

## Daphne

An EU response to combat violence towards children, young people and women

### Illustrative case # 19



## Domestic violence and health care – making the link

***Health-care professionals are often a first point of contact for women suffering from the effects of domestic violence. These practitioners need guidance to develop a pragmatic and sensitive approach to recognising signs of domestic violence and caring for victims.***

Living in the constant shadow of domestic violence causes stress, anguish and feelings of shame, all of which can isolate the victim. Often women are reluctant to seek help and speak about their situation, even when they suffer from physical and psychological illnesses. Generally, however, health-care professionals within the European Union are ill-equipped to deal with the problem. Little research exists in this field, and there are hardly any training courses focusing on the health repercussions of domestic violence. The project *Formation des professionnels de santé à la violence conjugale*, funded by the Daphne Initiative in 1999, set out to develop a working and training tool for health-care workers.

The project partners consisted of health professionals and members of aid organisations for female victims of violence, from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Belgium. They chose the Internet as the most appropriate training tool, because of its potential for interactivity and for further specialised information to be added in the future.

### Fruitful co-operation

Based on wide research and consultation with medical specialists, the site was structured to cover the following main themes:

- general information on domestic violence, to encourage understanding of its causes and effects;
- practical advice on detection and medical care of female victims and their children, and guidance towards other, non-medical assistance;
- action plans for each medical field of specialisation concerned;
- clinical analysis of the various effects of violence on women's and children's health;

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- medical documents, i.e. what should appear on a medical certificate or in the medical file, with model examples;

- a links and contacts section containing shelter addresses and other sites related to domestic violence;
- a feedback system for users; and
- an animated section that addresses common prejudices.

### First-hand knowledge

Co-operation among the project partners' wider circles of contacts in the health care, research and aid association fields proved to be a major factor in the project's success. General practitioners, gynaecologists, obstetricians, psychiatrists and surgeons formed a working group to draft the texts for inclusion on the website, based on their professional knowledge and experience. The aid association members used their first-hand contact with female victims of violence to help develop the more general sections of the site and practical information. All the project partners, as well as groups of external experts in each country, re-read the final texts, and this was important in creating a clear and practical tool for use at European level.

The final, approved website texts in French were translated into Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, as well as English. The partners decided to produce a card printed with the Internet address in each language, aimed at health professionals, to publicise the site's existence as widely as possible. The team chose the name 'SIVIC' for the site – *Site sur la violence conjugale pour les professionnels de santé*. Rather than having a generic leaflet to accompany the site, which was the partners' initial intention, users can download for themselves the texts that most interest them.

### A useful tool

The presentation of the project results to the Ministries for Women's Rights and Health in Spain, France and Portugal encouraged reflection on the issue. Plans to maintain and develop the site were developed by the French and Spanish partners. Health-care professionals were involved at every stage of the website's development, and the result is an instrument which meets their needs and which they can develop in the future. Aid associations also brought to the project their practical experience of supporting women. The impact of the SIVIC website will be judged by the concrete help it offers female victims of domestic violence.

The Spanish team invited the other partners to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Madrid in December 2000 to launch the site officially and to discuss its future maintenance. This event received widespread media coverage.

In France the site was presented to the Ministry of Health in February 2001, as part of a workshop organised by the 'Institut de l'Humanitaire' on the topic 'Female victims of conjugal violence, the role of health professionals'. Once again, medical and general media took part and received 'press packs' with information on the project.

A working group on domestic violence established by the Ministry of Health in France produced a report stressing the need to train health professionals, particularly by means of the SIVIC website. More than 1,300 copies of this report have already been produced and there are plans to distribute it to 2,000 company doctors throughout France.

### **Project title: Formation des professionnels de santé à la violence conjugale**

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