CARE 4 TRAUMA

CARE4TRAUMA
Improving Gender-based Violence Victims Support Services and the Access to Justice through Trauma-informed Care

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

May 2023

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The Care4Trauma Project

EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS POSITION PAPER

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The Care4Trauma Project

Victims' Rights Strategy 2020-2025 pays particular attention to the specific needs of victims of gender-based violence. In its two-strand approach the EU highlights how one of the main objectives presented in the strategy is the empowering of victims of crime to improve their capabilities of reporting crimes, participate in criminal proceedings, claim compensation and recover, as much as possible, from the consequences of crime.

An approach capable of providing a safe environment and promote a culture of empowerment and understanding for the victims of GBV is an approach which can lead to a more consistent access to justice for traumatized women and to an improvement in the area of reporting GBV, whose real numbers still remain unclear.

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is an approach which recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual's life. On an organizational level, TIC aims at changing organizational culture to improve the response to the effects of trauma at all levels. TIC has been used to combat the effects of unaddressed trauma and secondary victimization within organizations. Secondary victimization or system-oriented trauma, is a form of re-traumatization which, as also stated by the Victims' Right Strategy, is often faced by GBV victims in the process of receiving support and protection and in accessing the judicial system.

Therefore, the Care4Trauma project aims improving the access to justice of victims of GBV by:

1) strengthening the services for traumatised women provided by victims support organizations
2) encourage the adoption of a trauma informed approach in a larger number of supporting organisations
3) enlarging the understanding of the benefit offered by TIC approach.

Partner Organizations

Name	Country	Website
Associazione Mondodonna	Italy	www.mondodonna-onlus.it/
Società italiana per lo studio dello stress traumatico - SISST	Italy	www.sisst.it/
Syndesmos Melon Gynaikeion Somateion Irakleioy Kai Nomoy Irakleioy - UWAH	Greece	https://kakopoiisi.gr/
Asociación Bienestar y Desarrollo	Spain	https://abd.ong/ca/
Women's Support and Information Centre Npo - WSIC	Estonia	https://naistetugi.ee/en/
Autonomna Zenska Kuca Zagreb - Zene Protiv Nasilja Nad Zenama - AZKZ	Croatia	https://azkz.hr/

Composition of the Project Scientific Committee

Name	Position	Appointing Partner
Vittoria Ardino - Secretary	Adjunct professor "Psychology of emergencies and trauma, University of Urbino" Carlo Bo	SISST - Italy
Rossella Selmini	Associate professor of Sociology of law, deviance and social change, Department of Legal Sciences, University of Bologna	MondoDonna - Italy
Joana Badia	Labor lawyer, consultant and expert in gender discrimination	ABD - Spain
Sophia Balamoutsou	Lecturer MSc Counselling Studies, College for Humanistic Sciences – ICPS, Athens Greece	UWAH - Greece
Hector C. Pagan	Higher education teaching professional University of Tartu - Skytte Institute of Political Studies, Tartu	WSIC - Estonia
Una Mikac	Postdoctoral Researcher (Psychometrics) at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Zagreb	AZKZ - Croatia

EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS POSITION PAPER

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Strategic Overview

Care4Trauma Project seeks to widen the implementation of Trauma-informed approaches in services and institutions supporting women victims of violence. All project partners have initially mapped the level of awareness about GBV- related traumatization into national legal and policy documents to assess the state-of-the- art of Trauma-Informed-Care in their countries. Secondly, partners collected data through a survey and semi-structured interviews with professionals to better address existing gaps and barriers to implement trauma-informed-care to develop a national policy framework to be proposed to policy makers. This policy paper reflects a synthesis of national data and it aims to propose actions to favour the implementation of TIC to better sustain women victims of violence in Europe and to implement prevention strategies to overcome the longer term consequences of violence.

Trauma -informed approaches are policies and practices that recognize the connections between violence, trauma, negative health outcomes and behaviours. These approaches increase safety, control and resilience for women who are seeking an access to justice and services in relation to their experiences of violence and/or have a history of experiencing violence.

Trauma-Informed Principles and Gender-Based-Violence
Recognize the impact of violence and victimization on coping strategies;
Identify recovery from trauma as a primary goal;
Employ an empowerment model;
Strive to maximize women's choices and control;
Are based on a relational collaboration;
Create an atmosphere that is respectful;
Emphasize women's strengths;
Minimize the possibility of re-traumatization;
Strive to be culturally competent;
Solicit consumer inputs in designing services and interventions

The first phase of the project showed that trauma and violence-informed approaches require fundamental changes in how systems are designed, organizations function, and practitioners engage with women in all partner countries. Such changes are based on the following key policy and practice principles:

1. Understand trauma and violence, and their impacts on women' lives and behaviours;
2. Create emotionally and physically safe environments;
3. Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection;
4. Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support women coping and resilience;

Health, social and judicial systems – in terms of both professionals and policy makers – are urged to raise awareness about the complex and lasting impacts of violence and trauma and about the risk of re-traumatizing women if this lack of awareness remains. Cafe4Trauma project enabled all partners to gain a more systematic vision about the importance of trauma -informed approaches in minimizing harm to women—**whether or not professionals and policy makers know their experiences of violence.**

Embedding trauma -informed approaches into all aspects of policy and practice can create universal trauma precautions, which provide positive supports for all women

victims of violence. **They also provide a common platform that helps to integrate services within and across systems and offer a basis for consistent ways of responding to women with such experiences.**

Summary of findings of national reports

Initial desk research about the awareness of trauma-informed-care principles in policy and legislation documents and data analyses of both the survey and semi-structured interviews portrayed a scenario of the necessity of disseminating and implementing more widely TIC approaches for the following reasons:

Minimize harm, not to treat trauma

Trauma -informed approaches are not about 'treating' trauma, for example, through counselling or psychotherapy only. Instead, policy actions should be directed to minimize the potential for harm and re-traumatization, and to enhance safety, control and resilience for all women involved with systems or programs. These approaches benefit everyone, whether or not they've experienced trauma in their lives or their personal history is known to professionals.

Increase attention on the impact of violence on women's lives and well-being

The concept of understanding violence and its relationship to trauma and to create a shared language in the system was common across all partner countries. Data showed:

1) The urgence of recognizing that like past violence, ongoing violence may be a primary cause of trauma responses;

Consultation workshop highlights

The connections between trauma and violence:

1. Trauma is both the experience of, and response to, an overwhelmingly negative event or series of events, including violence;

2. Violence can take many forms, and can occur once or many times during someone's life

3. Violence can have traumatic long-term effects, whether the violence is ongoing or in the past.

2) The need of reducing the tendency to blame/judge women for their psychological or behavioural reactions to experiences of violence, and recognize that these responses may be a result of trauma;

3) The importance of distinguishing how trauma that results from violence is different from trauma caused by other negative events, such as natural disasters

Therefore, Care4Trauma highlighted the necessity of connecting systems to:

- Draw attention to the cumulative effects of multiple forms of violence including systemic violence, such as racism or discrimination;
- Direct attention to the importance of organizational-level actions, such as changes to policies that take women's safety and experiences of violence into

account and that recognize how broader conditions of women's lives (e.g. poverty or unstable housing) increase risk of multiple forms of violence.

Reduce re-traumatization

All partner countries directed the attention on the fact that service providers, organizations and systems may not be aware that they can cause unintentional harm to women who have experienced violence and trauma. Women who interact with systems such as justice, health, housing, refuges can be re-traumatized by their experiences in these systems. Re-traumatization can happen each time a woman needs to re-tell their story of abuse when seeking help across sectors, organizations or service providers, or when women experience discrimination, marginalization or stigma.

During consultation workshops, professionals reflected on the fact that service providers can inadvertently re-traumatize or trigger their clients when they:

- touch without warning or permission
- speak in a way that conveys negative judgement or blame
- interpret a woman's reaction or behaviour as being out of proportion or unwarranted without considering the experiences which may have contributed to the reaction or behaviour

Improve system responses for everyone

Care4Trauma reports demonstrate that professionals consider Trauma -informed approaches as a valid support to make systems and organizations more responsive to the needs of women victims of violence and to provide opportunities for practitioners to be more effective in responding to women's needs.

These approaches should increase action for ensuring safety, control and resilience of all women, regardless of whether or not they have experienced violence or trauma sometime in their lives.

Consultation workshop highlights

Re-traumatization depends on triggers can reactivate trauma; trauma-informed approaches should train professionals to recognize trauma mechanisms:

- Neurobiological changes caused by trauma can result in triggers, whereby present day events can recreate past traumatic experiences so that potential threats are perceived as real— whether they are real or not.

- Commands, touches, sounds, smells or other physical sensations can remind people of violence experiences and trigger a response;

- Physical environment does not elicit a sense of safety and therefore women can be triggered by entering services, courts;

Increase cultural awareness

Trauma -informed approaches recognize that experiences and effects of violence are strongly linked to gender and culture.

The importance of cultural safety in trauma-informed approaches

Cultural safety is an approach to working across ethnic and other differences to make systems and organizations responsible to ensure that service environments are safe for everyone—regardless of their expressed or assumed culture. This approach to policy and practice is compatible with, and often an embedded component of, trauma informed approaches.

The system supports cultural safety when they
- reduce power differences between themselves and women
- stop making assumptions based on women's appearance or presumed ethnicity
- avoid actions which demean, disrespect, or disempower women

Gender

Trauma and violence-informed policies and practices recognize that violence and trauma are shaped by gender stereotypes and inequities, and thus tailor services and programming to individual needs.

Overall, rates of intimate partner violence are higher for women compared to men in every age group. Certain groups of women experience higher rates of violence than other women, particularly Indigenous women and women with disabilities[1, 2]

Violence against women is rooted in gender inequity and women are more likely to:
- report ongoing violence, physical injury, more serious types of injuries and greater health issues.
- experience coercive control
- have greater fear of physical injury and death
- experience sexual violence
- **Girls** have a higher risk than boys of being sexually abused

Culture

Culture is also important in the European context where women coming from extra-European countries experience multiple forms of disadvantage, interrelated with disproportionately high rates of violence.

Some migrant and refugee women – who are also often trafficked - face assumptions about how their culture contributes to experiences of violence. Such assumptions can create barriers to effective service and support.

[1] Chan, K. L. (2011). Gender differences in self-reports of intimate partner violence: A review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *16*(2), 167-175;.

[2] Hayes, B. E., & Kopp, P. M. (2020). Gender differences in the effect of past year victimization on self-reported physical and mental health: Findings from the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. *American journal of criminal justice*, *45*, 293-312

Key implementation policy recommendations

INTERSECTORIAL AWARENESS

POLICY MAKER INVOLVEMENT

ECONOMIC RESOURCES
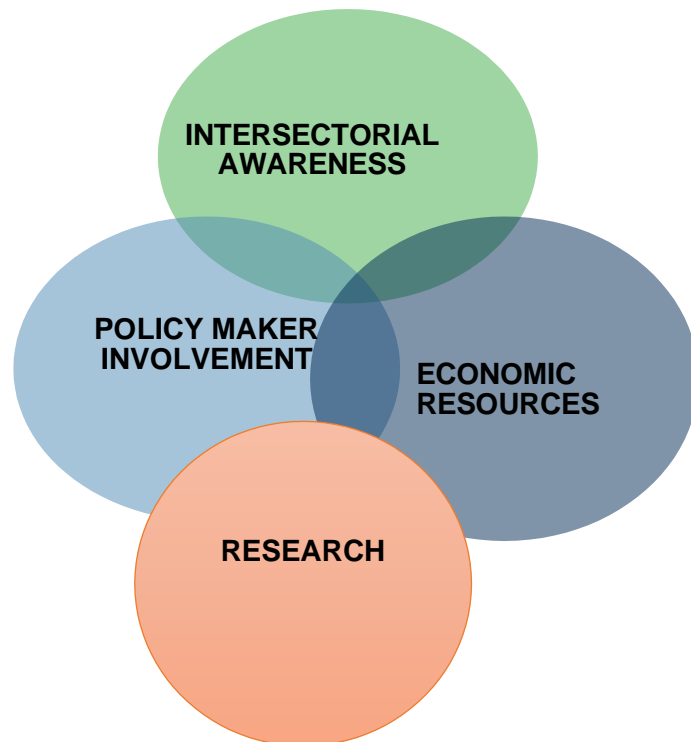
RESEARCH

Key strategies

1. **Training and Education**
2. **Standardization and Monitoring through applied research and evidence-based practices**
3. **Collaborative and multi-professional partnerships at different levels of the system**
4. **Resources and Support**
5. **Advocacy and Awareness-raising**
6. **Gradual implementation of the approach**
7. **Greater Involvement of policy-makers**

Actions to better implement GBV Trauma-Informed-Care in Europe

Care4Trauma project produce a throughout analysis of national, regional, and local laws, policies, guidelines, and victim surveys related to trauma-informed care. The research consisted of mapping the relevant documents and assembling documents accordingly and then scrutinize these according to the pre-defined indicators. The documents were divided into three categories: Strategic level documents (e.g. legislation, national administration guidelines, charters and strategic plans); Organizational level policy documents; and Organizational level procedure documents.

In sum, the mapping highlighted a basic understanding of re- traumatization but not enough comprehension, and cultural competence with administrative/legal bureaucracy barriers and a lack of victims empowerment.

Professionals mirrored mapping scenarios when responding to survey and to semi-structured interviews reporting several insights to sustain a further implementation of TIC into European policy strategies
Trauma-informed approaches require fundamental changes in how practitioners and institutions engage with women, how organizations function and how systems (such as the health system and the justice system) are designed. For individual practitioners, a change in strategy means attempting to eliminate assumptions about women who experience violence and trauma and their actions. For organizations and systems, it means supporting a culture of learning and capacity-building to create safe environments for women and professionals.
The following information outlines four key principles and sample implementation strategies for service providers and organizations working with women victims of violence in Europe:

1. Understand trauma and violence and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours

Service providers

- Acknowledge the root causes of trauma without probing. Women do not necessarily need to disclose what may have happened to them for you to help them
- Pause and reflect when women acts or reacts in an unexpected way
- Listen, believe and validate victims' experiences
- Recognize their strengths;
- Express concern

Organizations and systems

- Develop organizational structures, policies and processes that foster a culture built on an understanding of how trauma and violence affect women's lives
  - Develop hiring practices that seek people who understand trauma and violence and reward systems that compensate employees for building their competencies in this area
  - Train all staff on the connections between violence, trauma and health outcomes and behaviours, including vicarious or secondary trauma

2. Create emotionally and physically safe environments

<u>Service providers</u>

- Communicate in non-judgmental ways so that women feel deserving, understood, recognized and accepted
- Foster an authentic sense of connection to build trust
- Provide clear information and consistent expectations about services and programs

<u>Organizations and systems</u>

- Walk through your practice setting to see and assess how a woman might experience each moment. This simulation can help identify where improvements can be made. For example:
  - Travel to the site on bus and see what it feels like to arrive at the service site.
  - Spend time in the waiting area, fill out the forms and experience how long a client might wait to be seen.
  - Go through all client activities, such as being asked to undress/put on a gown, being physically examined or asked sensitive questions.
- Pay attention to welcoming intake procedures and signage, comfortable physical space, consideration of confidentiality
  - Seek women's input for inclusive and safe strategies
  - Create policies and structures to allow women to bring a support person with them to meetings when possible
- Provide support for service providers at risk of secondary trauma and facilitate their self-care.
- Consider peer support, regular clinical supervision, and self-care programs.

3. Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection

<u>Service providers</u>

- Provide choices for treatment and services, and consider the choices together
- Communicate openly and without judgement
- Provide the space for women to express their feelings freely
- Listen carefully to the women's words and check in to make sure that you have understood correctly

<u>Organizations and systems</u>

- Offer training and professional development opportunities for staff on:
  - the importance of critical self-reflection on power differences between practitioners and women
  - how experiences of violence can influence the way that women engage with providers
- Set expectations, create opportunities and provide the time and space for collaborative relationships

4. Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience

<u>Service providers</u>

- Help women identify their strengths, through techniques such as motivational interviewing, a communication technique that improves engagement and empowerment
- Acknowledge the effects of historical and structural conditions on women's lives
- Help women understand that their responses are normal
- Teach and model skills for recognizing triggers, such as calming, centering and staying present

<u>Organizations and systems</u>

- Provide sufficient time and resources to support meaningful engagement between practitioners and women
- Offer a range of services and interventions that respond to women's needs, strengths and contexts
- Foster an organizational culture that recognizes the importance of emotional intelligence and social learning in the workplace

5. Addressing the impact on service providers who work with people who have experienced violence and trauma

Service providers who work directly with people who have experienced violence often hear difficult stories and witness the impact of these experiences. Second-hand exposure to experiences of violence can result in vicarious or secondary trauma, with negative health impacts which are similar to those experienced by people with first-hand experiences of violence, such as:

- depression, emotional exhaustion and anxiety
- sleep disturbances and intrusive thoughts
- trigger to external events, some of which may seem harmless to others

Organizations can help reduce secondary trauma for their employees with trauma and violence-informed policies and practices that:

- actively support the well-being and self-care of service providers who are repeatedly exposed to others' stories of violence
- help providers to understand women's responses to violence, including their own
- help to prevent 'trigger responses' for both women and providers

When they are well-supported by trauma and violence-informed approaches and workplace wellness programs, service providers can find satisfaction and growth in their work, despite the challenges.

Focus on access to Justice

	Strengths points	Development points
1	Women's Support Centers available in all partner countries.	Need for a shared methodology to interview and assess women and for the implementation of a shared monitoring system to measure trauma-informed-care effectiveness when women access justice
2	A basic awareness about the relationship between violence and trauma at an individual level.	Institutions need to sustain consistency over time to consolidate trauma-informed-practices over time.
3	Trainings on GBV, IPV and TIC are gradually made available for justice professionals.	Training should be mandatory, ongoing, and based on evidence-based practices.

Strategic dissemination actions of GBV-TIC in European services and institutions

There are several strategies that can are central for all partner countries becoming, therefore, a European-wide priority:

- **Providing training and education**: Organizations should provide training and education on TIC to their staff and partners. This can help build awareness and understanding of the importance of TIC and provide staff with the skills and knowledge needed to implement TIC principles in their work.

- **Creating policies and procedures:** Organizations should create policies and procedures that prioritize TIC and ensure that it is integrated into all aspects of their work. This can help ensure that TIC is not just a buzzword, but a guiding principle that is incorporated into all decision- making processes.

- **Offering financial incentives:** Financial incentives can be offered to organizations that demonstrate a commitment to TIC. This can include funding for training, implementation support, or other resources that are needed to implement TIC effectively.

- **Creating a culture of accountability:** Organizations can create a culture of accountability around TIC by setting **measurable goals, tracking progress, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of TIC implementation.** This can help ensure that TIC remains a priority over time and that progress is continuously made.

- **Multi-agency collaboration and partnerships:** Organizations can partner with other organizations, government agencies, and community groups to promote TIC and create a more coordinated response to gender-based violence. Collaboration and partnerships can help pool resources, expertise, and knowledge, and promote a shared vision for TIC.

Overall, promoting and favouring the dissemination and adoption of TIC requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the **cultural, organizational, and systemic barriers** that may exist. By adopting these strategies, services and institutions can create a more trauma-informed and woman-centered response to gender-based violence, which can ultimately help improve outcomes for survivors.

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Identified actions by TIC principles across Europe

TIC principles	Key identified actions	Key strategies
Recognition	Recognizing the effects of violence as a form of traumatization and its pervasiveness. Furthermore, being able to interpret trigger-related behaviours to modulate support accordingly .	1. Training staff in trauma and GBV recognition. 2. Using screening and assessment tools based on scientific evidence 3. Using research to inform interventions and organizational setting to better respond to GBV-related trauma
Establishing emotional safety	Set-up daily actions to foster calm when women access to justice and care systems. Physical environments should be also considered in terms of layout, quiet spaces in welcoming women. Providing psychoeducation about practices and procedures	1. Active and non-judgmental listening in a safe environment; 2. Waiting rooms that are noise free and that provide privacy to women 3. Signs to indicate where to find professionals and rooms

Restoring choice and control	Women should be an active part of their recovery and they should be given choice about treatment, life choices and they should be given the opportunity to express what it is in their best of interest. .	1. Promoting service-users involvement in designing refuges, services and interventions 2. .Women survivors increasingly involved in advocacy initiatives
Facilitating connection	Creating a safe and supportive environment where the women feel comfortable to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings	1. Building supportive relationships 2. Encouraging participation in group activities 3. Courage of nominating traumatic experiences
Avoiding re-Traumatization	Systems is more aware of how re-traumatization work and attempts to prevent the risk of re-traumatizing	1. Trauma-informed communication 2. Providing choices and control 3. Avoiding to ask many times about the experience of violence 4. Avoiding stigmatizing language
Cultural Competence	Recognition and addressing cultural biases. Provision of language services. Building partnerships with culturally specific organizations	1. Education and training 2. Partnering with community- based organizations 3. Cultural experts to sustain professionals
Secondary trauma	Provision of regular supervision and support. Promotion of self-care. Training on trauma-informed care. Fostering a supportive work environment	1. Professionals must prioritize self-care as a key strategy to avoid secondary trauma. 2. Professionals working with victims of violence should receive comprehensive trauma-informed training to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize and respond to trauma in a sensitive and supportive manner.

Conclusions

In sum, to implement Trauma-Informed Care systematic changes are required:

Develop and adopt TIC policies: It is important to develop and adopt policies that prioritize TIC in all areas of service delivery, including health care, social care, and the judicial system. These policies should reflect a trauma-informed approach and provide guidance on **how to provide services that are sensitive to the needs of women who have experienced violence.**

Provide TIC training and education: Staff and professionals working in health care, social care, and the judicial system should receive training on TIC principles and how to implement them in their work. **Training should be mandatory, ongoing, and reflect evidence-based practices.**

Allocate funding for TIC implementation: Funding is needed to support the implementation of TIC principles in health care, social care, and the judicial system. This can include **funding for training, the development of policies and procedures, and the evaluation of TIC interventions.**

Promote interagency collaboration: Interagency collaboration is crucial in providing a comprehensive response to gender-based violence. Policies should encourage collaboration between different agencies to ensure that women who have experienced violence receive the services they need.

Monitor and evaluate TIC implementation: Policies should promote the monitoring and evaluation of TIC implementation **to ensure that services are meeting the needs of women who have experienced violence.** This can include tracking the implementation of policies and procedures, measuring the effectiveness of TIC training, and evaluating the outcomes of TIC interventions.

Support research on TIC: Policies should support research on TIC principles and how they can be effectively implemented in different settings. This can include research on the effectiveness of TIC interventions and the **identification of best practices** for TIC implementation.

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