate in the escalation of violence?
  - b) Not minimise the seriousness of the problem, nor tell her she will recover easily. Warn her that here is the possibility that violence may come up again. Warn of the possible appearance of difficulties in the process.

### Other important aspects

The table below presents some other key aspects to take into account when carrying out intervention with women survivors of gender-based violence. The table focuses mainly on tips when responding to women and issues related to assessing women’s and children safety. Moreover, it also provides few guidelines for continuing care.

#### Tips when responding to women

- Listen: being listened may be an empowering experience for women who have suffered violence
- Communicative belief: “That must have been very frightening for you”
- Validate the decision to disclose: “It must have been difficult for you to talk about this”, “I am glad you were able to tell me about this today”
- Emphasise the unacceptability of violence: “You do not deserve to be treated this way”

#### Helping to assess women and children safety

- Speak to women alone
- Does she feel safe going home after the appointment?
- Does she need an immediate place of safety?

- Does she need to consider an alternative exit from the building?
- If an immediate safety is not an issue, what about the future safety? Does she have a future plan of action if she is at risk?
- Does he have weapons?
- Does she have emergency telephone numbers?
- All women have the right to live in a safe environment. If women live in an area where services are not really available or women do not feel comfortable accessing them, professionals should still let them know that they are concerned for their safety and assist them to consider their options

### Guidelines for continuing care

- Consider women's safety as a paramount issue
- Provide emotional support
- Monitor women and their children safety by asking about any escalation of violence
- Empower them to take control of decision making. Ask women what they need and present them the existing choices
- Respect the knowledge and the coping skills they have developed. Build on their emotional strengths by asking "how have you dealt with the situation before?"

## 6. CARE OF PROFESSIONALS

Working with women who have suffered gender-based violence has a high emotional impact on any professional. These professionals may assume the following risk:

- Physical contamination as a result of exhaustive and harmful exposure to violence and anxiety
- Exposure to the participant's decision-making due to overidentification
- Excessive expectations of change which may lead to a feeling of failure

Caregivers working with victims of violence carry a high risk of suffering from:

- **Burnout:** it is a process that involves gradual exposure to job strain that results in exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. The signs and symptoms of burnout are: apathy, feeling of hopelessness, rapid exhaustion, disillusionment, melancholy, feeling of failure,

forgetfulness, irritability, experiencing work as a heavy burden, alienated, impersonal, uncaring and cynical attitude towards clients and tendency to blame oneself.

- **Vicarious trauma:** it is a process that unfolds over time. It is the cumulative effect of contact with survivors of violence. It is what happens to you over time as you witness cruelty and loss and hear distressing stories. The signs and symptoms of vicarious victimisation are: denial of women's trauma, overidentification with women, feeling of great vulnerability, feelings of alienation, loss of confidence that good is still possible in the world, generalised despair and hopelessness, increased sensitivity to violence, feeling disillusioned by humanity, cynicism, diminished self capacities. disrupted frame of reference.

In order to avoid both burnout and vicarious victimisation, here below there is a list of prevention factors:

- Self care
- Solid professional training
- Regular self-examination and external supervision
- Limiting caseload
- Continuing professional education
- Keeping a balance between empathy and a proper professional distance with women

## 7. CLOSING REMARKS

As stated in the introduction, the aim of the Toolkit was, on the one hand, to provide professionals with key conceptual information on VAW and on the Romani communities' social and cultural organisation. On the other hand, it aimed at providing resources and guidelines on how to prevent and detect VAW, as well as on how to intervene in cases of violence. With the document presented here, we believe that this aim has been achieved.

However, as also stated in the introduction, in order to ensure the effectiveness and the validity of the resources and guidelines provided, the Toolkit needs to be adapted to each woman's reality taking into account her needs and the specificities of the context surrounding her and her family.

On the other hand, the Toolkit presented here is a first introduction to the phenomenon of VAW within Romani communities. We hope it is indeed a useful resource. Nevertheless, we invite professionals working either with Roma communities or on gender violence, to keep reading and receiving training on both Roma and gender issues.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Almedia, R. et al. (1999) "Addressing culture in batterers intervention: the Asian Indian community as an illustrative example". *Violence Against Women*, 5(6), 654-83.

Alonso, B. *Protocolos locales de actuación antes casos de violencia de género desde dispositivos de inserción sociolaboral en organizaciones de atención a población inmigrantes*. Madrid: Fundación CEPAIM.

Braaf, R. et al. (2002). *Cultural challenges for violence prevention: working towards an ethical practice of sustainable interventions*. Australia: University of Sydney.

Burman, E. et al. (2004) "Culture as a barrier to service provision and delivery: domestic violence services for minority women" *Critical Social Policy*, 24(3), 332-357.

Fernández, P. et al. (2010) *Manual Salir Adelante. Prevención y sensibilización de la Violencia de Género dirigida a Mujeres Migrantes*. Madrid: Fundación CEPAIM.

Fundación Secretariado Gitano. *Guía de actuación ante situación de violencia contra mujeres gitanas*.

Kasturirangan, A. et al (2004) "The impact of culture and minority status on women's experience of domestic violence". *Trauma, violence & abuse*, 5(4), 318-332.

Pross, C. (2006) "Burnout, vicarious traumatization and its prevention. What is burnout, what is vicarious traumatization?" *Torture Volume*, 16(1):1-9.

Rana, S. "Addressing Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities: Critical Issues for Culturally Competent Services". School of Social Work, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Minnesota: University of Minnesota,.

Smith, A (2009) "To Stop Gender Violence, Start Changing the Tune", *On The Issues Magazine*, Fall 2009. Available at: [http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009fall/2009fall\\_smith.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009fall/2009fall_smith.php)

Sokoloff, N. et al. (2005) "Domestic violence at the intersections of race, class and gender: challenges and contributions to understanding violence against marginalised women in diverse communities", *Violence Against Women*, 11(1), 38-64.

Williams, Oliver J. (2007) *Concepts in Creating Culturally Responsive Services for Supervised Visitation Centers*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota.

Womankind Worldwide (2007) *Tackling Violence against Women: A worldwide approach*. London: Womankind Worldwide.

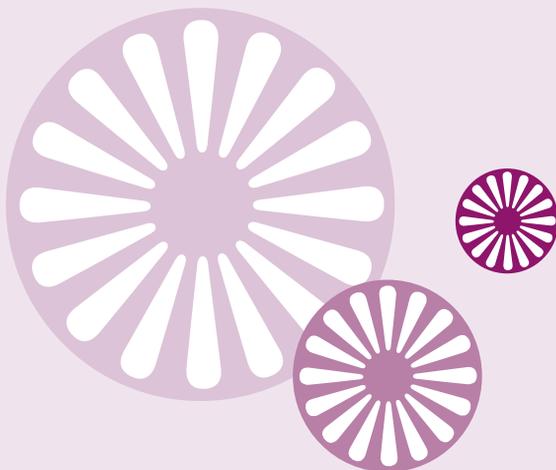
### Other resources:

The Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (IWDVS) Australia: <http://www.iwdvs.org.au/home.htm>

Headington Institute. Care for caregivers worldwide:  
<http://headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1295>

Training forums: Helping Culturally Diverse Victims of Interpersonal Violence: Avoiding Stereotypes & Meeting Needs  
<http://www.trainingforums.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=67>

European Roma Rights Centre on a statement on State Response to violence against Roma (February 2012): [www.errc.org](http://www.errc.org)



Project coordinator



Partners



Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini



ASOCIATIA FEMEILOR TIGĂNCI  
"PENTRU COPILII NOȘTRI"  
Timșoara 1900, Dozobanilor 62  
Tel/Fax: +40256.206.083  
E-mail: aft.pentrucopii nostri@yahoo.com



Funded by

