

# 'How can I help you?'

Practice behaviour of social workers towards victims of domestic violence



A comparative study between Austria and The Netherlands

Dissertation

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*'This dissertation is the work of 2035812 and was completed solely in fulfilment of a dissertation for the MA in Comparative European Social Studies at the Hogeschool Zuyd in Maastricht'*

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*Illustration by Len in 'Mozaiek', Transact*

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>Preface</b>	3
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b>	4
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 Aims of the Study	6
1.3 Research Question	6
1.4 Definitions	6
1.5 Outline of the report	8
<b>Chapter 2 - Facts on Victims of Domestic Violence</b>	10
2.1 Domestic violence in Europe	10
2.2 Domestic violence in Austria	11
2.3 Domestic violence in the Netherlands	13
<b>Chapter 3 - Legal Framework</b>	16
3.1 International Legislation	16
3.2 European Legislation	16
3.3 Legislation and policy in Austria	18
3.3.1 Legal possibilities for outplacement of perpetrators	
3.3.2 Legal possibilities for victims	
3.3.2.1 Special attention for migrant women in Austrian legislation	
3.4 Intervention centres	20
3.5 Legislation and policy in the Netherlands	21
3.5.1 Legal possibilities for outplacement of perpetrators	
3.5.2 Legal possibilities for victims	
3.5.2.2 Special attention for migrant women in Dutch legislation	

<b>Chapter 4 - Social work and Victims of Domestic Violence</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 Social work in Austria	25
4.2 Social work in the Netherlands	25
4.3 Social work, a vital link in domestic violence?	26
4.4 Social assistance towards victims in Austria	29
4.5 Social assistance towards victims in the Netherlands	29
<b>Chapter 5 - Research Methods</b>	<b>31</b>
5.1 Research Approach	31
5.2 Research Design	31
5.3 Research Setting	32
5.4 Data Collection Process and Methods	32
5.5 Data Analysis	34
5.6 Ethical Considerations	34
5.7 Reliability and Validity	35
<b>Chapter 6 – Results</b>	<b>36</b>
6.1 Research population	36
6.2 Characteristics of the respondents	36
6.3 Descriptive analysis	39
6.3.1 Introduction on identification, fact assessment and intervention practice	
6.3.2 Identification	
6.3.3 Fact assessment	
6.3.4 Intervention practices	
6.4 Own vision, institution protocol or a combination of both	43
6.5 Answers to open questions	45
<b>Chapter 7 - Discussion</b>	<b>46</b>
7.1 Introduction	46

7.2	Interpretation of the results	46
7.3	Overall discussion	47
7.3	Research limitations	48
7.4	Recommendations for future research	49
<b>List of references</b>		<b>51</b>

## **Abstract**

Domestic violence is not a private affair anymore; it affects all participants of society. In their practice, social workers are participants in the tackle of domestic violence on a daily basis. Although this group of professionals are influenced by institutions policy that possible influences their range of tasks, one of the common dominators in their field of practice is domestic violence. Taken into account that social workers provide assistance in a variety of settings, they are potentially vital links in tackling violence. However, a confirmation on empirical basis in Europe is not easy to find. Therefore, this study makes a step in the direction of providing research results on social work in domestic violence.

The central part of this cross-national study is a description of practice behaviour of social workers towards victims of domestic violence. Practice behaviour includes identification of domestic violence, the assessment of facts and interventions. Moreover the guidance of personal view, institution protocol or a combination of both in dealing with domestic violence is looked upon. The research results are obtained by use of a survey. The four earlier mentioned indicators measure social work practice behaviour in domestic violence. The original research group included social workers in two types of settings namely social workers active in women shelters and youth care institutions. While conducting the research a small group became additional.

The most important research results show that social workers in Austria as well as The Netherlands indeed identify, assess facts and intervene. Most eye catching is the fact that Austrian social workers identify more often then their Dutch colleagues. Obviously, some items were not applicable for social workers in both countries and within the various settings of working. The fact that identification has already taken place before working with the victim could be an explanation. Furthermore, similar patterns in fact assessment of social workers on cross-national as well as cross-setting level is recognized and shown in the chapter 'Results'.

Intervention practices in Austria and in The Netherlands differ as the identified tasks are more frequently practiced by Austrian social workers. Moreover the influence on guiding social workers in practice differs in the fact that Dutch professionals prefer a combination of own view as well as institution protocol. Indeed, that is also recognised in Austria but to lesser extent and with a higher score on the option for institution protocol.

Although comparative research has been realised in the United States of America, this research was conducted on a pilot scale since the survey was specially set up for this research. It can be viewed as an attempt to reflect on practice behaviour of social workers in Austria and the Netherlands, aiming at identifying challenges for the profession social work.

## Preface

This paper can be considered as a final work of my MACCESS study. Although this is the second time to have the opportunity to dive into a topic of interest, it was again an intense process that has its ups and downs. Therefore I would like to show several persons my gratitude for their support, especially during my down periods.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Nivedita Prasad for her constructive feedback and the abundant flow of literature. Secondly, a word of thanks goes to all survey respondents, for their energy and time spent on my research. It is very motivating to see so many social workers interested in research. Furthermore I would like to thank some persons who helped me finalizing the dissertation, all in their own role:

Maria José, thank you for our constructive and helpful conversations. Rosa Logar, your enthusiasm and our pleasant conversations are still fresh in my mind. I hope to have the opportunity to work more often with you. Denise, we peeled the orange together; your support gave me energy and I am glad to have a sincere friend like you. Sasha, Edith, Gabriela, Mieke and Paul; thanks for all the technical, practical and moral support during my research process. My sister Frédérique and dear friend Lissy, you never stopped believing in me and helped me to recognize my down periods as the beginning of breakthroughs. Both, many thanks for fulfilling that role. Further gratitude goes to my parents. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to study and discover the interesting world of social work. Finally, I would like to say a word of appreciation to the women I work with, everyday. I feel very honoured and privileged to follow your processes and to stand next to you. I feel a deep respect for you in the process of finding back your strengths. All of you gave me the motivation to continue and finish my final work.

Merci,

Caroline Martin

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## Introduction

### Chapter 1

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*The introduction frames the research topic, aims of the study, research question, definitions and finally the outline of the report.*

'Why do I have the feeling that I still need to 'cover my back' when walking towards the supermarket. Or bringing the children to their swimming lesson. Or lying in my bed, sleepless while horrible scenarios pass the known scenarios again and again. I forgot to check all the locks on the door. No, I didn't that was yesterday. All the time I forget which day it will be tomorrow. Because everyday, I am in fear of him.

Yes, he is arrested and yes, I've got the feeling that I made the right choice by reporting his violence. But my fear of being a prisoner has changed into fear for not being a prisoner anymore. How is it possible that my liberty still feels like captivity in my world?'

These are the exact words of women who became victim of domestic violence while she writes down her feelings during a therapy session. She is a one out of five woman in the Austrian and Dutch society who experiences the threat of being captured in an environment that is meant to function as one of the safest places in a human beings life. An English saying tells: 'There is no place like home.' Was it the period of time where closing eyes was part of reality? Has our society so drastically changed that we our now able to face reality? All questions that are answered in the following paragraph. Furthermore, let's suggest that home, as unique and safe place is a noble ambition.

### **1.1 Introduction**

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon in our society. This type of violence exists in every country within all social classes. As the European Commission explains 'it is the most graphic symptom of the imbalance of power in the relationship between men and women.' (EC, 2000). Although its long history, it is only until recently that theoretical approaches towards domestic violence exist. Abuse of female partners within a relationship has long been viewed as an accepted part of

marriage and only at the end of the twentieth century (the 70's) the term domestic violence did appear in West-European societies. Women movements already fought for recognition and ways to tackle partner violence for almost 30 years. Only recently political actors followed by the executive branch of the state are starting to play an active role in the last decade. In 1993, the first major step was taken at UN level by finally recognizing women's rights as a human right at the Vienna world conference followed by many other actions. One of the results for the European Union is the development of 52 standards and recommendations of how to fight violence against women, a change that definitely has influenced EU-policies (EC, 1999; 2000). One of the most important shifts in influencing political agendas at several levels is approaching domestic violence as a joint responsibility of government and citizens. An example of this shift is the prosecution of violent partners. This social paradigm is a form of implementing new norms in West European societies rather than to stay focussed on victimizing survivors of domestic violence. Austria is one of the countries that took the lead in changing their system into a zero tolerance attitude on policy level and executive level. The Austrian approach is considered a good practice and has inspired many countries in Europe, including the Netherlands.

Social workers deal with domestic violence in their profession. On a daily basis this involves support to victims, violent partners and children in different fields of general social assistance. Although this group of professionals potentially is vital in tackling domestic violence, no valid results have been published in European research that state social workers fulfil this role. A first step to indicate the role of social workers is to identify their practice behaviour towards victims of domestic violence. This comparative study therefore focuses on practice behaviour of social workers in Austria and the Netherlands. Three indicators cover the meaning of practice behaviour in this study, namely identification, assessment of facts and intervention towards victims of domestic violence. Furthermore it is screened whether the social worker act out of institution protocol, of personal view or both. An indication of social workers behaviour is presented in American research, published by Fran Danis who is assistant professor in social work department at the University of Missouri Columbia. According to Danis, social workers challenges lie in the improvement of identification and screening skills (Danis, 2003,). Research results from this study tell whether these challenges suit countries as Austria and the Netherlands as well. The choice for the Netherlands as one of the comparative countries is based in the availability of knowledge and practical experience in the Dutch model. The latest political, social and economical changes on domestic violence in Austria have

changed legal measures and social structure for victims and violent partners. Therefore, the comparison not only offers results on domestic violence practice behaviours of social workers but also on the influence of legislation on domestic violence.

## **1.2 Aims of the study**

The aim of this study is two folded. Firstly, to make a comparison between the practice behaviours of social workers towards victims of domestic violence in Austria and the Netherlands. Secondly, to compare the influence of own vision, institution protocol or a combination of both on social work practices. Both aims are set up, in order to suggest a first answer to the question if social workers are a vital link in domestic violence and to identify challenges for the profession as such.

## **1.3 Research question**

*To what extent are Austrian and Dutch social workers identifying domestic violence, as well as their assessment of facts and intervention practices?*

*To what extent is own vision, institution protocol or a combination of both, guiding social workers in domestic violence?*

## **1.4 Definitions**

The way language is used in practice and literature, influences professionals constantly. Terms, frequently used in this study will be defined as tool to understand the background of the writer's terminology.

### **Domestic violence and Women**

The range of definitions to explain domestic violence is broad. In this study, domestic violence is violence against women by men. Violence has to be seen in a broader context as defined by the United Nations 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.'  
(United Nations 1996: p.p. 73)

The UN further declares:

'Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement.' (United Nations, 1996: p.p.75).

Domestic violence has many faces: it exists in heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual relationships. Although violence at home suggest that both sexes could be victim or violent partner, research shows that women are by far more victim of violence. Data differ per country and research in percentages, but results prove that women are by far the largest group of victims. Furthermore, men are in most cases violent partner and violence against women by men is more severe (Collarossi, 2005; Ministerie van Justitie, 2002).

Without ignoring men as potential victim at home, this study will focus on violence against women as a larger social problem than just recognizing violence at home. Considering victimization in a broader social context of oppression, human rights, social justice and gender processes, the term violence against women gets a total different connotation than the term family violence (Collarossi, 2005). The latter implies that women belong to the same social category as other victims at home. Violence in the family also suggests that the problem has to be solved within the family, neglecting the power imbalance and the fact that the problem is grounded in the private sphere.

The former definition excludes forms of violence against children, sexual abuse against children and maltreatment and neglect of elderly. Although there is acknowledgement of these severe forms of violence, this study focuses is on violence against women only. Child maltreatment and elder abuse will be seen in the light of domestic violence as a crosscutting issue, with other problems as poverty, suicide and homelessness (Danis and Lockhart, 2003).

### **Victims of domestic violence**

Many discussions prevail on a proper term that covers all aspects of violence against women in the domestic sphere. The most frequently used term for the person undergoing violence is victim, that according to Collarossi (2005) indicates a description of an individual who is in need of treatment in the present, where the crime is in the past and where violent partner is not the immediate focus (Collarossi, 2005). Fröschl (2003) adds that the term victim does not take into account that

women put up resistance against abuse. Almost the same critique is used by Collorossi (2005) for the term battered women, since it implies an extremely socially stigmatised woman who is stereotyped as weak, lacks self-esteem, makes bad choices and participates in a bad relationship. The most appropriate term seems to be survivor, often used in the feminist discourse, where the focus is not on the individual, but on a person surviving an external threat, in this case the violent partners violence. In this study the term victim will be used. Agreeing with Fröschl (2003), who explains that women who suffered injustice have the right to be protected and to be heard in legal measures. Social workers should ensure not to approach victims in a stereotypical way but to stimulate the strengths in women. Communication with victims about the choice in terminology seems to be crucial in the process of supporting them.

### **Violent partner of domestic violence**

Men as husbands, ex-husbands, cohabitants, boyfriends and former boyfriends will be described as violent partner of violence using physical and psychological or sexual abuse.

### **Violence in the domestic sphere**

Violence is seen as a single or combined form of physical, psychological and sexual abuse. On top of these types, sexual assault, social isolation, deprivation, intimidation and economic coercion includes violence against women.

### **Social workers**

Social workers are professionals in Austria and the Netherlands with a Bachelor degree in social work from an accredited social work program.

## **1.5 Outline of the report**

In **Chapter 2 domestic violence** is introduced by presenting the severity of this phenomenon. Facts on European, Austria and Dutch level show results that underline why violence at home is not a private, but a public affair. The reader gets more acquainted with the topic.

**Chapter 3** is viewed from a **legal perspective**. Relevant Austrian and Dutch legislation is described in order to explore differences and commonalities and helps the reader better understand how policy regarding domestic violence is set up. Furthermore, International and European legislation and policy is introduced.

**Chapter 4** includes **social work** in general and particularly in domestic violence in order to understand developments, the meaning of social work and current challenges. Finally, an insight is given on social assistance in Austria as well as The Netherlands.

**Research methods** in **chapter 5** discuss the approach and design of the study, including choice for methodology. Furthermore the process of data collection and justification of these choices are justified. The chapter finishes with acknowledged ethical problems and the validity and credibility of the research.

In **chapter 6, research results** are described. The outcome of the survey shows an inside on Austrian and Dutch social work practice in domestic violence.

**Chapter 7** presents the conclusion of the study. Survey results are interpreted and conclusion are drawn. Finally, recommendations for further research are presented.

## Facts on victims of domestic violence

### Chapter 2

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*This part provides general facts on violence against women at home. After general information on European level, more detailed facts on the Austrian and Dutch situation are included. An inside on the reality and the severance of the topic, enables the reader to get more acquainted with domestic violence, It furthermore creates a funding to place the topic into a larger context.*

#### 2.1 Domestic violence in Europe

Domestic violence is recognized as a serious problem and affects European societies and their citizens. Facts diverse regarding the level of severance yet all points out a need for action. The Council of Europe as well as the European Commission acknowledges this need. Domestic violence is in general under-recorded and under-reported (Reid, 2003) but nevertheless empirical results prove an increase in overall extent and intensity of violence in society. Moreover an increase of multiple forms of violence (Finn and Jacobson, 2003) is today's reality. To get an inside on the Council of Europe's perspective regarding the current situation, Sheila Reid (2003) published a part of their findings as follow:

- One women out of 5 is victim of violence, every day in Europe
- Between 20 - 50 % of European women undergo domestic abuse
- Women are more likely to be attacked by a partner or former partner than by any other person
- The vast majority of violent partners of gender violence are men (where women are victim)

The European commission underlines these findings as female victims of domestic are in 98% of all situations recognized as victim. The under reported development finds ground in the fact that only one out of 20 incidents is reported by police (EC, 2000). Not only politicians are aware of the need for action and change but also citizens, as important participators in society. A part of the European awareness campaign, that aims at breaking the silence and taboo regarding domestic violence, achieved a participation by spreading out a survey under citizens of 15 European countries, Outcomes of the Europeans Commission's survey (EC, 2000) tells all right that recognition for domestic violence is a fact as is presented in the following:

- 94 % of interviewed Europeans states that domestic violence is unacceptable.

- Only 4% has never heard of domestic violence against women.
- Almost 66% of respondents agrees on treating domestic violence as a crime and punished by law.
- Nearly 90 % of people view the European Union as a main actor in tackling domestic violence.

So, this does not leave a lot of space for lack of clarity. Although results diverse, the current situation is that domestic violence exist in large extent and two main actors in the European Union make steps towards taking a stand against violence at home. Moreover, it suggests a guideline for Austria and the Netherlands.

## 2.2 Domestic violence in Austria

There is no question that Austria is not aware of the impact of domestic violence. As one of the first countries in Europe, police and representatives of the civil and criminal justice system together with initiative takers from women shelters triggered a change for social structure in domestic violence. Since the Protection Against Violence Act (see chapter: *Legal framework and policy*) came into force, figures on domestic violence are structurally collected by the Federal Ministry of Interior. This shows constructive practice that possibly results in a decline of underreport and helps to overview the extent of domestic violence. Rosa Logar (2004) as representative of women movement indicates

**Table 1 Collection of facts on domestic violence in Austria**

<b>1997</b>	App.1, 449	App. 138	App. 106	n.i.
<b>1998</b>	2,673	252	123	n.i.
<b>1999</b>	3,076	301	n.i.	n.i.
<b>2000</b>	3,354	430	n.i.	7,638
<b>2001</b>	3,283	508	105	7,517
<b>2002</b>	3,944	475	109	7,391
<b>Total</b>	17,779	2,104	-	-

**n.i.: No indications.** This means that no figures are available here for all of Austria

Fact is that the number of evictions and barring orders increased over the years. Logar (2004) explains this rise of numbers in new legal possibilities being used by Austrian actors in domestic violence. Although an increase in violence is

acknowledged, it is not seen as the main reason. Furthermore, the following two tables, provided by the Vienna Intervention Centre show results that underline the identified European facts:

***Table 2 Numbers and percentage on identified victims of domestic violence***

Victim	Number	Percent (App.)
Women	845	92.2%
Men	44	4.8%
Child(ren)/Young persons (13 girls and 10 boys)	23	2.5%
Two persons being victims	4	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3 Numbers and percentage on identified violent partners of domestic violence**

Violent partner	Number	Percent (App.)
Men	856	94%
Male young persons	9	1%
Women	42	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>100%</b>

Interpreting this tables, women are by far the most frequently victim where men are violent partners, as confirmed by European Commission and the Council of Europe. Violence against children has to be seen from the perspective that in 70 % of all cases, where father or stepfather is mistreating the mother, children suffer also from physical or psychological abuse.

Thus, as far as the European and Austrian situation, results all point out in the direction of similar patterns where men are mostly identified as violent partner and women as victim of domestic violence. A closer look on the Dutch situation enables to confirm whether these patterns are cross-national interpretable.

### **2.3 Domestic violence in the Netherlands**

Not surprisingly, the Dutch situation shows earlier identified facts on identification of victims and violent partners and the necessary changes in police registration. Obviously politicians and Dutch police are now able to look upon domestic violence as a complex issue where a registration of marital problems does not solve the issue. More detailed in the Dutch case shows that every fifth women (between 20 and 60 year) is or has been victim of a type of domestic violence in partnership (Lünnemann, 1996) where in 80% of the cases, violent partners are men. (Ministerie van Justitie,

2005). Furthermore, only 12% of all cases in domestic violence find a way to the police. This implies, 500.000 incidents of domestic violence on a yearly basis, taken into account that 56.000 registrations are realized in the current situation of registration domestic violence cases (Ministerie van Justitie, 2005). Registration not only helps to obtain transparency in the extent of domestic violence in The Netherlands as well as it increases the ability for prosecution of the violent partner. Most recent numbers that are published show an increase on reporting the crime (36% of 56.000 registrations) and an actual prosecution of 58% of reported crimes (Ministerie van Justitie, 2005). Thus, enough reason for Dutch politicians but also for executive actors (social assistance) to follow the steps of Europe and Austria. Partly, these changes are realized together with the implementation of the Dutch note on domestic violence in 2002. This document serves as a guideline in a desirable paradigm in domestic violence. First results show a realization of the Dutch 'steps' for change since it triggered change in for example the Dutch police registration system, explained earlier. Furthermore, an important focus of the Dutch government is domestic violence within families with a two-folded cultural background. Although the current concerns of politicians result in special attention in for example the earlier mentioned note, a part of empirical results (Van Dijk et al, 1997) cannot bear out the extra concern. Possibly, Dutch politicians are guided by the fact that in contrary of Van Dijk's results, reality shows a filling up of Dutch women shelters, where more than half of victims have a two folded cultural background (Wolf et al, 2003). An explanation that underlines politicians' assumptions is the under-reportage with respect to this large and various groups of Dutch citizens. Moreover, the governmental note focuses on special types of domestic violence that could play a role within certain two folded cultural groups. Indeed, special types like female mutilation and honour related violence need special attention but since only little empirical results show an inside, only suggestions can be made. Furthermore, the fact that these types are delicate, it seems to be appropriate to not only view them as domestic violence but also as types of violence that need special attention and approach.

Yet once more a confirmation is found in the Dutch situation that, using the words of Dutch Ministry of Justice (Ministerie van Justitie, 2005) domestic violence is not a 'private matter' anymore but a 'public affair'. All facts within the European, Austrian and Dutch level point in the direction of acknowledgement for and active approach towards domestic violence. The most recent development on both national levels concern at least, a changing police registration aiming at more transparency and an

increase of prosecution possibilities. Dutch developments for special groups in society are mentioned in addition. Thus, all over this implies that the context in where social workers are active in both countries diver in the extent of change and developments. Nevertheless, it suggests a similar starting point for social workers to act upon domestic violence.

## Legal Framework and Policy in Domestic Violence

### Chapter 3

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*One important difference between Austria and the Netherlands is the legal framework regarding domestic violence. An exploration of differences and commonalities on legislation is made. It can help the reader better understand from which legal basis, social workers start to work and how institution policy is influenced. Therefore, relevant legislation is described. Also, an introduction on International and European legislation and policy is offered.*

#### **3.1 International Legislation**

Human rights, within or outside Europe have been captured since 1948 laid in several declarations. Two important basic principles for the fight against domestic violence in UN countries are the 'UN Universal Declarations of Human Rights (1948)' and 'UN Vienna Declaration of Human Rights (1993)'. In the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in 1995 the Beijing platform took a lead in condemning types of violence against women as a human right. This conference meant a major step on UN level in the fight against violence against women and influenced European as well as national policies regarding human rights.

#### **3.2 European Legislation**

On European Union level, domestic violence started to become a political issue in 1996 where the focus towards domestic violence shifted from theory to practical dealings. Facts on domestic violence are already introduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of this report. As result of this shift, The European Commission organised the international expert conferences in Vienna and Cologne in December (1998) and March (1999). Furthermore campaigns, spreading surveys and the disposition to launch financial resources is realised in EU-countries. Amongst other conferences the European Commission, together with the German EU Presidency organised the Cologne conference that resulted in 52 standards and recommendations on how to combat male violence against women. At the same Cologne conference, indicators were identified in order to set up standards and recommendations for (the former 15) member countries of the European Union. Although countries diverse in developments in tackling domestic violence, it certainly offers a minimal of standards for member countries to strive for. Moreover it entails a clear signal for shifts in national policy. The framework for standards and recommendations was set up in

expert forums, in order to clarify subjects that need to be covered within European as well as national policy.

To get a better inside on the set up of the expert forums and recommendations, a part is presented in the following:

- **The extent, reasons behind and consequences of violence against women.** The second recommendation covers:

‘The member nations of the European Union and the European institutions are called to maintain contact with this mixed (as mentioned in the first recommendation of this forum; experts researchers and women NGO’s) group for the purposes of exchanging information and experience and to guarantee influence on socio-economic decisions on the European level, so that the problem of violence against women is taken into consideration particularly in policy pertaining to equal opportunity, family, equality and home affairs, as well as legal, educational and media policy.’ (EU, 1999)

- **Legal possibilities for combating (domestic) violence against women.** More detailed, this recommendation describes legal possibilities for Member states, partly as following:

‘The member states of the European Union, together with the applicant nations , are called on to establish explicit, effective and clearly defined legal regulations pertaining to domestic violence, oriented towards the immediate separation of the victim from the offender through the immediate removal of the violent man from the common household and environment of the women and children. The police forces are to be given concrete instructions on the implementation of such regulations, including further measures to protect the victim. The efficacy of the measures taken and the behaviour of the violent man must be monitored both during and after the implementation.’ (EU, 1999)

- **Prevention**
- **Help organisations and cooperation with institutions, European networks**
- **Work with violent partners**

As discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter regarding facts on domestic violence, these standards and recommendations are almost unavoidable. Only the acknowledgment on itself for severance of domestic violence and (the lack) of police registration asks for developments in legal possibilities, working with violent partners and prevention activities. European networks are therefore fruitful and offer stimulation in interchange of good practice. The Council of Europe confirms the importance of

exchanging information on developments. Not only international but also national and local exchange is viewed as an important step forward in tackling domestic violence (Reid, 2003), taking into account that every country develops in their own speed and possibilities. This latter fact is linked to recognition for domestic violence, differences in defining domestic violence and actions taken by member countries.

Additional to recommendations of the European Commission, three focus points are selected by the Council of Europe that underline the principles of Commission in Brussels. Three focus points are identified, presented as follow (Reid, 2003):

- Common principles in policymaking regarding domestic violence among other types of violence against women. Violence is interpreted in the range of thoughts that views domestic violence as a violation of human rights.
- Preventive work, protection of women and service provision are identified as the main items that are important to 'translate' from policy into national action plans.
- Third focus is of supportive nature as it helps to continue developments in the desired direction and helps avoiding possible stagnation.

In this way, developments on International as well as European level in legislation and policy offer a framework for implementation as such in Austria and the Netherlands.

### **3.3 Legislation and policy in Austria**

Austria has a European reputation in being one of the countries that enabled to trigger a paradigm on national level and policy regarding domestic violence. For good reason, the Austrian system functions as a good practice example for other member's states. Why is Austria a model for others? In 1997, the law for the Protection Against Violence came into force, with the intention of a more effective legislation and better protection of victims. Government as well as executive actors such as women shelter and police developed a model built on three necessary elements in order to break the circle of violence. These elements include legal possibilities for outplacement of violent partners, legal possibilities for victims and intervention centres that are interlinked to each other. This combination suggests the strength of the model. Some clarification on the elements follows, as the most relevant information is included, summarised from Logar (2004).

### **3.3.1 A legal possibility for an outplacement of violent partners**

*Police and the right to evict and realise barring orders.* This element refers to the area concerned with police jurisdiction where Austrian police under Police Security Law (Sicherheitspolizeigesetz, art. 38A) is able to expel violent partners from their home (Fröschl, 2003). The most important part of the Police Security Law is the fact that when life, health and freedom of individuals is threatened by other individuals living at home, the violent partner can get a barring order from the police. In practice this means an outplacement of the violent partner for ten days, aiming at a time out for victim as well as violent partner, an example that turns out to function as a basic principle in social assistance. After the second day, local authorities are allowed to screen whether the decided measure was lawfully taken. Furthermore, victims cannot withdraw the ban on returning with an acceptance in the no longer existence of the ban (Fröschl, 2003). Although the steering character of this fact, it can be considered as a turning point in acting, as practice shows that in most situations the pressure's off and a beginning of tensions is yet realised.

### **3.3.2 Legal possibilities for victims**

*The Order that makes Long-Term Protection of victims possible.* The second element aims at realising victim protection within the 10 days that the ban is remain valid. Further action depends on the victims' willingness to opt for a time out. In the case of continuing a temporary injunction, this can be applied through civil court (under art. 382b EO) for a duration of three months. From there, it is possible to extend the injunction under the condition that a divorce petition (or an petition of eviction) is put forward by the victim. Obviously the temporary injunction can function independently from the Police Security Law, as an outplacement of the violent partner is not always applicable. Main point of the Long Term Protection Order is the fact that protection is not only a fact at home but also in the living environment as children school and workplace as examples (Fröschl, 2003). This component points out that physical protection as well as psychological impact is taken into account. The combination of the described elements sets already a strong basis to prevent recidivism of domestic violence and suggest a well thought-out move in the positive direction. Prior to discussing the relevance of the third element, it is in order to include legislation regarding migrant women, since this group deals with special circumstances.

#### **3.3.2.1 Special attention to migrant women in legislation**

Migrant women are a group of victims that require special attention since domestic violence can influence their legal status. Marriage to an Austrian man is the only way

to be qualified for a residence and working permit in Austria. Divorce within four years of marriage has a consequence of being expatriated towards their former country, if migrant women cannot prove a secure means of livelihood. When living in Austria is based on grounds of family visa, this group of women is not allowed to work at all. Against this background the situation gets even more difficult for migrant women than for 'Austrian' women when violence at home is a fact or even triggered by the independence of the woman. Leaving her husband in the first four years of marriage means risking her residence permit. Since 1998 a new law came into force that is stimulated by the women's support services. This law was designed to increase the employment participation under migrant women. Although this positive development, the requirements are very stringent resulting in the fact that only few women are able to change their working situation. This intolerable situation results in increased domestic violence (Logar, 1998). Under this legislation, dependency of migrant women is stimulated and the risk for violence at home is a fact. Moreover, the basic right to freedom of violence under European Human Rights is violated, confirmed by Logar (1998).

### **3.4 Intervention centres**

Third and last element that is covered in the Protection Against Violence Act concerns the *social assistance* provided by *Intervention centres*. Although this part is not immediately described under law, it counts as a social measure under the Protection against Violence Act. The work of the intervention centres functions as a social measure supporting legislation. Intervention centres follow up after police intervention and part of their tasks are supporting victims and their children. Support in practice includes securing rights and protection in civil as in criminal lawsuits (Logar, 2004). Further, legal and social measures have to be taken in order to prevent violence. More inside on the function of intervention centres is included in the chapter '*Social work and Domestic Violence*'.

So, there is no question that the Austrian's model is not well over thought by experts. Indeed, the link between the three actors suggests the grounding for strengths in fighting domestic violence structurally, taking into account that the model has pitfalls. This, since challenges are partly identified regarding the group migrant women. Overall, it is an attempt to suggest that this model has positive consequences for the profession of social work, in the context of these the Protection against Violence Act. Law and legislation frequently interplays with policy and since policy offers guidelines for the framework of social assistance, it is assumed that social workers are

influenced by this interaction. Nevertheless, no published results so far can confirm this assumption.

### **3.5 Legislation in the Netherlands**

As discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, domestic violence is highly prioritised on the agenda of government, police, the Prosecution Council and executive actors. Two main focuses are the legal possibilities for an outplacement of violent partners as well as the legal possibilities for victims, like recommended by the European Commission. Legal possibilities do not have the capacity to deal with all cases appropriately, where home outplacement of violent partners, as in the Austrian legislation could be a solution. A suggestion is made to realise a basis of legislation with the goal of a realisation for crisis intervention. (Ministerie van Justitie, 2002). Shortly, the most relevant parts of law and policy are presented here as summary of Lünne-man & Overgaag's (2003) research. An introduction frames the legal context for social work profession.

#### **3.5.1 Legal possibilities for an outplacement of violent partners**

The situation in the Netherlands has another basis and interpretation of the law as in Austria. Violent partners who are caught in the act (using violence) will be arrested under the Code of Criminal Procedure (Art 53 Sv). If the incident is already past tense, arrest is again a possibility however it enables arrest within a certain time limit (Art 54, Sv). In the interest of investigation, temporary detention of the violent partner is applicable (Art 57 Sv) as well as the grounds of the temporary custody are respected (Art 67 and 67a). Recent amendments in the penal code (2002) offer nowadays-legal possibilities for arrest as well as temporary custody of violent partners of domestic violence. Next to the jurisdiction of the Code of Criminal Procedure, a possibility exists to use order by law with the effect of maintaining civil order also (Art 540 Sv). In this situation violent partner are caught in the act where temporary custody is a possibility without proven facts of violence that are normally necessary for temporary custody. These type of arrest is applicable when it concerns situations where recurrence of the crime exist and the court judges the situation as danger for society. Thus, what does this all mean for the Dutch situation on prosecution of violent partners? An overview on legal possibilities shows a system that rather puts up barriers than offering allies for prosecution. The Dutch Ministry of Justice also acknowledges these assumptions, while a new legislation proposal is developed in 2004. The proposal will be based on the Austrian model but to what extent good practice will be implemented raises questions. Dutch criminal law is only

used for ‘finding trustful elements’ in the investigation while civil law partly deals with the prosecution as well. In the discussed outdoor placement of Austrian violent partners, Police Security Law provides the possibility to act. Thus, if the Netherlands would implement the Austrian way of outdoors placement, it suggests an amendment in law of large extent. But as said before, no Dutch judgement answers this question yet.

### **3.5.2 Legal possibilities for victims**

Legal possibilities for victims of domestic violence fall under the civil jurisdiction, just as in the Austrian case. Three options offer a possibility to obtain the right for living accommodation namely apply for temporary injunction, application of a temporary supply and allowance through cantonal judge. In comparison to Austria, this is necessary to obtain the right to life in the house. This process is already covered under Austrian law, while an outdoor placement solves the issue.

#### **3.5.2.1 Possibilities regarding living accommodation**

The first possibility is to apply for a temporary injunction in order to obtain the right to live in the house. This possibility can be used when important interests demand a temporary supply (Art. 289 Rv) and the defendant (violent partner) has committed a wrongful act. Wrongful act basically means contrary to law, violation of subjective law or unwritten norms that have been crossed. Under authority of law, the defendant (violent partner) can be forced to respect the banning order. Beside the issue concerning the house, the victim has the possibility to ask for an injunction, which implies no contact or forbids someone to appear in a certain area (Art 3:296 BW).

The second option, is the application of a temporary supply, which in the case of divorce can result in sustained claim. This means that victims have the right to life in the house, even if the violent partner is the official owner of the house. The supply on temporary basis is always linked to the demand for a divorce. Condition is that divorce has to permanently end the marriage (or registered partnership) under Art 1:150 BW and Art. 814 Rv. If not so, temporary supplies are not legitimate.

The third possibility concerns an allowance of the house through a cantonal judge. When partners are living together but not married, the cantonal judge can decide that the women who survived the violence has the right to rent the house for a certain time limit. A standard procedure is necessary if the violent partner is the main renter. Also in the situation where both partners are equally named, a procedure is necessary for the victim’s exclusive use. When the victim is the main renter, it isn’t necessary to start a standard procedure since she already has the right to stay.

Leaving the prosecution process aside, it suggests already a rather difficult system for victims of domestic violence, since the described part only deals with possibilities to living accommodation. Possibilities for prosecution leave two options: the first is a process under criminal law and the second under civil law. Basic difference is the fact that criminal prosecution obliges victims to report the crime, where in most cases this has a severe impact on victims. Before discussing the Dutch situation in its existing support, the special situation on migrant women is included, just like in the Austrian case.

### **3.5.2.2 Special attention for migrant women in legislation**

Before 1999 it was problematic to step out of an abusive relationship since this had direct influence on the legal status under Dutch law. Since 1999 law and therefore policy has changed: Dutch law recognizes this form of violence on humanitarian reasons. In the second note of the Ministry of Justice, that describes the progress in tackling domestic violence on national level, measure 27 is entered in the documents, which claims acknowledgement for domestic violence. In practice, it means that when humanitarian reason is demonstrable, this is enough reason to continue an independent Dutch legal status. In addition, both migrant as other women who survived violence and living temporarily in a shelter home, have priority over other people registered for housing (Ministerie van Justitie, 2003).

Thus, an overall picture shows a complex juridical system for victims of domestic violence but as well the prosecution possibilities functions as barrier. Although support is offered and the position of migrant women has developed a bit further into a positive direction, facts are as plain as day that the accessibility is a shortcoming in legal possibilities for victims in the Netherlands. Also politicians are aware of these facts as were they feel the need for change. The Austrian Protection against Violence Act enables to view a different approach, showing promising results for future of the Dutch system. But also here remarks on the suggested proposal are in order. The strengths of the Austrian system lie in the solid chains and the interaction between them. Leaving vital parts out suggest a contradiction in terms. Gerda Dijkman, national project manager of the Police department expresses her critique on Dutch government, who have not excluded a partly implementation of the Austrian system (van Zeijl, 2004). All in all it suggests implications for social workers within both countries. Indeed social workers deal with domestic violence but law and legislation and the effects for national but also institution policy sketches another context for this

group of professionals. The outcome of this study could offer an inside on the impact of policy in working with victims of domestic violence.

## Social work and victims of domestic violence

### Chapter 4

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*Societies without forms of social assistance are not imaginable anymore nowadays; social assistance without social workers either. Although the role of social workers varies per country, region and institution, there is always a common dominator in the profession. Social work in general and in domestic violence in particular is described in order to understand developments, the meaning of social work and the current challenges of the profession. To understand the broader context, this chapter also provides an insight into social assistance in Austria and the Netherlands.*

#### **4.1 Social work in Austria**

Social work' profession and education was primarily for women's business in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Just like in the Netherlands, welfare state and social work started to grow after the Second World War together with the National economy. Nowadays the position of social workers is concentrated on counselling individuals and families (Weissenborn, 2004). Furthermore social work includes social group work, where according to Weissenborn community work is not well established. The Austrian education model does not recognize social pedagogues as specialization, resulting in the fact that social workers are often covering this field as well. Tendencies in Austrian social work lay for an important part in the education of social workers (Weissenborn, 2004). The curriculum covers a four years program with a balance between theory and practice.

#### **4.2 Social work in the Netherlands**

The importance of social work as part of society became reality after the Second World War, with the development of the Dutch welfare state. Nowadays the profession has its own rules and procedures and more or less 40.000 students per year are following education specialized in one of the various fields of social work (see Freitas, 2004). An attempt to define the meaning of this social work is made by Freitas (2004), where Dutch social workers are viewed as intermediaries between vulnerable and their best level of participation in society. Although the word 'vulnerable' defines users of social assistance in a rather negative way, fact is that people are in need for assistance. One of the tendencies within Dutch social work focus on 'reaching out' towards users and prevention activities. Furthermore, a tendency towards a more generalist approach and less specialist is recognized in discussions on at least education level. This latter founds ground in the fact that

focussing on one social aspect is an unconstructive way of working, according to Reverda (1993).

Yet, taking into account the general picture on social work within both countries, elaboration towards social work in domestic violence seems logical.

### **4.3 Social work, a vital link in domestic violence?**

What can be said regarding potentials to function as vital link in domestic violence in Austria and the Netherlands? The answer is not so hard to find. Social work has developed itself over the years from mostly charity work or people who act out of religious point of view towards well-accepted professionals in both societies. The term social work already speaks for itself, although there are differences in interpretation. The work always deals with participators in society and is influenced by several developments. For example, looking back in the history of the Netherlands and Austria the profession and training have evaluated and changed. This often goes hand in hand with societal, political, social and economical change, according to Weissenborn (2004). Domestic violence is an out-standing example of change that influences but also is influenced by social structure, society, politics and economy. Hamilton and Coates (1993) give an inside on the American situation as social workers are the most frequently contacted group of professionals in domestic violence. This provides an indication for the Dutch and Austrian situation. Thus, seen from the point of view that social work is always in interaction with above mentioned changes and the indication of being a frequently contacted group for victims of domestic violence, possible capacities of social workers are identified as its suggest a function as vital link in developments in domestic violence.

Unlike its proven added value, especially women movements that have already acknowledged the severe character of domestic violence in a much earlier period criticize the profession. In the American situation, as an indication for European social work, the critics include being uncaring and unhelpful towards victims followed by not providing enough information. Examples that support these critics include blaming the victim or revictimisation (Collarossi, 2005; Humphreys & Thiara 2003), lack of recognition of abuse being a problem (Hansen, M., Harway and Cervantes, 1991) and failing to make appropriate interventions and referrals (Ross and Glisson, 1991). In Austria, the work of international feminist movements for women's human rights was and still is the principal factor in the public debate on violence against women, including home violence (Fröschl, 2004). This group influenced a change in

vision on domestic violence and has influenced policymakers in resulting into important changes on political and social level. In The Netherlands the developments are more recent as policy makers and executive actors are starting to follow the footsteps of the Austrian model that functions as a good practice model on legal measures and social structure.

What are the challenges for the future of social work in general and in domestic violence? Firstly, 21<sup>st</sup>-century developments have to be acknowledged and challenged in general. These developments include globalisation as in financial competition, social dumping and brain drain (Weissenborn, 2004) and trans-national capital and global inequality (Finn and Jacobson, 2003). Furthermore, a market-oriented society and its dilemmas (Freitas, 2004) and Europeanization as in political integration and Fortress Europe (Weissenborn, 2004) are all complex economical, political and social factors that pressure welfare systems. Social exclusion comes as a result of these developments (Freitas, 2004; Finn and Jacobson; 2003) where social workers are suggested to acquire competencies to empower users and stimulate participation in society (Freitas, 2004). Moreover, not only within Europe but also in other West-European societies, challenges are identified in advocating human rights and active citizenship as one of the most important focus points for social work (Weissenborn, 2004, Finn and Jacobson). Secondly, specific challenges for the field of domestic violence are identified in the latest European developments. One of the most specific challenges in the field of domestic violence issues lies in changing views of social workers, bearing in mind the need for change in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. Social workers could use a model that helps to visualize the fields of practice in domestic violence, designed by Fran Danis (2003). Although the field of practice is influenced by the national social structure, it can be used as a universal model to recognize the crosscutting issue, that domestic violence is for societies. Interpreting the model we recognize fields of practice that all have their own function in intervention. Every field includes its risk factors and recommendations for effective interventions. Universal screening is suggested as a constructive way to work with all actors. Therefore, it is needed that social workers address domestic violence in all fields of practice, resulting in concern, discussion and finally action (Danis, 2003) Yet, this confirms the identified Dutch tendency that shows preference on a more generalist approach than speciality as universal screening includes social workers within several fields of assistance.

## Domestic Violence: A Crosscutting Issue for Social Workers



Developed by Fran Danis, Ph.D., ACSW, University Of Missouri-Columbia

Furthermore, suggestions are given to redefine the social justice mission of social workers. Understanding the complexities and dynamics of violence against women within a broader context, throws a different light on behaviour of social workers (see Collarossi, 2005). By complexities and dynamics is meant being able to view violence against women differently than other 'family violence'.

Thus, mentioned challenges as preventing a further grow of social exclusion, empowerment of users, changing view on domestic violence and redefining a social justice mission does not imply that no social worker is acting on challenges or acknowledging them in countries as Austria and the Netherlands. Against that background, they are simply helpful to keep a sharp focus on the development of the profession in the future as well as to function as possible eye opener for social workers who have not taken challenges into account.

#### **4.4 Social assistance towards victims in Austria**

Several actors in the field support women in their process to overcome domestic violence. Women shelters, intervention centres, public assistance, help lines and youth care are examples of institutions, which can assist victims in psychological as well as material way. Since several European countries consider intervention centres, under the Protection against Violence Act (see part Legislation) as part of good practice model, it is worth mentioning their view on assistance towards victims.

Intervention centres respect the actual condition of the victim when entering the centre. Support comes in different ways as in juridical, practical or emotional. From a feministic social workers point of view this is a constructive way of approaching victims, that Fröschl calls pro-active (Fröschl, 2003). Indeed, violence can paralyze victims, leaving victims lacking energy needed or being afraid to take individual steps (Fröschl, 2003). Thus, the intervention centres goal is to stop domestic violence but does not imply a definitely separation of partners. Fact that most women want to stop violence, does not always imply ending a relationship. Intervention centres take these considerations into account while supporting victims. A theoretic goal of the Protection Against Violence Act is that support is followed up in Intervention Centres after police intervention. In practice this goal is to a certain extent possible to achieve since financial facilities seems to inhibit the work within intervention centres. This means that certain women services take over a part of the Intervention Centres as they cannot be managed under present circumstances. (see Logar, 2003). Such developments also apply to women who are not living in the proximity of an Intervention Centre. Moreover there is close operation between Intervention Centres and assistance to violent partners and youth.

#### **4.5 Social assistance towards victims in the Netherlands**

Before elaborating on the social assistance towards victims, there will be a short inventory on assistance towards violent partners. As argued in the chapter two and three, a shift from the focus on victims towards violent partner is recognized in the Dutch society. Implementation of current Dutch policy, aims at providing victims assessable support but also obliging violent partners to take more responsibility for their crimes. Government has set out guidelines to organize assistance towards violent partners in the following ways: care on a voluntary basis, mandatory therapy for violent partners and treatment in detention. (More detailed information: see note of the Ministry of Justice, 2002).

Victims of domestic violence all have an individual path. Since there are no intervention centres (yet), police can (in the case of reporting the crime) refer to several actors in the field, like women shelters, public assistance offices, help lines, youth care or NGO's specialized in female victims. Just as in the Austrian model, assistance can focus on psychological or material aid but a combination of these services exists as well. Women themselves can also approach social assistance, bearing in mind that this behaviour requires already a range of empowered thoughts. Since different areas in the Netherlands are in different stages of working together in the combat against domestic violence, it is very hard to sketch an overall picture. The common dominator for all areas is the subsidy provision of government to support changes for assistance to victims of domestic violence. Examples of that is public awareness, extension of budget for women shelters and program developing for developing expertise on domestic violence.

Thus, the overall picture shows a development of a profession that evaluated over the years, resulting in a large group spread out over several area's of social assistance. As argued earlier, social work has indeed the capacity to serve as vital link but so far no valid proofs confirms this argument. Moreover, a short comment seems to be appropriate while there is a case for learning from woman movements' strategies, which in the overall picture enabled change or at least a reconsideration of social structure. Furthermore social assistance is looked over within this chapter. As already discussed in the chapter on legislation and policy, situation are changing where Austria as well as the Netherlands recognizes pitfalls and the need for further development. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Interventions Centres in the Protection against Violence Act seems to offer a more accessible way for victims of domestic violence in order to provide assistance by social workers or other professions.

## Research methods

### Chapter 5

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*This chapter on research methods discusses the approach and design of this study including choice of methodology, the process of data collection and the justification of these choices. Furthermore, the chapter addresses some ethical problems and the validity and credibility of the research conducted.*

#### **5.1 Research approach**

The study serves as a first attempt to reflect on social workers' behaviour in Austria and the Netherlands, towards victims of domestic violence in practice. Qualitative research is best suited in this study to answer the research question. The great number of respondents included in the survey suggests a quantitative approach. This should be interpreted as indicative only as the respondents only form part of the total group. In addition, the survey includes questions on way of acting and social workers' motives behind it. Despite its describing character the research gives room for a possible causality in order to place the topic in a larger context. Additional elements are, the influence of institution protocol and/or social workers own acting in practice. The discovery of possible patterns in social workers' behaviour provides an insight on the problem starting reflecting the particular reality to putting it into a more complex picture (Qualitative Paradigm). Thus, the qualitative approach seems to be most appropriate, since this type of research helps to formulate an initial answer on the potentials of social work in domestic violence. Next to this, the qualitative character of the chosen method of working and group of participants underlines the choice in approach.

#### **5.2 Research design**

This research is cross-national, cross setting, empirical and descriptive. Domestic violence and social workers' practice is compared between Austria and The Netherlands (cross national) and between women shelter and youth care (cross setting). This study thus offers an understanding of the characteristics of particular cultures, societies, economical and political systems and their effect on underlying patterns of behaviour (Dierkes, 1987). In this context behaviour of social workers is the focus to look upon, where not only the characteristics on cross national is identified but also the particular culture characteristics of national institution are included. Data were collected by means of electronic surveys hence the empirical

nature of the survey. The research is descriptive as most background information on the research topic is inspired on the American situation. This supports the formulation of questions but nevertheless it does not offer valid results to construct a theory.

### **5.3 Research setting**

As this research is set up to gain a deeper insight to social work, it speaks for itself that social workers have been involved in the process. The choice to approach social workers in Austria and the Netherlands stems from the differences in context in which social workers operate. Being the researcher's field of experience, the choice for the Netherlands is an obvious one. Austria and its reputation within Europe will serve as the benchmark. The research divides social workers in two groups: active in women shelters and those in youth care. The rationale behind it being that, these two settings are recognizable in both countries and although differences between settings exist, the similarities are identified as well. Furthermore, these settings certainly deal with domestic violence in both countries, as literature and experience confirm. Moreover, practical considerations are also taken into account since motivating staff and participants is consumed and requires powerful argumentation. Thus, the choice is made to concentrate on two groups where time was manageable and powerful argumentation offered a fruitful outcome. Settings as women shelters and youth care in both countries offer a first indication on social workers behaviour towards victims of domestic violence taken into account that domestic violence issues are (one of the) focus(sus) of these practice fields.

### **5.4 Data Collection Process and Methods**

The research is conducted by means of two types of data: secondary data and a structured survey. Secondary data are collected to gain a better understanding of the topic and its context. These include research reports, articles, fact sheets, convention notes, political promotion material and policy notes. The survey is structured and has limited possibility to answer open questions. The aim is to obtain a closer look at the perspective of social workers in the practice field. The written survey is spread out under two groups of social workers within both countries. In practice this means that four groups have been approached for participation: social workers in Dutch youth care and women shelter and Austrian youth care and women shelter. All respondents receive a semi-structured survey, divided in four parts namely: personal and background information, identification of the victim, assessment of facts on domestic violence and intervention practice. Questions within the four parts are variables to measure the practice behaviour of social workers. The

survey is based on existing research carried out by Fran Danis, assistant professor in social work education at the University of Missouri-Columbia, USA. The definitions of these variables follow Danis (2003). Firstly, identification practice is defined as tasks that cover a large part of screening on domestic violence. Secondly, assessment tasks include determining the degree of risk as a result of violence and the options available to the victim. Finally intervention practice deals with tasks associated with providing supportive counselling, referral to a safe place, advocacy within the criminal justice system and development of a personal safety plan (Danis, 2003). Instead of the original 5 point Likert scale used by Danis, this research uses a 4 point Likert scale with a fifth option 'not applicable'. This means that a respondent chooses a position that reflects his or her opinion best or explains why he or she chooses 'not applicable' in the open box following the question. The choice not to opt for five options, lies in the linguistics. A literal translation of the original set of questions proved to be difficult and therefore four possibilities were chosen. Furthermore, some questions are left out but others are added within the survey. Aim is to tune in on the research question as closely as possible. The second part of questions give opportunity to show whether the respondent is guided by personal view, institution protocol or by a combination of both. Thus three options are available. Moreover, a list with definitions is used, as to ensure uniformity of understanding the topics under research.

The justification for using the survey as means data collection is many folded. Firstly, a part of the survey is already pilot tested in American research carried out by the University of Missouri-Columbia. Therefore the framework of the existing survey is a good starting point for this study and offers and increases reliability of the outcome. Questions regarding the influence of institution protocol are specially developed for this research. Since one of the research questions focuses on the extent of guidance of own view or institution protocol in practice, questions are set up to screen the extents to which this is the case. Secondly, this form of data collection enables to reach a large group of social workers, taking into account the limited time frame. A third reason to choose for a written survey is the fact that this method is very accessible for use in two countries, with a different mother tongue. While Austrian social workers reply in German, participants in the Netherlands use a Dutch version. Furthermore, not only the language is adjusted but also the point of departure for social workers. This means that questions are set up from the 'mother of the child' point of view in youth care and the 'woman herself' point of view for women shelter. Finally, the survey is set up in digital version, which facilitates participation. So

indeed, the approach used is not limited by geographical location and promotes efficient use of both. Limitations of the research are included in Chapter 7.

## **5.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process that according to Huberman and Miles (1994) follows a pattern where three sub processes are recognized namely data reduction, data display and development of meaning of data. The first process is reduction of data, aiming at selecting what is relevant to research questions and the concept of the framework. In this study, this process is recognizable. In order to become more acquainted with the topic, several research reports, articles, fact sheets web pages i.e. are used with the aim of selecting the most relevant documents for supporting the research question. In order to come to an analysis research uses data display (Huberman and Miles, 1994). In practice, this means that selected documents help to recognize a link between secondary and primary data that become available from the survey. The technique of analyses is SPSS 11x in order to obtain survey results. As will be provided in the chapter 'Results', the survey is built up on open and closed questions. Furthermore, Huberman and Miles (1994) explain the last process as the conclusion drawing part. Although the documents are of use during the process and able to help formulating a research question and setting up a framework, they are of second order. As is mentioned in the paragraph 'research design' this study is not built on a theory since it has a describing character. Therefore, theories are used as suggestions in order to support the research question and concluding thoughts. Obviously, the results from the survey are prioritised.

## **5.6 Ethical considerations**

In this study, ethics is concerned with an attempt to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour (May, 2001). Furthermore, May (2001) explains that decisions on ethical basis mean defining what is right and just for all participants to the research. In the context of this study, the first ethical consideration deals with the participation of Fran Danis, who gave permission on using the already developed survey. In addition there is the recruitment of participants. Before participation, members of staff within the organization were approached and informed. In Dutch institutions either a manager or a human resource specialist was contacted to obtain information on the research and to give the green light for participation. In the Austria, the approach for both groups was different. Just like in the Dutch situation, the manager of youth care was consulted aiming at her approval for participation. Different was the process of approaching Austrian social workers in women shelter. As addressed before, Rosa

Logar took responsibility to provide women shelters in Austria with information on the research. She is, on top of several other roles within the network of domestic violence, one founder of the Violence against Protection Act and expert in domestic violence issues in Austria. Through her, women shelter partners are reached and motivated for participation. Thus, this part is covered taking ethical considerations into account by means of management approval. Thirdly, all participants were informed that participation within the survey is on an anonymous basis. In practice this means that solely the researcher has access to survey results. After analysing the data, results will be kept for a certain amount of time but on the basis of principles and values. Outcomes will no longer be kept then necessary. The last consideration deals with objectiveness of the researcher. Although it is rather tempting to be guided by knowledge, truth, reality, goodness and rightness (May, 2000), the results and conclusion are solely based on what the results show. A personal touch is recognizable within the acknowledgment and argumentation of used definitions. This research needs a common dominator in language as to create a starting point for working on a bilingual principal. Thus, personal beliefs, judgements and values have not influenced the research process and were put aside when the study required it.

### **5.7 Reliability and Validity**

Validity in this research implies if the meaning of measurement are accurate and actually measuring what they intend do measure (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability aims at showing that results are replicable (Joppe,2000) In this research reliability was taken into account while a developed survey was used in order to obtain the data. Although the questions were adapted to answer the research question, it still had a reliable fundament. Written surveys as used within this research, provide valid and reliable data since results are laid down on paper. Furthermore this type of data collection can quite intensively be studied. Finally, the choice for conducting the survey in the mother tongue of the respondents increases the chance on reliability. Although a bias is acknowledged within one part of the survey (explained in chapter results) the results gave an inside on social work behaviour in practice.

## Results

### Chapter 6

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*In this chapter the survey results are presented. Firstly, the group of responders is characterised followed by descriptive statistics. Finally, open-ended questions are discussed.*

#### 6.1 Research population

Both in Austria and the Netherlands social workers, active in the fields of youth care and women shelter participated in the survey. In the Netherlands 17 women shelters and 17 institutions for youth care were approached. All 17 women shelters did participate and of the 17 youth care institutions, two decided not to participate. Amongst the reasons for not participating are high caseload for social workers and the fact that domestic violence was not priority on the agenda anymore. Since Dutch reactions ranged from enthusiastic to little or not interested, institutions were asked to provide at least two respondents per institution as to support the research. In practice this means that 62 Dutch social workers were asked for participation.

Rosa Logar, contact person for the Austrian group of respondents in Austria distributed the survey amongst 17 women shelters. For youth care in Austria, Brigitte Zinner approached social workers in the Vienna area. For Austrian women shelters the number of respondents per institution was equal to The Netherlands: two social workers per women shelter. For youth care the standard was different since Vienna has many youth care services. The target therefore amounted to three social workers per youth care institution. Other youth care institutions in Austria were not approached because of the limited time frame. Nevertheless, 86 surveys were distributed in Austria.

To conclude, of the in total 148 social workers approached within the two countries. **69 (=N)** social workers responded. This excludes 5 surveys that were returned after expiration of the deadline. This brings the responds rate to 47%.

#### 6.2 Characteristics of the respondents

The first part of the survey comprises the respondents. The respondent group is characterised in terms of country, type of setting, gender, age and the years of work experience as shown in the following tables.

**Table 1 Respondents per country**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Austria	44	63.8%
Netherlands	25	36.2%
Total	69	100.0%

**Table 2 Respondents per setting**

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Womensh.	28	40.6%
Youth.	32	46.4%
Other	9	13.0%
Total	69	100.0%

As put forward in Table 1, the sample is dominated by Austrian respondents (63.8%) versus 36.2% Dutch. In terms of type of setting, 40.6% works in women shelters, 46.4% in youth care and another 13% in a different setting. These are Austrian institutions closely linked to women shelters, active in ambulant setting for victims of domestic violence (8) and Interventions Centres (1.)

An overwhelming majority of respondents is female (91,3%), versus (8,7%) respondents. The age distribution is more diverse with 4,3% below the age of 25 years, 39.1% between 25-35 years, 30.4% between the age of 35-45, 24.6% between the range 45-55 and only one person (1.4%) above 55 years.

**Table 3 Gender of respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Number in Percentage</b>
Men	6	8.7
Women	<b>63</b>	<b>91.3</b>
Total	69	100.0

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate how long they already worked with victims of domestic violence. Table 4 shows that most respondents work between 2 and 5 years (40.6%) followed by between 5 and 15 years (24.6%) in domestic violence. A smaller group has between 15-25 years of experience and another 11.6% over 25 years.

**Table 4 Work experience in domestic violence**

<b>Years of working experience in domestic violence</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No experience	1	1.4 %
Between 2 and 5 years	<b>28</b>	<b>40.6%</b>
Between 5 and 15 years	<b>17</b>	<b>24.6%</b>
Between 15 and 25 years	7	10.1%
More than 25 years	8	11.6%
Total	69	100.0%

To conclude, there is an overrepresentation of Austrian social workers as compared to Dutch social workers in the respondent group. Settings are comparable with a

slight under representation of youth care and an inclusion of a small group of social workers, active in ambulant assistance for victims. Most respondents are female, of diverse age and between 2 and 5 years experience in domestic violence.

### **6.3 Descriptive analysis**

The descriptive statistics describe the distribution of scores on the research variables. This allows for a cross-national as well as cross setting comparison. The independent samples t-test is used to describe the social workers' behaviour towards victims of domestic violence in order to provide answers to the research questions.

The results show a relative effect of the characteristics of respondents and the variables that are tested in the survey. Finally, open questions are covered.

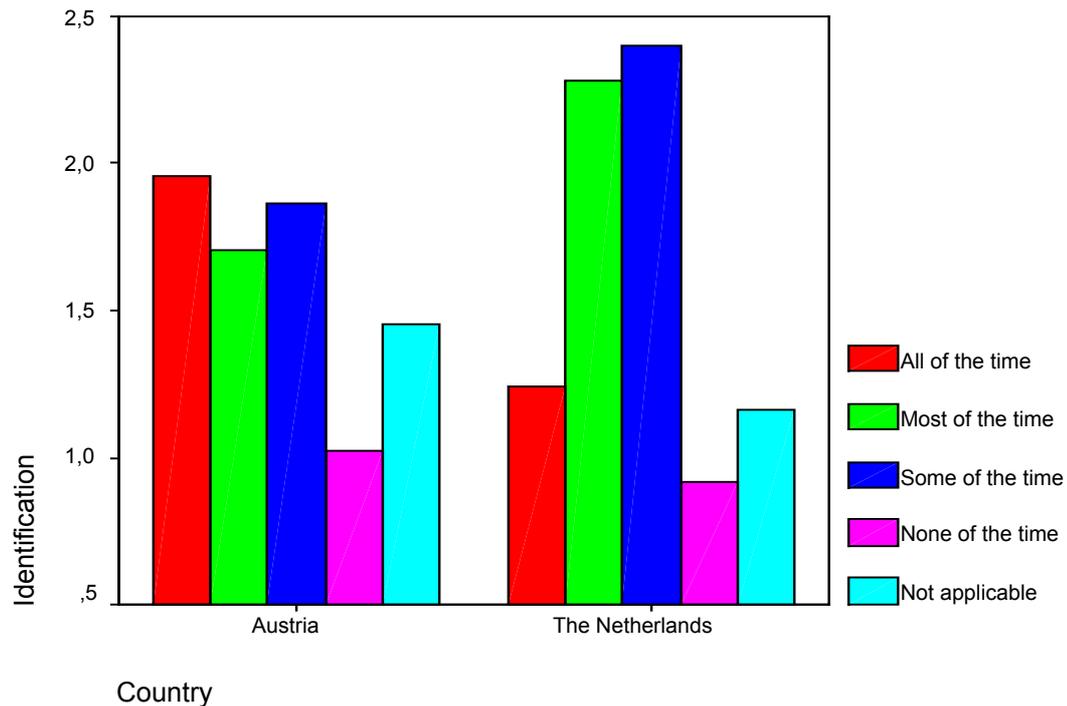
#### **6.3.1 Introduction on identification, fact assessment and intervention practice**

The survey was set up in four indicators: characteristics of the respondents, identification of domestic violence, and assessment of facts regarding domestic violence and intervention practices. An example of the survey is included in the appendix, while these paragraphs refer to the survey questions. The Dutch survey for women shelter and Austrian one for youth care show the set up for the four variants namely Dutch women shelter and youth care, followed by Austrian women shelter and youth care. The indicators identification, fact assessment and intervention are important as they answer the research question. These results touch the core of this study.

Three independent t-tests were conducted to describe the practice behaviour of social workers as well as an attempt to recognise patterns within the respondents group.

#### **6.3.2 Identification**

The following two bar charts inside in social workers' practice behaviour regarding identification. Eight items measure the intervention practices. The first bar chart includes cross-national comparison.



**Bar chart 1** Identification of victims of domestic violence

Questions on identification deal with tasks associated with the specific screening for domestic violence. When comparing both countries, Austria scores higher on 'always' identifying, whereas 'mostly' or 'sometimes' prevails in the Dutch sample. Strongly represented is the choice for tasks that are not applicable (question 1.2.a.) An explanation hereof lays in the fact that questions were aiming at first screening on domestic violence. Thus, it seems logical that some questions were not applicable since domestic violence is already identified in an earlier stage. Explanations of respondents confirm this suggestion. Both in Austria as well as The Netherlands, results show that working together with violent partners is not applicable (question 1.3.a and question 1.4.a).

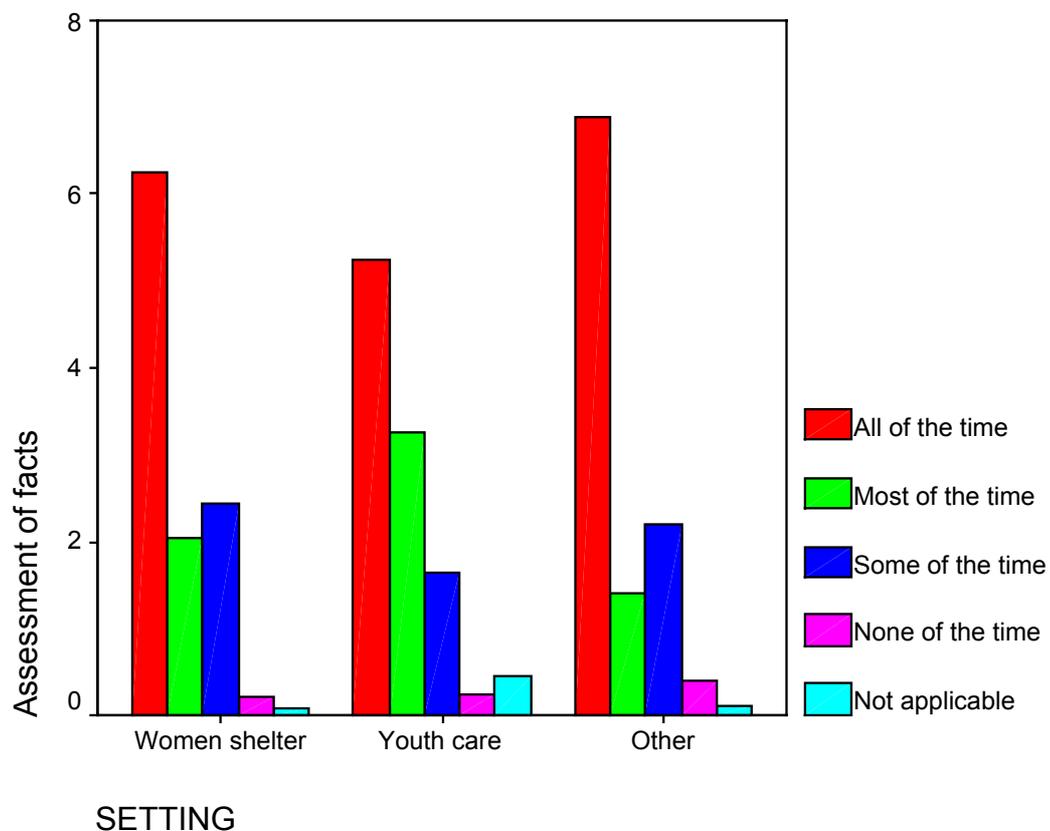
A comparison between youth care, women shelter and other (meaning ambulant assistance towards women) leads to a same pattern within the group. The only difference is a higher score of ambulant assistance for the choice 'always'. It could be explained from the fact that their tasks are more identification oriented than they are for women shelters and youth care institutions where identification of domestic violence has already taken place in an earlier stage.

To conclude, domestic violence practice behaviour of social workers is different in Austria and The Netherlands. Identification of domestic violence is a standard task

for Austrian social workers but not for Dutch social workers who have a preference for 'most' or 'some of the time'.

### 6.3.3 Fact assessment

Tasks on fact assessment aim at determining the degree of lethality those victims of domestic violence face and the options available to her. Ten items measure fact assessment on domestic violence. This bar chart visualises the outcome of fact assessment: all settings prioritise in always asking for the degree of lethality and to options available to the victim.



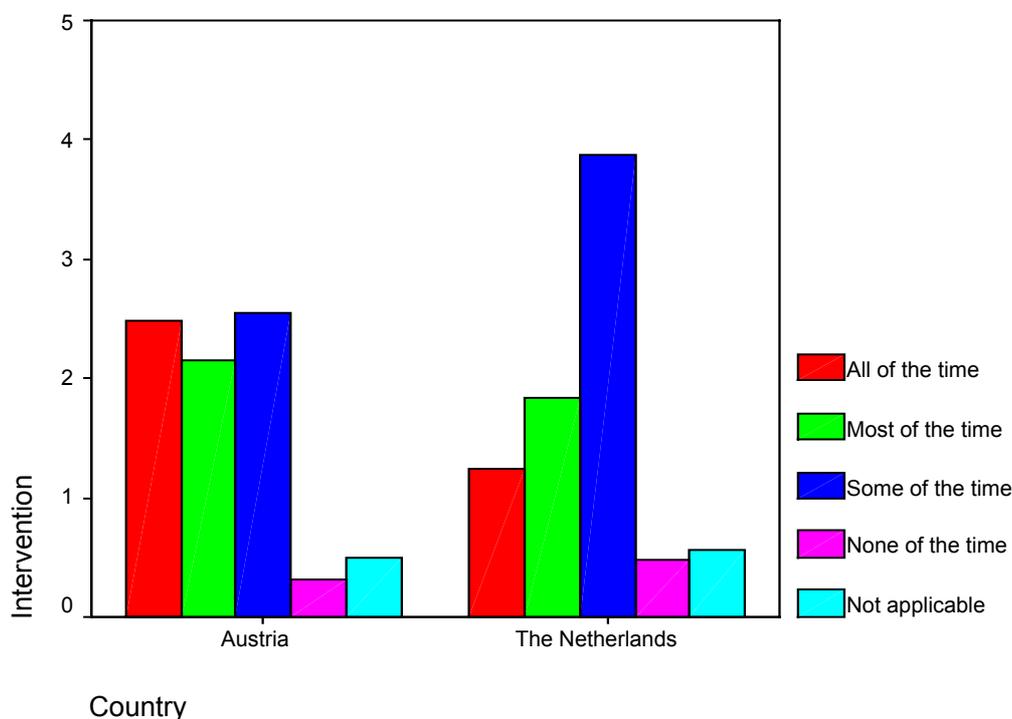
**Bar chart 2** Fact assessment on victims of domestic violence.

The high number on the choice 'all' or 'most of the time' show a respondents group used to deal with domestic violence issues where assessment tasks seem well developed.

### 6.3.4 Intervention practices

Intervention practices of social workers in domestic violence are the third indicator. Eight items measure intervention practices. The cross-national comparison shows a different pattern in intervening. Having a closer look, obviously Austrian social

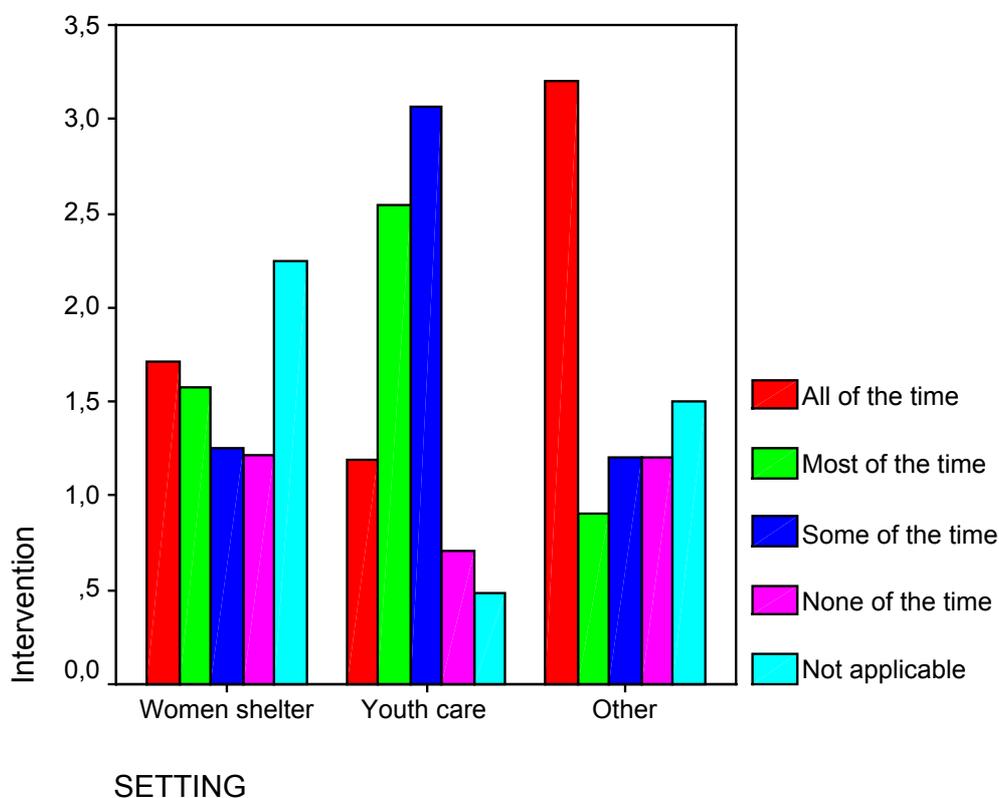
workers intervene more often 'all of the time' or 'most of the time', while Dutch interventions are less frequently.



**Bar chart 3** Intervention practice on victims of domestic violence.

Thus, this asks for a closer look at differences within the items. One question (3.2.a) deals with network partners being involved in the set up of a personal plan for victims of domestic violence. Austrian social workers (25% always and 31.8% mostly and 29.5% sometimes) involve more often network partners than their Dutch counterparts (12% always, 20% mostly and 56% sometimes). The set up for a personal safety plan is more common in Austria (54.5% always, 34.1% mostly and 11.4% sometimes) than in The Netherlands (12% always, 20% mostly and 48% sometimes). Furthermore eye-catching outcomes were identified regarding explanation of legal options for victims or violent partners. Where Austrian social workers choose for explanation quite often (84.1% always, 11.4% mostly and 0% sometimes), the Dutch situation (32% always, 20% mostly, 32% sometimes) the outcomes show a different pattern. Notable differences are recognised in stimulating victims to take legal action against the violent partner. Stimulation is more frequent in The Netherlands (28% always, 40% mostly and 28% sometimes) than in Austria (9.1% always, 40.9% mostly and 36.4% sometimes)

An explanation for these outcomes partly lies in construction of the respondents group. The next bar chart shows cross setting results and partly clarifies the outcomes:



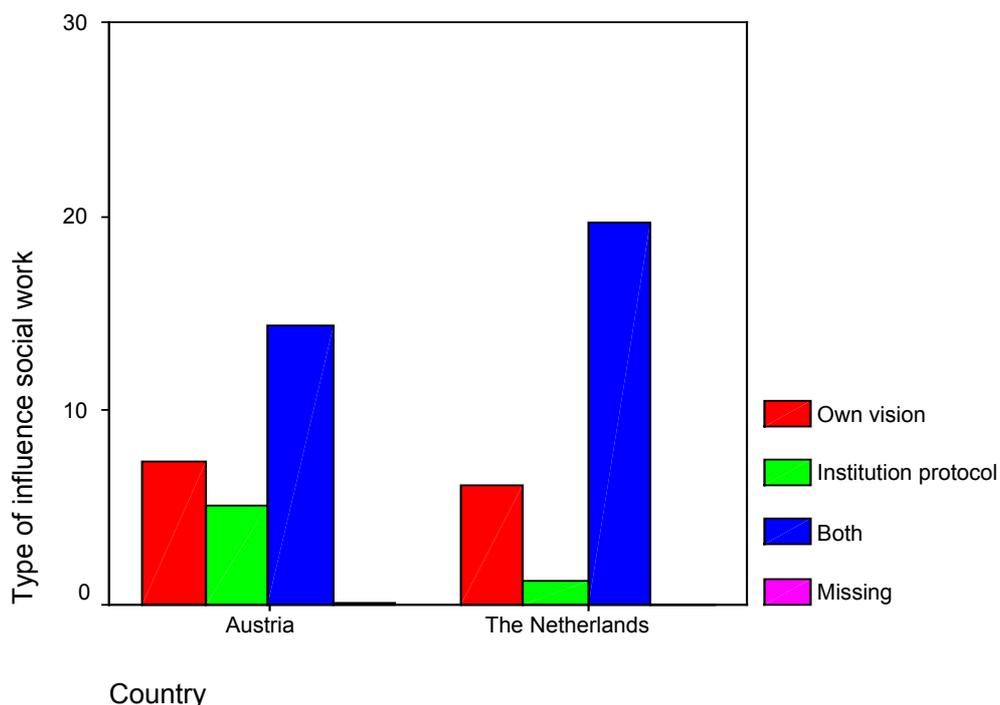
**Bar chart 4** Intervention practice on victims of domestic violence

The ambulant assistance towards victims (other) scores higher on 'always' acting in comparison to women shelters and youth care institutions were the different pattern in the options 'all of the time' and 'most of the time' are identified. Youth care institutions prefer the option 'some of the time'. Within the three groups, respondents opted for "not applicable" (20.5% Austria and 8% The Netherlands) in particular when referring victims to specialised assistance. This is explained through the fact that respondents already work within specialised settings. Thus, bias is identified in this indicator while participants in the category 'other' show only an Austrian outcome. Nevertheless, it gives us an impression on social works' intervention practices on cross-national level.

#### 6.4 Own vision, institution protocol or the combination of both

The last part deals with the influence of own vision or institution protocol on behaviour. Yet again, the independent sample t-test is the instrument that helps

describing practice behaviour of social workers and a first step in recognising patterns within the respondents group. It is certainly interesting to view practice behaviour of social workers screening on identification, fact assessment and intervention practice on cross national level. Moreover the comparison between two countries indicates another context for social workers as explained in the chapter 2 and 3. This research anticipates on the Austrian and Dutch context by indicating whether social workers in practice are guided by own view, institution protocol or a combination of both. Since the legal context and influence on national policy for Austria and The Netherlands differ, it suggest that institution policy (and protocol) is adapted to national guidelines. The following research results show to what extent social workers are convinced to be guided by own view, by institution policy or by a combination of both. Items (8 identification ,10 fact assessment and 8 intervention) framed in the latter paragraphs are followed up by questions that attempt to screen social workers' behaviour and the extent of policy influence. In the following bar chart, outcomes present the type of influence on social workers dealing with domestic violence.



**Bar chart 5** Types of influence on social workers

There is overwhelming evidence that Dutch and Austrian social workers are convinced to be influenced by a combination of own vision and institution protocol. The differences are identified in the choice for own vision or institution protocol. In

Austria, institution protocol seems to guide social workers more often than in the Dutch situation. The same tendency is replicated but to less extent for own vision. Thus, the 'real' variation lies in Dutch social workers who are more guided by a combination of both influences against Austria where institution protocol seems to influence to a greater extent.

### **6.5 Answers to open questions**

Now that these results are presented, there remains one more set of results that need to be discussed, the answers to the open-ended questions. In the survey 4 open-ended questions were included, aiming at clarifying the structured question within the survey. The selected were two questions on influence of cultural background (1.8.a, 3.7.a) on the level of identification and intervention, followed by questions on stimulating prosecution (3.5.b) and explanations on legal options (3.6.b). Although respondents chose options in the structured questions, only a small part of the group reacted on open questions (Appendix 3). Therefore open questions are not included within the analysis.

## Discussion

### Chapter 7

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*In this chapter results of the study are presented and interpreted, followed by the conclusion. Finally, limitations and recommendations close the chapter.*

#### 7.1 Introduction

This study has investigated the behaviour of social workers in practice, towards victims of domestic violence. In order to do so, this study described and tested to what extent social workers identify, assess facts and intervene towards victims of domestic violence. Furthermore the extent of influence of own vision, institution protocol or a combination of both on social workers' behaviour is brought out into the open. The research results were able to answer the research question while in this last chapter the findings of the study are discussed.

#### 7.2 Interpretation of the results

In the last chapter, research results show different behaviour in cross national and cross setting comparison. The indicators namely identification, fact assessment intervention practice and influence by institution protocol, by own vision or by both are described and show differences in patterns. Identification of domestic violence is realised within both countries as well as settings. The results include the fact that Austrian social workers have identification as a standard task while Dutch social workers act on a less frequent basis. It is of logic that social workers in ambulant settings identify more often than the other two groups while in most cases the identification process has started already for settings as women shelter and youth care institutions. Thus, this offers one possible explanation for the differences in choices. Several items were not applicable for social workers within all settings. Next to identification within an earlier stage, 'not applicable' partly grounds in the fact that help towards victim of domestic violence implies no contact with violent partners as basic principle within the setting. Obviously, it concerned mostly respondents from women shelter and ambulant setting.

The tasks in fact assessment differ the less between setting as well as between countries. Apparently, social workers practice behaviour resembles a lot in collecting detailed information on the victim's situation. It suggests that these tasks are a universal part of assistance towards victims of domestic violence.

Outcome on intervention practice differs a lot between countries. Emphasis of Austrian social workers differs between 'sometimes' to 'always', Dutch social workers

prefer to intervene on less frequently basis. Explanation lies in network partners being more involved, a larger extent of safety plans development and more frequently informing victims on legal options. Furthermore, Dutch social workers prioritise stimulating prosecution of the violent partner, which seems logical in the context of legal options for victims within both countries.

Last indicator includes the type of influence on practice behaviour of social workers. The combination of institution protocol and own vision has the preference of all social workers within both countries. Dutch respondents are obviously most of the time acting from a combination of both, while Austrian colleagues act more often out of own view or institutions protocol. This outcome confirms the expectations that in Austria more social workers are guided by institution policy. These assumptions find ground in the set up of the legal framework, its influences on policy and institution protocol regarding domestic violence. More frequently being guided by own vision or institution protocol in Austria, could be linked to the fact that more clarity exist on institution protocol. This means that social workers can better argue their own choices or the ones of their institution.

### **7.3 Overall conclusion**

Beyond all doubt, the selected group of social workers in Austria and the Netherlands are active in identifying, assess facts and intervene towards victims of domestic violence. The influence of own vision, institution protocol or a combination of both is identified within both groups. Yet, are challenges for the future profession identified? The (partly) comparable study of Fran Danis (2005) partly overlaps in the fact that the same survey questions are used then for this study. American results point out that social workers need to improve their identification and screening skills by universal screening techniques. Although this recommendation seems to suit the Austrian and Dutch situation as well in the first place, a better inside asks for a more delicate answer. Social workers within settings where domestic violence is a specialised field, start from another point of working with victims of domestic violence since often (partly) identification has already taken place. Danis' research included social workers within a range of settings, while this implies a different reaction pattern. A closer look on intervention helps to recognise challenges for the profession. While Austrian social workers are able to explain the legal position on victims and violent partners, Dutch colleagues tend to fulfil this task less often. Are Dutch social workers in default of knowledge? Does the Austrian system provide more possibilities to get more acquainted with this theme:? All suggestions that could be possible. Above all, it is an important challenge for Dutch social workers since it implies empowerment of the victim (Freitas, 2004) and an attempt to social justice (Collarossi, 2005). Dutch social workers do acknowledge the importance of the prosecution process, while they stimulate victims in a large extent. A suggestion for the

difference in acting on cross-national level is explainable from the fact that the Austrian legal context offers better opportunities for victims. The accessibility to assistance for victims of domestic violence as argued in chapter 3, is theoretically more lowly profiled than in the Netherlands. It suggests a prosecution process that takes into account the possibility that after a violent period, not all victims are empowered enough to prosecute. This, in contrary to the Dutch system where (lack of) strength and empowerment of victims of domestic violence is a more or less obliged point of departure. It could be an explanation for a higher Dutch respond on stimulating in the survey, but more qualitative research is necessary in order to obtain empirical results. Moreover, differences are identified on the working relation with network partners. Austrian social workers use more frequently their network for setting up a personal path for victims of domestic violence. An important factor that can influence preferences of professionals is the social policy and structure that obviously frames a different basis for social assistance. Yet also this explanation is an assumption that can be explored in the future to provide further recommendations. The results in to what extent social workers are guided by own vision and institution protocol explore the nature of influence. It is rather an assumption of social workers, since answers are not compared with institution protocol itself. The results show preference for both influences, taken into account that cross-national differences are identified. It gives a first idea on how social workers are being influenced in their work towards victims of domestic violence but also on how they can influence policy. Since a certain extent of social workers reacted by own vision or by a combination of both, opportunities are offered to influence practice and policy. This in order to improve social justice in all its facets for victims of domestic violence. A benchmark for these opportunities is women movements, as argued in chapter 4.

So indeed, challenges are identified. The research offers a first impression on social work in domestic violence within Austria and The Netherlands, partly based on empirical results. It shows that much is done, happens and has to be done in the future for tackling domestic violence and providing assistance to victims. Are social workers vital links in domestic violence? A question that cannot be answered in this stage but hopefully a first step in that direction is realised.

#### **7.4 Research limitations**

Several factors influence the validity of the research and herewith limit a broad application of the research findings. In this research limitations are number of respondents and infrastructure. Surveys do not allow for personal interaction here with limiting the possibility for probing communication, in order to clarify answers. This is partly offset by the possibility to further explain in the open box. Within a time span of one month participants were able to react. The recruitment of the respondents covers the first limitation. Although Rosa Logar, who is an Austrian colleague in domestic violence issues took responsibility for the

recruitment in Austria and no large obstacles were identified under the Austrian groups, requests in the Netherlands were not always received positively. Reasons not to participate are limited availability of time and no online access. A second limitation emerged later in the process. The downtime of the server –hosting the surveys- made it impossible for certain potential participants to complete the survey before their holidays. These limitations count for Austria as well as for the Netherlands. A third limitation is identified in linguistics. Since the survey was distributed in Austria and The Netherlands, respondents were able to answer in their mother tongue. The set up of the research questions was in English and therefore questions had to be translated. While English vocabulary optioned a 5 point- Likert scale, this was not realisable in a Dutch version by limitation of language. Therefore, one options was left out that might have resulted in bias. Fourthly, the research results had a limiting effect on the research outcome. Although four open-answer questions were included, the response rate was not enough to provide the research with representative numbers. It limited the options to get an inside on not only the ‘what extent’ but also the ‘why’ in order the extent of quality in the research. The last limitation was the fact that only two settings in two European countries were involved. This gives a limitation on generalising patterns and a complete picture of the factors that define social work’s behaviour in practice.

### **7.5 Recommendations for future research**

Describing social work’ practice behaviour on domestic violence was an important part of this study. Results trigger new questions and possibly hypothesis for new research. The describing character of the research provides a first inside on social work in domestic violence in Austria and The Netherlands. Yet, enough challenges are identified.

Firstly, this research included social workers in settings where domestic violence was a specialisation. The original survey is developed in order to test to level of identification, fact assessment and interventions practice within a cross cutting settings. It would be of value to research several groups of social workers since it gives a broader idea of how social workers act within ‘non specific’ settings, in general. A possible second dimension in this type of research is of cross-national nature in order to describe and explore social work behaviour. It offers possible answers to social works’ challenges and education.

Secondly, the research leaves a lot of questions open, since the research topic is explored. The challenges for the profession are identified but rather on a suggestive basis. More qualitative research could deep out the ‘reasons behind choices’ of participants. An example is a semi-structured interview within the settings in Austria

and The Netherlands. This way results can help to sharpen challenges within social work and education.

Thirdly, the used research instrument was pilot tested within the research. Although the survey was inspired on existing research questions, the open-ended questions followed by the questions on protocol and own view, were set up for this group of participants. Furthermore, as mentioned within the paragraph 'research limitations', the originally 5-point Likert scale did not suit within the research, for linguistic reasons. It would be in order to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument.

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